

Chinese in Europe – Catholic Perspectives A European Vision: Commitment and Solidarity

Agostino Marchetto

I am grateful for this invitation to conclude this Colloquium with a vision of the future, in my capacity as former Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People.

I will divide my talk into two parts, keeping in mind that famous saying “*Memoria historia futuri*,” history is future’s memory. For this reason, and treasuring the reflections of our Pontifical Council, I consider it necessary to revisit the Instruction *Erga migrantes caritas Christi*,¹ published by the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People. The Instruction is a reflection of the Church’s concern for more effective pastoral care for migrants, refugees, and foreign students, at the beginning of the Third Millennium.

My intention in this part of my address is to offer an historical perspective of this Document, to outline the comprehensive vision of *Erga migrantes caritas Christi*, and to stress the importance of dialogue in this context, which is a prominent theme in the Document. If this is valid for all, of course it is valid also for the Chinese in Europe, even if in the second part of my talk I will be more specific for them.

I) An Historical Perspective

1. Since the beginning of the last century, the Holy See has systematically focused its attention on human mobility, recognizing the implications of changing social situations, and promoting pastoral initiatives aimed at the integration of migrants into welcoming and supportive environments.

Realizing the many dangers associated with migration, including its impact on the social, economic, and political situation, the Holy See also has an insight into its spiritual and cultural potential, and the opportunities for human enrichment that exist for both migrants and the receiving countries.

Archbishop Dr. Agostino Marchetto is the former Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People. The following text is his contribution to the 8th European Catholic China Colloquium “Chinese in Europe – Trends and Catholic Perspectives,” Freising, September 16–19, 2010.

1 Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, Instruction *Erga migrantes caritas Christi*: AAS XCVI (2004) 762-822; *People on the Move* XXXVI (2004) 95, pp. 105-172.

2. After the Second World War, while various nations were launching welfare and religious initiatives for migrants, the Holy See recognized the need for a more concerted effort to revitalize and organize its vast and complex network of pastoral ministry in this field.

It was thus that the Apostolic Constitution *Exsul Familia*² was published by Pope Pius XII in August 1952. With this Document, the Pope promoted a re-structuring of the assistance provided to migrants of various nationalities, thereby establishing common and universal regulations for the Catholic Church. Consequently, *Exsul Familia* is considered the magisterial *magna charta* on migration. Indeed, it was the first official document of the Holy See that systematically and comprehensively dealt with the issue of spiritual assistance to migrants, from the historical as well as pastoral and canonical points of view.

The Document states, for example, that assistance should be provided by priests of the same language or nationality as the migrants, who have been suitably trained and placed under the authority of the local Ordinary, while local priests must also provide care to them as requested within the scope of ordinary pastoral care.

It also recommended the establishment of *missiones cum cura animarum* (missions for the care of souls), in which the pastoral functions of the missionary/chaplain were to be combined with those carried out by the local parish priest. Therefore, the ethnic dimension was included in the pastoral care of the Universal Church. Essentially, elements of pluralism were introduced into the Church's assistance to migrants. Contrary to the trend towards immediate "assimilation," the Church's approach to migration included a deep appreciation and respect for the various languages, cultures, and traditions of migrants. This is the context in which pastoral care for migrants was born.

3. Needless to say, *Exsul Familia* was also influenced by the period in which it was written. Yet, its pastoral and prophetic tone allowed for further enrichment of thought and action. During the 1960s, the Church sought to provide a pastoral response to the many changes that constantly re-created the overall situation of international migration, namely the process of European integration, the stabilization of migration flows within Europe, together with the rise and spread of immigration from non-European countries, the advent of certain rapidly expanding oil-producing countries as migratory destinations, and the huge increase of refugees in regions of international conflict.

These were also the years when the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council took place, a time of renewal, in fidelity to tradition, of the structures of the Church and its growing commitment to evangelisation and integral human development. The Church put its efficacy to the test more profoundly in the context of the contemporary world, in a spirit of cooperation, while maintaining its own identity. The "signs of the times" were seen in the important characteristics of nowadays' world, and were to be interpreted in the light of the Word of God and Church Teaching.

