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# MIGRATION AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL RENEWAL IN THE TEACHING OF POPE FRANCIS

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## **Abstract**

The phenomenon of migration, especially its most difficult aspect, i.e. refugeeism, has become one of the most serious political and social challenges in recent years. Migration is caused by the search for better living conditions, political repression and refugees, as a result of long-lasting war conflicts that have resulted in thousands of deaths. The huge number of people arriving on the shores of the old continent is causing many serious consequences. Migration can be considered as a humanitarian, political, socio-economic, demographic, cultural and civilization problem, as well as a religious and moral one. In this last context, the views of Pope Francis are of particular importance, who, full of understanding for the complex nature of migration, identifies the presence of migrants in Europe with a source of mutual enrichment for the common good.

*Keywords:* migration, refugees, immigrants, Pope Francis, church

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## **1. Introduction**

Refugee crisis in Europe begun in 2015. In this time huge number of people arrived to the European Union from across the Mediterranean Sea to seek shelter and asylum [*EU migrant crisis: facts and figures*, News European Parliament, June 2017, [www.europarl.europa.eu](http://www.europarl.europa.eu)]. It is the biggest phenomenon of this type of migration since the Second World War. Majority of immigrants have been coming from Syria, Africa, Afghanistan, Iraq and since then, the political leaders of the European Union have been trying to reach a consensus on how to solve this situation and deal with refugees' resettlement. This still new to the EU leader's situation tests the stability and integrity of the EU. Still, different EU member states and EU political leadership question the resolution of migration issue [1].

The definition of a refugee was forged by the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees: "a refugee is a person, who 'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his

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nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country” [United Nations The Refugee Convention 1951, article 1, A, 2, <https://www.unhcr.org/4ca34be29.pdf>].

The term ‘migrant’ is consistently used in EU documents, such as, in the “Commission and OECD present report on the local integration of migrants” [Commission And OECD Present Report On The Local Integration Of Migrants, European Union, 2018, [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/factsheet/oecd\\_local\\_integration\\_migrants\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/factsheet/oecd_local_integration_migrants_en.pdf)]. ‘Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean’, in which it is stated: “In 2016, a record high number of refugees and migrants tried to reach European shores across the entire central Mediterranean” [Brussels, 25.01.2017 JOIN (2017) 4 final, [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/proposal-implementation-package/docs/20170125\\_migration\\_on\\_the\\_central\\_mediterranean\\_route\\_-\\_managing\\_flows\\_saving\\_lives\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/proposal-implementation-package/docs/20170125_migration_on_the_central_mediterranean_route_-_managing_flows_saving_lives_en.pdf)]. Voluntary migrants should be distinguished from refugees who have left their country for fear of persecution [UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency, <http://www.unhcr.org/pl/365-plwiadomosci-2016uchodzaca-czy-migrant-tlumaczmy-roznice-i-wyjasniamy-ich-sens.html>].

The Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* (Second Vatican Council 1965, 66) clearly paved the way for modern-day thinking regarding refugees and migrants, which is shown by the manner in which all popes have handled the issue in recent years: “The local people, moreover, especially public authorities, should all treat [immigrants] not as mere tools of production but as persons, and must help them to arrange for their families to live with them and to provide themselves with decent living quarters” [Vatican Council II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World ‘Gaudium Et Spes’*, 1965, Modern Catholic Social Teaching on Immigration: Notable Quotes, [https://cliniclegal.org/sites/default/files/modern\\_catholic\\_social\\_teaching\\_on\\_immigration\\_0.pdf](https://cliniclegal.org/sites/default/files/modern_catholic_social_teaching_on_immigration_0.pdf)].

Pope Francis admits that there is a need, in the first place, to raise general awareness of refugees among the general public. He considers it an intermediate step to reaching the final goal: a just and stable solution for migrants and refugees worldwide. Therefore, the Pontiff should make people aware of this humanitarian drama and by creating a common consensus around the need of finding a solution; the citizens would themselves influence their representatives at the different levels of public organizations to allocate resources into it. In other words: to put migrants and refugees on the political agenda of each country [2].

