
THE ATTITUDE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN POLAND TOWARDS THE CURRENT MIGRATION CRISIS

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Abstract

The migration crisis caused many serious consequences in European countries. It became a reason of political conflicts, social cleavages as well as intensive disputes conducted especially in mass and social media. Uncontrolled wave of migrants was a subject of many, very often aggressive discussions in the Visegrad countries (Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia). Because of the significance as well as ethical and emotional dimensions of the issue of migration crisis the Catholic Church in Poland has taken part in the discourse dedicated to this matter. The Church through the declarations of bishops and the Polish Episcopal Conference clearly expresses opinion that Catholics are of a moral obligation to help refugees and immigrants. This stance refers to the teaching of Pope Francis and his predecessors, particularly Pope John Paul II. It is also deeply rooted in the personalistic ethics which underlines supremacy of the each person with its dignity and its inalienable rights, including the right to life, to any reason of state or national interest. At the same time this official stance of the Catholic Church and Polish episcopate is not commonly acceptable by lower clergy and believers whose opinions are very often similar to statements of right-wing radicals denying the principles of Christianity as well as European system of values.

Keywords: Poland, migration, crisis, social, doctrine

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the systemic transformation, the Catholic Church has been playing an important role in Polish political life. Even though the state maintains its secular character in the constitutional sense, the influence of the Catholic hierarchy on law, functioning of public institutions and social relations in Poland is significant. Generally, all the ruling groups treated the Catholic Church in a special way, often undermining the principle of separation of religion and state. Such practices were not unfamiliar to the governments of the post-communist left (of 1993-1997 and 2001-2005), but they became a rule at

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the time of the right-wing government. The alliance of the throne with the altar intensified during the period of the conservative-nationalist governance. In the 21st century, the governments of the conservative-national right (the Law and Justice Party and its allies) took office in 2005-2007 and later from 2015 until now. The Law and Justice Party has become a representative of the interests of some part of the Church hierarchy in Poland, especially those holding views convergent with conservative and people's parties. In 2010, the accelerated presidential election witnessed an unprecedented situation, even as for the Polish conditions, with some priests and hierarchs directly supporting the Law and Justice Party's candidate. One of the bishops who questioned that state of the affairs expressed the view that the Polish bishops were "dazed by the Law and Justice" [1]. This tendency was intensifying with each and every subsequent election. Many Church pulpits became the place to broadcast the party's propaganda. Many of the most senior hierarchs gave their either open or veiled support, which has been stronger due to the aggravation of the crisis phenomena, triggering a sense of fear and danger. One of such phenomenon was the migration crisis in Europe. Although it did not reach Poland directly, it did fuel fears, especially among less educated Poles. The crisis became also a catalyst for populist movements in Poland. It was adapted by the conservative-national right, which in 2015 won the presidential and parliamentary elections. Objections against the relocation of refugees, threatening with Islamization of Europe, as well as identifying immigrants from Muslim countries with a criminogenic factor all became the leitmotif used in the Law and Justice Party's narrative and in the media associated with them, including public media which the party took control over after it had won the election. The anti-immigrant rhetoric was faced with opposition, though not always directly expressed, of the Catholic hierarchy, especially its official body - the Polish Episcopal Conference (in the further part of this paper referred to as the PEC) and its authorities. However, it would be in vain to look among the PEC documents for a declaration that would directly call for the admission of refugees to Poland or reprehend politicians using anti-immigrant slogans for their anti-evangelical attitude. A point of view not convergent with the one held by the ruling right wing is also represented and publicly articulated by senior bishops, in particular the Archbishop of Gniezno, Wojciech Polak, the Primate of Poland, and Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki, the Metropolitan of Poznan and President of the Polish Episcopacy. (Both authorities of the Church are known for distancing themselves from direct engagement in political disputes. And although in terms of their personalities and diametrically opposed views they hold, neither can be accused of supporting any political power in Poland.) Anti-immigrant or even xenophobic statements apparently may be found in sermons, especially those preached by the lower clergymen, but the official authorities of the Catholic Church in Poland have remained faithful to the Catholic doctrine and to the Holy See and Pope Francis, who proclaims the moral duty of the Church, particular churches and individual Catholics to admit refugees and immigrants.