Therefore, migration issues also had their place within the Council. Importance was given to the rights of migrants and to the cultural dimension of migration. The causes of old and new migrations, namely uncontrolled economic development and certain political and economic choices, were condemned. The conviction was expressed that the

2 Pius XII, Apostolic Constitution *Exsul Familia*: AAS XLIV (1952), pp. 649-704.

Church, in its universality, could become a sign and instrument of new rules based on the fundamental dignity of every person and their equality.

The spirit of renewal sparked by the Second Vatican Council led to an enhanced commitment by local Churches to discuss the migration issue internally, and to prepare more suitable means of intervention, as they felt that they were primarily responsible for the related pastoral care. The foundations were thus laid for updating the pastoral care of migrants, taking into account the fundamental themes of development and peace in the context of Church teaching.

4. While Bishops' Conferences and specific migration organizations were established at national levels, a reformulation of the whole issue also emerged at the central level. This was carried out by Pope Paul VI with the *Motu proprio Pastoralis migratorum cura*³ and the related Instruction *De pastorali migratorum cura (Nemo est)* of the Congregation for Bishops in 1969.⁴

5. In 1970, the framework of initiatives in favour of migrants was expanded with the creation of specific structures in the Roman Curia by Pope Paul VI, including the Pontifical Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migration and Tourism (which became the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People in 1989),⁵ which were made responsible for important tasks of pastoral coordination, animation, and promotion, above all in relation to the Bishops' Conferences.

6. This awareness also marked the teachings of Pope John Paul II who, in his Encyclicals and numerous speeches and messages, made constant appeals for human and Christian solidarity with migrants.

Based on a broad consensus, as mentioned above, the Bishops' Conferences of individual nations generally organised themselves to assume their responsibility for coordinating the pastoral care of migrants in their own countries. Moreover, in response to the appeal for the effective participation of everyone in evangelisation and integral human promotion, Catholics – in accordance with their respective vocations, including clergy, religious, lay people, and those associated with new movements – tackled together the problems arising from inflows of migrants from increasingly distant regions, thereby leading to inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue.

Pope John Paul II, in his frequent speeches on the human, social, and religious aspects of migration, has also left a special personal mark on what has become a permanent phenomenon, characterised by the strong Christian humanism of his Encyclicals. The defence of fundamental human rights has been thus one of the privileged ways of proclaiming the Gospel. The cultural heritage of each ethnic group has become therefore a special link with the Christian message. Consequently, in a certain sense, the defence of the cultural

3 Paul VI, *Motu proprio Pastoralis migratorum cura*: AAS LXI (1969), pp. 601-603.

4 Congregation for Bishops, *Instruction De pastorali migratorum cura (Nemo est)*: AAS LXI (1969), pp. 614-643.

5 John Paul II, *Apostolic Constitution on the Roman Curia Pastor Bonus*, 149-151: AAS LXXX (1988), pp. 899f.

heritage of a people is a way of protecting their very existence, their unique place in history, and the undeniable relationship between faith, culture, and civilisation.

7. *Exsul Familia, Gaudium et Spes, Pastoralis Migratorum cura*, and now *Erga migrantes caritas Christi* all indicate the continuity and relevance of Church teaching, and the substantial contribution of our Church to the question of migration, in general and in particular.

It is clear that the Church has taken an interest in this human phenomenon, and has called for more widespread recognition of the human rights of mobility for people.

The Church, therefore, does not merely look inward, but outward, at the whole world, contemplating the faces of men and women of all colours, races, nationalities, and religions. With the new Instruction *Erga migrantes caritas Christi*, the ecclesial community is called upon to become increasingly aware of its universal mission in the world and in history, before God and mankind, trusting that, in the end, migrants will be a vehicle of unity and peace in a world that is ever more united by the bonds of solidarity.

II) A Comprehensive Vision of *Erga migrantes caritas Christi*

8. By way of a contemporary analysis, allow me to recall that the phenomenon of today's migrations constitute the greatest movement of people at any time in history. In recent decades this international phenomenon, which currently involves more than two hundred million people, has become an event that affects the structure of our society and comprises a complex, social, cultural, political, economic, religious, and pastoral reality.