Since the beginning of the pontificate the problem of migration of a large number of people from the Middle East to Europe of the Pope has become an important topic in the various speeches of Pope Francis is. This is because he believes that this problem is a paradigm of our times that no one can pass by indifferently [3]. Papal sensitivity to the phenomenon of migration is embedded in his biography. The Pope never hid that he was the son of an Italian emigrant who

found himself in Argentina [4]. The expression of the Pope's statements on migratory phenomena is identified with a kind of 'hurricane' - as his biographer, British writer and journalist Austen Ivereigh called it [5]. Pope Francis, as a master of suggestive gestures, was one of the first apostolic journeys to Lampedusa, an island in the Mediterranean that had not been known before. By doing so, it not only expressed its attitude towards migrants arriving on the shores of Europe, but also made a significant contribution to the visibility of this phenomenon. The event was so significant that it aroused almost universal interest on the part of the world's media. It drew attention to the immigrants and the attitude of the head of the Catholic Church towards them. The Year of Mercy, proclaimed by Pope Francis, was not only an occasion for a deeper theological reflection on the mystery of God, but also for the experience of his tender and compassionate love for a fallen man who is not sensitive to the tragic fate of his neighbour, in this context of people forced to leave their family home. The necessary deepening of the imagination of mercy and the attitude of mercy among those who consider themselves disciples of Christ [6]. The rediscovery of this fundamental truth about God must be a source of religious and moral renewal for contemporary Christians; a catalyst for growth in faith and for a higher level of trust in God. Mercy, so much sought after today on the widest possible social scale, should be a distinguishing feature of believers in Christ and not an episode in the life of the Church, since it is a synthesis of the Gospel [7]. By adopting such an attitude, this deep truth of the gospel is made visible and even tangible [6]. Without this, the Church will become a museum of original ideas and not a living community drawing its strength from its relationship with God [8].

## **2. Let us look for sources of desired attitudes in the teaching of Jesus**

For Pope Francis, the problem of refugees in particular is not so much a social problem with an international and intercultural dimension as a religious and pastoral challenge. It is an expression of the desire to restore the original determinants of faith, which include, among other things, hospitality and openness to others [3]. Pope Francis interprets the phenomenon of migration as a sign of the times that verifies faith and trust in God. He sees many concrete references in Jesus' own teaching to this kind of poverty. They are particularly clear in the parable of the final judgment when Jesus identifies with a man in need, saying: I was a stranger, I was hungry, I was naked, I was in prison. Thus, the relationship with one's neighbour becomes at the same time a criterion for verifying the relationship with Jesus. The key test is to recognize Jesus in those with whom He identifies Himself. In the parable there are no additional circumstances, no precise conditions, no exceptional situations. They contain a general standard, which is categorical and definitive.

In the Gospel there are many places indicating the openness of Jesus to foreigners, people of different culture, ethnic minorities. The notions of a pagan, a Samaritan, a stranger, often appear on the pages of the Gospel. These situations constantly provoke a confrontation of one's own beliefs and the resulting

attitudes. First of all, to overcome fear, distance or even contempt for people with different social statuses. Also in Christ's day, a kind of hermetic exclusiveness in enjoying the benefits of faith and its fruits could be seen. Samaritans or pagans from an exclusive point of view were perceived as people of at least another category, with whom they were not even allowed to hang out. Jesus broke these stereotypes spectacularly, wanting to show in each case that we are no different in terms of dignity. We have the same desires and needs. What is more, the source of the desired attitudes were those who came to him "from outside". They often showed greater openness and sensitivity to the truth of His message. A very clear example of good human relations is Jesus' attitude towards the Samaritan woman, his conversation with her, and especially her surprising response to Jesus' words: "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw" (John 4.15, *21<sup>st</sup> Century King James Version*, Deuel Enterprises, 1994). The openness and attitude of dialogue on the part of Jesus, despite the prevailing stereotypes and prejudices, caused enthusiasm and acceptance on the part of the Samaritan woman.

Another example by which Jesus wants to sensitize his disciples to the categories of the newcomer is the Syrian Naaman. Only he of the ten healed from leprosy feels a profound need to thank Jesus personally for this miracle. Being sick together with other lepers, he knew who to come to for help. After the healing he found Jesus to thank him. This Gospel theme shows the important truth that sickness, poverty and human helplessness do not know borders, cultural or religious divisions. They touch different people to different degrees. Everyone equally needs the help of God and others in a crisis situation. Thus, Jesus did not only heal the representatives of the chosen people, in other words, those of the 'his' category, but all those who came to him in need.