The aim of this article is to show the official stance of the Catholic Church in Poland towards the migration crisis in Europe. This stance will be presented against the background of the debates that take place in Polish public life and pertain to the issue of migration, reception of refugees and attitudes towards immigrants, especially those from Muslim countries.

The source materials include the official documents of the Holy See and the PEC as well as the statements of the leading representatives of the Polish Catholic Church, including the above-mentioned Primate of Poland and the President of the Polish Episcopacy as well as Bishop Krzysztof Zadarko, the Chairman of the Council of the Polish Episcopacy for Migration Tourism and Pilgrimages.

2. The migration crisis in Europe

The migration crisis - a sudden and uncontrolled increase in the number of migrants arriving at the old continent through the Mediterranean region, whose intensification occurred in 2015-2016, was one of the largest and most complex challenges for Europe, and in particular for the European Union. Europe had not seen anything quite like the volume of post-2014 asylum-seekers since 1992, when the EU-15 received 672,000 asylum applications from Yugoslavian nationals [2]. According to official data of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), in 2014-2018 a total of 1,905,068 refugees and illegal migrants arrived in Italy, Cyprus, Malta, Greece and Spain: in 2014 – 216,054, in 2015 – 1,015,078, in 2016 – 362,753, in 2017 – 172,301, and in 2018 – 138,882 [UNHCR, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean#_ga=2.263485068.1010603800.1548089562-2098452978.1547498944, accessed 20 March 2019]. The mass influx of people from the Middle East, Africa and Asia was predominantly a consequence of the events accompanying the Arab Spring, a series of protests, civil conflicts and social unrests which in 2010-2012 occurred in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa. They led not only to serious political changes, but also to the destabilization of the situation in the region and long-lasting civil wars in Libya and Syria. The events were additionally exacerbated by the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq, which deepened the crisis there and enabled the expansion of the so-called Islamic State. Similarly to the Middle East, also North-East and sub-Saharan Africa, as well as some parts of Asia (e.g. Afghanistan and Pakistan) have been characterized by a high level of instability and conflicts in recent years. People flee from these areas for fear of armed conflicts; political, ethnic or religious persecution; oppressive regimes; terrorist attacks, as well as poverty and the lack of prospects for a better life.

Those who try to reach Europe use predominantly one of the three migration routes which lead through the region of the Mediterranean Sea. The first is the Western Mediterranean route passing from Morocco to Spain. According to Europol data, in the period from January 2014 to November 2018, 133,241 attempts were made there to cross the EU borders illegally. The second

is the Central Mediterranean route running from the areas of Libya and Egypt, mainly to Italy. In the same time period, 788,079 cases of illegal border crossings were detected there. The last one is the Eastern Mediterranean route leading from Turkey to Greece, where in the same time period 1,427,584 cases of illegal external EU border crossings were detected [FRONTEX, <https://frontex.europa.eu/along-eu-borders/migratory-map/>, accessed 20 March 2019].

The massive inflow of hundreds of thousands of refugees and illegal immigrants accumulated in a short time brought serious political, social, economic, cultural and security-oriented consequences in many European countries as well as at the EU forum. At the same time, the crisis has been the most serious humanitarian challenge for the old continent to be faced with in the recent years. Europe is considered to be the migratory destination with the largest death toll [3]. It is estimated that only in the first fifteen years of the 21st century, 22,000 men, women and children drowned in the Mediterranean Sea alone. The vast majority of the casualties were people escaping from violence, armed conflicts and poverty, from countries such as Syria, Iraq, Somalia or South Sudan [*European Migration Crisis: Failing Policies, Fatal Journeys*, <https://www.trocaire.org/sites/default/files/resources/policy/migration-policy-briefing-2015.pdf>, accessed 20 March 2019].

