

Cultural Diversity as a Fact and Field of Organized Religion

Swiss Catholic Church Policy and Practice between Coexistence and Togetherness

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1 Introduction

1.1 Changing Contexts

The focus of this chapter is on the Catholic Church in Switzerland and its approach to a growing migration-related internal diversification that has affected established structures, routines, narratives, and practices of lived religion on different levels. As a religious organization, the Catholic Church in Switzerland is part of the global Catholic Church that has, according to its self-understanding, a universal character.¹ As such, it is multi-cultural and multinational by nature and the question of what catholicity means under the conditions of plurality is intrinsic to local churches all over the world.

In the past decades however, the Catholic Church as a global and local organization has been challenged in a previously unknown way by migration, since in today's world, people of different cultural and national origins live in close proximity to each other or even in the same place (Kessler 2018b: 81). Therefore, plurality and diversity have become normal, not only for the cross-continental organization with its many dioceses held together by shared doctrine, ritual practice, and leadership, but it has also become a matter of fact for local churches and their parishes.

The changing conditions of being one united and universal church in the face of increasing pluralization and diversification on the ground has led to an increasing need to reflect on and adjust the concept of catholicity. The church's self-understanding of being catholic and its ongoing (re-)interpretation and implementation of this self-concept

1 The Roman Catholic Church, with its 24 distinct churches under their own law and with their own rite, is the largest church within Christianity. It consists of the Latin Church with its numerous local churches (dioceses) and the 23 so-called Eastern Churches. They all recognize the jurisdictional primacy of the Bishop of Rome and stand in "communion" of faith, prayer and sacraments among themselves.

into practice has to be negotiated between different poles. These poles include the biblical vision of the church, which draws no boundaries between people of different backgrounds and origins (Galatians 3, 26–28) and the social conditionality of a body of people connected by shared beliefs and practices and a shared identity that distinguishes them from those not sharing these common characteristics (Serra-Rambone 2016: 186). This social constitution of the church is always bound to the historical and cultural context in which it is realized. The church in its social shape, therefore, is the result of an interplay between passed down and (re-)interpreted heritage and contextual conditions.

1.2 Identity Narratives Reloaded

The self-image of an organization is connected to its identity narrative (Ammermann 2003), which bundles together narratives of its origin and history and gives expression to the vision and mission of the organization. For the Catholic Church, past and present sources like biblical stories, church traditions, and papal writings generate an ecclesiological vision from which conclusions are drawn to guide the church through history and changing contexts (Baumann/Nagel 2023: 104). Thus, the church's narrative of universality and unity in diversity not only symbolizes its understanding of being Catholic but also provides a legitimate basis for its strategic organizational planning and acting. But narratives, and their guiding messages, are not independent forces working beyond and above social realities. In fact, they interact with the context in which they take shape. In other words, they are constantly subject to processes of construction and reconstruction as a result of the interplay between different internal and external logics in changing environments. Yet, these processes are not radically open-ended and determined by social changes alone, since religious identity narratives are bound to un-negotiable principles (Gabriel 2022: 155).

So, the Catholic Church as a global religious organization with its local sub-organizations needs to navigate its way through the tides of social transformations in contemporary societies by constantly contextualizing its own identity narratives.

Sixty years ago, the Second Vatican Council redefined the church's relationship to the world and depicted the trope of universality and unity as follows:

[...] though there are many nations there is but one people of God, which takes its citizens from every race, making them citizens of a kingdom which is of a heavenly rather than of an earthly nature. All the faithful, scattered though they be throughout the world, are in communion with each other in the Holy Spirit, and so, he who dwells in Rome knows that the people of India are his members [...] In virtue of this catholicity each individual part contributes through its special gifts to the good of the other parts and of the whole Church. [...] Moreover, within the Church particular Churches hold a rightful place; these Churches retain their own traditions, without in any way opposing the primacy of the Chair of Peter, which presides over the whole assembly of charity and protects legitimate differences, while at the same time assuring that such differences do not hinder unity but rather contribute toward it. Between all the parts of the Church there remains a bond of close communion whereby they share spiritual riches, apostolic workers and temporal resources. (Second Vatican Council 1964)

Here, the self-description of the church is presented as a vision of unity between different parts which are held together by the bond of communion given by the Holy Spirit and which contribute to that unity according to their own gifts. Unity is seen as a spiritual gift effecting and producing, as a result of the efforts of the social bodies, to be one church despite and beyond particularities and differences.

Sixty years later, Pope Francis' vision of the church in the contemporary world shaped by migration stresses this aspect of collaboration amongst and between people and groups of different character and orientation. He talks of communion and community and amplifies the social dimension of the church as an inclusive body of people – be it on a global or a local level:

The Catholic faithful are called to work together, each in the midst of its own community, to make the Church ever more inclusive. These pastoral orientations invite us to expand the way we experience being Church. They challenge us to see the tragedy of prolonged uprooting, to welcome, protect, integrate and promote our brothers and sisters, and to create opportunities to work together toward communion. [...] His Holy Spirit makes us capable of embracing everyone, cultivating communion in diversity, and harmonising differences without ever imposing a depersonalised uniformity. Catholic communities are invited to grow in the joy of encounter and to recognize the new life that migrants bring with them. (Pastoral Orientations on Intercultural Migrant Ministry, 2022)

The challenge of translating and transferring the vision and mission of being a Catholic Church into practice in a constantly pluralizing world and society has occupied the Catholic Church in Switzerland for decades now. Especially the challenges associated with migration have called for adjustments to the concept of catholicity and its organizational and pastoral implications.