9. The Instruction *Erga migrantes caritas Christi* aims to update the Church's vision of the pastoral care of migrants in this contemporary milieu, thirty-five years after the publication of the *Motu Proprio Pastoralis migratorum cura* by Pope Paul VI.

The Instruction also aims to provide an ecclesial response to the *new* pastoral needs of migrants, in order to turn the migratory experience into an opportunity for dialogue and mission for the purpose of new evangelisation. Moreover, it is designed to facilitate the precise application of the legislation contained in the *CJC* and the *CCEO* in order to respond better to the particular requirements of the increasing numbers of believers who have emigrated from Eastern Catholic Churches.

10. The composition of current international migrations, as well as the development of ecumenism itself, also calls for an ecumenical vision of this macro phenomenon, due to the presence in traditionally Catholic areas of many Christian migrants who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church. Inter-religious dialogue also comes into play, due to the growing numbers of immigrants who belong to other religions, especially Muslims.

This places a pastoral obligation on all Catholics, namely the duty to promote an action that is faithful to ecclesial Tradition and at the same time open to new developments regarding pastoral structures. This means making these structures suitable for guaranteeing

communion between specific pastoral workers and local hierarchies, who play a vital role in the pastoral care of migrants, and who have the prime responsibility for them.

11. After a brief review of the special features of contemporary migration (globalisation; demographic changes underway, especially in developing countries; the widening inequality gap between North and South; the proliferation of conflicts and civil wars), the Instruction underlines the severe hardships that migration causes among families and individuals, especially women and children. This phenomenon also raises the ethical issue of the search for a new international economic order in which the world's goods are more equally distributed, with a vision of the global community as a family of peoples, and the application of international law.

The Instruction then sets out a precise biblical and theological framework of reference for migration, by contemplating migration in the history of salvation, which is a sign of the times and of the presence of God in the history of mankind, with a view to universal communion.

12. As I mentioned before, the Instruction offers an historical overview of the Church's care for migrants and refugees as expressed in ecclesial documents, such as *Exsul Familia* and the Instruction *De Pastoralis migratorum cura*, as well as subsequent canonical legislation. These texts reveal important theological and pastoral principles, such as the central importance of the human person; the defence of migrants' rights; the ecclesial and missionary dimension of migration; the pastoral contribution of lay people, Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life; the value of cultures in the work of evangelisation; the safeguarding and promotion of minorities, including within local Churches; the importance of *ad intra* and *ad extra* ecclesial dialogue; as well as the specific contribution that migration could make to universal peace.

13. Other points – such as the need for “inculturation” of the Christian message, the vision of the Church as communion, the continual importance of specific pastoral care for migrants, and the dialogical and missionary commitment of all members of the Mystical Body of Christ and the consequent duty to foster a culture of welcome and solidarity toward migrants – introduce an analysis of specific pastoral requirements to be met, regarding both Catholic migrants (from Latin and Eastern rites) and those who belong to various Churches and ecclesial Communities, as well as other religions in general, and Islam in particular.

14. The pastoral and legal aspects of pastoral ministry is then further explained and reaffirmed – specifically with regard to chaplains and missionaries and their national delegates (coordinators), diocesan and eparchial presbyters, religious and lay persons from lay associations and movements – whose apostolic commitment is seen and considered within a vision of a pastoral care of communion.

15. The integration of pastoral structures (whether already in place or to be established in the future) and of migrants within ordinary pastoral care – with full respect of their legitimate diversity and their spiritual and cultural heritage, also with a view to forming an increasingly “catholic” Church – is another important characteristic that the Document aims to emphasize and propose to the local Churches. This integration is an essential condition in order that pastoral care, *for* and *with* migrants, may become a meaningful expression of the Universal Church and the *missio ad Gentes*, (mission to peoples), a fraternal and peaceful dialogue, a house for everyone, a shared and welcomed school of communion, reconciliation that is called for and given, mutual and fraternal welcome and solidarity, as well as authentic Christian and human development.