The desire to improve living conditions as well as to escape the threats, in the absence of legal migration channels, forces refugees and migrants to choose the difficult and dangerous road having resort to illegal trafficking routes, often controlled by crime groups involved in the practice. The level of the risk associated with the attempts to reach Europe is confirmed by dreadful statistics. It is estimated that in 2014-2018 over 20,000 people went missing or died when trying to get to the Mediterranean EU countries [UNHCR, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean#_ga=2.263485068.1010603800.1548089562-2098452978.1547498944, accessed 20 March 2019].

3. The migration crisis in the Polish public debate

The migration crisis in many European countries, as well as at the EU forum, led to a number of serious consequences. It became the seedbed for acute political disputes, social divisions, as well as fierce discussions conducted through mass media. The uncontrolled influx of migrants gave rise to considerable controversies in the countries of the Visegrad Group [4].

In Poland, the migration crisis introduced the subject of migration to the mainstream of the public debate and led to the polarisation of the phenomenon [5]. Previously, the issue of the movement of persons had occupied only a marginal position in the Polish public discourse. Barely existent in the election programmes of Polish political parties, it had not attracted particular interest of mass media; neither had it been a matter raised during the election campaigns [6, 7]. Until recently, issues related to migration had been explored in Poland almost exclusively by a narrow circle of researchers, officials dealing with the state's

migration policy and representatives of non-governmental organizations acting for the benefit of refugees or migrants. The information on the mass movement of people which appeared in the Polish public discourse used to be limited only to topics such as: emigration of Poles (especially after Poland's accession to the EU), repatriation of people of Polish origin from the former Soviet Union countries, liberalization of border traffic (especially in the early 1990's), employing highly-qualified management staff from abroad, the issue of integration of immigrants in Western European countries, or combating terrorism (especially after 9th September, 2001). As it has been said earlier, the migration crisis radically changed this state of affairs and led to a situation in which not only politicians and journalists, but also officials, representatives of local governments, members of various organizations, scientists and researchers, as well as the Catholic Church aired their views on migration. In this way, the broadly understood problem of migration became the focus of public interest.

One of the significant consequences of the migration crisis and the way it was problematized in the public discussion was the change in the attitude of the Polish society towards refugees and immigrants, the latter being more and more often identified with the former. Until mid-2015, that is until the aggravation of the migration crisis refugees had not been stirring particularly negative emotions. The surveys conducted in May 2015 by the Centre for Public Opinion Research (CBOS in Polish) showed that at that time Poles were showing a significant level of openness to international migration and the presence of foreigners in Poland [8]. Similar results were observed on the ground of two other surveys: the European Social Survey, conducted in Poland from April to September 2015 (which in terms of openness to refugees placed Poland at the forefront of the European countries covered by the survey) [9] as well as Ipsos survey, commissioned by the International Organization for Migration and carried out in June 2015 [10]. Already in the second half of 2015, however, a rapid and considerable decrease (almost by one third) was observed in the relatively high level of declared positive attitudes towards refugees and towards providing them with support, which was accompanied by strong intensification of negative attitudes towards them. Refugees, previously perceived first and foremost in the humanitarian aspect, suddenly became a public and political problem in Poland, as well as a challenge in terms of security. The change in the attitudes towards refugees was largely affected by the way how the migration crisis was presented in Poland, as well as by its social reception [11]. In July 2018, 60% of Poles were opposed to the influx of migrants. Nearly one third of the respondents (29%) believed that Poland should host refugees only until they are able to return to their countries of origin, whereas every twentieth Pole (5%) expressed the opinion that free entry and settlement of refugees in Poland should be allowed [12]. Importantly, since the very beginning (i.e. since May 2015), the majority of respondents taking part in cyclical CBOS surveys have been opposing the plans of the relocation of refugees prepared by the European Commission [11, p. 84].

The Spanish sociologist, Ricard Zapata Barrero notes that in the context of migration processes “public opinion is not an objective reality, but only a socially and politically created reality” [13]. It follows from what he states that public opinion is largely shaped by media messages and political figures, in particular through the interpretations of given phenomena which can be seen in the public space. There is, therefore, important feedback between the mass media, politicians and society that are mutually interdependent and shape each other.

