Migration and Integration of Foreign Priests. Aspirations, Religiosity, and Tensions in the Narratives of Foreign Priests in Italy

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Abstract: This paper aims to understand the individual factors sustaining the migratory flow of Catholic priests to Italy. Priests' migration cannot be seen as the mere result of lack of vocations and shortage of priests in the host country since their agency, belief, aspirations, and motivations affect their religious identity and, consequently, their integration and participation in the host country. Drawing on qualitative research, this paper collects the voices and the narratives of selected international priests living in Italy. Priests' interviews led to broad-range questions about the nature of migration decisions and their integration into the host society and churches that originate from differences in religiosity, vocations, and missions. That resulted in a typology of 4 types of migrant priests: *careerist priests*, highly educated and integrated into the host country, driven by career and salary aspiration, and showing a highly politicized vision of religion; *servant priests*, with a strong missionary impulse to serve the Church as a universal institution transcending abstract and real boarders; *evangelist priests* who feel the moral obligation to evangelize secularized countries to bring them back to the origins of Catholicism; *rebel priests* who feel second-class priests, discriminated both within and outside the Church, in a country where they were forced to move, for this reason questioning their sense of clear vocational directions.

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This paper has as its focus the study of the migration of foreign Catholic priests to Italy.[1] The importance of the phenomenon is inversely proportional to the number of studies conducted in this field. In the study of international migration, the migrations of priests are normally neglected probably because they are not thought to be real migrants, and their effects in the country of arrival are considered negligible. This lack of scientific interest may also be due to the irrelevance (in quantitative terms) of religious migration if compared to mass migration flow and to its particular nature.

The migration of foreign priests to Western Europe and Italy is due to the shortage of native priests, no longer able by number and age to fully perform their functions. Lack of vocations to the priesthood by young men and the continuous retirement of older priests, as well as continued growth in the Catho-

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[1] While this paper results from a conjoined effort, in the final draft, Angela Delli Paoli wrote sections: *Methodology*, *A Typology of Foreign Priests in Italy*, *Evangelists*, *Rebels*, *Discussion and Conclusion*, and Giuseppe Masullo wrote the introductory section, *The International Migration of Priests*, *Careerists*, *Servants*.

lic population, are the leading causes of the shortage of the number of priests. In Italy, for several years now, vocations have been declining (Cipriani 2020), and priest ordinations fail to replace deaths. The only way to fill the void of priests without changing the organization of apostolic activity and reducing the number of churches is to resort to international migration.

Italy is a significant pole of attraction for religious catholic personnel from other countries for various reasons: the existence of prestigious and esteemed centers of priestly formation and religious education; the presence of places of worship of mysticism; the seat of Vatican City and the complex organization of the spiritual and temporal government of the Catholic Church in the world.

That is a particular type of migration that breaks new ground in the conceptualization of the motives that generate and impede migration. It can hardly be conceptualized through orthodox theories of migration, particularly under the rhetoric of labor migration, marriage, or family migration. That is not labor migration in the strict sense since there is no religious labor market, nor is it population migration, with priests being a population excluded from demographic events such as marriage and reproduction. Thus, it imposes alternative ways of framing migration.

The paper aims to give voice to priest migrants unheard of in scientific literature. The central purpose of our research was to hear the viewpoint of international priests living in Italy to understand how their migration is experienced and narrated and shed light on the factors, aspirations, and desires that shaped their migratory choices. To meet that end, we opted for qualitative research due to its ability to illuminate unexplored reality (Elliker 2022). We carried out in-depth interviews with selected priests living in Italy at the moment of our meeting. As a result, we produced a typology of different migration paths, able to detect similarities and differences among types of foreign priests.

The paper is organized as follows. The next section provides an overview of the limited literature on priests' migration. The following one outlines the research design, providing interviewees' demographics. Then, we present the classificatory principles of the typology and the different types of migration patterns. In the conclusive remarks, we shortly discuss our findings.

The International Migration of Priests

The little research on priests' migration has driven some scholars to analyze the phenomenon by applying the classical paradigms of the sociology of migration, both from the macro- and micro-sociological perspectives. For the former, priests have been considered in the same way as highly skilled migrants, arriving in Western countries to correspond to a structural shortage of new vocations. From the micro point of view, on the other hand, they are understood as subjects who weigh the costs and benefits of migration, among the latter being the possibility of improving their personal and family conditions (Lecchini and Barsotti 1999). These explanations may appear somewhat simplistic, especially if they do not take a closer look at the structural and relational complexities called into play in the phenomenon of religious migration. These complexities, as mentioned above, for different reasons, are not perfectly assimilable to those experienced, for example, by economic migrants.

A first useful way to try to delimit the phenomenon, taking into account its specificities, is to consider the context of its origin. The Church is an organization in itself. The Church is a vertical institution that has expanded its influence since colonization in all areas of the world. That aspect is also proven by the existence of numerous religious congregations (many of them with a missionary vocation). The existence of well-established exchange programs, as well as the relationships that the bishops of Western churches have with those of non-European countries from which most migrant priests come, is undoubtedly a driver of migration, making it more likely and directly shaping migration decisions.

