

## Test of faith

*<https://www.avvenire.it/attualita/pagine/migranti-il-piano-ruanda-britannico-e-illegale-corte-suprema>*

*<https://lanuovabq.it/it/scandalo-immigrazione-finti-cristiani-per-restare-nel-regno-unito>*

Recent news events in the United Kingdom have raised serious concern about the growing phenomenon of conversions, from Islam to the Christian faith, of numerous immigrants whose criminal record is, however, stained with crimes of no small importance, such as drug dealing, sexual crimes and even murders. The large number, and the frequency with which these conversions followed one another, has raised suspicions about their authenticity, and led the British Prime Minister to order a specific investigation aimed at verifying their veracity. An emblematic case of this delicate situation is that of Emaa al-Swealmeen, perpetrator of the attack in Liverpool in 2021, who converted to Christianity in 2015 at the end of a failed asylum request process, but at the time of the house search they were objects typically used in Muslim worship for daily prayer were found. Added to this are other similar cases, although less famous in the news, such as that of the Bengali man who murdered his wife, imprisoned for 12 years and who appealed to the art. 3 of the ECHR, or the Human Rights Act of 1998 itself, which prohibit the expulsion of people who would risk suffering serious harm as a result of torture or inhuman or degrading treatment. The point of the matter is, according to the English authorities, the need to verify the reliability of the conversion paths, in order to prevent a well-founded abuse from taking place in the name of a human right, or of several human rights that are presumed violated on false testimony, which undermines the rights of those seeking asylum for humanitarian reasons by not resorting to ethically and legally questionable tricks. Certainly it is necessary to distinguish cases in which one limits oneself to declaring a simple desire to change one's religious faith, perhaps accompanied by cult practices, or as in one case by the tattooing of Christian religious symbols on the skin, but without there having been a transition official. Baptism, in fact, represents the legal, as well as spiritual, title to be able to officially declare oneself Catholic, but it is also considered an entrance qualification for other Christian communities. The problem that the English authorities have posed is based on the speed of conversion paths and the presumed ease with which certain pastors of Christian churches even organize full immersion baptismal ceremonies, without further proof of fidelity. And it is necessary to reflect on this point, on the interference of secular authority in the activities of the ecclesial ministry, a sort of jurisdictionalism revisited in a contemporary key, but also on the difficulty of reviewing the movements of the soul subjected to justice of the internal forum. On the other hand, this phenomenon also raises doubts and criticisms within the Christian world, as allowing an impressive flow of conversions, apparently without the actual element of a real and lasting spiritual adherence of the subjects, would damage the objective of encouraging a true evangelization, which certainly cannot be based on exclusively numerical data. A voice in favor is that of Catholic Bishop Paul McAleenan, spokesperson on migration matters for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, who comments positively on the decision of 16 November 2023 by the English Supreme Court to prohibit the deportation of rejected asylum seekers to Rwanda under the Illegal Migration Act, who would risk deportation back to their countries and, almost certainly, violations of basic human rights and even the risk of their lives in these places. The high prelate praises the work of Catholic charities in favor of the protection of the human person, but the English government intends to control this activity by alluding to the fact that it is precisely these organizations that suggest the solution of rapid conversions to Christianity, to circumvent the prohibitions of Rishi Sunak's restrictive British policy on migration. The Church of Scotland is also against the rigidity of the London government, recalling that it is a

component of the Christian mission to welcome refugees from countries where fundamental human rights are not respected, and people suffer serious discrimination for political or religious. However, it should be underlined that tolerating a flow of unreliable or unstable conversions over time, therefore probably chosen to evade the law, could equally represent a reason for discrimination, favoring immigrants who choose the Christian faith, rather than those who remain faithful to their beliefs of origin and simply claim the right to asylum only for political or humanitarian reasons.

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