In Poland, the aggravation of the migration crisis coincided with two electoral campaigns. In May 2015, there were presidential elections in the Republic of Poland, and then at the end of October the parliamentary elections followed. Therefore, for the first time in Poland, the issues of refugees and migration were politicized and at that very moment became an important element of the pre-election debate. The subject of migration and refugees was then used as a tool to activate the electorate and to provoke attacks on political competitors. The dispute mainly revolved around the issue of Poland’s acceptance of refugees as a part of the relocation system developed by the European Commission. In view of the increasing number of migrants coming to Europe, in May 2015 the Commission agreed on the relocation of about 60,000 people, of whom slightly more than 3,600 were to come to Poland. Subsequently, in September 2015, the Commission submitted a proposal for a second set of measures to address the existing crisis. Within the proposal 120,000 people were to be relocated. That decision obliged Poland to accept over 9,200 people. In addition, in the same month Poland was required to relocate over 5,000 people from Italy and Greece [14]. The plans of the relocation were from the outset opposed by the countries of the Visegrad Group. The Polish government led by Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz (the Civic Platform), for pragmatic reasons, agreed to accept approximately 7,000 refugees [15]. The government called upon the opposition groups to work out a compromise on the relocation of refugees and not to fuel unnecessary fears of migrants. The Prime Minister assured that Poland would accept only refugees, not economic immigrants, and in small numbers only. At the same time, she referred to the arguments of European solidarity and Poland’s historical background as an émigré country. Simultaneously, Ewa Kopacz repeatedly emphasized that in relation to refugee issues her government would always be guided above all by state security concerns. The Law and Justice Party (PiS in Polish) in opposition at that time, however, strongly criticized the government not only for its approach to the issue of refugees as being too liberal, but also for its submission to Brussels and insufficient involvement to defend Poland’s interests. On 16th September, an extraordinary Sejm meeting on the issue of refugees was convened, during which PiS leader, Jarosław Kaczyński articulated mainly his party’s arguments which were as follows: the government’s decision regarding the admission of refugees had been taken under external pressure and without the consent of the nation; the decision itself would have a negative impact on the lives of Polish citizens and it would constitute a serious threat to the security of

the state; it would lead to an increase in the number of foreigners who would not respect the Polish law or customs and would start imposing their own rules (as an example Kaczyński gave here ‘54 zones in Sweden’, in which Sharia law applied and which the Swedish state did not control); therefore ‘Poles will cease to be hosts in their own country’. In addition, the leader of PiS emphasized that it was Germany who was responsible for the increase of economic migration to Europe and they should take responsibility for the situation. According to Jarosław Kaczyński, Poland did not participate in destabilizing the Middle East and was therefore not responsible for the migration crisis. In his speech of 16th September 2015 including all the aforementioned statements [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N1A4V2HBZDk>, accessed 21 March 2019; 16], he also added that Poland should only help through a safe method, and that is financially. The rhetoric regarding the migration crisis which prevailed during the electoral campaign was largely populist [17]. Issues referring to refugees and immigrants were most often presented in the context of threats to the security of the state and its citizens. It was even suggested that the reception of refugees would lead to the development of various diseases in Poland [TVN, <https://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-z-kraju,3/kaczynski-zastanawia-sie-czy-imigranci-sprawadza-do-europy-zarazy,585502.html>, accessed 21 March 2019; WP, https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/swiatowe-media-komentuja-slowa-andrzeja-dudy-ws-zagrozenia-chorobami-przywozonymi-przez-imigrantow-60277420_91936897a, accessed 21 March 2019]. Thus, the migration discourse in the political space was dominated by the rhetoric of fear and the need of securitization of the migration phenomenon. In the end, the Law and Justice won the elections of 25th October, and the newly formed government headed by Beata Szydło, after the attacks in Paris and Brussels, withdrew from implementing the commitments undertaken by its predecessors.