In the light of these agreements and relationships, priests are sent to the West to respond to the needs of the Western Church, an aspect that in the literature is called "reverse mission" (Morier-Genoud 2018). It consists of an inverted evangelization compared to the past as a consequence of the deepened secularization and decline in faith—a flow of missionaries coming to the global North from the global South when, in the past, missionaries left Europe and the Americas to evangelize the South, the colonial world.

Within the so-called push-pull factor perspective (Massey et al. 1993), secularization may be conceived as the structural driver in the place of destination explaining migration. The priests' decisions to move is not taken individually but depend on structural macro disparities between the high number of priests in the place of origin and the shortage of priest at the site of arrival. Priests migrate as a response to the needs of the ecclesiastical institution. However, migration cannot be seen as the mere result of a set of push-pull factors, as the literature on general migration (Carling and Schewel 2018; Col-

lins 2018; Meyer 2018; Scheibelhofer 2018) and priest migration (Hoge and Okure 2006; Trzebiatowska 2010; Gallagher and Trzebiatowska 2017) demonstrated, showing the relevance of individual agency and motivations in most individual migration strategies. A recent study (Nkulu Kabamba 2017) examining the relational processes underlying the decision by the bishop to send a priest to a foreign land revealed how the migration of priests is not always cast from above and cannot be seen as a simple response to the role. It was highlighted how, in selecting the most suitable person to undertake the migration, great importance is played by certain character attitudes of the priest, as well as the willingness to apply for this role. The research revealed a certain propensity of some priests to migrate, with their desire to acquire higher theological training or to make a career in ecclesiastical institutions in Western countries.

A critical analysis of the analytical dualism between structure and agency can provide a more sophisticated theoretical basis for understanding the process of migration (Archer 1982). An exclusively structural explanation leaves out some aspects that seem to specifically characterize some micro-relational components of the phenomenon. More than structural drivers acting at a macro level, it is significant to explore how these are perceived and interpreted by different priests, and these differences in interpreting and detecting opportunities and advantages may explain a wide range of variations in individual pathways. The ethnographic research of Gallagher and Trzebiatowska (2017) carried out on Polish Catholics in the UK demonstrated the strength of migrants' agency and belief in affecting their religious participation in the host country. In the absence of a homogeneous religious culture in the host country, their religious experience depends

on their agency, their attitudes, and their predispositions. Only priests with an embedded religiosity and belief continue to practice in the same way as their country or explore flexible, personal, and independent practice. Whereas those with passive belief, question their faith.

Recognizing the agency of priests means also recognizing specific challenges associated with being a priest, which may be exacerbated in migration—loneliness, limitations in pastoral work, facing social expectations toward clergy, or prejudice (Ciarrocchi and Wicks 2000; Hoge 2002; Isacco et al. 2014; Pietkiewicz and Bachryj 2014). Various studies indicate that priests experience role-specific challenges such as higher levels of distress, depression, and burnout than the general population (Virginia 1998; Knox, Virginia, and Lombardo 2002; Rossetti and Rhoades 2013; Pietkiewicz 2015).

In addition, valuing the agency of foreign priests also means recognizing the ambivalent nature of the integration process itself, which, in this case, is the outcome of both the pressure to integrate to answer the need of the sending Church (spirit of service), the personal religious identity, and the quality of relationships with the local clergy and the laity. There might also be a problem of acceptance by clergy and laity. The exercise of the priesthood takes place in a context, that of the immigration society, not infrequently characterized by deep ethnic, racial, and social divisions or tensions that would also touch migrant priests in the same way as they do economic migrants. The priest is to occupy the same role in a different context. While in the context of origin, his authority is strongly recognized and legitimized by his parishioners, on the contrary, in the context of arrival, the reverse sometimes occurs. While it may be true that Catholics of different nationalities share the same religious institutions (Rey 2007), differences in liturgy, rites, and pastoral care may exacerbate the difficulties of integrating (Hoge and Okure 2006). Sometimes, a mismatch between priests' dispositions and the conditions of the host culture causes conflict and lack of integration, contributing to the strengthening of religio-nationalism. The qualitative study of Polish priests in the UK carried out by Trzebiatowska (2010) underlines the dynamics of both integration and conflict between Polish and local Catholics. By leveraging on the concept of *habitus* (Bourdieu 1991) as both a structural and structuring field, she identifies the mismatch between the *habitus* of Polish and Scottish clergy as the reason for the lack of integration of foreign priests. Polish priests live the tension between the field and symbolic system they are familiar with and the Scottish context. Their *habitus* becomes inadequate, and this perceived inadequateness causes tensions. The conflict between Polish and Scottish priests is the conflict between two different ways of conceptualizing Catholicism, which is expressed in different ethnic rituals, ways of professing the priesthood, sacred rites, and so on. This study highlights deep divisions within the Church itself, for example, between foreign and native priests, and thus the lack of a certain uniqueness of thinking about professing the priesthood, sacred rites, et cetera. Thus, the religious field would seem to be characterized by deep power asymmetries, by internal conflicts over stakes of both material and symbolic kinds. Such conflicts may exacerbate to the extent that Catholicism takes on a political significance for migrants, an extension of national identity to which migrant priests do not easily give up in continuing to identify with it in the exercise of their mandate.

Thus, more than causes and international obligations, we will look at priests' responses that are mediated through migrants' agency.

