Catholic Social Teaching and Forced Migration

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Before its demolition in 2016, on the outside wall of the Eritrean-led church in the “Jungle” migrant camp in Calais hung a striking picture of Christ. The large painting, created by a young refugee and former camp resident, depicted Christ knocking on the door of—what can be taken to be—the soul, the church, or the world. It is a peaceful, bucolic image framed by rolling green hills and a calm sea, and in this regard, it was in striking contrast to a second dominating image located within the grey, plastic-sheeted walls of the Church’s interior: an icon depicting the cosmic battle between good and evil, as recounted in Revelation 12. The war that breaks out in heaven draws the Archangel into combat—the forces of evil are overcome through the power of God and the authority of his Messiah, and the devil is cast down to earth. With foreboding, it is foretold that earth and sea shall be disturbed until the end of time by the one who brings conflict in his wake. There is rejoicing on earth and in heaven for the victory won for the peaceable kingdom and a prayer made through the saints for the endurance, wisdom, and faith needed to negotiate the conflicts that will blight the earth until the coming of the final judgement. This image at the heart of the makeshift Calais church depicted (as in Orthodox iconography) the Archangel Michael holding a sword in his right hand and the scales of justice in his left hand.

In a tradition of Catholic social teaching (CST) that has been dominated for a century by Christologically-inflected natural law, it is notable that Pope Francis’s social teaching on migration resonates with the scriptural, mystical, and narrative forms of theological reflection that mark the meaning-making evident among communities of contemporary migrants. Not only
has Francis made reflection on migration a stubbornly persistent focus for his papacy, producing an almost endless stream of addresses, sermons, documents, and informal comments on all facets of human migration, but this work has been notably scriptural. Francis has made personal journeys to the sites of arrival, processing, and detention in Europe, offering a message of pastoral proximity and concrete solidarity. He has worked with civil society agencies to promote the idea of humanitarian corridors, sponsoring a small number of refugees to move from Lesbos to Rome. Working through his own newly formed Migrant and Refugee Section, he has also addressed the United Nations during their recent Global Compacts migration process¹ and produced an innovative form of CST that aims to guide policy-making on migration in light of CST principles. In sum, it is difficult to see how Francis could have placed greater emphasis on the importance of migration as an epoch-defining social reality. Taken together and viewed analytically, his various initiatives constitute a turn toward the scriptural, an appeal to the duty of renewed humanitarianism at the level of the local and the formally ecclesial, and an appeal to a theological form of—what could be read as—rooted cosmopolitanism, imagined as a counterpoint to both liberal narratives and the rise of populism and nativism. Francis presents us with a challenge—in response to the realities of contemporary migration, and the contexts into and out of which migration is happening—to re-imagine the life of the common/s in terms of basic and plural human goods.

The Long View

While we tend to date the origins of modern CST to 1891, migration has been a significant theme in the church’s wider social reflection since at least the 1850s. Consequently, it is worth

¹ See https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/migration-compact.
exploring the longer theo-historical background that forms the context of Francis’s contemporary interventions.

Arguably the initial impetus for the “modern” tradition of Catholic social teaching on migration emerged from the emigration of European Catholics to the so-called New World, with the migrations out of Europe to the Americas during the mid and late nineteenth century raising questions of provision for the religious and pastoral needs of Catholic migrants. This led to the formation of religious orders—perhaps most notably in the field of ongoing migrant care were the Scalabrinians—whose mission was to ensure practical care and religious instruction for those on the move. The next major impetus for a development in Catholic social teaching on migration came with the internal and external displacement of Europeans following the Second World War. In 1952, Pius XII promulgated his apostolic constitution on forced migration *Exsul Familia*. The title comes from the reference in the first line of the document to the exilic journey of the Holy Family with the child Jesus. Acting as a text that would shape official Catholic social teaching on migration for half a century, *Exsul familia* complemented the pastoral and catechetical emphasis of earlier teaching offering the beginnings of a systematic and biblical framework to guide ministry among displaced persons. Drawing on the theological trope of the Holy Family as both the models and protectors for all displaced persons, Pius devotes much of the heart of the document to an outline of the practical history of Christian ministry among migrants. Emphasizing the initiatives of the institutional church that have aimed to increase the security and dignity of migrants, Pius argues for the reception and integration of migrants within stable political communities and against encampment as a solution. He argues for provision of culturally and linguistically appropriate pastoral and spiritual care and for an awareness of ways to mitigate the dreadful choices that face the destitute.
The next major migration document issued by the Vatican took another fifty-two years to arrive. Issued by Cardinal Hamao and Archbishop Marchetto, President and Secretary of the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples in May 2004, *Egra migrantes caritas Christi* repeats many of the earlier themes but updates the Church’s social teaching to reflect the changing nature of migration flows. The increasingly global and South-South as well as more politically (and religiously) contested South-North and East-West migration of the early twenty-first century leads the document’s authors to note that any theological discussion of migration must now take account of ecumenical and interfaith responses. Addressing the question of the causes of migration in a more systematic and structural way than previous documents, *Egra migrates caritas Christi* calls for the intensification of a search for a new economic order that better represents the universal destination of goods and, therefore, reduces the need for survival migration. The document repeats earlier teaching on the need for appropriate pastoral and missiological provision for migrants but also names internal challenges for the order of the Church itself as it negotiates the relations of different Catholic cultures brought together in new forms of interaction and division in local and national church contexts.