16. Updated and precise legal and pastoral regulations round off the Instruction, setting out in appropriate language the duties, tasks, and roles of pastoral workers and the various ecclesial organisations involved in the pastoral care of migrants, with a view to bringing them as closely into line as possible with the needs of migrants and the expected outlook for the future.

17. Ideally, the Document is to be considered in the light of *Exsul Familia*, and underlines the continuity of its inspiration, but at the same time points to the new questions that arise from today’s migration. Therefore, the Church is constantly reflecting on how best to approach current realities, and how to respond appropriately with sound pastoral planning. Tradition and innovation thus go hand in hand.

III) Dialogue: One of the Characteristics of *Erga migrantes caritas Christi*

Throughout the Instruction there is an underlying theme: *dialogue*. Human mobility, and especially migration, means that “we are face to face with a cultural and religious pluralism never perhaps experienced so consciously before” (no. 35). Encounters between people and groups who have historically lived apart, inevitably give rise to many problems that necessitate the creation of a new life together. Dialogue is an indispensable element in such a project, and indeed is a non-negotiable requirement, particularly because migration involves the interaction of people and groups on deeply human, religious, and cultural levels.

What is dialogue? The Instruction *Erga migrantes caritas Christi* does not aim to fully explain the term. Rather, it presupposes knowledge of other ecclesial documents that promote it (for example, *Gaudium et Spes*, *Dignitatis humanae*, and *Nostra Aetate* from the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, as well as other documents from various Dicasteries of the Roman Curia). It is clear, however, that dialogue assumes various concrete forms. A meeting of experts belonging to different religions, for example, is only one of these forms, which include the so-called *dialogue of life*. This is perhaps the most common form, as it is the one in which people from various religions seek to live together as neighbours, sharing their joys and sorrows, and their problems and satisfactions. There is also the *dialogue*

of *action*, which involves Christians and non-Christians in a collaboration aimed at promoting the integral development of society. Likewise, in the *dialogue of sharing religious experiences*, people who are deeply rooted in their religious traditions share their spiritual aspirations, such as prayer and contemplation, faith and the paths that lead to God and the Transcendent.

The Instruction also emphasizes other aspects of dialogue, such as the fundamental pastoral attitudes and their characteristics necessary for peaceful co-existence. Paragraph no. 36, on the inculturation of the Gospel, for example, describes the process of dialogue:

[It] begins by listening, which means getting to know those to whom we proclaim the gospel ... Tolerance is not enough; needed is a certain feeling for the other, respect as far as possible for the cultural identity of one's dialogue partners. To recognise and appreciate their positive aspects ... is a necessary prelude to its successful proclamation. This is the only way to create dialogue, understanding and trust.

The Church addresses today's cultural and religious pluralism on three levels:

First, Dialogue within the Catholic Church

We should bear in mind that our Instruction is addressed above all to Catholics, priests, religious men and women, and the lay faithful, whether members of the host community or migrants themselves. Dialogue should take place among them. Its purpose is “to build up the Church and make it grow *in* and *with* the migrants, to rediscover together and reveal Christian values and form an authentic sacramental community of faith, worship, love and hope” (no. 38). The Instruction is concerned not only with pastoral care *in favour* of migrants, but “in and with” them as well. Therefore, the document attaches great importance to migrants’ mother tongues “in which they express their mentality, thought and culture, and the characteristics of their spiritual life and the traditions of their Church of origin” (no. 38). Pastoral experience teaches us that when migrants feel understood and at ease, they integrate more easily into the community and enrich it. In this regard, the popular piety that migrants bring with them warrants particular attention, as it is “a fundamental link with their Church of origin and with their ways of understanding and living the faith” (no. 46). In order to appreciate this fact, intense pastoral dialogue must take place.

Catholic migrants also include “ritual groups” (cf. no. 38), especially those from Eastern Catholic Churches. “The sacred liturgy celebrated in the rite of their own Church *sui iuris* is important as a safeguard of the spiritual identity” (no. 46) of these migrants. Therefore, ensuring that there are pastoral workers and structures which promote their identity in the host countries is a duty of the host Church (cf. nos. 53-54). This also requires dialogue, especially between Churches of origin and arrival and with the Congregation for the Eastern Churches (cf. no. 55).