Methodology

The paper relies on a qualitative study based on in-depth interviewing. Migration studies, particularly those with a feminist perspective, have underlined the potential of narratives to move beyond normalized scripts of migration to grasp individual motivations, aspirations, desires, and perspectives. Narratives are a privileged way of accessing migrants' representation and understanding of their migration decisions, providing a critical basis for interpreting the relationships between agency and structure in migration choices (Lawson 2000; Silvey 2004).

Interviews were carried out with foreign catholic priests flown into Italian churches (June-September 2022) to remedy the need for pastoral care. Due to the difficulty in defining the population, we opted for a snowball sampling that takes advantage of the social networks of identified respondents, providing an expanding set of other contacts (Thomson 1997). Although snowball sampling contradicts many of the assumptions underpinning conventional notions of sampling, it has several advantages for 'hidden' or unexplored populations, such as migrant priests. Members of a 'hidden' population are quite difficult to locate due to the inexistence of a sampling list. To avoid geographical homogeneity and balance priests both in terms of country of origin and geographical location of the host church, we used different chain referrals from which we identified the initial respondents. This assured to include priests of different origins operating in southern, central, and northern Italian churches.

The interview guide covered some key areas:

- *Personal history* (life before migration, country of arrival, year of arrival, role and responsibilities at the departure, etc.);

- *Identity* (meaning attributed to religious obedience, to being Catholic, vocation and motives behind joining the priesthood, personal conception of the Church, sense of belonging, etc.);

- *Life in Italian churches* (theological training, relationships with leaders and peers, the function performed and pastoral responsibilities, functioning of the church/parish in which one works, discrimination and acts of racism experienced, differences between Italian Catholicism and that of origin with attention to liturgical practices).

The primary questions were almost the same for all the participants, but the follow-up sub-questions to each central question differed according to the responses and biographies of each participant.

The interviews were carried out in Italian, face-to-face, and lasted 50 minutes on average. They were audio-taped and transcribed in full (verbatim) once the interview was over (as the canonical qualitative interview prescribes [Silverman 2010; 2015]). To assure anonymity, an identification number was given to each interview, and identifiable characteristics (e.g., names and places) were removed.

During the data analysis, we made use of analytical procedures of grounded theory methodology (GTM), in particular memoing (Glaser 1978:83) and constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss 1967:105). Data collection and transcriptions were iterative processes. After multiple readings of the transcriptions, general categories were identified and grouped into five themes: motivations, aspirations, discriminations, religiosity, and migratory prospects. Although we are aware of the uniqueness of each participant and his ability to add something new to the study,

the interviews were stopped after reaching saturation (Neuman 2006) in terms of coverage of these themes.

Findings will be accompanied by emblematic excerpts selected by general references to similar ideas representing common themes. They will be reported integrally to preserve the authenticity of the quotes.

The total number of respondents is 30. International priests who do not speak Italian are not included here; first, because we could not talk to them. Second, most of them see themselves as merely passing through and do not aspire to minister in Italy. Few priests approached did not agree to participate in the study, having concerns about privacy or fear that their narratives may jeopardize their immigration and religious status.

On average, they were aged 45 years and came from different countries (Congo, Nigeria, and Togo are the most recurrent ones). Most of them moved to Italy more than ten years ago and have changed at least two host churches, not always geographically near. Most host churches are in medium-sized towns. Diocesan priests make up most of our interviewees. They have a home diocese in their country, and a few have an adopted diocese in Italy. Religious priests belong to international orders. Such international orders decide on their migration, deploying their members to one country or another, depending on the needs for limited periods. Concerning their priest's ministry today, most of them are parochial vicars, and a very small number are pastors, chaplains, or spiritual directors. It is found that foreign priests, even incardinated and after a long stay, rarely have high-level responsibilities in dioceses and diocesan curia. Thus, they seem to be relegated to the role of auxiliaries, of second-order clergy. It is, apart from rare exceptions, one of their sad recurring remarks (see: Table 1).

Table 1. Group demographics

Origin	Brazil	3
	Cameroon	1
	Colombia	1
	Congo	7
	Ivory Coast	1
	India	3
	Indonesia	1
	Madagascar	1
	Nigeria	5
	Poland	1
	Togo	4
	Ukraine	2
Order	Diocesan priests	17
	Religious priests	10
	Non responses	3
Age	36-40	9
	41-45	8
	46-50	6
	51-55	2
	56-64	2
	Non responses	3
Ministry	Parochial vicars	22
	Pastors	6
	Spiritual directors	2
	Total	30

Source: Self-elaboration.

A Typology of Foreign Priests in Italy

We identified two classificatory principles to detect and order differences and similarities in the migration paths of foreign priests living in Italy.

The first is *voluntariness in migration decisions* as a product of considerations expressed in the previous section. Although we are aware that forced or voluntary decisions are not a dichotomy but need to be conceptualized as a continuum of experience, to detect differences among migratory choices without running the risk of reifying extremes, we look at the agency of migrants and how they represent and narrate their decisions. We distinguish between those

who narrate their migration as *voluntary*, acted by choice without compulsion or any sort of pressure, and those who present migration as forced because they feel they had no other options or alternatives.

