

The problem of refugees and immigrants in the teaching of the Catholic Church

Artur Michał Banaszak

Alcide De Gasperi University of Euroregional Economy

Abstract

The problem of emigration and refugees is constantly present in the history of mankind. It is also present in the teaching of the Catholic Church. Both in history and in the present, the Church preached the Gospel message calling Christians to see Christ in every person, even in a stranger. The Church voice on emigration and refugees was heard both in the past and it is specially loudly heard now, in the present time when we experience the emigration crisis.

The subject of this study is to present the Catholic Church teaching on the issues of emigrants and refugees. The purpose is to show the care and concern of the Christians and the Catholic Church about the fate of refugees and immigrants. The analysis of the biblical texts and the documents contained in the teaching of the Catholic Church concerning immigrants and refugees will be the basic method used in this research.

Keywords: the Catholic Church's teaching, immigrants, refugees, Catholic social teaching.

Introduction

The problem of emigration and refugees is constantly present in the history of mankind. It is also present in the teaching of the Catholic Church. Both in history and in the present, the Church preached the Gospel message calling Christians to see Christ in every person, even in a stranger. The document of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People and the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum* titled: *WELCOMING CHRIST IN REFUGEES AND FORCIBLY DISPLACED PERSONS – Pastoral Guidelines* says “In the meantime, the Church is guided in her commitment to refugees and other forcibly displaced persons essentially by the Sacred Scripture, the Tradition and the Magisterium, and for what concerns social matters, by the ‘permanent principles’ of her Social Doctrine that ‘constitute the very heart of Catholic social teaching” (Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care

of Migrants and Itinerant People and Pontifical Council Cor Unum, 2013, no 5). The Church voice on emigration and refugees was heard both in the past and it is specially loudly heard now, in the present time when we experience the emigration crisis.

The subject of this study is to present the Catholic Church teaching on the issues of emigrants and refugees. The purpose is to show the care and concern of the Christians and the Catholic Church about the fate of refugees and immigrants. The analysis of the biblical texts and the documents contained in the teaching of the Catholic Church concerning immigrants and refugees will be the basic method used in this research. In order to see the very big concern of Church for the emigrants and refugees, we must look to the Bible, to the conciliar documents, pontifical councils' documents and also to the teaching of popes.

It is important to notice that the Catholic Church does not only limit itself to teach about the necessity of taking care of migrants, refugees or other kind of newcomers. The Church also undertakes many different action which are aimed to help all those people who must leave their motherland and due to the different reasons, they must move to other countries or sometimes escape to other countries.

1. Concern for the newcomers in the Bible

It is not possible to talk about the Catholic Church teaching without references to the Bible. In the Gospel of John we can read: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*" (John 1,1). The word of God contained in the Holy Scripture in the primary and the most important source of Church teaching. Therefore, it is necessary to look first to the texts of Bible because there are the bases of the Catholic Church teaching on the migrants and refugees. The entire teaching of Church, documents, messages, preaching or speeches of other kind are based on the Bible and they are kind of repetition and interpretation of the God's words contained in the books of Old and New Testaments.

The call to take care of foreigners is contained in the Old Testament. There we can find many indications on the treatment of foreigners. In many places of the Old Testament, the stranger is treated as a person in need of support, as well as widows and orphans. In many places of the Old Testament, it is repeated that the Israelites should care for the foreigners because they also were alien

when they lived in Egypt. It is worthy to notice that the foreigners, especially those who lived together with the Chosen Nation – “*resident alien*”, are specially protected by the law given by God to the Israelites (see: Exodus, 20:10; Numbers, 9:14; Numbers, 15:14; Deuteronomy, 5:14; Deuteronomy, 28:43).

In the book of Leviticus which is the third book of the Greek Old Testament of Christian biblical canons, and the third of five books of the Pentateuch, it is written that: “*When an alien resides with you in your land, do not molest him. You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; have the same love for him as for yourself; for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt. I, the LORD, am your God*” (Leviticus, 19:33-34). In the above-quoted biblical text, there is the prohibition to be oppressive to foreigners and the warrant to treat this group of people as well as their own people. This passage directly calls the Israelites to love alien as yourself.

The indication of good treatment to foreigners may also be found in the book of Deuteronomy. This book is a part of the Pentateuch and it consists of three speeches delivered to the Israelites by Moses on the plains of Moab, shortly before they enter the Promised Land. There we can read: “*I charged your judges at that time, ‘Listen to complaints among your kinsmen, and administer true justice to both parties even if one of them is an alien*” (Deuteronomy, 1:16). According to this text, the good treating should be shown by just treatment of alien in the court.