### **3. A point of reference is necessary - let's look for it in foreigners' minds**

In his homily at the end of the Marian Jubilee, Pope Francis, remembering Naaman's story, stressed the question of contemporary foreigners. After all, Naaman and Samaritan were two foreigners and we sometimes forget or even ignore such people. However, as Pope Francis said, it is they who, despised and marginalized people of other cultures, "can teach us how to follow the path that the Lord wants us to follow" [9]. According to the Pope, when confronted with the category of 'other', 'culturally and religiously alien' one can verify the authenticity of one's faith and its existential determinants. The declared faith and the legalistic approach to its practice, consisting only in the observance of superficial customs, is not the true faith to which the Lord has stimulated his disciples. Having in mind the meaning of Jesus' meetings with foreigners, the Pope put the matter in a very categorical way: "Let us ask ourselves: are we ready to accept the gifts of God, or do we prefer to confine ourselves to material security, intellectual certainty, the security of our plans? [9]". The question is whether the reference to Christian values is an expression of total trust in Jesus or a mere fortress intended to preserve and maintain a certain status quo, safe in

human understanding. Another, even more legible thread, describing refugees is the fact that Jesus Himself, surrounded by His Mother Mary and Protector Joseph, was a refugee. Faced with the threat to life from Herod's unbridled aggression, fearing for power, the Holy Family had to seek refuge in Egypt, a country with a different culture and customs. Pope Francis also mentions this, pointing out that "Our Lady and her spouse Joseph experienced a distance from their land. For a long time also she was a stranger in Egypt, far away from family and friends. Her faith was able to overcome difficulties." [9]

The Pope is determined to oppose religious hypocrisy, which he considers to be the most non-evangelical. This is particularly true of an attitude which rejects love and mercy while defending doctrine. He recalls here Jesus' attitude towards the pharisees, who were then the main religious opponents of Jesus. The Pope notes that they rejected Jesus in the name of doctrine [10]. An example is the reaction of Pharisees to the healing of lepers. A strong moment of this event was the fact that Jesus, contrary to the law, touched a sick person. The Pope points out that Jesus, in order to show merciful love to the needy, then took many risks. Thus, he was exposed to both the risk of infection with a disease that was not curable at the time and the social risk associated with breaching the adopted safety rules. However, he did so against the accepted conventions and stereotypes, because he wanted to save religion from the soullessness that deformed the face of God.

#### **4. Migrants? - the question of the real threat**

The assessment of the refugee phenomenon is sometimes performed from a risk position. The question is, what's in danger? In responding to them, one can mention many goods that require, now and in the future, appropriate shifts, sacrifices or even losses. This concerns many spheres of life, from social, political and economic to cultural. This is an understandable and justified view. However, it is not enough when one evaluates reality from the point of view of the gospel. The question arises as to whether Christianity can lose something by showing the world its true face: generous mercy?

Pope Francis, while warning against the spread of misfortunes, while not explicitly mentioning the problem of refugees in need of help, the general meaning of this message has its own meaning in this context. The more so because Pope Francis based his reflection on the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The Pope has suggested that suffering, poverty and need for help have specific names. They are not a general problem, but they are individual, specific people in their dramatic fate. It is the Christian who should come out of himself to create history! [11] The assessment of reality through the prism of threat triggers fear, which paralyzes and closes. The same reality, treated as a challenge, opens and releases a potential that has not been noticed so far. The dangers mentioned by Pope Francis are not specified here. However, it can be assumed that the problem of refugees can be treated as one of them. It is presented in this way many times in various media messages. This creates a kind of reluctance and, as a

result, insensitivity to suffering. “Contemporary insensitivity”, said the Pope, “is driving the impassable abysses forever. And we have fallen into this disease of indifference, selfishness and worldliness”. [11]

On another occasion, in his speech to Jesuit school graduates, he expressed his gratitude for his efforts to help refugees. He noticed in it that young people owe what they have, what they have gained, to the openness and generosity of others. Both materially and spiritually. He stressed that they had experienced the ‘open door’ of many homes and institutions, including the Jesuit school, in various ways in their lives. This fact cannot be underestimated, especially in the context of those seeking refuge from war. Such awareness should fruit with a similar openness and find its expression in action. The Pope thanked for his reflection on the reception of refugees. For opening the door for them caused by the presence of the Jesuits in the posture. For openness to knowledge gained from refugees.