The increased influx of refugees and immigrants to Europe become one of the most frequently discussed topics in the Polish media in the period 2015-2016. Almost overnight, the issue of the migration crisis dominated news websites, newspaper headlines, as well as web portals and services, revealing a clear dichotomy of approaches to the subject of migration. Thus, two different attitudes were quickly adopted. The first, characteristic of the liberal media, presented refugees and immigrants as people in need of help. As part of that attitude, it was stressed that Poles had been forced to leave their homeland many times in the past and to seek security and higher living standards abroad. Therefore, at that time Poles finally had the opportunity to ‘pay off their debts’. In addition to the moral obligation resulting from the Christian character of the Polish society, they also referred to our European obligations resulting from the principle of solidarity and respect for shared EU values. There was also an attempt to justify the necessity to accept migrants giving the arguments of a demographic and economic nature that the inflow of migrants would contribute to easing the aging of the Polish society and to reducing the shortage of employees on the Polish labour market. The representatives of the conservative-right-wing media approached the issue of the migration crisis differently. In line

with that approach, the migrants who reached Europe were first and foremost economic migrants, and not those in need of refuge. The inflow of migrants was often referred to in terms of 'a foreign invasion' and the Islamization of Europe. The reports stressed that Europe was being overflowed mainly with young men who posed a threat not only to European values but also to the safety of the inhabitants of the old continent. In this context, refugees and immigrants were often associated with Islamic terrorists. That attitude was therefore largely based on articulating fears and threats. For that reason, according to the representatives of that approach, the only appropriate solution was to protect their own territory and population, as well as native cultural values by refusing to accept migrants, and not yielding to the EU dictates along with liberal elites which supported the policy of multiculturalism [18].

The migration crisis, combining various political, social and moral aspects, undoubtedly polarized the Polish society, leaving little room for a rational and balanced discussion.

4. The position of the Catholic Church in the debate on the migration crisis

As it was mentioned in the introduction, the Catholic Church became one of the participants of the debate on refugees and the migration crisis in Poland. Its position, opposing the ruling party, was expressed both in the form of the statements of the Church hierarchy and the PEC's announcements. In this matter, the position agreed by the Polish Catholic Church was identical with the Catholic doctrine and, in the face of the current migration crisis, identical with the views expressed by the Holy See and Pope Francis in particular. It must be emphasized that migration issues have not become the subject of the theological reflection of the Catholic Church only when it has been faced with the influx of refugees and immigrants to Europe in recent years. On the contrary, the Catholic Church has already discussed this subject, seeing in migration not so much a social problem but a pastoral challenge and an inviolable human right to decide where to live, as already mentioned in the conciliar document, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*. Pope John Paul II, who in the years 1985-2005 delivered twenty messages on the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, made a special contribution to Church teaching on migration and migrants. In his papal teaching, he clearly expressed the view that the particular Churches have a moral obligation to care for migrants and to counteract the stereotypes and xenophobia that accompany the phenomenon of migration [19]. The Pope who came from Poland put it eloquently, and his words can be confronted with fears of the Polish public opinion fuelled by anti-immigrant right-wing rhetoric, including the right wing ruling from 2015. In 1996 in his annual Message, John Paul II stated: „In the Church no one is a stranger, and the Church is not foreign to anyone, anywhere. As a sacrament of unity and thus a sign and a binding force for the whole human race, the Church is the place where illegal immigrants are also recognized and accepted as brothers and sisters [...] Solidarity means taking responsibility for those in

trouble. For Christians, the migrant is not merely an individual to be respected in accordance with the norms established by law, but a person whose presence challenges them and whose needs become an obligation for their responsibility. [...] ‘I was a stranger and you welcomed me’ (Mt 25:35). It is the Church’s task not only to present constantly the Lord’s teaching of faith but also to indicate its appropriate application to the various situations which the changing times continue to create. Today the illegal migrant comes before us like that ‘stranger’ in whom Jesus asks to be recognized. To welcome him and to show him solidarity is a duty of hospitality and fidelity to Christian identity itself” [Vatican, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/migration/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_25071995_undocumented_migrants.html, accessed 20 March 2019].