The second dimension is *integration*. As emerged from the previous section, for international priests, integration is a multidimensional concept involving different levels:

- *Inclusion in pastoral care*: liturgy may be very different in Italy, and it requires adaptation and acceptance. It is not a mere ritual question but involves the conception of religion. Many foreign priests, particularly those from Brazil and Congo, where the celebration of mass is very lively and participatory, complain of excessive ritualism, speed, and lack of interaction in the liturgy that does not make them feel integrated;

- *Relations with other priests*: if they feel accepted or experience discrimination with refer-

ence, for example, to the parish or ministry they were assigned. In some cases, they feel poorly integrated because they are assigned to a ministry that other priests do not want (poor or multicultural parishes, hospital ministries, etc.);

- *Integration with the laity and the local community*: integration also depends on acceptance by the laity, on the image of the foreign priests among the Italian community, and the eventual presence of ethnic prejudices and stereotypes.

From the intersection of these two classificatory principles, we derive the typology of foreign priests depicted in Figure 1 that distinguishes among four types: *careerists*, *servants*, *evangelists*, and *rebels*. Although they can be considered neither fully exhaustive nor mutually exclusive, they help to identify some common patterns that could also be found in other priest migration flows.

Figure 1. A typology of foreign priests in Italy
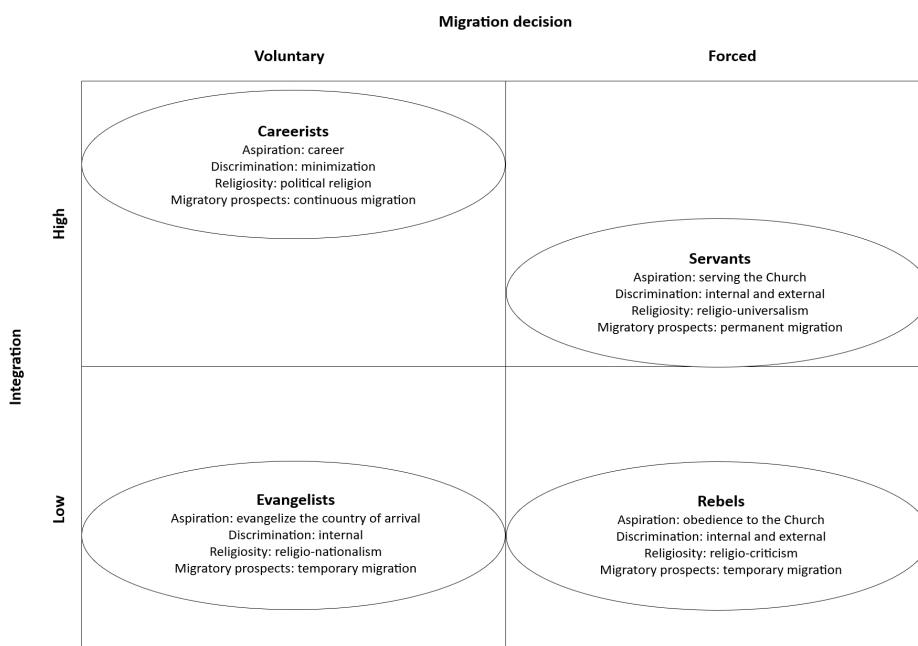
Source: Self-elaboration.

Careerists

This group includes three priests who voluntarily moved to Italy and seem highly integrated. They are nomadic priests without a stable connection or attachment to a specific destination, community, or local church who show extreme obedience to church hierarchies.

> In 2011, I was invited to teach "work ethics" at the Stigmatines' vocational school in V. [city in the north of Italy], where this congregation originated, and after three years, I stopped because I was called back to the Ivory Coast to serve on the council as a leader and then I returned to P. [city in the north of Italy] as an assistant pastor, while now, I am a pastor in the P. [city in the north of Italy] area. Currently, I have been loaned to a diocese, and my travels depend on the length of my contract. I live by obedience, so I go where I am told to go, where my competencies are required. As priests, we are the labor force of the apostolate, and we are called to bring our education where it is needed. On the other hand, in the past, I was in Pretoria, where I was teaching. I was a formator for the Stigmatine friars. [5]

This group of migrants seems to have traits of high-skilled labor migration. The migration of priests cannot be considered a labor migration in the orthodox sense, given that priests cannot be placed in the 'normal' labor market, nor is the salary the mechanism that regulates the balance between supply and demand. Their territorial mobility takes place within an a-territorial organization, the Catholic Church, to optimize the use of human resources. They represent themselves as the labor force for the apostolate. For those who fall into this group, migration is likened to that of highly skilled personnel since these migrants are highly educated. Thus, the motivation

behind the brain drain in traditional professions is also present among this group of priests. Their migration decision is based on career aspirations. They come from developing countries and have the motivation to move to wealthy, developed nations since life opportunities, further training, and salaries are better there. The salaries of priests are much higher in Italy than in developing nations. Housing is provided at no cost, and if they live in a rectory, food cost is nearly zero. In Italy, they can expect a three-fold salary increase in buying power on average. This motivation to earn good money works in the opposite direction from the missionary impulse.

