

GLOBALISATION AND MIGRATION IN EUROPE: TENSIONS GIVING RISE TO OPPORTUNITIES

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Introduction

Due to its geographic location, the Mediterranean basin has always been a melting pot of cultures. It can be described as a complex system of countries with very different, and often contrasting cultures and religions, bordering a vast closed sea, which connects them with one another. This makes the region particularly likely to experience both tensions but also opportunities. The Mediterranean Sea has, in fact, by virtue of these differences, always been a hub for trade and of encounter, and therefore, also a highway for travellers, and other times, even a theatre of conflict.

It is precisely in these tensions of opposing and contrasting forces that I am most interested in this paper, and how these tensions are manifested in the interplay between globalization and migration. I argue that due to its geographic location, the Mediterranean Sea, especially the countries in the southern European border is the locus of different kinds of tensions related to the complex issue of migration. I also argue that for the same reasons, this region has a long history of structures of social friendship that have developed organically to address the challenges of that arise from migration.

The paper is divided into three parts. In the first part of the paper, I briefly analyse such opposing forces and how they give rise to tensions: the thrust towards globalization on the one hand and the opposite drive towards insularity on the other; the movement of countries wanting to join the EU and simultaneously, the fragmentation of the EU; and finally, the push and pull economic factors that lead to migration across Europe and the Mediterranean.

Second, using the lens of social friendship as proposed by Pope Francis in *Fratelli Tutti* I propose that there are already tools at our disposal in the Mediterranean culture and in the

project of European unity to respond to the fragmentation and individuality that causes so much suffering among migrants in Europe.

Third, I conclude by retrieving some practices that have a long-standing tradition in Europe and the Mediterranean, and which are rooted in Christianity, and which acts as a kind of globalization from below to respond to migration in a more wholesome way.

Part I: Opposing Forces: Tensions and opportunities

It is first worth pausing briefly on Europe and the Mediterranean region to understand better its specific values, given that it is composed of several seemingly different countries bordering each other. My aim in this section is to show that just as Alasdair MacIntyre argues that cultural contexts give rise to specific practices, narratives and traditions, and therefore to a particular way of doing ethics,¹ so this also happens in the Mediterranean context. I concur with Josef Ratzinger, who would then become Benedict XVI, where in his reflections on Europe had commented that rather than a geographic location, it is better understood as a cultural reality.² By this is meant that the history of how Europe developed, even before the separation between the Hellenistic States and the Roman Empire, had to do more with certain cultural values rather than geographic boundaries. This was further reinforced with the advance of Islam (c. 8th Century), that resulted in a border dividing the Mediterranean region into three: Asia, Africa and Europe.

It is also helpful to consider, by way of example, the distinctive characteristics of the Southern European countries, including Italy, Spain, Greece, and Portugal, but also Malta and France, as they offer further insight into the theological and cultural particularity of the Mediterranean. First, these nations share a deep-rooted legacy in Western Christianity, having inherited the cultural and spiritual heritage of the Roman Catholic Church, itself shaped by the Roman Empire rather than the Byzantine tradition. Second, their location as Mediterranean countries, positions them within a long-standing history of navigation, trade, and intercultural

exchange, as I have already alluded to. This has made the Mediterranean not just a sea but a meeting ground of civilizations, especially with the Arab world, and shaped their collective memory as one of encounter and mutual influence. Third, by virtue of their geographic location at the southern edge of Europe, these countries have become frontline destinations for migrants arriving by sea from Africa and the Middle East. This intersection of geography, culture, and history gives rise to complex sociocultural dynamics but also opens up profound theological opportunities. The Church that emerges in this context, and which, willy nilly has an influence or at least a role to play, is shaped by hospitality, movement, and the need for solidarity, is synodal not merely by institutional intention but by historical and cultural necessity. This further highlights how Mediterranean, then, becomes both a border and a bridge, embodying tensions of globalisation while offering a theological space for renewal, inclusion, and prophetic witness.³ Even within bioethics, one can notice a kind of reasoning that is specific to southern European countries. Elio Sgreccia notes that the “Latin model [elaborates] four foundational values of life; liberty and responsibility; totality; and social subsidiarity.”⁴

The series of historical events that followed continued to spread the Christian movement and its specific culture, which had started first in the Middle East, in Greece, and eventually in Rome, and then further developed in the monasteries scattered around Europe. Already here we see an important development even in the understanding of social friendship. In his book *The Rise of Christianity*, Rodney Stark emphasises that the practice of mercy in Rome by Christians in the first century was particularly important for Christianity to spread so rapidly. This, together with the proliferation of monasteries that by their nature emphasised spiritual kinship and the practice of mercy are both examples of how social friendship became entrenched in the Christian roots of Europe.