The openness of Catholics should not be limited only to fellow believers or other Christians. It shall also apply to what the Catholic Church, Muslims and other non-Christians teach [19]. This issue is also present in teaching of the next two popes, namely Benedict XVI and the aforementioned Francis whose pontificate came in a time of this current migration crisis. Hence, it is not surprising that Pope Francis particularly emphasizes the openness towards migrants and refugees, and calls on local Churches to take responsibility for migrants and refugees’ fate regardless of their religion and confessional affiliation. Pope Francis clearly indicates the moral obligation “Every stranger who knocks at our door is an opportunity for an encounter with Jesus Christ, who identifies with the welcomed and rejected strangers of every age [...] The Lord entrusts to the Church’s motherly love every person forced to leave their homeland in search of a better future” [Vatican, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20170815_world-migrants-day-2018.html, accessed 20 March 2019].

Janusz Balicki, a Catholic clergyman and migration researcher from the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, points out, referring to the official position of the Catholic Church expressed by the current Pope, that in the context of migration and refugees, Catholics in Poland have a duty to realize the fact that:

- 1) All the people, regardless of confession, are children of the Creator. It also applies to Muslims, which is emphasized by the clergyman.
- 2) Pope Francis does not work for the Islamization of Europe, but through his call to be open to migrants and refugees, he wishes to make Europe more Christian. He, who closes to the needs of another human being, is not a Christian.
- 3) It is possible to promote faith in Christ only through love, not hatred towards representatives of other religions, Muslims in particular.
- 4) Rape and cruel murders are not the immanent traits of Muslims. They want to fight this type of cruelty like Christians do [20].

It is in this spirit that the local Polish Church, through the statements of its bishops, voices its opinion. However, it must be emphasized that it only concerns official declarations of the leaders of Polish Catholicism. The views

expressed are not those of the faithful and the lower clergy who may display certain ambivalence in this subject, given the fact that the Polish populist Catholicism combined with nationalistic and xenophobic opinions is not so unusual in Poland. What is more, such a combination of views is also expressed by the influential Polish media defining themselves as Catholic. However, they do not represent the official position of the Catholic Church in Poland [21]. Yet this topic is a different issue and we shall not discuss it in this article.

The position of prominent hierarchs is meaningful, and their attitude, as we have mentioned above, is consistent with the official position of the Holy See and Pope Francis, however, opposing at the same time the approach of the Polish right-wing which tends to emphasize its attachment to the Church, Christian values and Catholic morality. In this socio-political context the opinions voiced by Archbishop Gądecki, who is considered to be a conservative hierarch, sound very serious. In one of his speeches, he clearly and decisively expressed the view that in the matter of refugees the proper approach is given by Jesus himself, and not in “the rules in politics, economy or culture”. It was a clear signal of opposition against politicians of the ruling right. And as in his reaction in the cases of the violation of the constitution by the Law and Justice, the hierarch was very reticent, expressing his concerns about such actions in veiled terms only that was not the case in the matter of refugees when he presented his strong views. He was of the opinion that “Migrants are our brothers and sisters looking for a better life, far from poverty, hunger, exploitation and an unjust distribution of the resources of our planet, which should be distributed equally among all people. And besides, isn’t that the desire of each of us to improve our own living conditions and to achieve a fair and just prosperity that one could share with their loved ones?” [KEP, <https://episkopat.pl/abp-gadecki-w-sprawie-uchodzcow-kierunek-wskazuje-jezus-nie-politycy/>, accessed 17 March 2019]. Gądecki does not show naivety in this matter. He also expresses the view that to live and act according to Jesus’ teaching is not easy. Nowadays the phenomenon of migration has been gathering pace, becoming a challenge for individuals and societies, as the situation conflicts with a traditional way of being of both migrants and their hosts. It arouses genuine suspicions and gives way to prejudice, which, however, in the opinion of the archbishop, contradict the Bible’s command to welcome with respect and solidarity all the newcomers who are in need. This attitude creates a ‘culture of encounter’, contributing to the building of a more just and fraternal world. The message of Archbishop Gądecki is rooted in the tradition of philosophical personal approach, in Poland represented mainly by Karol Wojtyła (later Pope John Paul II). A reference to personal approach is shown further on in the hierarch’s homily that we are mentioning in this article. Gądecki says that “It is important to look at migrants not only from the point of view of their regular or irregular status, but above all to view them as persons”, and he adds that these persons “can contribute to the well-being and development of everyone, especially when they accept their duties towards those who accept them, and when they gratefully respect the material and spiritual heritage of the host

country, obeying its laws and contributing to its expenses. Still, the issue of migration cannot only be limited to political and legal dimensions, to the economic consequences and a pure coexistence of different cultures within the same territory. These are the aspects that complement the protection and promotion of a human being, the culture of encounter of nations and the culture of unity, where the Gospel of Mercy inspires and encourages people to take action that can renew and transform all humanity.” [<https://episkopat.pl/abp-gadecki-w-sprawie-uchodzcow-kierunek-wskazuje-jezus-nie-politycy/>]