> I think that among the benefits of being a priest in Italy is the excellent organization of the dioceses. All priests in Italy receive, for example, economic sustenance equal to the sum of 900 Euros, which allows me not to be miserable, while in Togo, this sum is extremely lower as a priest has to provide for his sustenance with only 50 Euros with which one will never be able to secure his basic needs of movement and communication, not to mention the many needy who come to him personally. Throughout the nation, housing is provided in canonical houses, as well as food from parishes and health insurance from dioceses. [17]

They do not feel acculturation stress and appear to be integrated both in the Catholic and the laic communities also due to their long stay in Italy (more than 15 years). They cannot be considered second-order priests because, in most cases, they hold important positions that contribute to their feeling of integration into the foreign context.

> With the other priests, I have always had a good relationship, I have never felt like a foreigner. They do not see the color of my skin to the point that they chose me, among many Italians who speak the language

perfectly, as provincial secretary and guardian of the community. [8]

In some cases, they do not feel discriminated against at all, in others, they minimize discrimination experiences by being ironic about them.

Outside, with others, I have so much "fun." You know, when you're in the car and a black cat goes by. What happens? When I put on the black robe and walk down the street, there are some people who get scared and make the sign of the cross. [8]

They do not set limits to their migratory project, which could stabilize in Italy, open up to other destinations, or foresee a return to their homeland. They add to the usual dichotomy that opposes temporary migration to permanent migration, the notion of *continuous migration*, a migratory path that temporarily lands in Italy but may have other stages and subsequent destinations.

Servants

This group includes 12 priests who have moved to Italy on an average of 10 years, dedicated to the needs of the Church. Their engagement with faith and religiosity remains a salient part of their identity, and in light of this, they feel obliged to answer to church hierarchies and decisions and serve the ecclesiastical institution.

They are mainly religious priests with a strong missionary impulse independent from the place and their nationality. They consider their order or the Church as a whole as their home, not identifying with any geographical diocese. That also makes it easier for them to move from nation to nation. They show a high missionary impulse.

Before I came to N. [city in the south of Italy], I was in B. [city in the south of Italy], N. [city in the south of Italy], A. [city in the north of Italy], and I studied in Rome, and then I was sent to I. [Apennines of Campania] where it was very cold, and, for an African, it was a very hard experience. If I had the choice, I would like to go back home, but I have submitted my will to God, and this is my mission... There is a great risk in coming out of poverty and falling into the hands of wealth, which has happened to many in Latin America, with "liberation theology" in which the priest is no longer the one who says to believe in the Word of God, but says to come out of poverty and emphasize how wealth is the best thing. There is, therefore, a misinterpretation of the Bible, and the Pope himself urged us to take the latter and talk about God, not money. According to "liberation theology," one does not have Jesus as the main goal but a more comfortable life. Priests should remember that they have taken a vow of poverty. [6]

Some of them also operate under a different financial system, not receiving salaries directly and not being able to save and spend money as they wish. They take a vow of poverty, their finances are managed by the order, and receive stipends only for living expenses. Also, when the vow of poverty is not imposed by the order, they choose to live in poverty to experience spiritual richness.

The priest should live in poverty, his true wealth should be solely spiritual wealth, and I, for one, would feel uncomfortable being rich in front of poor people. [7]

They focus on the needs of the universal Church more than the needs of the local Church. Their religion is universal, and that makes them prone to religious integration (what we call *religio-univer-*

salism). They believe in the universal nature of the Catholic faith, in the universality of Catholicism, and its ability to transcend abstract and real borders through adaptation to local customs and practices—thus becoming embedded in the fabrics of societies worldwide. That leads them to minimize cultural and ritual differences to explore the qualities of their religion that transcend culture and hierarchies.

If they can overcome liturgy and ritual differences, they, however, feel not very accepted by clergy and laity, as these narratives demonstrate.

> I can easily accept differences in liturgy that do not change the universality of religion, but sometimes, I feel not welcome in the Italian community, and this is not coherent with the universality of humanity. I can say that I was often asked how I had arrived in Italy, assuming that I had arrived by "barge," and it seemed absurd. People looked up on the Internet where Togo was and asked me if I lived in old, defaced houses that I had never actually been in and that were meant for tourism. [20]

> It is very sad to say that many of the Italian priests and Capuchin friars are reluctant to accept Indian priests with respect. They feel that they belong to a higher class and that others are inferior. This is not the spirit and teaching of Jesus. [28]

They are ultraconservative on personal moral issues such as sex and marriage and non-normative identities, showing a very radical conception of Catholicism.

> I can say that homosexuality is condemned already in the Bible. It is not something to discuss. Homosexuality is something diabolical, but here we are not

talking about possession. The Church must figure out how to act to get these people out of a way that is not correct, and in today's world, talking about it in some terms is also risky. Strategies need to be put in place to root out this evil, and people need to be welcomed and listened to because if direct strategies were used, these would not work, here again, the role of the formator and his efforts to understand how to root out this evil is crucial. [7]

Evangelists

This group includes six priests who moved not long ago to Italy, driven by the missionary motivation of supporting churches struggling with membership decline and the effects of secularization.

Their migration and faith are voluntary and individually driven, they do not merely answer to the Church's request to move, but they feel it as a moral obligation, so shifting from a context of obligation to that of choice. In that sense, they represent a form of reverse or return mission, which is "when non-Western churches return with the gospel to societies that initially brought the gospel to them" (Kim 2011:148). In other words, those coming from countries converted by missionaries (the south) migrate to the missionaries' society to proselytize there.