This chapter tries to show how the Catholic Church in Switzerland has been dealing with migration-related pluralization and internal diversification in the past and present by looking at the interplay between different internal logics concerning the church's identity, its organizational measures, and the impact of expectations from external logics and regimes of the wider social and political environment. It is obvious that this is a challenging endeavor that cannot be dealt with in a satisfactory manner in this chapter. The matter is highly complex and does not allow for a reductive dualism between “inside” and “outside” realities or theses on the cause-and-effect relationships between socio-political forces and church developments (Luckmann 1972). Thus, the aim of this chapter is to track and describe some aspects of a multifaceted process of “being and doing church” in an increasingly culturally diverse society against the background of the church's self-image.

1.3 Congregational Studies Approach

With this focus in mind, borrowing from a “congregational studies” approach² becomes reasonable. This approach proceeds from the assumption that religious organizations are adaptive social and relational entities, “embedded in the history, landscape and mindset of [...] culture.” In the context in which they are placed, they act and react within the horizon of their own self-concept and their understanding of mission, which are based on narratives of origin and tradition. In other words, the self-concept, shape, and action of an organization in a given context is the result of the interplay between internal logics, routines, and regimes and external logics, routines, and regimes. The congregational studies approach distinguishes between “identity”, “program”, and “process” of a religious organization and its wider “context”. These categories can serve as a heuristic model to observe and analyze the complexity of being and becoming church in a changing society. It allows for the study of the research object from different perspectives by examining various conditional factors of organized religion such as structures, interactions and communications, patterns of belonging, mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, role distributions, power constellations, and conflict zones (Krech/Schlamacher/Hero 2013: 54–55) as well as by bringing both the synchronic and diachronic dimension into focus (Jackson/Dudley/McKinney 1986: 14).³

Often, the first reaction of an organization to changes in the environment is to adapt its program, meaning “those organizational structures, plans and activities through which a congregation expresses its mission and ministry both to its own members and those outside the membership” (ibid: 11). Of course, the program is implicitly or explicitly influenced by “the convictions about itself that constitute a congregation’s identity”, which means the “persistent set of beliefs, values, patterns, symbols stories and style that make a congregation distinctively itself” (ibid:12). Identity concepts and narratives therefore help to legitimize the measures taken at the level of organizational structures, communications and patterns of decision-making, and leadership as well as at the level of social engagement (ibid: 11–12).

Of course, the Catholic Church in Switzerland cannot be compared one-to-one with congregational realities in the USA, where the congregational studies approach has been developed. But as a heuristic model the concept has been attracting interest from researchers in Europe for some years now. This interest grew as a result of a changing society which impacted the status and influence of religion and its organizations in society. Under the conditions of secularization and individualization, religion has become an option and religious organizations find themselves in unprecedented competition with numerous other religious and non-religious organizations (Carroll/Dudley/McKinney 1986; Hausschildt 2016: 247–248; Ammermann 2017; Burkhardt 2018). Even though historically established Christian denominations in Switzerland are not directly dependent on the commitment and engagement of their members, as the congregations in the USA are (Latzel/Wegner 2017: 20), church affiliation and participation has declined in

2 The same approach is used by Anna Kórs in this volume.

3 Of course, it must also be considered that religious organizations themselves can have an impact on their environment. An examination of this question is beyond the scope of this chapter.

Switzerland and become an option and a matter of individual choice (ibid: 17–19). The established churches, with their local communities, have thus taken on the characteristics of decision-based organizations that work on a voluntary basis inside and outside parochial structures and bring together individuals with both similar and different backgrounds, motives, needs, and commitments (Hoover 2014; Hauschildt 2016: 249; Burkhardt 2018).

This chapter draws on the congregational study approach and focuses on adjustments of the Catholic Church in Switzerland in relation to its migration-related pluralization in the horizon of both its socio-political context and its identity narratives (ibid: 12). Through the lens of this approach it will become obvious that not only have different readings of the concept of unity emerged, but also different forms of being church, of coexistence, cooperation, collaboration, or even conviviality, caused either by top-down policies or bottom-up initiatives.

1.4 Terminology Clarifications and the Concept of Conviviality

This chapter ties in with the conviviality discourse, since it deals with questions about shared convictions and practices that, perceived as heritage, are actually non-negotiable, but are nevertheless historically and culturally conditioned. It deals with visions and practices of witness and togetherness, and even interdependence between those who are culturally different (Studdert/Walkerline 2016), but also with the experiences of difference and divergence between actors in multicultural church settings (Vertovec 2007; Valluvan 2016).

As it has become clear in this introduction, the terms involved in describing the phenomenon of conviviality in a church setting are problematic. They are neither used in a consistent way nor is their meaning clear-cut and distinctive. Therefore, some conceptual clarifications will support the readability of the chapter, even though the ambiguities, in terms of overlapping terms, cannot be resolved completely. A considerable confusion prevails when using the following terms: communion, community, congregation, and conviviality. Some of these terms are used in a more theological sense while others are more sociological or used to describe both spiritual as well as social realities.

In theological texts, the terms communion and community are often used as synonyms to describe church or church groups in a more general way. But then they also stand for different dimensions of the church as a mystical as well as a social body (Römisch-katholische Zentralkonferenz/Schweizerische Bischofskonferenz 2012). While the term communion in the Catholic reading alludes to the sacramental dimension of the church and symbolizes the union of humankind with Jesus Christ through the sacrament of the Eucharist, which unites those who participate in that sacrament (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1997), community rather alludes to the social form of church defined by formal membership and bound to a territory or place. In contrast to this understanding, the term is also used to describe groups whose members share a feeling of belonging. Community here is not automatically given by the sociability of human life itself, but is something that people produce by practicing sociality and being together (Studdert/Walkerline 2016). However, the term is sometimes also used to describe the church as a time and space transcending phenomenon that unites all

those who belong/d to the church and share/d its traditions in the past, present, and future. In this version, it seems to come close or even overlap with the concept of communion. Nevertheless, the term community primarily has a social character and therefore overlaps with the concept of the congregation, which describes an organized social body, whose members actively or passively participate and share traditions of belief and practice. A religious congregation therefore is always also a community in one way or another (Carroll/Dudley/MacKinney 1986).