Promising a fuller scriptural engagement with its theme, *Egra migrantes caritas Christi* delivers a much more explicitly eschatological and teleological framework for social reflection on migration. Faith is said to discover or encounter itself through its special engagement with a social “other” in migration. Faith becomes evident in both the prophetic act of denunciation of the forms of evil that manifest in survival and forced migratory experience: deportations, dispersals, exploitation, and criminalization; and also in the revelation of exile as our condition and salvation as our yearning. The document argues that any reflection on the meaning of
migration from a Christian perspective must take as its end point (and work back from there) the ultimate purpose of human relations: the call to universal communion—what Pope Francis later re-phrases in his teaching on migration as “fraternal communion.”

The doctrinal focus of *Erga migrantes caritas Christi* falls initially upon a hermeneutic of Incarnation—meaning is drawn from the idea of the Incarnation as a concrete migration of God through human history in the incarnation and the earthly ministry of Christ is itself dominated by the exilic motif. This exilic motif embraces the role of Jesus as the Incarnate Word, as itinerant preacher, and as migrant who transgresses the logic of death and thus transforms the boundaries of human suffering. There are also strong soteriological themes drawn both from the Book of Revelation and a particularly strong emphasis on the Pentecost narrative. Ethical import is drawn from the Pentecostal character of the church as an ever vaster and more varied intercultural society; held in a relationship of fraternity, communication, and difference. This Pentecostal sociality becomes, by analogy, a model for all forms of human community that are called to represent the fullness and diversity of humanity. This serves as the basis for a later distinction between a church called to act without geographical borders and a political community that might make limited and provisional use of territorial borders for reasons of ensuring the universal common good.

The documents of CST on migration also offer a set of gradually developed principles of natural law aimed at orienting church engagement with concrete questions of law and politics in the context of migration. The documents propose, in the first instance, the right not to be

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2 See discussion of the biblical context and figure of Christ as refugee in *Erga migrantes caritas Christi*, (Vatican City: Pontifical Council for Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples, 2004).
displaced or forced into emigration—a “right to remain.”⁴ This principle is presented less an Enlightenment natural right and more an expression of a Thomist Catholic political anthropology. If the human person is by nature a social and political creature, oriented to negotiating their own good as part of a common good, then achieving basic human flourishing implies the need for membership of a functioning political, economic, and ecological community. Thus, both the “right to remain” and the “right to migrate” stem from the same emphasis on the social, political, economic, and cultural (including religious) protection due to the person who belongs to a covenantal political community.

Thus, the second principle of Catholic social teaching on migration teaches: where there is conflict, persecution, violence, hunger or an inability to subsist there exist natural and absolute rights of the individual to migrate and a natural right to seek sanctuary within an alternative “safe” political community.⁵ This teaching is rooted in a transcendent humanism, which recognizes that the wellbeing of the person is tied to both the good of the bounded community and a prior recognition of a meaningful global citizenship of each person through membership of the universal human family. The task of government is to form judgements about state membership—who can be admitted and recognized as a member—based on a balance of local and universal common goods, offering sanctuary in recognition of its commitment to the universal common good and the universal need for a political “home.” It is the task of government to ensure maintenance of the local common good or the just life of the city, such that hospitality and reciprocal exchange between host and migrant is possible within the life of the nation. This implies a duty to think through issues of the universal distribution of goods and

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⁴ See Erga migrantes caritas Christi (The Love of Christ towards Migrants), (Vatican City: Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples, 2004).
cultural dialogue, such that cultures are enabled to engage dialogically and labor markets act to support the basic needs of migrant and settled populations in a non-exploitative manner. The political question of borders is never wholly divorced from the questions of wider economic justice or the value of culture.