> Here, some would talk about migration, but actually, it is another kind of mission—an individual mission—we could say between study and pastoral experiences in the VARIOUS parishes in the host country. And it is a real mission, indeed. It is a return of mission. There was a time in history when European missionaries came to us to evangelize, and many missionaries also stayed in Africa and still are, and many are also dead and burst in Africa. Africa was evangelized by many Europeans. Now,

I feel that Africa has the duty to come to Europe to bring back what I have received in the past, also because, in Europe, there are not so many priestly or religious vocations anymore. That is why I prefer to speak of a return of mission and not a simple migration. [29]

They carry with them their faith in Jesus Christ and seek to express it in their new context. They emphasize the importance of preserving Catholicism against widespread secularization and are worried about the ambiguous public status of Catholicism. One of the reasons identified as the origin of disaffection to the Italian Church is the separation between faith and life, the perception of a ritual faith, detached from concrete life, and far from the social and cultural reality that people live in. That would lead to spiritual poverty.

I realized that people often ask for the sacraments solely because it is practice and not because they feel the faith within them. [18]

We have very beautiful but, sadly, empty churches with massive participation in popular devotion (funerals, pilgrimages, Marian feasts, pro-loco festivals, alpine feasts), while Sundays are more empty, except for Christmas and Easter still very much felt, with attention on the time table. In Europe, a 40-minute mass seems long, while the lunch of a First Communion can go over 10 hours... and, unfortunately, mass is conceived as a function with the risk that one would be a priest like one who is an administrator with precise hours of reception outside of which the rectory or churches are closed. [26]

In Africa, everything is different. One can go to the rectory or church at any time, the celebrations are filled with people always with joy, and in the celebra-

tions, people sing and dance without looking at the clock, and people are happy even if they last. Indeed, celebrating mass telegraphically, as in Europe, is sacrilege. [29]

The mismatch between their religious identity, their way of conceptualizing faith, and the Italian way with its *modus operandi* and representatives is the driving factor behind the reported integration issues (what we call *religio-nationalism*). In pastoral care, the priests must adapt to a fast-paced liturgy and the large number of Christians who say they are non-practicing, to the flexibility of a Church that sometimes takes too much freedom concerning canonical law.

Another difference between our parish and yours relates to the length of the celebration. Many faithful participate, but some look at their watches already during the homily in the hope that the mass will end soon, as opposed to Togo, where the latter lasts up to two hours. To put it simply, in Italy, people are in a hurry and do not pay proper homage to God, who is, as I usually say, "The author of the twenty-four hours." Among the biggest differences between Italy and Togo is the duration of mandates. In Togo, in fact, we are used to moving around a lot, and the maximum duration of mandates is nine years, while I realized that here, in Italy, priests are stationary for many years in the same parish, and this is not good because you have to have the desire to discover other places and, above all, there is a problem related to the monotony of pastoral work as you run the risk of repeating the same things over and over again. [18]

They are concerned that Italian children are brought up in an excessively permissive and secular society—in this way, they lose their faith and make

wrong life choices. They accuse the Church of being absent in the education of children and work hard to educate young children in the Catholic faith.

> They [the Italian Church] don't try to attract young people to Catholicism. [22]

Fundamental, then, is the role of parents who should accompany young people during their journey to educate them in Christian formation, thus avoiding the emptying of parishes that occurs immediately after receiving the sacraments. Also, I can say that priests should pay more attention to young people to accompany them and explain to them the importance of religion, and this will allow younger people to receive God's call. Also, one of the major concerns is about helping young boys to have a true faith to continue attending churches after the sacraments of Christian initiation. This will be an opportunity for them to hear the call to consecrated life, and thus to respond to the vocational crisis. [18]

They feel internally discriminated against by the Italian Church.

> In Rome, how many Africans are members of the dicasteries? How many are in charge of the front line? How many African Cardinals are there? With an ever-growing African Church, will there one day be a black Pope? How many African Pontifical Colleges are there in Rome? How many Africans are Prefects of Congregations? How many Africans are Rectors in Pontifical Universities? How many Africans are Superiors of Congregations for men and women? In dioceses in Italy, how many Africans are incardinated? Or do they simply have a convention for pastoral service? In these dioceses, how many are pastors? For example, in Italy, is it possible to find an African priest Vicar General? Will an African ever be a bishop in an Italian diocese? In Africa, on the other hand, there are so many European priests who are placed in so many dioceses, and so many of them are pastors, Vicars General, bishops with power over everything and everyone, et cetera. Even at the level of vocabulary, there is discrimination. When a European priest works in Africa, he is called a missionary. When an African priest works in Europe, he is called a migrant... does that seem fair? I will stop here not to evoke other pressures suffered, such as homosexuality, with consequences on our formative journey with only one question: who will be saved? Thankfully, Christ will never betray us. [29]

Rebels

The group of rebels includes nine priests who have not long moved to Italy (five years on average). Their migration decision can be considered forced as it is not taken by the migrants but by church hierarchies or families. They decide to fulfill an explicit request from their diocese, order, or families.

> I initially had no intention of coming to Italy, but being a priest, you put your life in the hands of the bishop, who is supposed to act at the hand of God. [1]

They feel and are treated like second-class priests.