Last but not least, the concept of conviviality is linked to certain understandings of the terms discussed. It brings into focus “social interaction and connection, which emerge through wider projections and dispositions shaped by resource and constraint but also filtered through senses of place, proximity and practice” (Neal et al. 2019: 74). It is another heuristic concept to help explore and describe modes and strategies of co-existence and togetherness in practice without evaluating them in a normative manner (Nowicka/Vertovec 2014).

As this chapter borrows from the congregational studies approach, it focuses on the social dimensions of church in terms of the organizational character of religion and makes use of the terms “congregation”, “community”, and “conviviality” from a sociological point of view.

1.5 Outline of the Chapter

This chapter focuses on the question of how the Catholic Church in Switzerland is doing church in the context of growing cultural plurality and diversity. After a short reflection on the migration-related multicultural realities of both society and church, a summary of migration and integration policies follows. The main focus lies on the organizational adjustments of the church that occur through the interplay between its own self-image and the state’s political programs and measures. Different modes and claims of togetherness in terms of conviviality on the part of the church will be noted. It will become clear that the church’s search for unity and togetherness is an unfinished process on all sides and for all parties involved (Neal et al. 2019: 73). The chapter ends with a desideratum for further research in the field of local multicultural congregations.

2 Migrant Reality of Swiss Society and the Catholic Church in Switzerland

According to the Swiss Federal Statistical Office over two million foreigners lived in Switzerland in 2021, representing 26 percent of the permanent resident population of 8.7 million persons over the age of 15. Today, 39 percent of the population has a migration background (Bundesamt für Statistik 2022).⁴ The majority of all immigrants belong to a Christian church. Most are Catholic, and they have made a strong migrant imprint on

4 The population with a migration background includes all persons with foreign nationality (including third generation foreigners). This population also includes first generation naturalized Swiss citizens, second generation naturalized Swiss citizens with at least one parent born abroad, and Swiss nationals from birth whose parents were both born abroad (BFS 2021). The concept replaces the distinction between natives and foreigners based on current citizenship and migration status.

the Catholic Church in the past decades. Thus, in 2022, 39 percent of the resident Catholic population, aged 15 and older, had a migrant background. This roughly corresponds to the composition of the Swiss population itself. The Catholic Church has not been shaped by migration to the same extent in all parts of the country. Especially in the French- and Italian-speaking parts of Switzerland, Catholics with a migration background are strongly represented or even form a majority (Schweizerisches Pastoralsoziologisches Institut 2022). In the canton of Geneva, this proportion exceeds the 60 percent mark, and in the cantons Zurich, Zug, Basel-Stadt, Ticino, Vaud, and Neuchâtel, this proportion is 40 percent and even higher as well (Bundesamt für Statistik 2022).

The extent and irreversibility of migration, but also the increasing pluralization of migration and the increase of the number of people with migration backgrounds in both society and church, has become a long-term challenge for the Catholic Church in Switzerland. It has reacted with ongoing adjustments in organizational policy and pastoral measures. In the dual system, a unique characteristic of the Catholic Church in Switzerland which distinguishes administrative from pastoral structures and functions of the organization,⁵ the mediation between these two “sides” has been a particular challenge, especially regarding decision-making processes. This chapter highlights the developments in dealing with immigrants since the 1960s in society and state politics as well as in the church. It will become clear that the church as an organization in society is influenced by and interacts with its environment.

3 Cultural Diversity and Strategies in Society and Church

3.1 Migration and the Federal Immigration Regimes⁶ in Switzerland

3.1.1 Immigration as a Temporary State and Economic Buffer

Switzerland experienced its first major immigration influx in the second half of the 19th century with the second industrial revolution. Changing labor conditions, the expansion of the railroad network, and an unrestricted immigration policy led to a rapidly growing number of immigrants from neighboring countries, most of which were Catholic (Piquet 2006: 13; Bundesamt für Statistik 2008: 2; Bundesamt für Migration 2012: 8). As anti-foreigner sentiments began to emerge in the Swiss population due to the rapid growth of immigrant populations, the government felt compelled to regulate immigration by law (Holenstein/Kury/Schulz 2018: 20). In 1931, for the first time in the history of the nation-state, residence permits were tied to work permits (Piquet 2006: 15; Foppa 2015: 5–6). The second major immigration wave began in the wake of the European recovery after

These terms are criticized because they make migration history a characteristic that deviates from normality and is visible as an attribute (Baumann/Nagel 2023: 83).

- 5 The Catholic Church in Switzerland is “divided” into organizations, structured in accordance with the ecclesiastical law of the state (Staatskirchenrecht), and into parishes, structured in accordance with the law of the Church (Canon Law). The former are responsible for the administration, the latter for pastoral care issues.
- 6 An immigration regime refers to the migration policies and their outcomes that collectively reflect the admission and settlement of foreign-born people over time.

World War II (Vuilleumier 2007: 189–193, 200). In order to recruit the necessary workforce, Switzerland ratified a bilateral treaty with Italy. The migration policy of the time was based on a “system of rotation”, which did not provide for structural and cultural integration of the guest workers and issued only temporary residence permits. Labor migration became an economic buffer for Switzerland and immigrants were expected to leave the country at the end of the season (Bundesamt für Statistik 2012).