### **5. God’s mercy for us is associated with our mercy for our neighbour – “The name of God is mercy”**

For the Pope, these words are crucial and constitute the most urgent challenge for all members of the Church community. Their faith in Jesus and their material satiety must not become cold and closed to the needy [12]. God’s hunger, in its proper sense, is linked to the hunger for brotherhood. Recalling the figure of Saint Theresa of Calcutta, the Pope stated that her life was founded on two pillars: Jesus embodied in the Eucharist and Jesus embodied in the poor [13]. In every Christian, therefore, these two elements of faith must complement each other and be put into practice in concrete ways. The love we receive should be visible in the love we give. Recognizing Jesus in the sacraments while rejecting Him in the poor who come to us is a serious threat to faith and an anti-witness.

The Pope even speaks of the sacrament of the altar and the sacrament of neighbour. At the end of his homily in Macedonian Skopje he appealed: “Let us encourage one another to stand up and experience the abundance of his love; let him satisfy our hunger and thirst in the sacrament of the altar and in the sacrament of the brother” [13].

There may be a dangerous paradox in the mentality of some Christians. It may result from a far-reaching determination to defend Christian culture in Europe, which in practice will lead to the denial of the fundamental Christian values of openness to God and neighbour. Therefore, the position of the Pope and his actions are a consequence of faithfulness to the Gospel and not a question of political correctness. Though it may seem like it. Since the Pope’s teaching is not devoid of political and social context, it is in fact an attempt to apply evangelical postulates to the phenomenon of migration.

The missionary character of the Church is especially visible in the meeting with followers of other religions. This meeting is not so much about the effectiveness of understanding the transition of the infidels to Christianity as about giving testimony of what the essence of Christianity is. The manifestation of faith should not be at this moment a cult, but rather an attitude of open and

active love. “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven” (Matthew 5.15). This attitude cannot be conditioned by anything. It stems from the knowledge of God, who is love and anticipatory love. “You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and I have predestined you to go and bear fruit, and to bear your fruit” (John 15.16). In one of his homilies at Mass in the house of St. Martha, Pope Francis, addressing the missionaries, encouraged those who did not belong to the community associated with Christ to go to the meeting.

The threat of terrorism, which is associated almost always with Islam, is a particularly important consequence of the presence of migrants, which causes fear of them, is that the Christian is confronted with a dramatic test. The testimony of faith, which is the essence of evangelization from the beginning of Christianity, was connected with martyrdom and martyrdom. An example is the person of Father Jaques Hamel from France, who died a martyr’s death at the hands of a terrorist citing Allah. Recalling this story, Pope Francis made another appeal: “How good would it be if all religious denominations said: Killing in the name of God is a devil’s business” [*Killing In The Name Of God Is A Devil’s Business*, <http://www.osservatoreromano.va/pl/news/killing-in-the-name-of-God-is-a-devil’s-business>].

It is impossible to protect Christianity by closing ourselves off, by giving up the sensitivity of the heart, even if the price of this loyalty to Jesus would be, as in the case of Father Jaques Hamel, death. According to Francis, we either desert from Christianity or overcome fear for our own life and security. There’s no way to find and justify a third way. Speaking of J. Hamel states the Pope: “He gave his life for us, gave his life so as not to renounce Jesus on the altar, and there he accused the perpetrator of persecution: Go away, Satan!” [<http://www.osservatoreromano.va/pl/news/killing-in-the-name-of-God-is-a-devil’s-business>] In these words, he gave a clear signal not to identify this brutal murder with religion and God, but with his eternal adversary. It was not religious motives that contributed to this tragedy, but their distortion and desecration. Then the Pope added: “This example of courage, as well as the martyrdom of one’s own life, the stripping of oneself in order to help others, the introduction of fraternity among people, help us all to move forward without fear” [<http://www.osservatore romano.va/pl/news/killing-in-the-name-of-God-is-a-devil’s-business>].