Thus a “right to migrate” implies a third principle: a moral requirement placed upon existing political communities, especially the most materially privileged, to receive the migrant and hear and assess with justice their claim for admission, transit, or membership.6 This teaching is nuanced by a fourth principle: the (imperfect) right of a sovereign political community to regulate borders and control migration. CST has not thus far proposed a Christian cosmopolitanism based on completely open borders. Borders are recognised as legitimate only insofar as they protect the common good of the established community and are porous and humane enabling the established community to enact its duty or obligation to offer hospitality and the right of migrants to exercise their own agency in seeking the goods of survival and life in community. Within the exercise of sovereignty, political communities are invited to include the establishment and oversight of just measures for those who arrive seeking sanctuary and for effective global governance to minimise and accommodate migration flows. Sovereignty and hospitality emerge in CST as mutually implicating; with legitimate sovereignty exercised always with reference to three prior principles: the universal destination of all goods, recognition of the prior and inalienable moral unity of humankind, and the requirement to regulate borders according to basic conditions of human dignity and social justice.7 Spelling out this teaching in an extended reflection on refugees in *Pacem in terris* (1963), John XXIII taught a normative and

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6 See *Pacem in terris* (1963), 106.
7 See Benedict XVI’s encyclical, *Caritas in veritate*, (On Human Development in Charity and Truth), Vatican City (2009), 62.
transcendent universalism in which the loss of state citizenship implies the need to restore this universal, ineradicable status in practical terms within the territory of another nation.\(^8\)

Finally, recognition of the social and political nature of the person implies a need for multivalent forms of responsibility and judgement (migrant, civil society, and the state) to enable the meaningful social, economic, civic, political participation of the migrant in the host community.\(^9\) This vision suggests the need to resist capitulation to a model of integration rooted in an assimilationist model of market and state. The model for sociality is one of participation, communication, the contestation and negotiation of goods within a shared social space. The Pentecostal ecclesiology noted in *Erga migrantes caritas Christi* suggests a logic of participation and communion, seeking to foster a genuine human plurality within a harmonious whole.

There is a notable widening of social and theological analysis of migration in the encyclicals issued by John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Both refuse to treat migration as an issue separate from discussion of nuclear weapons, food security, and increases in global inequality. Consequently, they exhort the world to closer analysis of and better responses to the deep roots of displacement—including proposing the need for new systems of international governance.\(^10\) John Paul II judged that the impact of globalized migrations was to intensify patterns of socialization and argued for greater attention to be paid to the moral corollary of such increased socialization: practices of human solidarity. In a widely quoted passage from *Sollicitudo rei*

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\(^8\) See *Pacem in terris* (1963), 25.


\(^10\) In *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (On Social Concern), (Vatican City: 1987) John Paul II reads forced migration in the context of a logic of death which refuses to engage deeper moral reflection on social changes which could lead to a “more human life” and true human development. He notes the continual failures to seek a peaceful international order and suggests that the isolationism of modern states mitigate against solutions to systemic issues which lie at the root of migration concerns. See notes 23–25. In Benedict XVI’s *Caritas in veritate*, migration figures in the sociological context of all that challenges authentic human development and the opportunities for cooperation and solidarity that exist within the universal human family. See note 62.
socialis, John Paul II asserted that interdependence is a mere social fact in an increasingly globalized world, but solidarity is the moral perspective we use to interpret the meaning and possibility for virtue implicit in this fact. Solidarity is not, then, simply a duty to respect rights in the face of globalized movements of people, but calls for a deeper form of social creativity, in which our communities are re-fashioned as socialization gives way to concrete forms of solidarity. Benedict XVI focused particularly on the duty to create well-ordered systems to manage migration flows. Considering his reconsideration of the principle of subsidiarity, he argues that the appropriate level for moral engagement with this issue is now between states at an international level:

We can say that we are facing a problem of epoch-making proportions that requires bold, forward-looking policies of international cooperation if it is to be handled effectively. Such policies should set out from close collaboration between migrants’ countries of origin and their countries of destination; it should be accompanied by adequate international norms able to coordinate different legislative systems with a view to safeguarding the needs and rights of individual migrants and their families, and at the same time, those of the host countries.\(^{11}\)