3.1.2 Switzerland as an Immigration Country – Between Assimilation and Participation

By the mid-1960s, there was a growing conviction among policymakers that modern economies remained dependent on foreign workers (Eidgenössische Migrationskommission 2020). Switzerland entered into further bilateral agreements with Spain, Portugal, Turkey, and the former Yugoslavia. The “system of rotation” was followed by an immigration policy that also provided for long-term stays and permanent settlements with family reunifications (Bundesamt für Statistik 2008: 2–4). As a result, the proportion of foreign workers grew from 6.4 percent of the population in 1960 to 25.5 percent in 1972 (*ibid.*: 10). During this time, immigrant organizations began to publicly formulate their demands for recognition and increased rights in Swiss society. Their political requests and the continuous growth of the Swiss population (Piquet 2006: 33–34) led, in the 1970s, to a revitalization of the fear of foreign infiltration in the Swiss population. A reduction of the foreign population and an end to the expansion of the social rights of immigrants was legally enacted (*ibid.*: 23–24) with the argument that immigrant organizations promoted segregation (D’Amato 2008).

The globalization process, connected with increased mobility opportunities, the growing number of conflict hotspots all over the world, and the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons, that Switzerland signed with the European Union in 1999, has since led to an increasing pluralization of the immigrant population in the country (Piquet 2006: 61–62). A look back over the last 120 years provides an insight into the history of migration in Switzerland: While around 3.3 million people lived in Switzerland at the beginning of the 20th century, this figure had risen to 5.5 million by the 1960s and to 7.2 million by the turn of the century. Today, 8.7 million people live in Switzerland. In 2021, almost 70% of the immigrant population was from EU/EFTA countries. The immigrants had come to Switzerland mostly for work reasons. Today, the proportion of people without Swiss citizenship (25%) and those with a migration background (40%)⁷ is very high. At present, only Luxembourg has a higher proportion of people with foreign nationalities and with migrant backgrounds in Europe.

7 The Federal Statistical Office defines migration background as follows: “The population with a migration background includes all foreign nationals (including third generation foreign nationals). This population also includes first generation naturalized Swiss citizens, second generation naturalized Swiss citizens with at least one parent born abroad and Swiss nationals from birth, both of whose parents were born abroad.” This definition makes it clear that immigrants in Switzerland retain a migration background for a very long time. For an international comparison of the figures, the definitions must therefore be taken into account (<https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/en/home/statistics/population/migration-integration/integration.html>).

In order to regulate the dynamics of immigration, a “dual system” has been established, together with the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons, that distinguishes between EU/EFTA citizens and citizens from so-called third countries. It ties admission criteria to national citizenship and grants residence permits to individuals from third countries only if they are highly qualified professionals or else recognized as refugees (ibid: 78) (Foppa 2015: 10–12). To provide a summary: The current immigration regime tries to mediate between the needs of the economy, smoldering xenophobia, and international developments and conventions (Foppa 2019: 42–43).

With the pluralization of immigration and continued population growth, the issue of the social integration of the immigrants increasingly became a virulent issue in Swiss politics. For decades, migrant workers had been expected to come and go as needed and the political consensus in Switzerland prevented a coherent policy geared toward long-term social integration. Only in 2008 did a new Federal Act on Foreign Nationals and Integration (AIG) implement immigration practices and politics. Slowly, integration became a topic in Swiss law, which not only placed the responsibility for a successful integration process on the immigrants themselves, but also on the federal government, the cantons, and Swiss society. Art. 3 of the AIG says:

- 1 The aim of integration is the co-existence of the resident Swiss and foreign population on the basis of the values of the Federal Constitution and mutual respect and tolerance.
- 2 Integration should enable foreign nationals who are lawfully resident in Switzerland for the longer term to participate in the economic, social and cultural life of the society.
- 3 Integration requires willingness on the part of the foreign nationals and openness on the part of the Swiss population.
- 4 Foreign nationals are required to familiarise themselves with the social conditions and way of life in Switzerland and in particular to learn a national language. (Fedlex 2023)

Equal participation of all members of society and equal access to its resources are the main goals here. At the same time, a policy of “demanding and promoting” (Staatssekretariat für Migration 2020) has been established to help achieve these goals. Therefore, immigrants who do not comply with the integration agreement and who do not meet certain integration criteria do not receive a residence permit according to AIG, Act, Art. 58 (Fedlex 2023). In the past, this approach has been criticized as a version of “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer/Glick Schiller 2002) that goes along with an assimilatory understanding of integration (Esser 2004) and a view of immigrants as deviating from the norm of the majority population (Alba 2008; Lauser/Weissköppel 2008; Nagel 2013). This essentialist understanding of culture and society, as well as of a successful integration process, have lost their legitimacy in today’s world. With the debate on transnationality and transculturality, integration has been brought into focus as a multidimensional process, and the possibilities of multiple affiliations and identities as well as of selective, partial, and temporary integration have thereby been highlighted (Pries 2001; Siouti 2012: 11–12). Accordingly, today the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) avoids men-

tioning integration criteria in the Federal Law that explicitly require assimilation on a cultural or emotional level.⁸ However, against the backdrop of the many requirements for Swiss citizenship, the “abnormalization of migration” and the deficit-perspective on immigrants are still prevalent (Bommes 2011: 223; Kessler 2018b). It is interesting, however, that on the flipside of a deficit-oriented discourse an alternative discourse has taken shape that focuses on the potential of immigrants and their organizations to contribute to civic society (SEM 2015).

The ambivalence of public discourses and integration policies is due to the fact that immigration, especially from non- EU/EFTA countries, is associated with a loss of sovereignty and rising social expenses in Swiss society. In order to maintain social cohesion and avoid the development of so-called parallel systems, the state is interested in controlling immigration. In doing so, the state is guided by the principles of political correctness, freedom and equality upheld in modern society, and society’s sensitivities itself. “Parallel societies” actually can become a serious problem when they are coupled with precarity and the inequality of opportunities, as faced by France and Germany are currently experiencing. That sheds light the risk that an integration policy can become symbolic when it serves to maintain the belief in achieving equality when in fact people only face hurdles (Kessler 2018b: 87–88).