As with any authentic dialogue, the one within the Catholic Church is based on values and beliefs and, in particular, on a theological vision of ecclesial communion and its “true Catholic spirit,” as we may read in *Lumen Gentium* 13.

Second, Dialogue with Other Churches and Ecclesial Communities

Among migrants, Christians from other Churches and ecclesial Communities are also found. This provides an opportunity for dialogue, especially in “everyday ecumenism,” which strengthens ties of unity, as far as possible, as well as love, and promotes greater mutual understanding. Like any authentic dialogue, this is also based on keeping to one’s own Catholic identity and not neglecting the need to take account of existing problems among Christians who unfortunately are still separate. Therefore, “facile irenicism,” and at the other extreme, proselytism, in the negative sense of the word, should be avoided (cf. no. 56). The Instruction also deals with certain more delicate issues that may arise when migrants are not only far from home, but also from their Church or ecclesial Community. Indeed, in interpreting the existing rules, no. 56 mentions, for example, the use of Catholic churches by Christians who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church. No. 57 deals with *communicatio in sacris*, whose regulations provide for some cases in which it is allowed. The dialogue that precedes and follows specific decisions in this regard is obviously important for Christian unity.

Third, Dialogue with Members of Other Religions (or with No Religion)

Migration also changes the religious aspect of host societies, as is the case of countries with an age-old Christian tradition, where a formerly unknown religious plurality now exists. Our pastoral care is also concerned with their “human development and with the witness of Christian charity.” “The Church is thus called upon to open a dialogue [that] should be conducted and implemented in the conviction that the Church is the ordinary means of salvation and that she alone possesses the fullness of the means of salvation” (no. 59). Therefore, it is a dialogue that is based on our identity, giving rise to mutual respect and the discovery of others’ religious and human values.

Living together with believers of other religions also requires an awareness of and a respect for certain contexts, especially holy places and Catholic schools, marriage rituals and traditions, and reciprocity, which are discussed in paragraphs 61-64. All of these contexts require a mutual seeking of solutions, with respect for the identity and religious freedom of both migrants and host communities.

Especially important is dialogue regarding Muslim migrants (nos. 65-68), who have become so numerous in some countries that groups have been formed which are particularly distinguished by their identity. Paragraph no. 65 reminds us of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council’s attitude towards them, while paragraph 66 summarizes the similarities and differences between Christians and Muslims. Numbers 67 and 68 mention specific problems relating to marriage and its preparation, the status of women, baptism, and the religious affiliation of children.

The specific problems that arise between Christians and migrants from other religions or with no religion require that everyone should adopt an attitude and spirit of dialogue. However, this is not an easy matter. An encounter between people with deeply held beliefs and customs that are not shared with Christians can be difficult. In any case, it calls for a

great deal of patience and perseverance. Pope John Paul II, who well understood the problems that arise during dialogue, said that

*[it] must continue ... it is obvious that this dialogue will be especially important in establishing a sure basis for peace and warding off the dread spectre of those wars of religion which have so often bloodied human history. The name of the one God must become increasingly what it is: a name of peace and a summons to peace.*⁶

This requires a “solid formation” for pastoral workers and “information on other religions so as to overcome prejudices, prevail over religious relativism and avoid unjustified suspicions and fears” (no. 69), which generate many negative consequences.

Finally, I would like to add, in this part of my talk, that dialogue and evangelisation are not opposed.⁷ The dialogue of life, which bears witness to Christian charity, also requires an explanation. Saint Peter urges Christians: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15). These words enable us to understand the conclusion of our Instruction, entitled “Universal Mission” (nos. 96-104), with its reflections on *semina Verbi* (seeds of the Word) and dialogical and missionary pastoral care, which should also be exercised in lands that have an age-old Christian tradition. “With great respect and attention for the migrants’ traditions and culture, we Christians are called to bear witness to the gospel of love and peace in our dealings with them and also to proclaim the Word of God explicitly to them so that the blessing of the Lord, promised to Abraham and his descendants for ever, may reach them” (no. 100).