The prohibition or dishonesty of poor can be found in another text of the same book. Every Israelites should be honest in relation to people in needs and there should be no difference in treatment between own people and people. The Deuteronomy Book states: “*You shall not defraud a poor and needy hired servant, whether he be one of your own countrymen or one of the aliens who live in your communities*” (Deuteronomy, 24:14).

The next fragment of the book of Deuteronomy gives very specific orders on how to treat foreigners. There we can read: “*You shall not violate the rights of the alien or of the orphan, nor take the clothing of a widow as a pledge. For, remember, you were once slaves in Egypt, and the LORD, your God, ransomed you from there; that is why I command you to observe this rule. When you reap the harvest in your field and overlook a sheaf there, you shall not go back to get it; let it be for the alien, the orphan or the widow, that the LORD, your God, may bless you in all your undertakings. When you knock down the fruit of your olive trees, you shall not go over the branches a second time; let what remains be for*

the alien, the orphan and the widow. When you pick your grapes, you shall not go over the vineyard a second time; let what remains be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. For remember that you were once slaves in Egypt; that is why I command you to observe this rule" (Deuteronomy, 24:17-22). The text begins with the general statement about the prohibition of violations of the rights of foreign and then there are detailed indications telling about the necessity to feed the people in need, among whom there are also foreigner or aliens.

In the book of Deuteronomy there is a part which is called by some of the biblical scholars as "Blessings and curses". One fragment of this part in this book says: "*Cursed be he who violates the rights of the alien, the orphan or the widow! And all the people shall answer, Amen!*" (Deuteronomy, 27:19). The blessing and the curses are something natural for style legislation the Middle East. It can be assumed that the status of aliens together with other people in need was very strong and important in the society of Israel. To not violate the rights of foreigner was one of very important legal regulation and the observance of this law was necessary if Israelites wanted to life in harmony with God.

The very similar provisions may be found in the book of Exodus – the second book of Pentateuch which contains the Narrative History and Laws. This part of the Bible "is called Exodus from the Greek word for 'departure' because the central event narrated in it is the departure of the Israelites from Egypt" (Exodus, Introduction). The part of this book called "the moral law" states: "*You shall not molest or oppress an alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt. You shall not wrong any widow or orphan. If ever you wrong them and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry. My wrath will flare up, and I will kill you with the sword; then your own wives will be widows, and your children orphans*" (Exodus, 22:20-23). Again, the biblical text takes care of foreigners and says that they should not be oppressed. Good, through His word contained in the Holy Scripture, reminds Israelites that they also were alien in Egypt and adds that He will hear the complains of those people and will punish all who do any harm to them.

The indication to treat alien in proper way is also contained in the book of prophet Jeremiah. In the Introduction to this book, in the New American Bible, we can read that this "combines history, biography, and prophecy. It portrays a nation in crisis and introduces the reader to an extraordinary leader upon whom the Lord placed the heavy burden of the prophetic office" (Jeremiah, Introduction). The prophet Jeremiah was sent to call the Israel to

improvement and conversion. One of this call says: *“if you no longer oppress the resident alien, the orphan, and the widow; if you no longer shed innocent blood in this place, or follow strange gods to your own harm, will I remain with you in this place, in the land which I gave your fathers long ago and forever”* (Jeremiah, 7:6–7). Fulfilling the prophet’s call is necessary for Israel in order to stay in the promised land. Once again, the Bible indicates that the concern of strangers is one of the very important duties as a member of the Chosen Nation.

Some scholars are showing that there are some biblical texts which have opposite indication regarding the aliens or foreigners. They point out to the texts which do not talk about good treatment of this group of people (for example see: Deuteronomy, 13:6-9). In fact, there are such texts but they must be seen from the historical and religious perspective in which Israel was that time. It must be said, that those words were written when Israel lived among other nations which do not believe in true God. They had own deities and some of the Israelites worshiped those goods. Therefore, there are these kind of indications in order to ensure compliance with God’s commandments and to prevent idolatry. However, these indications do not go in conflict with other indications which called the Israelites to special care and fair treatment of strangers.

The good treatment of strangers, foreigners and aliens is also written down in the books of New Testament. According to the indications of the New Testament, the Christians should see Christ in every person, also people such as aliens, foreigners or strangers. The call to help those people seems to be one of the most important duty of every believer in Christ. There is also a call to be merciful, because only such people shall obtain mercy.

