

Italian Church

Irregular migrants, now the Italian bishops take to the sea

ECCLESIA

27_08_2024



**Stefano
Fontana**



So, Luca Casarini head of the Mare Jonio of *Mediterranea Savings Humans* and the 'chaplain' Don Mattia Ferrari have returned to the sea in search of illegal migrants to rescue and bring back to Italy. He and his companions set sail from Trapani last

weekend with the local bishop's blessing.

This time, however, with two important novelties. The first being that the ship was accompanied by a support sailboat financed by the [Migrantes Foundation](#) owned and governed by the Italian Episcopal Conference, of which the bishop of Ferrara-Comacchio Gian Carlo Perego is president. The second is that Pope Francis sent the group a handwritten message saying 'I wish you all the best and send my blessing to the crew of Mediterranea Saving Humans and to Migrantes. I pray for you. Thank you so much for your testimony. May the Lord bless you and may Our Lady keep you. Fraternally, Francesco'.

The prior events, to this latest mission, which took place in December 2023, had been widely commented on by the press. At that time, it had come to light that numerous dioceses had donated Casarini tens of thousands of dollars to contribute to his "rescue" missions in the Mediterranean. The groundwork had also been laid for a systematic raking in of contributions from parishes for this purpose. *La Bussola* [\[HERE\]](#) had also reported on it, commenting on the diocese of Modena statements in its defence, which was strongly implicated, and of the Italian Episcopal Conference, which ultimately pulled out [\[HERE\]](#).

The operation seemed very anomalous, belonging not to a Church but more to an active ideological group, a political activist commando. In fact, Casarini and his companions in action past ideological militancy was public knowledge, and this gave rise to many perplexities, despite the fact that Casarini had participated as a guest at the Synod of Bishops the previous October. In this way incongruity added to incongruity.

Now, the new venture which began in the last few days, including the two novelties mentioned above, has added to its indigestibility. The active participation of the Italian Episcopal Conference through the Migrantes Foundation corroborates our hypothesis at the time, namely that Cardinal Zuppi could not have been unaware of the dioceses' funding of Mare Jonio. While Francis' signed message, although not out of character and the latest in a long series, once again outlines a point on which we cannot agree with him.

The Church is not a party or an action group. It must not take the field except to provide the principles and aims so that any social and political initiative can be said to be honest, useful for the common good, respectful of God's plan for humanity. Its task is to help identify ideological conditioning in political action and to avoid it, which is why it refers to the truths of its doctrine and true Christian charity. In giving these teachings, the Church takes care not to defend partisan interests, but in its freedom feels bound

only by truth and goodness.

For social issues, she makes use of her Social Doctrine, whose principles and directives for action she proposes, but leaves it to the responsibility of those directly involved to decide what to do. In providing these evaluation criteria, the Church is careful to orient minds and hearts to the complete and realistic picture, without amputations.

It is not a party too and does not want to be meddled with special interests, whether theoretical or practical.

It may even explicitly approve some particularly significant initiative that sets a good example - without, however, ever 'blessing' it in its concrete forms of execution, which may always contain human errors and injustices - but only if it complies with all the principles of human and Christian morality and is not scandalous to anyone. It will certainly not screen the personal 'morality' of the protagonists in this initiative, but neither will it be won over by sympathies that are not adequately founded, it will examine situations with Christian realism, and it will not avoid questioning their possible ulterior motives.

In the present case, this does not seem to have been the Church's behaviour.

Support has been given to a group with questionable ideas, resources from the offerings of the faithful have been used for purposes that many of them would disapprove of, an ideological view of the immigration issue has been endorsed that overshadows many aspects and distorts others: no account is taken of the instrumentalizations that weigh on the so-called immigrants, nor of their realistic motivation to leave, nor of the trafficking of which they are victims and which a blind reception corroborates, no thought is given to the possible violations of existing Italian and international laws, no account is taken of the fact that while the Italian bishops finance missions at sea, the African bishops call for a halt to departures.

The Church should draw up a proposal that holds it all together and gives, with justice, to each his own, instead in this case it identifies itself with a group action of a certain colour and bets its name on it. The Italian bishops have been making direct policy for a long time: on the European elections, on differentiated autonomy and now on the *jus scholae*, (citizenship) but in this case, in addition to giving political indications, which is not their responsibility anyway, they even go directly into the field, or rather into the sea.