Refashioning the Narrative

The papacy of Pope Francis has coincided with intensification in patterns of global forced migration, the paradox of both shrinking and expanding forms of humanitarian response, and increased public and scholarly debate about forced migration. This process is rendered most visible in a rise in the numbers of internally and externally displaced persons, a rise in long drawn out wars and consequent protracted refugee situations, and in increased politicization of the issue of migration. In making physical journeys to the heart of the geo-political sites that most represent our collective struggles with migration questions—to the shores where migrants

\(^{11}\) Caritas in veritate, 62.
arrive from sea, and to in-country holding facilities—Francis is deeply aware that migrants seeking entry to Northern states find that the most fundamental challenges to dignity in the migration process now often occur in the spaces between states and the internal spaces states create as structures of juridical exception. Principally, these are maritime spaces, and spaces of encampment and transit created within nation-states where law is suspended. Contemporary forced migrants negotiate the challenges of both mobility and immobility as part of their refugee journeys. The re-emergence of a pastoral ministry of the borderlands has been a crucial focus for the theo-political ministry of Francis.

While this new era of migration has not yet led to the production of a further Church document on migration, Francis has chosen to make migrant and refugee concerns a central focus of his papacy and has produced an unprecedented volume of teaching on the subject through homilies, addresses, and public statements. He has established a new body to oversee the Vatican’s migration and refugee work and through this new body has issued a brief interesting document to coincide with the United Nation’s Global Compacts on Migration. On the one hand, Francis has adopted a theological approach that owes less to natural law and public reason traditions (while nonetheless repudiating neither) and more to a liberationist and Ignatian engagement, and public conjuring, with Scripture. This teaching is of a piece with his views that the church must become a church of the poor. He has used preaching and a homiletic style to great—sometimes ecclesially and politically contentious—effect as a form of public apologetics. On the other hand, the brief text prepared for the UN process arguably reinvigorates and extends the Catholic natural law tradition of public reasoning on migration. Francis’s papacy marks both a point of deep continuity with the natural law teaching outlined above, which he does nothing to repudiate, and significant novelty when viewed through the lens of his homiletic, informal, and
directed policy interventions on migration.

Francis’s most well-known address on migration was made during a 2013 homily on the island of Lampedusa. The homily places the wider political dynamics that shape the migration experience in the context of Christian narratives of creation, fall, and redemption. Francis begins with a reflection on the first two questions which God asks humanity in the Scripture: Adam, where are you? Cain, where is your brother? Francis interprets these passages as stories of human disorientation, of the first signs of a tendency in humankind to lose our place within creation, to lose our orientation as creatures toward a creator. Thus, to Fall is to be disorientated and to lose our bearings. It is striking that Francis juxtaposes an account of the disorientation of the “settled” in relation to the orientation of the displaced. This appears as a narrative and doctrinal re-framing of a debate the church has couched in more rationalist language concerning the human search to secure particular individual, public and common goods. Francis offers a profoundly theological perspective to a debate that tends to be framed as an external legitimation about sovereign borders: in order to identify what might be going wrong politically in our failure to respond adequately to the challenge of the displaced, we must first come to recognize our own disorientation.

Francis explains this disorientation not only in terms of a classic account of the Fall but also in terms of the particular conditions of late modernity that seem to mitigate against our ability to perceive and know our disorientation. In various addresses and homilies, Francis grounds indifference to migrants in a culture of individualism that he thinks breeds anxiety and cynicism and in a capitalist market culture that reduces people to narrow economic value, yet

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13 The narrative of Cain and Abel is a trope to which Francis has returned on numerous occasions, most recently in his treatment of integral ecology in *Laudato si’*. 
simultaneously fails to deliver real economic value. He also criticizes a therapeutic narcissism that he calls a culture of “wellbeing.” Our own transient cultural ways breed indifference toward truly transient people. We—the disorientated “settled”—have forgotten how to inhabit space, place, and time well, seems to be the conclusion he wishes us to draw. While many contemporary secular studies of migration point to the way that state border policies disorder time for migrants—protracted journeys, lengthy waits, and traumatic experiences that seem to foreclose future promise—Francis’s theological contribution to this debate is to both echo these insights and to throw the mirror back on the disordered relationship to temporality of the “settled.” Thus, globalization, which creates ironically the transience of the settled produces as its by-product the globalization of indifference. In turn, the equally anti-theological by-product of the culture of indifference is that we ourselves become anonymous: we seem unable to understand ourselves as named, particular and responsible persons in relation to named, particular and responsible others. “The globalization of indifference makes us all ‘unnamed’…. without names and without faces.”¹⁴ And thus we all cry out, but often with the wrong object as the focus of our cries and our perceived “settled” wounded-ness. Francis emphasizes that this dynamic of anonymity is the opposite of the Creator-creature relationship, through which we are named, and as named beings called to account for other named beings.