The Second World War served as a catalyst for the unification of Europe with the aim of collaborating together on the goods of steel and coal rather than fostering competition that

would otherwise lead to war. Europe thus developed over time its own set of cultural values with a humanist foundation, even though they might be traced back to the significant Christian influence. These values include peace and freedom, power and responsibility, diversity, subsidiarity and differentiation, multilateralism and tolerance, and solidarity with the union and with the rest of the world.⁵ Founder of the Italian Christian Democratic Party and one of the founding fathers of the European Union, Alcide De Gasperi famously stated that, “to consider oneself Christian in the sector of political activity... implies the duty to feel united together in an even more particular way by a profound sense of civic kinship (*fraternità civica*), of morality and of justice towards the weak and the poorest.”⁶

While modern day Europe was established on 18 April 1951 with the European Coal and Steel Treaty to secure lasting peace and to strengthen the economy in the region, the current state of Europe is far from consolidated. Brexit, the departure of the UK from the EU on 1 February 2020, following the 23 June 2016 referendum, as well as the rise of other populist parties and governments around the world are partly due to the spread of populist ideological agendas around the world, and partly fuelled also by a general dissatisfaction with the general policies associated with the influx of migrants. Ever since Brexit in 2020 there has been some general worry about Europe becoming fragmented or even failing to remain united as countries seek more their own interests rather than those of the common good. So far, however, it seems that the benefits of being united still outweigh the cost of being isolated, especially in the volatile geopolitical situation that the world is currently facing.

In any case, migration continues to be at the top of the agenda for most European countries. The upward trend of right-leaning political parties which seem to be gaining more and more influence in recent national elections throughout Europe witness to this fact.⁷ This too can be attributed to a kind of globalisation of ideas, or rather, of ideology.

The relationship between globalization and migration, in particular work-related migration, the suffering that many experience because of this, and how acute the reality is increasingly becoming. As I write, the current US administration is waging a harsh trade war against many countries, including the European bloc. Although it might slow down globalization to some extent, there is no sign that globalization will reach a standstill, or even less recede. If for a few months some analysts were speaking of some kind of de-globalization in the wake of COVID-19,⁸ this hardly seems to be the case at all. In other words, globalization is now a given and is with us to stay.⁹

Part II – Social friendship as an initiative arising from tension

Tensions that arise from differences could lead to either of two paths. Tensions could escalate to such an extent that one group seeks to dominate over or exclude the other, leading to its annihilation. Alternatively, if approached with openness and respect, these tensions arising from differences could lead to social friendship. In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis focuses on social friendship as a new vision that recognises all human beings as created “equal in rights, duties and dignity, and called... to live together as brothers and sisters.”¹⁰ Pope Francis is careful to indicate that this fraternity happens not just at the level of words, but that it is also translated into a very practical aspect.¹¹ For the pontiff, social friendship “transcends the borders” of “every city and country” to make possible a “true universal openness”.¹²

“Building social friendship,” Francis affirms,

does not only call for rapprochement between groups who took different sides at some troubled period of history, but also for a renewed encounter with the most impoverished and vulnerable sectors of society. For peace “is not merely absence of war but a tireless commitment – especially on the part of those of us charged with greater responsibility – to recognize, protect and concretely restore the dignity, so often overlooked or ignored, of our brothers and sisters, so that they can see themselves as the principal protagonists of the destiny of their nation”.¹³

This paragraph from *Fratelli Tutti* recalls the challenge that countries, peoples, and cultures bordering the Mediterranean face but also the opportunities for growth and a “rewriting” of

history. If in the Mediterranean region the concept of family and indeed kinship, in the extended sense of the word, is so important, then this region might be particularly adept at cultivating social friendship, or fraternity.

As Benedict XVI had famously affirmed, globalisation makes us neighbours, but it does not make us brothers and sisters. In today's world perhaps more than ever before, Mediterranean countries are faced with this challenge: to either remain neighbours, living alongside one another yet remaining strangers, or becoming brothers and sisters, engaging in relationships that build bridges, heal and reconcile. The Church has a particular role to play here by serving as a catalyst of fraternity in the midst of a globalised-yet-fragmented culture.