> The bishop of R. [city in the south of Italy] had promised me to rise in rank and thus become from assistant pastor to parish priest, and instead, it happened that I became a simple administrator moving from C. [city in the south of Italy] and having nowhere to go and arriving only after several months in T. [city in the south of Italy]. I felt discriminated against precisely on the basis of my country of origin by superiors, but I noticed that many people appreciated my effort to become part of a culture that, in fact, did not belong to me. [1]

We talk about the universal Church, where a missionary should feel at home wherever the mission takes him. Maybe someone will say having experienced racism even in Africa, and that is possible. What I can say is that the treatment is not equal for everyone, both at the economic and personal levels. [25]

They feel discriminated against both within and outside the Church. Toward Italian culture, they manifest cultural resistance and acculturative stress by sometimes showing disapproval for Italian pastoral care and experiencing a mismatch between their old habits and the new ones. These are the driving factors behind the reported integration issues.

I arrived in Italy in 1996 and found a reality very different from my country, starting with the seasons and the way of eating. I, in the masses, from the first day after my ordination, am always praying for the seminarians, and now I will explain why. In fact, we often find ourselves going into a tunnel and never coming out again without even becoming priests. Upon my arrival in Italy, I was hosted by a priest. I arrived at this priest's house, a very precarious house with many cracks in which I stayed for only three months as I was not getting my visa, including a residence permit, which I later obtained by going to the Vatican Palaces. He probably did not want this permit to be issued to us to have more control over me and other seminarians that he used to do the cooking, get his house cleaned, et cetera. And when my confreres dared to rebel, he would pack their bags and throw them out into the street without papers or money. I, however, decided to not give up and went to talk to the police, who told me unpleasant things about the person who was hosting me and, among them, was the one about human trafficking. Back home, I talked to

other people who lived in that house, who told me that during the night, there were furious fights between this priest and the various seminarians who were also tied up and abused before being thrown out into the street. In any case…I, having reached that point, wanted to go back to Colombia because I saw no way out. Nevertheless, however, I wanted to make one last attempt to try to get what was due to me. The world relative to the ecclesiastical institution is formed by a very complex hierarchy and many undergrounds. [10]

The discriminatory episodes I received from my priest were several. For example, rather than giving the keys to the vault and even to the mailbox to me, he preferred to give them to the student, and this indicated a great lack of trust. I felt used because I celebrated about six masses a day and did not enjoy this benefit. The pastor in question, however, would only pay the fees but would not allow me to buy Latin and Greek books so that I could better study the Holy Scriptures. However, he emphasized that there was no money to be able to buy these manuals. Eventually, I dropped out of college, not finishing my studies in the specific subject I had chosen, and after graduating in philosophy and theology in Nigeria, I got my license to practice in Italy. [3]

They seem to engage in a version of cultural defense reinforcing religious identity and practice as a response to an external threat. The strength of the migrant's belief emerges as an important factor affecting his participation in the host country. Foreign priests with deeply embedded beliefs are predisposed to cultivate their faith regardless of their surroundings, while the passive ones lack this internalized mechanism that makes their faith vulnerable.

I usually try to organize the mass based on people's schedules. Often farmers have asked me to move the time of the mass to be able to come even though, being pastor in three churches, this is a bit difficult. In the past, I helped my colleagues on the same Coast, but stopped when I realized that, during a period when I had health problems, no one was going to help me in the management of my parish. I became very disappointed when parishioners accused me of having relations with a friend of mine, so much so that I decided not to even hitchhike anymore or rather not to give rides since my parishioners, seeing a girl in my car, might have thought who knows what. I used to be judged because I would post pictures of my car or girls on FB, and I felt "turned off." Since a few years, my way of doing catechism has also changed. In fact, I preferred to have during this hour a parent in attendance so that the boys themselves would be calmer and I myself would not be accused of being homosexual, thus giving importance to the figure of the parish priest. [1]

As a consequence, they express a critical vision of religion (what we call *religio-criticism*).

I think the Church as an institution will only be able to survive these times when it will stop condemning people and show a Jesus of Nazareth who simply says to love, and here, trying to get this concept across, I find it very difficult, they often say I am a threat. I think the mission of the Church is not to moralize the world but to love it. [3]

Let me give you an example. I often choose not to use the chasuble, which is that very showy garment, because my reality is a much poorer reality where such a garment is used very few times. Very often, I was told that you have to use it because it was a symbol of the Church, but I would reply that, actually, that

was a symbol of the Roman Empire because it was Constantine who introduced this garment, a symbol of power and not of Jesus of Nazareth. [25]

Often, we are only interested in the number, the quantity of people in the Church and not in the quality, and this happens precisely in a parish near mine where the priest does not even know what his "students" are called. We, priests, think we are ahead, but, in reality, we should go back two thousand years. To this day, in fact, bishops go around with their gold rings, taking applause in parishes, but then they don't really care about what goes on inside. We should take up the acts of the apostles and preach among the people, stripping off all these trappings. [23]

They feel burnt out, frustrated, and emotionally drained, and that impacts their sense of clear vocational directions putting into question their ability to serve the Church and their call to ministry.

I think I have a vocational crisis every day, but especially at certain times, and especially after seeing the ministry here, because I felt unsuitable, it can be defined as a vocational crisis because this touches my area of work, so I thought if I were here to do nothing, it were better to do a whole other job. [3]

It is, therefore, not surprising that the migratory project has a temporary nature tied to the completion of a specific mission and is experienced as a temporary sacrifice that allows one to return one day to his country of origin.