The supporters of Pope Francis’ position on openness to migrants may differ from his message as to the substance. This happens if the ultimate and sole motivation for this openness is economic and economic motive. There is a serious risk that migrants will be treated as cheap labour in the context of the demographic crisis. This is not only a matter of selective treatment of the Pope’s teaching, but also of its distortion and reduction. This teaching emphasizes the dignity of the human being, who can never be treated as a means to an end, only as an end in itself [5, 14]. The phenomenon of migration should always be measured personally, knowing that every refugee has a name and a face [15]. In his speech to the participants of the plenary session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences on May 2, 2019, the Pope spoke: “Assistance to migrants is to be

based on merciful love and not on economic, political or social calculations. This phenomenon requires a change of mentality in the direction of the imagination of mercy and a discontinuation of only a cool economic calculation or some form of social engineering.” [14]

The call to change the mentality of the Pope is addressed first of all to the members of the community of the Church. According to him, there is a need for constant *metanoia*, which is a condition for the development of faith and its authenticity in the face of the world. Otherwise, it becomes an anti-witness and a denial of the truth about God’s Fatherhood and the resulting human brotherhood.

## 6. Renewal of faith, not threat

Multiculturalism, which is a consequence of openness to migrants, should not lead to a blurring of identity and the blurring of all differences [14]. On the one hand, this would be contrary to the truth about the missionary nature of the Church towards every person who is called and invited to relate to Christ as Saviour, and on the other hand, it would be contrary to the sense of superiority and discrimination against other cultures and religious traditions. The attitude of mercy towards migrants is to be a form of witness to Christ and a confirmation of belonging to Him, with an absolute respect for the freedom of others and their dignity. This is the main motive for openness. It is Jesus who goes to the excluded, the weak, the persecuted, the abandoned, who inspires the Church. It is Jesus who shows the pattern of true worshipers of the Father, in spirit and truth. Through his tenderness and courage, he shows the path that his followers must follow in the various contexts and situations of life. It is Jesus who forces us to reflect and abandon the attitude of prejudice and stubbornness [10]. As in the case of the Pharisees, who want to be the guardians of God’s law and social order, it still sets new directions and motives for religious life, free from human considerations and calculations.

A very important issue in the Pope’s teaching on immigrants is the issue of mutual relations between incoming and outgoing migrants. The Pope’s stance towards immigrants is based on four pillars: reception, protection, promotion and integration [16]. In the Pope’s opinion, integrating does not mean assimilating. Such an attitude would include an element of domination and racism. In the Pope’s understanding, it is about the desire to share life in a new homeland while showing respect for cultural and biographical differences. The Pope does not share here the concern about the threat to the native culture and traditions or the value system. Francis states clearly and unequivocally: “Migrant is not a threat to the culture, customs and values of the people who receive him” [10, p. 36-37]. “He is convinced that it is precisely in this meeting of different cultures that the invaluable wealth of nations and the catalyst for development are found. Diversity is not a threat to him, but a ‘source of enrichment’.” [*Through Reconciliation Heart*, <http://www.osservatoreromano.va/pl/news/through-reconciliation-heart>]



There are considerable difficulties when political options referring to Christian values do not try to take up the papal interpretation of immigrants and refugees in a holistic and reliable way. Sometimes there may be an attitude of distance from the Pope's teaching also in Catholic circles. Especially in those European countries that have a clear and uniform culture and a strong national feeling. In this perspective, immigrants, especially those from other cultural and religious backgrounds, are not only not identified as a source of enrichment but also as a threat. They are usually associated with Islam and terrorism. The difficulty arises when political forces referring to Christian values are at the same time reluctant to accept immigrants. This occasion also reveals the Pope's position towards the nation state and those political forces that in some way fuel nationalist feelings against other nations or ethnic groups. According to the popes, such views and attitudes of politicians betray their mission, in which the idea of the national state should not be understood as "an island in the face of the surrounding context" [10, p. 36-37].

The attitude of the authorities of the Republic of Macedonia is a peculiar example of the right attitude towards immigrants. In the opinion of the Pope, who visits this country, it is a model for other European countries. The Pope praised the local state authorities and NGOs, including the Church's Caritas, for their generosity and courage. The country's actions are all the more worthy of recognition and appreciation, as it is itself struggling with scarcity and economic difficulties. This aspect seems particularly important, since it is linked to another circumstance of a moral nature. It is a fact that societies with a high level of material development and subjecting themselves to a more and more consumer lifestyle are becoming more and more selfish at the same time. At this point in time, the context in which the aid is being provided should be highlighted. It is an expression of solidarity and justice, given that immigration is a means of rescuing oneself in the face of extreme poverty and war [17].