The issue of migration is also analysed with a philosophical personal approach by Bishop Zadarko who is the chairman of the Council of the Polish Episcopate for Migration Tourism and Pilgrimages. In one of his interviews, he observes that “When speaking of migration, one should notice not only the phenomenon itself, but above all a certain person in need” [Więź, <http://wiesz.com.pl/2018/01/11/bp-zadarko-need-and-humane--evangelical-approach-to-migrant-and-refugee/>, accessed 20 March 2019]. When one looks from the perspective of a personal approach, it changes one’s attitude towards migration. Not only all non-social, economic or political aspects accompanying the phenomenon are critical, but also a particular human being becomes important, along with their drama and hope for a better, that is a safer or more prosperous life in exile. In this respect, it is crucial, as the bishop points out, for the host societies not to leave migrants alone, but to help them in an organized manner, facilitate their integration, which will all prevent migrants from being tempted to isolate themselves in linguistic and ethnic ghettos and which will give them a sense of security in a new place of residence [<https://episkopat.pl/abp-gadecki-w-sprawie-uchodzcow-kierunek-wskazuje-jezus-nie-politycy/>].

Archbishop Polak, the Primate of Poland, expresses his opinions in a similar, however, more radical way. He goes a step further when compared with the Archbishop Gądecki and Bishop Zadarko. He is blunt about it admitting: “Yes, I have clearly supported accepting refugees. And I will repeat that it comes directly from the Gospel. This is not an option that a Christian can accept or reject, but the very core of the teaching of Jesus Christ.” [22] He opposes to identifying immigrants and refugees with social pathologies, seeing the source of such an attitude in citizens’ inferiority complexes as well as in the inability to be well-rooted in their own collective identity. The attitude of not giving assistance to people seeking refuge and trying to save their own lives along with the public hatred towards them was compared by the Primate of Poland as being tantamount to “abortion on request”. In both cases, says the Primate, this is an act of opposition to life [22, p. 12-13]. Archbishop Polak also supports all the statements significant from the point of view of the Catholic doctrine and morality. In 2017 in an interview for the influential ‘Tygodnik Powszechny’, the magazine of Catholic intellectuals and the so-called open church, he threatened the clergy of his archdiocese that he was ready to suspend any priest who would take part in an anti-immigrant demonstration. In this way a clear signal was given to all which path must be followed by both the clergy and faithful [22, p.

11]. The Primate of Poland defends himself against the accusation of disregarding the security threat that may be brought to the country due to an uncontrolled influx of immigrants. He believes that “the Church has never claimed that the policy towards refugees and immigrants is to accept unthinkingly all who knock at our door, always and everywhere, without any rules” [22, p. 15]. A similar view is also expressed by Bishop Zadarko: “It must be emphasized that we have the right not to take in the people who do not accept our culture” [<http://wiesz.com.pl/2018/01/11/bp-zadarko-potrzeba-humanitarnego-i-evangelical-approach-to-migrant-and-refugee/>]. However, an entirely different problem is the creation of fears connected with the inflow of immigrants and refugees, which is the approach clearly opposed by Archbishop Polak [22, p. 15].