3.2 The Catholic Church’s Dealings with Immigrants

3.2.1 Side-by-Side and Social Engagement – Migrants as Temporary Guests

The history of Catholic migrant communities and congregations in Switzerland began with the first great wave of immigration from Italy in the 1860s and evolved after World War II with the movement of guest workers from the countries of southern Europe (Jäggi 2003: 93). From spring to fall, the mostly young men from Italy lived in makeshift shantytowns near the construction sites where they worked, usually outside of local settlements. They kept to themselves, neither learning the local language nor being able to participate in local social life in their free time (Foppa 2019: 59). The dioceses of Bergamo and Milan were concerned about the situation of their fellow citizens and supported the founding of Catholic congregations, the so-called “Missioni Cattoliche Italiane”, to meet the social and spiritual needs of the immigrants. As the attempt of the Swiss Church to attract immigrants to local parishes had not succeeded, the Catholic Church in Switzerland actively supported the building of these “missions”, initiated by foreign dioceses and led by priests of the home countries of the immigrant groups. There, the immigrants were supposed to find a religious and social home in foreign environment (Kaptijn 2011: 702; Baumann-Neuhaus 2019: 143). But at the same time, the missions were not intended to be established permanently (ibid: 702) instead they were meant to serve as an interim or temporary ecclesial solution for the guest worker generation.

8 The emphasis in Switzerland is on employment integration. Good results are achieved compared to other European countries, which also has to do with the fact that a large proportion of immigrants come from EU/EFTA countries and the immigration of experts from outside the EU/EFTA member states is subject to quotas. The number of asylum seekers is rather small compared to that of labor migrants.

In the early days of the guest worker movement, the Swiss Bishop Conference also responded to the situation of the guest workers and founded the “Swiss Working Group for Foreign Workers” (Schweizerische Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Fremdarbeiterfragen, SKAF) in 1969,⁹ which tried to spur developments for an increased reception, acceptance, and care of the workers both in society and church. In the further course of time, the bishops tried to align the church’s policy in Switzerland to that of the worldwide Catholic Church as set out in the “*Motu proprio. Pastoralis migratorum cura*” by Paul VI (1969). But they also realized that immigration opened up new opportunities for the Catholic Church as the process of church erosion started to be substantially felt in Switzerland at this time (Stolz et al. 2014; Gabriel 2004). While membership continued to decline and continued to distance themselves from the institution, migrant workers from Southern Europe did not question their religious affiliation, attended church services regularly, and identified themselves with the Catholic doctrine. It soon became clear, though, that the Catholic immigrants were confronted with a great deal of issues due to their immigration. So, while the church benefited from immigration and was able to stabilize its membership figures, it was also challenged to help and support those in need. With its increased social engagement (Gabriel 2015: 21–24) the church did not only act in accordance with its self-image as an advocate for the disadvantaged, it also seized the opportunity to make its influence and legitimacy in society as a civil actor visible. This was of great importance during a time of decreasing significance in society (Casanova 2004; Gabriel 2011: 390–393; Kessler 2018a: 74–76).

With its policy to establish temporary “missions”, the Catholic Church in Switzerland leaned on the migration policies of the state. At the same time it focused on its civic role and impact within a secularized society. By doing so, the Catholic Church viewed the immigrants as guests in need – and thereby not only ignored the question about their integration but also reproduced a common deficit-oriented perspective on immigrants from the standpoint of the established church. Under its own roof it treated its own members as non-equals. This practice was obviously not considered to be contradictory to the church’s self-understanding since the Catholic immigrants were perceived as “believers with equal rights” by virtue of their baptism. The concept of spiritual unity and community through shared faith and practice obscured the parallel coexistence and even separation of the social bodies represented by the local parishes vis-à-vis the language communities. There seemed to be no awareness of the inequality between the groups and communities. Just as the worldwide church conceived its unity in diversity as a cross-continental phenomenon of connected national churches and dioceses that existed side by side, the Catholic Church in Switzerland managed its cultural diversity by founding new communities and congregations that existed side by side, even if in parallel to each other. The question of an intercultural perspective was for a long time not actively addressed by the official church and its local congregations. The catholicity of the church was obviously not at stake here, for shared faith, rituals, and leadership sufficed to fulfill

9 In 2000, the SKAF adapted to changed circumstances and at the same time received a new name: “migratio” is now the Commission for the Pastoral Care of People of Other Languages of the Swiss Bishops’ Conferences (General Vicariate 2015: 11).

the claim of unity and community.¹⁰ However, from a nonreligious, sociological point of view the immigrants remained in the state of being “outsiders” and became objects of the supporting and hosting church (Kessler 2018a: 131–266).

3.2.2 Institutionalization of Parallel Structures – Coexistence between Unequals

With the economic upswing and the long-term and permanent settlement of migrant workers and their families in Switzerland in the 1970s, the conditions and needs of immigrants changed. For Catholics the question of the religious and cultural socialization of their children came up. Already in 1969, the Catholic Church in Switzerland reacted to the new situation by removing the time limit for the employment of foreign missionaries (priests in charge of the missions). And when, in 2004, the worldwide Catholic Church came to the conclusion – like the politicians before – that immigration was a structural phenomenon of modern societies,¹¹ the missions, as a model of dealing with cultural plurality and diversity, were already established and institutionalized. By the time local parishes were asked to face the fact of cultural diversification as a permanent task of their pastoral duties – they were to protect the immigrants in regard to their “cultural, ethnic, linguistic, ritual and spiritual identity” (Kaptijn 2011: 702) – the migrant communities and congregations had already become linguistic and cultural islands and established institutions for members of the first, second, and third generations of immigrants (Foppa 2015: 14). Here, they were among their own kind, receiving a variety of support and help, and becoming part of a social network that opened doors to society (ibid: 64). The diverse services offered by migrant congregations to their members, and their civic potential in society, have been repeatedly stressed in numerous studies in the last few years (Elwert 1982; Nagel 2015; Foppa 2019).¹² These have also become identity-traits of the migrant congregations themselves.

