

**“I was wandering, and...” Report of the Conference of Polish moral theologians on the migration crisis in Europe (Zakopane, June 12<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> 2016).**

A discussion during the annual meeting of the Association of Polish moral theologians that took place on June 12<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> 2016 in Zakopane focused on the actual and controversial problem of the migration crisis in Europe as a challenge for the Church in Poland. The conference demonstrated that the voices of Polish moral theologians are as diversified over this topic as the voices of the majority of the Polish themselves. The issue is complex and convoluted by politics, the discussions on this topic are controversial and the solutions are not easy.

The first part of this conference was dedicated to the description of the phenomenon of the contemporary migration and the problem of integration of migrants in European countries. Janusz Balicki from the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw spoke about migration and the background of the history of migration, history of conflicts and social inequality. He stressed the lack of migration politics by the Polish government, the aversion of the majority of the

Polish against immigrants and the symbolic gestures of Pope Francis that are an indication of the Christian attitude towards migrants. Eugeniusz Sakowicz from the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw spoke about the problem of integration in the context of cultural and religious varieties in Europe. The cultural and religious variety is in West Europe a normal phenomenon and should be seen as a challenge for society inasmuch as leads to relativism or to the reinforcement of self-identity. He spoke about the methods and possibilities of integration which were accordingly related to tolerance and harmony and showed Jesus Christ as a paradigm of dialogue and integration. Immigrants are for the European an opportunity for a fresh look on their own cultural and religious identity and the value of life. The controversial discussion specified both the organized character of contemporary migration, the threats to European and national identity, political-economic causes of migration and to the chance of dialogue and the need for quiet discussion and clarification. The best and most credible way for evangelisation in this context is the preaching of the gospel and the way in which humanitarian aid is given to the person in need.

Krzysztof Kościelniak from the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw spoke about the perspectives and problems connected with the Muslim migration in Europe. He stressed in his speech the variety of migrants and Muslims. Among the perspectives he enumerated on were the positive indicators for the job market, demography and international relations and amongst them the problems and the heavy strain put upon social systems, potential political destabilisation, the cultural-religious baggage against human rights along with terrorism and the support for it. In Europe some Muslims live in something akin to ghettos and some are integrated with Western civilisation. The migration of Muslims is an unstoppable process and the challenge is the education of the younger generation in relation to tolerance. The speech of Jerzy Gocko from the Catholic University in Lublin concerned the main dimensions of the theology of migrations. In the Bible migration is connected with candour and hospitality and in Catholic social thought with respect for the dignity of human beings, solidarity and justice. If those rights are broken then man has the right to migrate. Migration, for Gocko, is a necessary evil and should not lead to a greater evil on a moral level. The crucial moral category in the evaluation of migration is responsibility. The discussions indicated the phenomenon of the conversion of Muslims to Christianity and the problem of responsible decisions about migration.

The topic of the responsibility for people in need from the view of the category *ordo caritatis* was presented by Antoni Bartoszek from the Silesian University in Katowice. This category was concerned with a situation of whether the needs are bigger than the possibilities of helping. The question in this situation is who should

we help. In answer to this question Bartoszek mentioned that Christian love is rational and has order. Based on Noldin's order of values he stressed that material help cannot threaten moral and spiritual values and should not lead to the destruction of its own subjectivity. Irenusz Mroczkowski criticised the Neo-Scholastic casuistry in the discussion and made note of the ethics of virtue which can lead to a solution to this question. The problem of *ordo caritatis* is that this category can become an easy justification for a lack of activity concerning migrants. The other problem is its application in helping people in a situation of conflict for which we should help unconditionally.

Two bishops spoke during the last session of the conference in Zakopane. The speech of Bishop Grzegorz Ryś from Kraków was dedicated to the connection between mercy and refugees. Some people from abroad ask why is the Catholic Church in Poland against the refugees. Ryś paid attention to the fact that only one discourse on this topic is found in Poland and that is the political one and sometimes the non-Christian position is declared as the position of the Catholic Church. The Catholic position on this topic is based on an understanding of dialogue and the Church as a sign of the unity of the human family according to *Nostra aetatae* and according to the gospel on mercy (Mt: 25,31-46). Bishop Józef Wróbel from Lublin spoke about the concern of statements from European Bishop Conferences on migrants. He presented the statement of the German and the Polish Episcopacy. The voices of the German bishops are characterised by a culture of openness and solidarity. The refugees are not a problem for them but rather a message of God and a sign of the time. The activity of the Catholic Church in Germany for refugees is concerned with meeting with other people and accompanying them, to be the advocacy of the aggrieved people and to be responsible for their social integration. The pastoral work for refugees consists in helping them with their existential problems. The position of the Catholic Church in Poland is different because the influx of refugees is not so immense as in Germany. The Polish Episcopacy stressed the need for prevention to the causes of migration and lately the need of help to people in countries at war. Wróbel spoke about some examples of help which the Catholic Church in Poland offered to refugees. This question was a theme at the last session of the Polish Bishops Conference on 7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> June 2016 in Warsaw which prepared a document on refugees. In it is the speech that Catholics have to help the refugees and the persecuted and not only receive but support them in their countries. One other idea is the humanitarian passage that consist in the preparation of apartments for persons most in need. Wróbel summarized that Poland is not closed to refugees and that the Polish government takes care of its compatriots first and foremost and that is connected to the question of security.

The sometimes emotional discussions of Polish moral theologians on the migration crisis in Europe had a theoretical character and did not bring any practical solutions. The conference presented the different points of view of Polish theologians on this topic and a lack of information in the Church and not nearly enough formation work of the Church on the Christian position of Catholics in Poland. The position of the Catholic Church in Poland can be summarized in the formulation that help and support for the refugees is possible and necessary but rather in their countries and by not receiving them in Europe.

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