In the context of the migration crisis, a clear message from the PEC in the form of a document or a pastoral letter would be of particular importance here. However, the Polish bishops as a whole body, being the representation of the institutional church in Poland, adopted a rather passive attitude. The PEC only confines itself to expressing very general comments in its pastoral letters, such as, for example, the letter ‘Be good as bread’ from 14th March 2017, in which the Syrian drama is discussed and which reminds of the campaign ‘A Family for A Family’, carried out by a church charity organization, *Caritas Polska* [<https://episkopat.pl/byc-dobrym-jak-chleb-list-pasterski-episkopatu-polski-na-niedziele-milosierdzia/>, accessed 17 March 2019]. This opinion, the opinion of such an important institution, can be interpreted as an attempt to avoid giving an unequivocal answer in the face of the tragedy of refugees and immigrants on the one hand, and the anti-immigrant rhetoric of the right-wing and populist parties on the other. Perhaps the most important official position of both the PEC and other Christian Churches affiliated to the Polish Ecumenical Council is ‘The Message of Churches in Poland on Refugees’ of 30th June 2016. In this document, signed, among others, by Archbishop Gądecki, the attention is drawn to the educational role of ecclesial communities. Its signatories state that “The task of the Churches is to change hearts which through certain deeds of mercy will come to the assistance of those who suffer, and those who flee from war, persecution and death”. In addition, the document points to the need to “open up our hearts” and to establish rights guaranteeing respect for the dignity of Polish citizens and immigrants as well [KEP, <https://episkopat.pl/przeslanie-kosciolow-polsce-w-sprawie-uchodzcow-2/>, accessed 16 March 2019]. Nevertheless, in the message we will not find any call to open Polish borders to refugees. In this matter, the comments in the aforementioned document are just as restrained as the pastoral letters of the PEC addressed to the Polish faithful.

5. Conclusions

In the Polish public debate devoted to the current migration crisis, through its bishops and the PEC, the Catholic Church clearly expressed the view that Catholics have a moral obligation to help immigrants and refugees. In its

opinion, the Church brings up the position developed by the Catholic social doctrine, which explicitly refers to the question of migration. In this respect it is notably important to recall the opinions of Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI and the present Pope Francis, who all give the universal Church a proper approach to migration issues from the point of view of Catholic morality. Particularly in recent years, the Holy See has intensified its activity in this matter. In 2016, Pope Francis established a special Vatican office - the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, dealing, among others, with migration issues. As a result of its work, a document entitled *Responding to Refugees and Migrants. Twenty Action Points for the Global Compacts* was created [<https://www.unhcr.org/events/conferences/5a05d0137/responding-refugees-migrants-twenty-action-points.html>, accessed 12 July 2019], and it became an inspiration for the Catholic Church in Poland. This document primarily sets out measures that should be taken by host countries to give refugees and migrants their basic rights and to preserve their dignity as human beings.

Although the lack of a clear opinion of the PEC, whether in a form of a pastoral letter or any declaration, is, in our opinion, a serious act of omission, the position expressed by the Polish hierarchs leaves no doubt that the Catholic Church is on the side of immigrants and refugees and their rights to find shelter and asylum. This position, and especially along with the radical, in the light of specific national conditions, views of Archbishop Polak, is opposed to opinions expressed by the right-wing ruling party in Poland as well as the media that support it, including public media. Nonetheless, it is certain that both the official position of the PEC and the views shared by the bishops quoted by us are not universally accepted by the lower clergy or the faithful. Additionally, the opinions of bishops presented above are not popular in the media falling within the group of the Catholic ones since here; it is more likely to find the views expressed by right-wing radicals in essence undermining equally the principles of Christianity and European identity [23]. The intention of this article was to present the position of the Polish institutional Church which does not voice the opinions of the faithful or even the lower clergy, but these of its bishops and official organs including the PEC among others. This very position corresponds with the views represented by Pope Francis and his predecessors, including the Polish Pope, and it expresses a deeply personal approach emphasizing the superiority of each person with their dignity and inalienable rights (including the right to life) over the state or national interest. It was clearly stated by Archbishop Gądecki during one of his press conferences: “The principle of a human person playing a pivotal role here obliges us to place human safety above national security. The interest of the state comes second, giving first priority to a human being.” [dziennik.pl, <https://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/wydarzenia/artykuly/566696,abp-gadecki-bezpieczenstwo-uchodzcy-wazniejsze-niz-bezpieczenstwo-narodowe.html>, accessed 17 March 2019]

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