Francis considers that the contemporary reality, permeated by all the characteristics of globalization, requires the joining of forces in international cooperation and the assumption of a greater responsibility than that of caring for the welfare of one's own state and nation. Only such an approach gives hope not only for greater security and peace, but also constitutes a factor limiting and inhibiting all tendencies of economic colonization, domination over the weaker and ideological expansion. The Pope calls for globalization in the form of a polyhedron, in which the guiding principle is the primacy of the whole over the parts [10]. One of the most dangerous effects of globalisation is the "globalisation of indifference" [18].

## **7. Opposition to globalisation of indifference**

Migration is very complex. It requires multifaceted consideration. Bringing it to one perspective would be untrue and unwise. Each aspect of this phenomenon requires specialised competence. Synergies may result in a constructive vision of solutions to changing challenges. However, migration

cannot be escaped. It is one of the bright symptoms of modern civilization problems. Demanding to undertake them with humility and patience, “Where there is no service, life becomes useless!” – states the Pope [19]. While calling for sensitivity and assistance to people fleeing war zones, the Pope also calls for peace negotiations. According to the Pope, strengthening peace by creating a climate of dialogue is one of the most important tasks of all religions, because “peace is the name of God” [20]. The XXX World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi was a special occasion to oppose all violence and terrorism, which is often attributed to religious motives. These meetings were initiated in 1987 by Saint John Paul II with the idea of peace and intercultural and inter-religious reconciliation in mind. In addition to Pope Francis, it was attended by representatives of various religions, faiths and churches. The underlying religions of different cultures, directed towards God, must not betray fundamental values. The appeal signed by all the participants of the meeting reads, among other things: “Those who call on the name of God to justify terrorism, violence and war do not follow his path: war in the name of religion becomes war on religion. We therefore firmly believe that violence and terrorism are contrary to the true spirit of religion.” [20]

On the one hand, this position shows that if someone invokes religion to justify hatred and aggression against another person, he treats God instrumentally. On the other hand, these meetings reveal that leaders of various religions are keen to distinguish between norm and abuse in the social and media space. At the meeting there was a strong common conviction about the need for dialogue and “opposing all forms of violence and abuse of religion in order to justify war and terrorism” [20].

The Pope is aware that migration can also lead to extreme abuses in the form of making a living from human suffering and poverty. This must be counteracted by all legal and political means, but it must not relativize the need for openness to migrants. The modern world, thanks to new technologies in communication, is subject to dynamic processes. Globalisation means that distances, natural barriers and walls are no obstacle to the flow of information or the movement of people. There is no wall that can effectively protect against aggression; on the contrary, the larger the walls, the stronger the sense of harm and the desire to demolish it. All of this, instead of protecting it, drives a spiral of hatred and retaliation. Pope Francis, with all his determination, points to the need for dialogue. Francis is aware of the laborious and even long-term ineffectiveness of his actions, which, however, does not justify the loss of hope. In his address to the Apostolic Nuncios, the papal diplomatic service, he drew attention to the need for dialogue with public institutions and persons; effort to identify the power centres that make key decisions. To believe that there is a causal power to influence these centres, to influence politicians in the name of faith in the inner space where the voice of God can be heard. Conduct your dialogue clearly and do not be afraid that mercy may confuse or diminish the beauty and power of truth. Pope Francis clearly sensitizes the danger of turning cultural, ethnic, political or linguistic differences into conflicts. It points out that the tendency to exploit these

discrepancies leads to tragedy. In his opinion, it is precisely the differences between people of different cultures that “can and should be a source of mutual enrichment for all for the common good. This requires that each person should be able to make full use of his or her differences, having first of all the opportunity to live in peace on his or her own land or to return to it freely if, for some reason, he or she is forced to leave it.” [Pope Francis I, *The path of peace and development*, Speech to the representatives of the authorities, society and the diplomatic corps in Tbilisi, 30 September 2016]