Discussion and Conclusion

The paper attempts to fill the significant gap in the sociological literature about the migration of priests. In this way, it recognizes the significance of a ne-

glected topic that questions the categories of international migrations by presenting salient peculiarities.

The paper proposes a typology to classify migratory narratives of foreign priests working in Italian churches based on the nature of their choice and the level of integration they report. Although relevant in quantitative terms, the migration of foreign priests in Italy is neglected in the limited literature on the topic, which, instead, focuses principally on Polish priests in the United States and the UK.

Four types of migrant priests emerge, which appear to be driven by different motivations turning into different levels of integration in the hosting church: *careerists*, *evangelists*, *servants*, and *rebels*.

Several configurations of relations between migrants and religion emerge. These different groups manifest their form of religiosity by expressing diverse conceptions of religion, which sometimes turn into conflicts and a lack of acceptance of both religious rites and church hierarchies.

The analyses illuminate the complexity of an apparently cohesive institution, but one that, on the micro-relational level, unveils numerous tensions depending on different motivations.

First, the perceived prejudices of the local priests about the 'real' motivations to arrive in the country of immigration, as well as widespread ethnocentrism that limits the freedom of expression and autonomy of foreign priests.

Second, the feeling of foreign-born priests of being undervalued or exploited by local prelates (especial-ly when they are entrusted with minor or complex tasks) and toward whom they harbor ambivalent attitudes, both of respect and gratitude and of criticism to the extent that they assume a certain laxity toward the secular attitudes expressed by parishioners concerning the rites and respect for the sacraments.

There is no shortage, of course, of racial tensions with parishioners as well. These are also related to stereotypes regarding skin color, nationalities of origin, and customs and traditions that foreign priests adopt in celebrating mass, often even introducing elements typical of how it is processed in the country of origin.

Conflicts are tolerated by foreign priests when supported by a strong missionary impulse, as in the case of *evangelists* and *servants*. However, for different reasons—in the former case, the aim of evangelizing, and in the latter—that of sacrificing themselves to answer the request of Catholicism. In terms of practice, the *evangelists* continue to do so the same way they did in their home country with the aim of saving the Italian Church and returning to the origins of Catholicism. The *servants* adapt to Italian practice with a spirit of sacrifice.

Sometimes, conflicts associated with role-specific challenges, problems with authority structure, and disenchantment with work are not tolerated, as in the case of *rebels*. The narratives of *rebels* demonstrate that migratory experience in the host churches can also have an alienating effect on an individual's faith, impairing their sense of clear vocational direction.

The presence of foreign priests solves the shortage problem, but creates the new challenge of overcom-

ing cultural differences and cross-cultural problems. To answer these challenges, Ahanotu (2019), for example, proposes to provide pre-departure training and post-arrival cross-cultural training. However, even to the extent that specific courses may be provided, such do not eliminate inevitable cultural differences that priests bring with them from the point of view of the lifestyles, rules, and imaginaries of Western countries, as well as the way of exercising and performing religious rites, which, in the country of origin, may be culturally connoted.

In that sense, Paul Ricoeur's philosophy (2013) is a source of inspiration shedding light on the notions of identity and alterity in migration. For a scholar, understanding the other proceeds through a simultaneous recognition of the other's differences and their similarity to us remains vital (mirror question)—if there is a 'how' that puts us in dialectical connection with the other, there are also differences that cannot be eliminated, and without which difference becomes indifference. The latter aspect makes weak the idea that religion itself, as a universally shared trait, can constitute an aspect that fosters 'anticipatory socialization' to the culture of the country of immigration, particularly for those Western countries with strong 'Catholic' traditions.

Therefore, the concrete integration of foreign priests implies the construction of material and symbolic spaces for inclusion without neither essentializing nor denying foreign identities. It becomes necessary to navigate the dialectics between foreign and local, recognizing these differences and avoiding attempts at reducing the other to the culture of the country of immigration (in this case, to the pastoral culture of the local Church). As

Lévinas (1990) points out, wanting to superimpose us on the other can lead to the annihilation of the other and produce forms of violence and brutality. For the Lithuanian scholar, otherness, understood as the difference between us and the other, always comes before any initiative. Ergo, the other is the one over whom we have no power. In light of these reflections, it is necessary to act on the conditions that favor the recognition of difference, removing asymmetries of power in the exercise of priestly functions within local ecclesiastical institutions. For example, by culturally adapting the liturgy to make it more coherent with the cultural habits of the priests who carry it out and by offering to foreign priests roles in line with their skills and qualifications.

The study of priests' migration contributes to the advancement of sociological theory and provides grounded understanding based on first-hand experience of participants to the broad public outside academia.

However, the research is not without limitations. We are aware of the blurring boundaries between the types distinguished due both to the difficulty of identifying migration as forced or voluntary (some migrants may fall in the blurry middle of the forced-voluntary spectrum) and to the dynamic nature of migration. Indeed, motivations to depart and integrate into the host country cannot be considered static, but they may change as an effect of migration and at different stages of the migration process.

Our claims are explanatory in nature, and they need to be understood as a tentative effort to classify types of priests' migration as represented by migrants at that moment.

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