This approach to the ethics of migration deals less with the external borders of the nation state and more with the prior internalized borders of the human will as the “matter” at the heart of a properly theological ethics. These two sets of borders—one geopolitical and one interior to the human self—are not opposed to each other as matters to be treated by two different kinds of “specialists,” but rather are read dialectically against each other. There is no repudiation of a

¹⁴ See the link to Pope Francis’s Lampedusa sermon in footnote 11 above.
theological critique of the moral function of borders, no spiritualization of forced migration. Francis’s constructive theological response to this situation is rooted in an appeal, via scriptural narrative, to a renewed natural law personalism mixed with a strong communitarian dimension. He emphasizes both universal kinship and familial relations (literal and figurative) alongside a person-centered culture of political decision-making and a necessary respect for the basic dignity and rights of the person that go way beyond the narrow offerings of current legislative regimes. Read one way, Francis can be interpreted as renewing a Maritain-like personalist appeal to the rights inherent in the person as such, much in line with—but updating—the tone of teaching on forced migration in *Pacem in terris*.

However, more unusually in the canon of modern CST, there is also a more mystical-political turn discernible in Francis’s recent addresses. Francis argues that the capacity to break through cultural indifference comes not only through an in-principle affirming of the rights due to the person as such, but that such a recognition becomes possible when one adopts a contemplative gaze. He suggests that a contemplative gaze is necessary to re-orient perception toward the universal dimensions of kinship. He tackles this in two ways: through the theme of “suffering with” as an antidote to indifference (the theme of his Lampedusa sermon) and through a more constructive vision of the relationship between heavenly and earthly cities. He notes that contemplating the life of the New Jerusalem allows us to see differently the life of the earthly city. With strong echoes of St. Augustine’s “two cities,” he hints that those who are able to see the connections between the heavenly city (manifest in the communion of saints) and the cities we live in now will be able to break through the pervasive culture of indifference. The “fruits” of this contemplation—which implies, although does not make explicit, a Pauline logic of gift—are a spirit of dialogue and encounter. This dialogue and encounter do not exist only as an interesting
end in itself but as the basis for a new creativity: new forms of service, justice, and love that the Spirit can inspire through such contemplative-led engagement. The first form of social action in relation to migration is thus conceived as a receptive one, for both “host” and migrant alike. Through openness to this, including when such Christian engagement is interfaith, the Christian encounters Jesus Christ. This is the flesh on the bones of Francis’s call that we see “fraternal communion” as the necessary context of the upholding of rights, and as the end goal of a Catholic ethics of migration. The process of moving beyond ourselves through contemplation to receive the gift that enables us to perceive our social reality in its fragmented forms returns us, via the other, in reciprocal gift exchange and dialogue, to (and beyond) ourselves. Contemplation becomes the way to see what concretely is in all its stark difficulty and possibility, and to be moved by it. The process of attending to issues of migration is thus thoroughly theological for Francis: a transcendent account is the necessary ground for an ethics of seeing and being with others in a context of structural and social sin; and the social dimension of reality is the necessary, unavoidable grounds of our on-going Christian conversion toward a life of communion.

The addresses, documents, and homilies delivered by Francis have also utilized and developed the basic categories and principles of the social encyclicals. Francis develops the fundamental theological vision we noted above into a corresponding analysis of institutional and social processes. In *Laudato si’*, Francis connects the failure of law to respond to the pressing challenges brought by increased forced migration to a deep failure in civil society. Indifference to migrant suffering in Europe suggests not just the failure of government or the individual but—of central concern to CST—“the loss of that sense of responsibility for our fellow men and
women upon which all civil society is founded.” This hints at both a modern liberal conception of the basis of good law—nomos emerging from the social body acting both as legislator and the entity shaped by law—and also a continued complex Catholic philosophical view of social life rooted in plural forms of associational life, thus extending the insight beyond a social contractarian view of the constitution of good law.

In later addresses, Francis argues that solutions to the current suffering of migrants lies at the level of nation-states, within regions, as well as at the level of local civil (including ecclesial) society: he suggests that “solutions” lie within a newly generated mutually constituted political space in which all levels of social organization play their part. He calls for an expansion of humanitarian corridors organized by networks of civil actors and of local Catholic parishes and organizations acting as refugee hosts. Francis’s teaching offers a more place-based and communitarian vision of migrant response that his two predecessors, emphasizing the constantly interconnected relationship of the local and global and that the global is encountered in concrete terms through the particular. His proposals are focused not only on law and rights but also on a commitment to a reconstituted political order.