The church as a globalising phenomenon

By definition the Church is a global institution. I might also dare propose that the Church was among the pioneers of globalization. First, by virtue of being by nature a missionary institution. The Church has been commissioned, as from its inception, to be witnesses of the Risen Christ “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The missionary dimension of the Church is the practical embodiment of this command and in so doing it has long been a vehicle not only of faith but also of entire traditions and cultures. It would suffice to mention, for instance, how the Christian tradition spread from Jerusalem, through the several cosmopolitan hubs of the first century, and even more through Rome. After the Edict of Milan (313) its spread was facilitated and supported by the Roman Empire. The Christian ethos spread and thrived even where persecution was the order of the day.¹⁴

Second, the very structure of the Catholic Church is global in nature. Geographical territories are covered by parishes, which in turn fall within dioceses, who through their bishops are joined in communion with the Pope in Rome.¹⁵ Apart from territorial parishes there could also be “personal parishes” such as those based on language or nationality. If parishes are really

“communities of communities,” as *Evangelii Gaudium* describes them,¹⁶ then the Church is a veritable capillary network that connects the grassroots with their local and contextual realities to the Pope in Rome and therefore also to one another by sharing the same faith.

If globalization has its sinful dimension in the sense that it is entrenched by unbridled capitalism which favours the stronger countries at the expense of the weaker ones, one might also argue that it is on the back of this kind of globalization that the Church can capitalize and offer a response. Indeed, with St Paul we can say, “where sin has abounded, grace has abounded even more” (Rom 5:20).

Possible responses

Pope Benedict XVI rightly said that while globalization, is a reality that is here with us to stay, we cannot be its passive victims, but rather protagonists, where “a sustained commitment is needed so as to *promote a person-based and community-oriented cultural process of worldwide integration that is open to transcendence.*”¹⁷ One way of interpreting this is to refer to the various communities of which the Church is composed. It is within communities, that persons whose dignity is being trampled upon, can retrieve their value. It is also within the community that the virtues are cultivated and strengthened. If initiatives, no matter how noble with respect to migrants, are taken by individuals and not by communities, they remain sporadic and short-lived. But when these initiatives are taken on by communities, they are more effective and longer lasting. In other words, the virtues cultivated become ingrained in communities and in their practices and traditions.

The capillary network of parishes and communities mentioned at the beginning of this section serves this function well. These communities can on the one hand, serve as places of encounter with and welcome to migrants who are victims of injustices. On the other hand, these communities can also cultivate virtues that lead to sound economic and political choices to

counter the vices that lead to abusive dynamics between capital and labour as described in third part of the second section of this paper.

The Church, therefore, especially through parish communities participate in what has been called “globalization from below.” By this is meant “actors, groups or individuals, who are engaged in forging a globalized civil society (e.g., artists, hobbyists, interest groups, and social activists),” and which in different ways seek to counter the ill effects of economic globalisation.¹⁸ Up to a certain extent, this is already being done quite effectively with regard to migration.

Part III: Some practices of communities of kinship

An important way in which this capillary network of communities functions, is through kinship. On one level this happens through the acknowledgement of God as father of Christians and indeed of all of creation. On another level, this happens through the sharing of a common element, namely affliction or suffering and taking practical and concrete steps to respond to this in terms of structures and practices of kinship.¹⁹ In the past, especially in Europe, this was done by religious orders and by lay people who joined confraternities specifically founded to offer hospitality to migrants, as Italian professor of early modern history, Adriano Prosperi, reminds us.²⁰

Nowadays this work of hospitality is being carried out by some religious orders that continue this work of mercy with migrants, despite the dwindling numbers, and through NGOs for instance the JRS. One such initiative that is going on in Malta is that which is being called “*Salott taħt iz-zuntier*” (“Living room under the Church parvis”) in which a small table is set up with some drinks and food, and a few of chairs, where people can stop by, help themselves to some food and engage in a conversation with others. This is set up in place for two to three hours, mid-week, in the evening. Within a couple of days, a number of migrants, especially

homeless, were stopping and making friends with staff from the JRS, with other migrants and with locals who were also stopping by for a quick snack and a chat.²¹

Another initiative of encounter and kinship is being held in a parish in Ħaż-Żebbuġ, Malta, simply called “Encounter groups” wherein third country nationals residing in the parish territory are approached and invited to attend sessions that are held monthly. During these sessions, a theme related to the spiritual, human and communitarian dimension is discussed and there is also the opportunity to foster relationships with members of other parish groups, which has proved to be mutually enriching. It is also an opportunity for these migrants to seek assistance in anything that they might need.²²

If in *Fratelli tutti* Pope Francis echoes Benedict XVI’s prophetic phrase that globalization “makes us neighbours but not brothers and sisters,”²³ the Church has the necessary resources not least the theological, to do just this, and wherever possible, in collaboration with the State.