The institutionalization of the missions, with their subgroup character, in the Catholic Church in Switzerland was a logical consequence of the previously described developments in society at the time. It also corresponded to a concept of unity and community in diversity that did not aspire to uniformity, as was repeatedly suggested in papal writings: “The host churches are called to integrate the concrete reality of the people and the groups that compose it” (John II: 1985). The missions were integral part of the Swiss church and at the same time pursued parallel practices.¹³ The question

10 In Germany an almost identical situation emerged during this period (Tränhardt/Winterhagen 2012, 131–137).

11 Instruktion “Erga migrantes caritas Christi” (https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/documents/rc_pc_migrants_doc_20040514_erga-migrantes-caritas-christi_ge.html#Einheit%20in%20der%20Vielheit:%20die%20Problematik_).

12 In most of the studies that deal with this issue, the authors refer to Robert Putnam's social capital approach and make visible the civic achievements of migrant communities in terms of their potential to promote integration (Kortmann 2011: 18).

13 In Germany, a similar policy can be observed during the time discussed, as an almost identical situation emerged during this period. The structures were consolidated and the organization of pastoral care for migrants in the missions was also justified theologically and pedagogically, for example in the immigrants' right to pastoral care in their mother tongue. This was also intended to prevent immigrants from losing their faith in the new context (Winterhagen 2013, 138–141).

of interculturality as an alternative and contextualized form of unity and community on the basis of doing church together in a multicultural neighborhood was again not elaborated on. Instead, the official church with its established local parishes was still understood as a host for the immigrant communities. This very mode of coexistence was to be “signs and instruments of unity in view of a renewed humanity” to the world (Pontifical Council for Laity 2004: 89–90).

On all sides, the practice of coexistence was not perceived as problematic but rather as an appropriate realization of the church's self-understanding in the context of the growing cultural plurality at that time. The language communities themselves stressed their potential to support their members and to contribute to their social integration in a twofold manner. They helped them to become part of their country of residence and to maintain their connection to their home country. For many migrants the mission was not only a place of empowerment (Baumann-Neuhaus 2021: 83), from where they could take steps into an unknown society, but also a place of reconnection to their society of origin, which enabled them to keep alive the option of returning for themselves and their children.¹⁴

The practice of the institutionalized coexistence of different groups can be seen as a pragmatic solution to the pluralization problem within the church, and was not perceived as going against traditionally cultivated habits and understandings. It certainly had its advantages for all groups, it made sense. A systematic reflection on the structures of inequalities and dependencies between the established and the migrant congregations – and, along with it, of well-established decision-making procedures in matters of finances, personnel, and premises – did not become an urgent matter that led to change, even though a growing awareness of this urgency can be traced to that time, as described in the following section.

On the flip side of the solidified parallel structures of the migrant congregations, according to Kessler (2018: 81–85), the official church's function as host to the immigrant groups and as socially engaged civil actor led above all to an accentuation of the structural integration of immigrants. The semantics of the public debate on integration had found their way into the ecclesiastical debate, impacted practices on migration, and increased pressure on these groups to legitimate themselves as experts on integration – especially in times of declining resources and membership in the local parishes. Kessler states: “They work on the problems of integration, but must not solve them, lest they pull the rug out from under their own feet. They must credibly demonstrate the success of their efforts and at the same time show a need for further efforts in this area” (ibid: 86).

3.2.3 Pluralization and Decline of Resources – A Call for more Togetherness

With the increasing pluralization and the establishment of more and more migrant communities and congregations in the Catholic Church in Switzerland, the question of the

14 In research, the transnational approach has been discussed since the 1990s and empirically substantiated in comparative studies on migrant organizations. The transnational orientation is perceived as normal in migrant biographies and therefore becomes a possibility in overcoming the polarization of the integrative versus segregative effects of migration communities (Pries/Sezgin 2010).

quality of the integration of these subgroups within the church came to the fore.. By the turn of the century the institutionalized coexistence of the migrant alongside local congregations was increasingly discussed as a questionable and even problematic development on two levels, as a resource issue and as a pastoral care issue.

Today's challenges are: The growing number of migrant congregations causes financial expenses at a time when the resources of the Swiss Catholic Church show a declining trend. Therefore, local migrant congregations often find themselves in a competitive situation with parishes in their neighborhoods, not only for reasons of resources but also due to their tendency to have more pronounced vitality and a younger demographic (Röthlisberger/Wüthrich 2019). They need to legitimize their parallel existence especially when their members already belong to the second and third generation of immigrants. The local parishes on the other hand do not show much interest in helping to finance parallel structures for those who are no longer in need of special treatment (Foppa 2015: 16). Suffering from priest shortages, declining membership, and aging populations, they discover a potential in migrant congregations to counter these developments within their own congregations. Accordingly, they perceive the existing parallel structures as a lack of solidarity by the migrant congregations towards the problematic situations of the established congregations (Kessler 2018a: 265; Breitschmid 2020). Conversely, some migrant congregations feel criticized for their traditional theology and religious practice, but welcomed as taxpayers as well as for providing additional resources to a struggling church to which they feel pressured to conform (Kessler 2018a: 236). These different experiences and perspectives prevent an encounter based on mutuality that would facilitate opportunities to develop a practice of togetherness that transcends the paternalism and dominance on the side of the established church as well as the desire to stick to one's own convictions and routines on the side of the migrant congregations. The tension is also reflected in statements by the church leadership itself: While they speak in favor of a practice of cooperation and collaboration between the different and diverse groups, they keep a close eye on the current scarcity of the church's resources, as a quote from the Swiss Bishop Conference illustrates: "Not only the shortage of pastors, but above all the one Church as the People of God makes closer cooperation between priests and pastors of different origins inevitable. For this reason, we wish to see more forms of joint pastoral ministry examined and put into effect" (Schweizer Bischofskonferenz 1996). The process toward more togetherness does not proceed independently of economic considerations, even though this tends to be kept invisible in favor of a more pastoral perspective on the issue.