While the theological themes of Francis’s teaching are striking, it is worth noting that his interventions on forced migration have also been novel in more political and ecclesiological terms. While Francis acts and speaks as a resolutely global figure utilizing global platforms and networks, his focus has taken the form of calls for a renewal of local faith-based action. While the teaching of his immediate predecessors focused much more heavily on calls for global

15 Laudato si’, 25.
16 While clearly not a source of influence, it is worth noting the parallels between what Francis’ hints at in his comments on the failure of civil society vis a vis the failure of law and Seyla Benhabib’s concept of jurisgenerativity as a crucial part of renewing law in relation to the claims of migrants. See Seyla Benhabib, Exile, Statelessness and Migration: Playing Chess with History from Hannah Arendt to Isaiah Berlin (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 2018).
governance structures and greater cooperation between states, Francis has refocused Catholic migration teaching on the potential for avowedly local, place-based humanitarianism and civil action. While Francis’s calls have been made in both overtly scriptural language as well as a universal language of justice and solidarity, his calls can be read as parallel to movements within humanitarian policy toward localized responses to reception, protection, and integration of forced migrants. Such an emphasis is strongly theologically informed, but also mirrors wider trends in refugee response.

The stories told by contemporary South-North migrants indicate that the failures of nation-states to provide well-ordered and just processes for reception, handling and later integration of migrants impact not simply the dignity of the migrant but also the overall possibility of a just outcome. Their stories also indicate that local humanitarianism—both from local citizen hosts and between refugee hosts and other refugees—remains a major source of assistance for those on the move or those migrants trapped in forms of increasing immobility or stuck-ness during transit. This is especially clear in South-South migration contexts but also applies to South-North migration. While CST as a formal, disciplined body of thought has yet to fully address such insights drawn from shifting migrant experience and remains a largely top-down body of work, Francis’s teaching clearly nudges church social teaching in the direction of a more dialogical engagement with migrant experience and with a more localized and reciprocal ethics of response. Francis has chosen to highlight significant barriers to integration at the local level as well as the necessary responsibility local hosts take and must take for engaging with displaced people. He has not repudiated the call for greater international cooperation through global management bodies made by his two predecessors and has engaged in direct ways with the UN Global Compacts processes, but his emphasis has fallen much more heavily than his
predecessors on local and more informal faith-inspired humanitarianisms. This shift should be read in theological, political, and pastoral terms.

Francis updates and expands the natural law principles outlined by his predecessors in two ways. Following the motif of his pontificate, he presents the principles more accessibly and concretely. Engaging in an act of translation, he simplifies previous natural law-based migration teaching into the simplified form of four verbs: to welcome, to protect, to promote, and to integrate. “Conjugating these four verbs is a duty,” says Francis, “a duty of justice, civility and solidarity.” He defines welcome as provision of safe and legal programmes of reception, providing personal safety for arriving migrants, and access to services. “Protecting” implies availability of relevant and accurate information, defending basic rights independent of legal status and a duty to provide special care for child migrants. “Promoting” is defined as ensuring the conditions for the development of migrants according to their own needs and capacities and those of native citizens. Francis places greater emphasis than his predecessors on the duty of state and civil society to promote mutual integral development of migrants and citizens and to facilitate state and local actors in developing new forms of sustainable hospitality. Supporting integration implies providing opportunities for intercultural encounter and active citizenship. Francis addresses the question of culture by reminding Europeans that this is not simply a question of reflecting on the impact of the arrival of perceived cultural “others,” but also a matter of the internal erosion of a vision of “integral humanism” core to European ideals. Francis calls this vision “the finest fruits of European civilisation.” The vacuum left by liberal individualism and the commodification of reason causes fear and cynicism to take root. Francis is clear that migration does raise cultural and theological questions, but those questions are as much about the atrophied moral performance of Western and European projects and its attendant politics of
identity as they are about the presence of cultural “others” and demographic change.

Francis also updates the church’s social analysis of contemporary migration trends and integrates the principles of CST into this picture. He proposes that the key causes of contemporary displacement are armed conflict and social violence, poverty, economic crisis and exploitation, ecological change and climate vulnerability, political instability and corruption. He proposes that the current practice of border closing can itself constitute a form of cooperation with moral evil when shown that it leads to intensification of vulnerability and the criminal exploitation of forced migrants. Borders do not serve the good when they intensify rather than mitigate vulnerability, even for non-members. Such a claim is rooted in his wider account of a priori universal human kinship as well as a thoroughly historical appeal to moral action and its effects in a globalized, interconnected world. For both reasons, he repeats that the only possible ethical response to forced migration flows—whether economic or political—is solidarity.