Church as bridge of solidarity

Since globalization creates a gradient between the haves and have-nots, with the result that Filipina Christian ethicist Agnes Brazal invites us to look at the Church as what she calls “a bridge of solidarity.” She insists that bridges, as structures that “allow us to cross a divide,” function “both as a site as well as a means or medium for social groups separated by a divide to meet.”²⁴ Brazal’s point is that the Church has the potential of acting as a catalyst for this kind of bridging. This ought not to be understood as a reversal of globalization, but rather as a parallel process that “picks up the pieces” left behind by globalization. This is a process of practicing solidarity, even kinship, which draws its inspiration from the Triune God and the Word made Flesh.

Brazal gives a list of activities - or perhaps we might say practices - that embody this solidarity: “consciousness-raising activities, policy changes, law-enforcement, rehabilitation

and so forth.”²⁵ In particular she has in mind Congregations of Women Religious that engage in these activities with women who end up in the sex work industry in the Philippines and thus becoming “partners in the healing process.”²⁶ One might think of analogous initiatives that might be taken on even in Europe, where women who travel to mainland Europe either from Eastern Europe or from other countries originally to find work but who end up in the sex work industry. The comprehensive approaches listed above ensure that the efforts of such communities are not limited to simply helping others and making good deeds but are also aimed at changing the status quo at a wider level, even if the change is small and slow.

While this mission of “picking up the pieces” and of binding wounds is important, it is not enough, and the church therefore has the potential to make use of its strengths to propose a different kind of globalization.

Overcoming the Globalization of Indifference

Pope Francis often spoke of overcoming a globalization of indifference, possibly a phrase that he adopted and adapted from Adolfo Nicolás who often spoke of a globalization of superficiality.²⁷ In his visit to Lampedusa on 8 July 2013, Pope Francis had claimed:

The culture of comfort, which makes us think only of ourselves, makes us insensitive to the cries of other people, makes us live in soap bubbles which, however lovely, are insubstantial; they offer a fleeting and empty illusion which results in indifference to others; indeed, it even leads to the globalization of indifference. In this globalized world, we have fallen into globalized indifference. We have become used to the suffering of others: it doesn’t affect me; it doesn’t concern me; it’s none of my business!²⁸

He also insisted that, “the globalization of indifference makes us all “unnamed,” responsible, yet nameless and faceless.”²⁹ Finally, he also insisted that, “We are a society which has forgotten how to weep, how to experience compassion – ‘suffering with’ others: the globalization of indifference has taken from us the ability to weep!”³⁰

The globalization of indifference is closely linked to structures of sin mentioned earlier. Pope Francis often remarked that the globalization of indifference makes us participate in evil structures but without our taking responsibility for them. He quotes two examples from literature, one a play by Lope de Vega and the other, Alessandro Manzoni’s *The Betrothed*. In

the first instance, the governor of the city of Fuente Ovejuna the city is killed and when the king's justice asks who killed him, the people reply "Fuente Ovejuna." In the second example, one of the characters who commits a crime is known simply as the "unnamed."³¹ In both cases, the point is that through the globalization of indifference, we commit evil without taking responsibility for it: everyone and no one committed the crime.

As an antidote to this, pope Francis seems to suggest the culture of care, which must be carried out at different levels, in a series of concentric circles, as it were: in the family, in schools and universities, through religious leaders and through "all those engaged in public service and international organizations, both governmental and non-governmental."³²

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that the Mediterranean region by its very nature is marked by tensions, but which also give rise to opportunities. In particular, I identified globalisation as a dynamic which could isolate but at the same time foster encounters. Through the theological lens of Fratelli tutti, I suggested that social friendship, or fraternity is a value that is inherent in European culture as it evolved through the ages. By returning to this concept of social friendship, the ill effects of globalisation, especially due to migration, could be overcome and turned into opportunities to grow and flourish into a space of peacebuilding, healing and reconciliation. The Church, particularly through its capillary network of communities is particularly well placed to carry out this mission.

¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A study in moral theory*, (Blackstone Publishing, [Ashland, Oregon], 2018).

² Joseph Ratzinger, *Europe Today and Tomorrow: Addressing the Fundamental Issues* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2007) See esp. Chapter 1.

³ See Carlo Calleja, "Models of Journeying Towards a Synodal Church in Southern Europe: Portugal, Spain, Italy, Malta," in *Towards a Synodal Church: Moving Forward*, edited by Shaji George Kochuthara and Joby Jose Kochumuttom, (Dharmaram Publications: Bangalore, 2024), 298-307.