Already by the end of the 1990s a discussion was started among church leaders and experts on an overall perspective on pastoral ministry. In the last few years, it was increasingly emphasized that there should no longer be a separate migration pastoral.¹⁵ Reflec-

15 This was also the case in Germany, where the controversial transitional and parallel function of pastoral care for migrants was discussed, especially because it made a long-term perspective on a post-migrant situation impossible. However, ideas for change were lacking. As early as 2003, the German Bishops' Conference addressed a reform of pastoral care for migrants in the document "One Church in Many Languages and Peoples" – partly for reasons of the changing resource situation. In 2005, they presented four models for the future which, under the heading of integration, included various forms of cooperation ranging from the retention of mi-

tions and discussions aimed at an integrative concept of pastoral care in the Catholic Church in Switzerland. The concept of “post-migration”¹⁶, with its analytical and normative potential, was introduced into the debate. It helped to sharpen the view of the church’s reality as decisively and permanently shaped by migration and to accept it as the normal state of today’s church that calls for a culture of cooperation and participation between equals. In order to concretize the discussion and the development of measurements to further a culture of togetherness on all levels of church development and practice, the Swiss Bishop Conference and the Roman Catholic Central Conference finally initiated a project to search for “new ways of cooperation between parishes and missions” (Schweizer Bischofskonferenz 1996).

3.2.4 Strategy and Practice Towards more Togetherness – a Top-down and Bottom-up Process

There is no question that the Catholic Church in Switzerland and its local congregations have long since realized that migrant communities and congregations are a permanent part of the organization. Many of these communities and congregations have even ceased to behave as guests of the Swiss Church. They no longer place the issue of migration at the center of their activities and self-legitimization (Bünker 2020: 193), but act as intercultural communities, that have to come to grips with the cultural diversity within themselves as well as with a growing cultural plurality in the church and in society. They have developed practices of togetherness to function as a community and to work alongside local parishes. Their encounters with the established parish communities go beyond the renting and leasing of premises and performing intercultural celebrations together. They have become part of local or regional decision-making structures and illustrate bottom-up initiatives and processes at a time where concepts of togetherness, such as conviviality, were still debated at the leadership level. In the past, such initiatives have depended on the engagements of people in the communities, who follow their vision and are ready to go all the way, even when obstacles and conflicts arise. And they do, because people with different backgrounds and church experiences, different understandings of the church and its offices, and different understandings of gender etc. must finally agree on their shared common ground. Even if the process is now to be institutionalized, it remains a trial-error process, because in everyday life it has to be spelled out by people. This process of doing church includes the redefinition of one’s identity as a religious group but also the reformation of structures and processes, such as decision-making and planning processes and financial flows etc. without a proven model to lean

grant communities to their dissolution. It is as yet an unfinished process, but one that aims to strengthen cooperation between the missions and the other territorial and categorical pastoral offices of the local church. The missions are part of the local parishes, which is not the case for all missions in Switzerland, as some groups are regionally or even nationally organized because of their size (Scheidler 2002: 86–87; Winterhagen 2013, 148–150; Thränhardt/Winterhagen 2022, 331–332).

- 16 “Post-migration” does not mark the end of a migratory area but opens perspectives beyond the mere act of migration and considers other narratives and political regimes at play as well as the conflicts and transformations in societies shaped by migration (Foroutan 2019: 15).

on (Bünker 2020; Römisch-katholische Zentralkonferenz/Schweizer Bischofskonferenz 2021: 6; Baumann-Neuhaus 2021: 51–56).

The process thus so far proceeds as an open-ended process, involving interactions between people as well as strategic initiatives. It does not always lead to satisfying solutions and often is ambiguous and contradictory in its course as it draws on different convictions, experiences, and expectations of the people involved. The lived practice of doing church doesn't go without conflicts and also shows tendencies of creating divisions on the side of all involved parties. There is still a lot of "othering" and "self-othering" taking place that is contrary to the concept of togetherness, which goes beyond shared beliefs and practices and involves social mutuality, exchange, and connective interdependence among those involved (Neal et al. 2019: 69, 80f).

In order to support these tentative beginnings and to implement a vision of togetherness on all levels of the Catholic Church in Switzerland, the Swiss Bishop Conference and the Roman Catholic Central Conference commissioned a study to survey the current situation of pastoral care in Switzerland in 2017, including the realities of the migrant congregations (Socialdesign 2019). This study served as a basis for the development of an encompassing pastoral care concept, including for migrant congregations and their ministries. The study was not only intended to focus on matters of finances and structures but also on pastoral questions and on the potential of migrant communities for the wider church (Römisch-katholische Zentralkonferenz/Schweizer Bischofskonferenz 2021: 5).

In the brochure "Towards an Intercultural Pastoral Care. Increased Togetherness and Appreciative Coexistence", published following the mentioned study in 2021, the church's leadership referred not only to the narrative of the church as the "pilgrim people of God" but once again stressed the guiding principle of the ideal church, in which no one is forgotten, abandoned, or pushed aside. The church as a social body in its catholicity exists to welcome, protect, foster, and integrate all, including migrants. But the church as a body consisting of different parts reaches the desired and targeted togetherness only if all sides are committed and able to participate in the process (ibid: 11;15).