IV) Chinese in Europe: Perspectives

Before going on to this part of my talk, that is fundamentally justified on an analogy with the method of drilling through the earth and getting a sample (“carrot”) in order to analyse the subsoil, I would like to mention an interview by Anne Cheng that I found most interesting. It was published in *La Croix* on 12 February 2010 (p. 11) under the title “The Chinese thought is ‘a’ humanism.” After an historical “excursus,” Ms. Cheng so affirmed: “Starting from the point in which a reflection is made on what is a human being, there is necessarily humanism in it. This is a totally fundamental and central point in the Chinese intellectual tradition.” She added that “Confucius is the first person” who put man at the centre of his teaching. In his *Analects*, in fact, he continually goes back to the notion of *ren*, expressed by a Chinese character which is composed of a graphic stroke of the human being and that of the number “two.” *Ren* therefore represents the quality of human relation on which Confucian humanism is based. It is “man with man” and not an isolated entity that would be added to others. What is human cannot be realized except in relationship. It is living together that occupies the first place and makes us human beings. Hence the emphasis on ancestor worship, filial piety, culture, everything that guarantees

6 John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*: AAS XCIII (2001), pp. 266-309, n. 55.

7 Cf. Walter Kasper, “Ökumenische Bewegung und Evangelisierung (im Kontext der menschlichen Mobilität)” “Ecumenical Movement and Evangelization,” in: *People on the Move XXXVIII* (December 2006) 102, pp. 157-168.

the transmission of what is human from generation to generation and its continuity. It seems, therefore, that there is also a human base to our pastoral commitment in relation to the Chinese in Europe.

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Since it is not possible for me to know the European situation in general, I will now make use – as I said earlier – of a “driller” in order to have a sample (“carrot”) in the pastoral field, which – I believe – can help us form a vision of the future, starting from what is already being done and could inspire others. The “carrot” to which I refer is the Diocese of Prato (Italy). Here, too, I shall give a brief historical background, the “*Sitz im Leben*,” using a paper entitled “The pastoral challenge of Chinese immigration. The experience of the Diocese of Prato,” written by the Episcopal Vicar Mgr. Santino Brunetti.

In that city, there is quite a varied situation of immigration: there are in fact 107 ethnic groups and the number of immigrants is over 20% of the population. Official estimates recorded by the city affirm that of about 185,935 citizens, 12.37% are foreigners. It can be argued, however, that the numbers are much higher, because there are significant flows of people who are not in a regular situation.

The most representative ethnic group is that of the Chinese, though their numbers are not exact, ranging from 20 thousand to 30 thousand people. According to the estimates of the Municipality, 45.41% of immigrants are of Chinese origin.

Regarding their numbers, we note that the Chinese community is the second largest in Europe (Prato is next to Paris, in this sense) and also the particular mode of settlement of the Chinese has caused the emergence of a “parallel city” in the western part of the town. It is inhabited mostly by Chinese people, with stores, self-service shops, meeting places, ethnic associations. The very image of these streets, with signs, *dazibao*, billboards in various Chinese languages, has in fact given birth to a real “*Chinatown*.”

This massive presence of the Chinese is of course not always peaceful. There is actually a hidden form of slavery; the cases of violence are not few, caused also by “mafia activity.” For this reason it was thought appropriate to develop a pastoral plan which involves centres where one can confide his problems, meeting places, personal services, a school of the Italian language, and spaces for Liturgy and catechesis. I think that these are structures that should be present in the future in other communities.

The global project of Prato, approved by the Italian Bishops’ Conference, gives the opportunity to have people who are totally committed to the pastoral care of their Chinese brothers and sisters, to invest in the formation of individuals given in their native language, to have pastoral structures for welcome and various pastoral activities, to be able to count on a welcome centre (*Caritas decentrata*) to support and accompany people in their various problems. I underline this solicitude of an entire Episcopal Conference.