To understand what Francis means when he refers to solidarity requires us to remind ourselves of its earlier definition in the social teaching of John Paul II. Solidarity as a principle does not aim to invoke a weak universal benevolence but rather a structural orientation toward ensuring the dignity and development of the human person. He connects this ethic of solidarity to a critique of reductionist views of the human person that dominates debates about migration, in which the person is reduced to economic, legal, or political concerns. Francis notes that such reductionism offends against the principle of human dignity and is most visible in debates about legal and illegal migrants and when deciding national priorities for legal pathways. The use of humanitarian reason as part of a system of categorization is not exempt from this critique.

Francis repeats both the paternal and fraternal corporate themes of earlier CST, emphasizing the particular threat to the family posed by current migration patterns shaped
through inadequate or hostile policies. The separation of families, the increased risk of exploitation arising from the closure of borders and failure of dignified reception processes and the inherent trauma of forced migration, are all noted as threats to the dignity of the family. The moral framework through which Francis views migration continues to be that of the natural mobility of humankind and (without fundamental contradiction) a natural search for roots and a common life through which the human person comes to self-knowledge and fulfillment and is enabled to transcend the narrow borders of the self through acts of love and service. Francis continues to teach that, even when migrant journeys are brought about by loss, disaster, and evil, God finds ways to wrest blessing and God’s command to love of neighbor requires an openness to cooperate with that process of wresting blessing in the context of loss.

Two Concluding Political-theological Considerations

To place Francis’s work on migration within the long-view might also lead us to read his contribution alongside the wider streams of (often overlooked) informal Catholic social and political thought. Over the last two years, I have been particularly struck by the surprising parallels between Francis’s rendering of both the reality of forced migration and debates about migration (it is politically necessary to make some distinction between the two) and the mystical political writings of the mid-twentieth-century French philosopher Simone Weil. A French-Jewish refugee who wrote from within the Christian philosophical tradition and who died in exile in her 30’s in mid-war England, Weil wrote powerfully of migration in the context of what she

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18 It is interesting to note, as an aside, that many of the plural and highly diverse new lay movements that are taking root across the global context are drawing on the informal and unofficial tradition of Catholic social intellectual and activist thought and less than one might expect on formal CST. This is, I think, a notable current trend. One example can be found in the sources drawn from on the website of the French movement Limite, www.revuelimite.fr.
cast as the “uprootedness” of modern societies. She considered that visibly uprooted peoples (the displaced) were the tangible signs of a deeper, less immediately visible all-pervasive cultural-economic system that created a culture of uprootedness as a common, shared condition. Her intention was not to extend the idea of displacement gratuitously to whole populations and thus rob the term of any meaning, but to name the processes of (post)industrial capitalism which she understood disoriented persons from rightly oriented relations to place, time, nature, production and the other. She considered the structures of capitalist markets and the workplace, the operation of private property, class systems and liberal systems of political representation to each and in combination manifest and reproduce such uprootedness.19

Interestingly, akin to Francis’s emphasis on the disorientation of the settled, Weil suggested that this uprootedness produced blindness to the conditions and deep causes of displacement. Her remedy takes the form of training in a process of individual and communal attention to the other and to the conditions of affliction. I doubt very much that Weil has been a direct influence on Francis, and there are certainly tensions between Weil’s mystical political theology and a doctrinal Catholicism (her unorthodox Christology and theodicy as starting points), but nonetheless, the parallels in thinking are striking and interesting to a contemporary reader. Both Francis and Weil view an ethics of migration as necessitating a broader account of the disorientation of cultures, both insist on the need for a contemplative-political response to displacement, and both view a willingness to enter into contexts of suffering as a necessary part of an ethical path; yet neither wishes to make suffering in itself useful or justifiable. Neither valorizes the refugee as such but focuses on the moral obligations that are stem from the mere

fact of displacement and its complex material causes. Both refuse to view questions of refugee rights separately from forms of social, legal, political, and economic (dis)order.