First of all, the Christians should care for the foreigners because Jesus Christ was an alien and stranger too. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, although his family came from Nazareth. He was born not in his own land or town but far away from his fatherland. The Gospel written by Luke tells us: *“And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn”* (Luke, 2:4015–7).

Also, shortly Jesus was born, due to the danger of death from king Herod, he had to escape to another country in order to save own life. Matthew in his Gospel says: “*When they had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him’*” (Matthew, 2:13). This text shows that Jesus and his family were refugees.

In addition, Jesus during his public activities did not stay in his family house but he travels all the time. The text of the Luke says: “*He passed through towns and villages, teaching as he went and making his way to Jerusalem*” (Luke, 13:22). Similar reality is described by the Gospel of Matthew: “*Jesus went around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and curing every disease and illness*” (Matthew, 9:35). This situation is also pointed out by Jesus himself when he is saying that he has no own place: “*Jesus answered him, ‘Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head’*” (Matthew, 8:20 and Luke, 8:20).

The Christians are called to care for aliens because Christ asks us to do so. This is the duty of every Jesus’ disciples according to the words written in the Gospel of Matthew “*Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy*” (Matthew, 5:7). One of the works of mercy, which can be found in the catechism is “to harbor the harborless” which is presently interpreted as shelter the homeless (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, The Corporal Works of Mercy).

The idea of being merciful is explained in detail in the chapter 25 of Gospel of Matthew. This text of Gospel is called “the Last Judgment”. There we can read: “*When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked*

and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’ And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’ Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.’ Then they will answer and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?’ He will answer them, ‘Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.’ And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life” (Matthew, 25:31-46).

There are some special fragments that need to be pointed out in above – cited passage. Firstly, Jesus calls people “blessed” and offers them the place in his Kingdom because when he was a stranger they welcomed him (see: Matthew 25:34-35). When people are surprised and not sure when they have done such act (see: Matthew 25:38), Jesus reminds them that everything what they have done for people in needs they do for the King (see: Matthew, 25:40). In the next fragments of the above-mentioned text, Jesus states, that everyone who does not help and care for people in needs, among whom they are, also strangers, cannot be called Christ’s disciples and will not be able to enter the eternal life (see: Matthew, 25:41-46). Once again there is a call to love God in other people, especially in people who are poor and who need the help. The migrants and refugees are the people in whom every Christian should see Christ.

In the New Testament, one more important issue can be seen. This issue is linked very strongly with the call to be merciful and with the necessity to see Christ in every person, also in strangers, migrants and refugees. The Apostol John in his first letter is saying: *“If anyone says, ‘I love God’, but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. This is the commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother”* (1 John, 4:20). This is very strong statement which show very clearly what being Christian is all about. It must be said that being Christian is about loving God but, this love is worth nothing if the person does not see and love God in other people.

The Bible, both the book of Old and New Testament, shows the very big concern regarding aliens and foreigners. The care for this group of people was

very strong in the Jewish tradition. The same is in the Christian tradition. The Holy Scriptures has very clear and precise indication about the treatment of strangers and it says that no one can call himself Christian or disciples of Jesus if he or she cannot see God in migrants and refugees.

2. Migrants, refugees and aliens in the Church teaching

The message of the Bible has been repeated in the teaching of the Catholic Church. It is obvious that all provisions and indications contained in different Church's documents are in close relation to those which could be found in the books of Old and New Testament. The Catholic Church teaching does not add anything new to the biblical message. It is the repetition, interpretation or explanation of biblical texts. It is also showing these biblical passages in the context of current times.

The care for strangers and aliens has been present in Church's teaching since the beginning. In one of the oldest Christian document outside the canonical New Testament – the First Letter of Clement to Corinthians, there are the indication about the hospitality. This letter was written by the pope and the bishop of Rome – Clement in about year 96. The author points out to Moses and says that God's blessing rested upon Moses thanks to his faith and also thanks to his hospitality. It is a call to the Christians from Corinth to care of those who are traveling to their area from other places (see: Clement, the First letter to the Corinthians). Also, in another early Christian text – the Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, from IV century, we can see the provisions about good treatment of foreigners. The text states: *“All the first-fruits of the winepress, the threshing-floor, the oxen, and the sheep, shalt thou give to the priests, that thy storehouses and garners and the products of thy land may be blessed, and thou mayst be strengthened with corn and wine and oil, and the herds of thy cattle and flocks of thy sheep may be increased. Thou shalt give the tenth of thy increase to the orphan, and to the widow, and to the poor, and to the stranger”* (Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, Book VII, no. 29). In this document we can read about the necessity to take care of the people in the need. This care should be manifested by providing the food and shelter. The document lists the group of people in need and there are widows, orphans and strangers.