⁴ Lenoe S., "Il problema del 'valori comuni' nelle deliberazioni dei comitati," in *I comitati di bioetica: storia, analisi, proposte* (Rome, Edizioni Orizzonte Medico, 1990), 143-158, as cited by Emmanuel Agius, "In search of a European approach to Bioethics: The emergence of a common Euro-Mediterranean bioethical culture," in *Ethical Issues in Practice for Nurses, Midwives and Family Medicine*, edited by Maurice Cauchi (Malta: Bioethics Consultative Committee, 2003), 195. See also Pierre Mallia, "Is There a Mediterranean Bioethics?" *Medical Health Care and Philosophy*, 15 (2012): 419-429.

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- ⁵ COMECE, “A Europe of Values: The Ethical Dimension of the European Union,” March 2007. Available online at <https://www.comece.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/04/20070301-A-Europe-of-values-The-Ethical-dimension-of-the-EU.pdf>.
- ⁶ Alcide de Gasperi, as cited in D’Ambrosio Rocco, “Il contributo dei cristiani alla vita politica italiana: da De Gasperi a oggi,” in *De Robert Schuman à demain: Suite du Christ et engagement politique* (Rome: Gregorian Biblical Press, 2014), 66. (translation is mine).
- ⁷ Jon Henley, “‘Vicious cycle’: how far-right parties across Europe are cannibalising the centre right” in *The Guardian*, 1 February 2025. Available online at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/feb/01/vicious-cycle-far-right-parties-across-europe-are-inspiring-imitators>
- ⁸ Global Cooperation, “Deglobalisation: what you need to know,” *World Economic Forum* January 17 2023. Available online at <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2023/01/deglobalisation-what-you-need-to-know-wef23/>.
- ⁹ Parts of this paper are adapted from Carlo Calleja, “Migration in Europe: Globalization as a Cause and as a Remedy,” in *Globalization and the New World Order* edited by Joseph Ogbonnaya and Leocadie Lushombo (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2025) in press.
- ¹⁰ Francis, *Fratelli tutti* (FT), 3 October 2015. Available online at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html para 5.
- ¹¹ FT, 6.
- ¹² FT, 99.
- ¹³ FT 233.
- ¹⁴ For a more detailed analysis on this see Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1997).
- ¹⁵ Canon 515§1 stipulates: “A parish is a certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted in a particular church, whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor (*parochus*) as its proper pastor (*pastor*) under the authority of the diocesan bishop.” Canon 518 stipulates: “As a general rule a parish is to be territorial, that is, one which includes all the Christian faithful of a certain territory. When it is expedient, however, personal parishes are to be established determined by reason of the rite, language, or nationality of the Christian faithful of some territory, or even for some other reason.”
- ¹⁶ Francis, “*Evangelii Gaudium* Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World,” Holy See, November 24, 2013, para. 29, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.
- ¹⁷ Benedict XVI, “*Caritas in veritate*,” Encyclical Letter on Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth, June 29, 2009, para. 42, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html.
- ¹⁸ Kenneth R. Himes, “Globalization with a Human Face: Catholic Social Teaching and Globalization,” *Theological Studies* 69 (2008): 270.
- ¹⁹ For more on communities of kinship see Carlo Calleja, *Communities of Kinship: Retrieving Christian Practices of Solidarity with Lepers as a Paradigm for Overcoming Exclusion of Older People* (Lanham: Lexington Books, Fortress Academic, 2024).
- ²⁰ Adriano Prospero, “‘C’era più solidarietà nel Medioevo,’” *Reset DOC* (blog), September 24, 2008, <https://www.resetdoc.org/story/cera-piu-solidarieta-nel-medioevo/?lang=it>.
- ²¹ Mark Cachia, personal communication, 22 April 2025.
- ²² Fr Malcolm Saliba, personal communication 22 April 2025.
- ²³ Francis, “Encyclical on Fraternity and Social Friendship *Fratelli Tutti*,” October 3, 2020, para. 12, http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html.
- ²⁴ Agnes M. Brazal, “Metaphorical Ecclesiology: Faith-Based Responses to Sex Trafficking,” *Concilium* 3 (2011): 94.
- ²⁵ Brazal, 99.
- ²⁶ Brazal, 100.
- ²⁷ Tim Muldoon, “Globalisation of Superficiality”, in *Ignatian Spirituality*. Available online at <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/globalization-of-superficiality/>.
- ²⁸ Francis, “Visit to Lampedusa - Homily,” July 8, 2013, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130708_omelia-lampedusa.html.
- ²⁹ Francis.
- ³⁰ Francis.
- ³¹ Francis, *Hope: Pope Francis the Autobiography* (Broadway, NY: Penguin Viking, 2025), 14.

³² Francis, “LIV World Day of Peace 2021: A Culture of Care as a Path to Peace,” December 8, 2020, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20201208_messaggio-54giornatamondiale-pace2021.html.