By attending to the parallels between Weil and Francis’s rendering of the mystical politics of migration, we can begin to place Francis’s social teachings not only within the line of official Catholic social teaching but also within the tradition of twentieth-century political theology; more specifically a mid-century tradition of thought that did not win out at the end of the war and consequently, until recently, was largely forgotten. Weil, prefiguring Francis’s insights on disorientation, suffering, and attention was nonetheless a strong critic of Maritain’s personalism and the early stages of its embrace by the Church. She issued a critique of the turn toward human rights language and the uses of theology to ground these claims and preferred a philosophy of mutual obligation and what she called the *impersonalism* of duty for the other.20 Francis is perhaps not only resurrecting and developing aspects of the Church’s social teaching in his remarks on migration, but also returning us in rather interesting (if incomplete and possibly accidental) ways to resources from a lay Christian philosophical path not taken in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War—a path that might be fruitful for the Church to revisit, and one in which refugee political theologians were prominent thinkers. Given Francis’s teaching in *Laudato si’* and the turn toward a more comprehensive social ecological account of our times—toward an account of the systematic denaturing of our ways of living and dying—it is worth noting that there is a wider tradition that Francis might continue to weave together and develop as the intellectual theological hinterland that might challenge our current denatured political gaze. This is a collaborative task that might be shared between lay political theologians, migrant communities who are again reflecting theologically and politically and the papacy of Francis.

A second theo-political challenge relates to oft-repeated journalistic and theological mischaracterizations of Francis’s teaching on migration as a form of liberal cosmopolitanism. This is an unhelpful and inaccurate categorization for two reasons. As we have explored above, Francis’s teaching on migration is strongly theologically rooted and sits in some evident tension with the neo-liberal philosophies such analyses assume cosmopolitan thought to rest upon. Yet, such a categorization tends to be as poor a reading of the varied and pluriform cosmopolitan tradition as it is of Francis’s own contribution. Seyla Benhabib argues that in its classical, eighteenth and nineteenth century and contemporary forms cosmopolitanism tends toward two different traditions: “positive” and “negative.”²¹ Negative traditions of cosmopolitanism drawn from a Cynic heritage tend to rest on sentiments of necessary nomadism and universalism emanating from either a desired detachment from the particularities of place or from recognition of the inevitable, sometimes catastrophic failures associated with the life of the city. We despair of the fragility of the particular and invest in the universal. By contrast, “positive” cosmopolitan accounts, drawing from a Stoic genealogy, do not suggest such an inherently agonistic or broken relation of the universal and particular, and instead ground the ethical life of the particular person and place in what is already and transferable universal. The sharing of reason makes possible the sharing of law, belonging, and cohabitation. We begin from what is universal and work toward the particular.

It is this second strand of cosmopolitanism—seen by post-liberals as both anthropologically flawed and easily co-opted by late capitalism—that is the assumed point of universal reference for cosmopolitanism among many current commentators. It is such

contemporary cosmopolitans that David Goodhart seeks to immortalize in his recent work on the rise of populism *The Road to Somewhere*, cast in his terms as the “citizens of anywhere.” To characterize Francis as a liberal cosmopolitan in these pre-lapsarian political terms makes little sense. Nonetheless, Benhabib’s “negative” tradition of cosmopolitanism does have an important and almost entirely overlooked theological lineage in eighteenth and nineteenth century Christian and Jewish thought that is worth noting. Jewish traditions of cosmopolitan thought drew from the dark experience of exclusion, forced nomadism and expulsion of the Jews and insisted on the need for a political-theological cosmopolitanism that was capable of addressing the persistent failures of political communities to provide membership for all human persons. This tradition held onto both the abiding importance of place and rootedness, even the sacredness of this, but recognized the persistent uprooting of people from place, the continuous history of the generation of placeless persons, which impelled a necessary cosmopolitanism. The tradition of Catholic social teaching, including Francis’s contribution to reflection on migration, does not fit neatly into either Cynic or Stoic, “positive” or “negative” genealogies of cosmopolitanism; they cut across both and speak in a different voice. We are living through a time when the public contestation of ideas that draw from both kinds of cosmopolitan traditions and from long traditions of nativist populism has become brittle and deadly; and with it the life of the commons (beyond mere citizenship) is also brittle and threatened. With both this debate in mind and with the reality of increasingly large numbers displaced and displaced-immobile people globally, a willingness to engage with the terms of this debate and to retrieve and rethink its theological forms seems important intellectual-apologetic and pastoral-prophetic ground for the church. There is, arguably, a form of theological cosmopolitanism in Francis’s thought but it is neither

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that of the crude commentators nor easily situated in the landscape of crumbling secular cosmopolitan options. Nonetheless, if it can continue to stretch and open itself to responding to the fundamental challenges unfolding around us, it has something compelling to say to a necessary but ever more fragile life of a truly common good.