Now Some Background

The Church in Prato, since the seventies and eighties, especially with the first migration flows of Albanians, worked on two sides: on the one hand giving hospitality and accompaniment through the courageous and efficient work of *Caritas*, enacting a true evangelical

witness of charity; on the other hand it set up a committee and a working group for the catechumenate and evangelisation.

Nevertheless it should be borne in mind that for many, staying in Italy is not a definitive choice, but there is a desire to return home. Therefore it was decided to accompany them, to help them not to lose their own roots and, especially, to support them in growing in the faith.

A particular commitment in this Diocese towards the Chinese community must be underlined. It is both the largest and the most complex in Prato, and enjoys the presence of both a Chinese priest and a Chinese sister. There is also a Chinese priest, sent by “Propaganda Fide,” who carries out pastoral service from Friday to Sunday in the prison and in the hospital. The problem of language is important, but it is worthy of note that in these two places, people do not have work commitments, and therefore they are more open to a presentation of the Christian faith. In fact, each year, a certain number of catechumens come from the prison.

Moreover, the Chinese community has its own “pastoral council” and also its own pastoral structures in a parish area.

Furthermore a pastoral project was also studied. It involves various pastoral agents: two Franciscan friars minor, a sister of the Franciscan Sisters of the Gospel for an accompaniment consisting of systematic catechetical formation, of welcome, and of street work, especially in the neighbourhoods where Chinese presence is numerous.

The bishop of Prato, Monsignor Gastone Simone, has nominated – as I mentioned – an Episcopal Vicar for immigrants, in order to coordinate and promote all the work for their welcome and integration in the local Church communities.

Catechesis is weekly and is performed at different levels: at a general one to create a mentality of faith which should always be nourished; the catechumenate for those who are entering as full-fledged members into the life of the Church and a welcome service for newcomers. During evangelisation in the streets useful items are given out: sheets with questions, messages, and addresses of reference.

And Now a Few Words on the Content

In the first place there is the liturgical message on Sundays and on feastdays. Catechesis is based on the texts of the Catholic Church. The meetings are presented in at least two forms: in groups (communitarian approach) and individually. With respect to those who have asked to be included in catechumenal journey, previous meetings are able to discern personal situations: places of origin, basic cultural reality, and various supports. So the itinerary, except for communitarian moments, is at a personal level. It is not only the chaplain of the ethnic group who is concerned with this because hard work is also done by the parishes.

About the Method

It uses the method of catechumenal itinerary which is made up of a three-year “journey.” If there is, on the contrary, a request, in view of marriages between an immigrant and an

Italian Catholic, for a shorter time frame, this is not recommended due to previous negative experiences in similar cases.

Well, shall we make an evaluation of the Prato experience in order to encourage ourselves regarding the future? I think so.

The Positive Aspect

can be seen from a Church that grows in the measure that it welcomes, gives room, shares, and thinks up a pastoral care that takes into account the new typology of the territory and of its inhabitants. The way the immigrants express their faith brings enthusiasm also to the faith of the local population and a positive change to pastoral care.

Its Limitations?

The challenge of the sects does not always find the Catholic Church measuring up to the message she would like to announce. They have resources and people who are committed to live like the immigrants whom they address: they invest in language training and in instruments with messages in the very language of immigrants.

The parishes instead, at least a good number of them, are struggling to be open to new challenges: they have more “political” rather than evangelical reactions and are perhaps open to an integration of a “colonial” type – I would say – in this sense: they must come to us, think like us, and behave like us. In Prato, as far as the migration situation is concerned, there have been meetings with the whole Presbyterate, with the presence of priests working for the Italian Foundation *Migrantes*. There is nevertheless a lack of resources to invest in the training of Chinese laity for a serious work of evangelisation amongst their countrymen.

Yet there is hope also for the future, namely, that the Church will be able to focus and give ample testimony to the Gospel of charity, by making itself welcoming and a travelling companion of migrants, learning the theory of new relationships, and not becoming indifferent to the call of the Spirit. We, too, shall entrust the future to the Holy Spirit!