## **8. Conclusions**

The refugee crisis and the Church’s views on it are not new and they are only about the popes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Since St. John XXIII, papacies have urged the Church to lead the world by example. During the Synod of Catholic Bishops, the bishops gathered in Rome released a statement ‘Justice in the Word’: “The Church has the right, indeed the duty, to proclaim justice on the social, national and international level, and to denounce instances of injustice, when the fundamental rights of man and his very salvation demand it. The Church (...) has a proper and specific responsibility which is identified with her mission of giving witness before the world of the need for love and justice contained in the Gospel message, a witness to be carried out in Church institutions themselves and in the lives of Christians.” [*Synod of Bishops 1971*, article 36, <https://www.cctwincities.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Justicia-in-Mundo.pdf>]

Pope Francis has set himself the goal of his mission to encourage Christians around the world to adopt a human-oriented and migrant-friendly approach. An approach of full acceptance towards the other person. In his statements, the Pope makes it clear that he wants migrants to be seen as part of a society that creates conditions of danger for immigrants. The Pope in that way underlines the Catholic duty of social interchange which is set by the Catechism of the Catholic Church [2]. Accordingly, every individual should, according to their position and role, promote the common good. „Participation is achieved first of all by taking charge of the areas for which one assumes personal responsibility: by the care taken for the education of his family, by conscientious work, and so forth, man participates in the good of others and of society.” [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nn. 1913–1914, <https://rcav.org/civic-responsibility-catechism-references/>]

Moreover, Pope Francis believes that the causes of the migration crisis could have been resolved earlier what in turn, would prevent or mitigate their harshest effects. “I wish ...that Europe...has the means to defend the centrality of the human person and to find the right balance between its twofold moral responsibility to protect the rights of its citizens and to ensure assistance and acceptance to migrants.” [N. Thomas, *Pope: Migration crisis could have been tackled earlier*, FT.com, The Financial Times Limited, 2016]

Among the many different aspects of the complex phenomenon of migration, it is necessary to distinguish a clear thought that characterizes the Christian attitude towards it. They are expressed by Pope Francis. In the face of

the drama of thousands of people fleeing a notorious, intransigent conflict that brings destruction and death, a Christian must ask himself the fundamental question of whether he is in the church and whether he brings the consolation of God to others by being in it. Is he able to accept the other as a guest “and comfort those whom I see as tired and disappointed”? [19] In his speech to the participants of the international conference of the Centesimus Annus - Pro Pontifice Foundation, the Pope said he thanked the participants for their availability and competence to engage in dialogue “on these sensitive humanitarian issues and the moral obligations that this entails. The refugee crisis, the extent of which is increasing day by day, is one that I am particularly experiencing.” [21] He pointed out that action is required at the global level, a global commitment to reception of migrants. He stated that an unconditionally open heart was necessary for this [22].

Contrary to numerous ominous opinions, Pope Francis is convinced that migration is an opportunity. This applies to both Christianity and political life. Both these aspects of social life thus receive an incentive to verify the priorities and values that have been pursued so far. The Pope categorically rejects the attitude of closure and distance as anti-religious and anti-humanitarian. He is convinced of this and has made it a key feature of his message. Without any doubt, the Gospel is the fundamental point of reference for the doctrine of Pope Francis on migrants. It provides the main justifications and arguments for developing an appropriate attitude towards migrants. It is not, therefore, guided by political considerations, but by religious considerations. For him they are the expression and confirmation of his relationship with Jesus, whom he wants to follow with determination and consistency, without paying attention to severe criticism or misunderstanding.

The Pope believes that this problem will not cease to exist in the coming years. Or maybe it's going to get worse. Therefore, it is urgently necessary to prepare people to take up this challenge in a competent, systemic and global manner. He advocates the need for international cooperation at both government and NGO level. Since the problem of migration is one of the most important for the Pope because it concerns people, their fates, their hopes and dramas cannot be ignored in various parts of the Church in the world. The Communities of Churches should address this issue and develop both theoretical interpretations and practical applications. In the opinion of Pope Francis, the approach to migrants cannot be guided only by medicine and fears. Such attitudes are an expression of a lack of trust in God and a denial of faithfulness to the Gospel. Under no circumstances should we give up aid to migrants for religious reasons or for fear of Islam or terrorism. Treating this phenomenon from the position of anxiety and insecurity does not solve any of these problems, but rather exacerbates them. The renewal of the face of Christianity and political life lies in courage and absolute respect for the dignity of others, not in selfishness and withdrawal.

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