

# CREATURES



RADICAL ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION AFTER LAUDATO SI'  
Discovering the intrinsic Value of all Creatures, Human & Non-human

## Response to “A New Era of Human and Non-human Migration”

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Thank you to Martina and also to the organisers of this event. I will set out some brief remarks on Martina’s paper and some brief responses that connect Martina’s themes to broad themes in the Church’s approach to migration to date.

Martina presented us with a theory of contemporary human migration as an adaptation strategy, but an adaptation strategy not available to all. She suggested implicitly – or by implication - that both dimensions of this question – the view that migration be seen as adaptive and that this adaptation may not be available to all – are questions of justice and the good. She suggested that rather than viewing migration as always a matter of last resort with an assumption that the greatest good is that communities remain placed/settled, that we might need to see migration within a pattern of a longer human search for the good, for survival, resilience and flourishing. This challenges the way that we might think theologically, politically, economically and ecologically about human migration. Nonetheless her work also suggests to us that we need to pay attention to the magnified vulnerabilities that operate within this relation of climate to movements of peoples. These relate to dynamics of immobility and trapped-ness.

Such vulnerabilities are marked by strong patterns of economic inequality. Martina suggests that the global community needs to recognise such migration as a reality that cannot and should not be wished away and requires pro-active planning. She suggests the church can play a key role in educating and advocating towards this end.

In the second part of my comments I will note two ways that such a thesis ties in interesting ways with meta-trends in theological thinking about migration, and then I will suggest some areas for necessary on-going development of the church’s social tradition in this light. I conclude with a question for further development.

Unlike the often polarised debate about migration as either an unalloyed good or a pathological evil, the Catholic theological tradition – most obviously in the form of its

anchoring biblical texts – has tended to treat migration as both a natural and blessed movement of humanity – something that God calls his people into and something he blesses as part of his divine purpose - and also as a form of curse, as something that befalls humans as a result of their fallen nature and tendency to fall away from the good into harmful, unjust patterns of behaviour. The anthropology that roots the catholic social tradition draws on this view of human migration as complex. It also proposes through its natural law tradition an account of the human person as a natural seeker of its good. It is clear that this good is to be understood contextually, and one of the key contributions of *Laudato si'* is to read this search for the good both in a less anthropocentric way, opening the way for an ethics that relates human and non-human actors more clearly, but also as a matter that needs to be understood in its complex economic, cultural and political contexts.

### **Church teaching:**

However, a new generation of research such as Martina's challenges the church to continue to develop its own social teaching on migration. A much longer paper would be necessary to do justice to this. Let me note just two headlines for now. These apply to the church's natural law teaching on a duty to receive migrants.

1. Martina's paper suggests that part of the 'duty to receive' migrants borne by a nation-state might include a question about movement from climate vulnerability to greater climate resilience. This is an internal question within nations, mapping onto poverty experiences, as well as a question about who is received at the border. The Church has placed emphasis on the presence or absence of the protection of a state – a political community in its teaching on duties to receive, but less so on climate. Martina's work perhaps challenges an expansion of these criteria.
2. Martina's paper touches on questions of trapped populations and my own work on camps and detention facilities deals with increasingly common experiences of Immobility as a feature of contemporary human migration. This raises a range of questions that also challenge the church's social teaching to go further.

### **Finally, a question beyond Martina's paper:**

Given my own research on refugee hosting – and the relationships between local communities and refugees – it is perhaps unsurprising that I think there is a further dimension that flows from Martina's presentation that must also be addressed, both by researchers and by the church. This concerns the relationship of the global to the national and local common good. In a global context where we are seeing new stress-lines in systems of political governance, new expressions of more autocratic democracies, and the rise of a variety of populisms that trade on an anti-migration platform, we face significant challenges in opening the corridors to adaptation that Martina calls for. This raises questions about a necessary collaboration between the Church and civic actors to enable a necessary renewal in local and national political cultures.