In the brochure, different areas of church life in which increased togetherness should be promoted and become visible are listed: "in the celebration of the liturgy, in the proclamation, in diaconal and solidary care for one another, in community life as well as in catechesis, in hospital and home pastoral care, in prison pastoral care, in pastoral and administrative committees" (ibid: 13). A list of indicators of the intended outcomes of convivial practice is also added to give an idea of the concept behind it: A "credible pastoral care of migration", the document states, is reflected in a "fair distribution of resources", the "provision of funds for overarching projects that promote togetherness", the "participation of members of migrant congregations in parish authorities", but also in a "cooperation practice that is characterized by participation, appreciation and a solution focus." This will be realized through "encounters at eye level", and in a culture of "mutual learning from one another" and "mutual consideration" for one another (ibid: 17, 28). A shift of power becomes apparent and the plea for more togetherness approaches a concept of conviviality defined as an attitude and practice characterized by mutuality and interdependency.

Yet, the quality of participation, mutuality, exchange, and even interdependency aimed at is left to the discretion of the people in charge at each location. The advice to look for adequate structural and pastoral adaptations specific to each site opposes the tendencies that try to merge migrant congregations with local parishes. Subsidiarity, which refers to the maximum self-determination and self-responsibility a congregation can take on, as well as the consideration of situational circumstances, should be leading principles: “The situation on the ground should be decisive for the choice of models for the organization of pastoral ministry” (ibid: 15). In other words, the authors of the brochure know that togetherness in the form proposed or desired is by no means feasible everywhere – and it remains an open and unfinished process of encounter, interaction, and collaborative experiment between different people and groups, with the potential to stir conflicts or even to fail.

Attention should be paid here to the alternative to the proposed concept of togetherness – to the concept of “appreciative coexistence”. Since unity in diversity shall not be pushed by any and all means (ibid: 6), the search for more togetherness can also end up as side-by-side initiatives or as with-ness with the different others (Neal et al. 2019).

The motto of “increased togetherness” and “appreciative coexistence” of the church’s leadership is based on a reading of the church’s traditional identity narrative that implies an attitude of “learning from each other” (Römisch-katholische Zentralkonferenz/Schweizer Bischofskonferenz 2021: 14, 26). Thus, the designed concepts and proposed measures for church practice show organizational adjustments that result from a contextualized self-concept in times when cultural diversity has come to the neighborhoods. This contextualization is the result of the interplay between organizational rationales and traditions within the social and political context as well as learnings from local bottom-up initiatives and experiences. In this respect, it reflects a multifaceted ecclesial reality in a process that is characterized by the interplay of multiple factors and paths.

How and if the concepts of “increased togetherness” and “appreciative coexistence” will be realized in the future remains open and must be observed in and between the local communities and congregations themselves. A research project that focuses on lived religion, particularly on the practice of togetherness in local settings, has been launched by the Schweizerisches Pastoralsoziologisches Institut in 2023.

4 Summary

Leaning on the concept of the congregational studies approach, this chapter tries to show how the Catholic Church in Switzerland, as a historical and established religious organization, is an adaptive social entity. In a changing context it acts and reacts within the horizon of its own self-understanding or identity, which is based on narratives of origin and tradition and their ongoing reconstruction under changing circumstances. Constant negotiations take place on different levels of the organization that make clear that doing church is a process that occurs in the interplay between organizational logics, routines, and regimes of the church itself as well as the logics, routines, and regimes of society.

The structural processes and phases as well as the discursive negotiations within the Catholic Church in Switzerland often went hand in hand with the political processes, an observation that also applies to the Catholic Church in Germany. The current church policy in the area of migration in Switzerland indicates a direction, but largely leaves the concrete formulation to the decision-makers at the grassroots level – whoever that is in the specific case. Situationally appropriate solutions are the goal.

5 Research Desideratum

In Switzerland, hardly any systematic research has been done on the question of the culturally conditioned diversification or multiculturalism of Christianity. Since the Catholic Church in Switzerland is highly affected by migration it is forced to find adequate approaches to its given realities in terms of organizational and pastoral adjustments – as outlined in this chapter. What is missing is a deeper insight into the dynamics of local congregational practice. Therefore, the Swiss Sociological Pastoral Institute (SPI) initiated a qualitative study in 2023 in order to fill this knowledge gap (Swiss National Science Foundation 2023–2027). This empirical study focuses on the following questions: Where, how, and why do culturally diverse Catholic communities emerge and consolidate? Who is involved? What holds them together? What do they have in common? How do they handle differences and conflicts? How do they function and also change? What is the interplay and power play with the wider Church and with society? These are a few of the questions addressed. With the help of a multidimensional grid for observational studies, as developed in the context of the congregational studies approach (Ammerman et al. 1998), interculturally oriented Catholic congregations in French- and German-speaking Switzerland will be studied.

Their practices of togetherness – however they take shape – will then be compared with each other. This approach allows researchers to observe different variations of togetherness practice in culturally diverse congregations against the background of regional contexts, organizational measures, theological concepts and narratives, ritual practices, patterns of communication, and sociality. The study borrows from Neal et al.'s approach to social practice in culturally diverse recreation organizations (Neal et al. 2019; Singh 2013: 190). By linking the concept of conviviality to religious congregations, contemporary religious formations can be analyzed and understood as specific social formations along the spectrum of urban “multiculture.” Practices of togetherness will become observable as a continuous act of social reciprocity with its partialities, contradictions, and conflicts (Studdert/Walkerline 2016; Blokland 2017).

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