The different documents, during the long history of Church, treated about the issue of emigrants, refugees, strangers or foreigners. A good example of

such writings are two documents published by the pope Pius XII. In 1949, the pope – Pius XII wrote the encyclical letter focusing on the war in Palestine – *Redemptoris Nostri*. The document was created in the very specific historical context and the pope leans over the fate of the Palestinian refugees and calls to help to all refugees who had to leave their homes because of the war. Pius XII says “*We make an earnest appeal to those responsible that justice may be rendered to all who have been driven far from their homes by the turmoil of war and whose most ardent desire now is to lead peaceful lives once more*” (Pius XII, 1949, no. 7).

The same pope, few years later, in 1952, published the Apostolic Constitution called *Exsul Familia*. This document is recognized as a magisterial magna carta on migration. The pope is showing the Holy Family – Mary, Jesus and Joseph as an archetypes of refugees and he discusses the challenges and principles of the spiritual care for migrants. We have to remember that this Constitution was written in the middle of twenty century in the time before the Second Vatican Council. The Catholic consciousness and Catholic approach to other confessions and religions were different from this what the Church now represents. Therefore, this care and concern of the Church and the pope is basically focus on the catholic migrants. The document talks about creating the parish for immigrants and about pastoral care done in the language spoken by immigrants. The pope not only shows history of spiritual care and pastoral help done by the Catholic Church in past time, especially in the context of the First and Second World Wars but also outlines norms for future action regarding (see: Pius XII, 1952).

The next important point in the Catholic Church teaching is the encyclical letter of pope John XXIII – *Pacem in Terris*. This document bases the concern about the immigrant and the refugees on the fact that those people, the same as anybody else, are the subject of human right. First of all, John XXIII states that every person has the right to proper condition of living and right to develop his or her live – “*Man has the right to live. He has the right to bodily integrity and to the means necessary for the proper development of life, particularly food, clothing, shelter, medical care, rest, and, finally, the necessary social services*” (John XXIII, 1963, no. 11). Then, the pope points out that a person has also the right to change the place of living – “*Again, every human being has the right to freedom of movement and of residence within the confines of his own State. When there are just reasons in favor of it, he must be permitted to emigrate to other countries and take up residence there. The fact that he is a*

citizen of a particular State does not deprive him of membership in the human family, nor of citizenship in that universal society, the common, world-wide fellowship of men” (John XXIII, 1963, no. 25). This document clearly states about the right to emigrate and underlines the fact, that these people should be received by the citizens of other countries.

In addition, the pope John XXIII, in his encyclical letter – *Pacem in terris* says that there is a lot of suffering connected with the fact that many people must leave their homeland. He says: “The deep feelings of paternal love for all mankind which God has implanted in Our heart makes it impossible for Us to view without bitter anguish of spirit the plight of those who for political reasons have been exiled from their own homelands. There are great numbers of such refugees at the present time, and many are the sufferings – the incredible sufferings – to which they are constantly exposed” (John XIII, 1963, no. 103). Pope also notices that in some countries there is a problem with the freedom (see: John XIII, 1963, no. 104). Therefore, the pope wants to remind to everybody, that the emigrants and refugees are persons and due to this very reason their rights need to be recognized. No one loses rights only because he or she had to leave their country – “For this reason, it is not irrelevant to draw the attention of the world to the fact that these refugees are persons and all their rights as persons must be recognized. Refugees cannot lose these rights simply because they are deprived of citizenship of their own States” (John XIII, 1963, no. 105). The next paragraph of this encyclical letter underlines that one of this right to choose the new country of leaving and the right to receive the asylum in this country – “And among man’s personal rights we must include his right to enter a country in which he hopes to be able to provide more fittingly for himself and his dependents. It is therefore the duty of State officials to accept such immigrants and—so far as the good of their own community, rightly understood, permits—to further the aims of those who may wish to become members of a new society” (John XIII, 1963, no. 106). Additionally, the pope – John XXIII gives his approval to all who understand the problem of refugees and helping them and calls all to support those organizations and institutions which care for emigrants and refugees (see: John XIII, 1963, no. 107-108).

The documents of the Second Vatican Council are very important for the Catholic Church. Also there, we can see the concern for emigrants and refugees. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World

– *Gaudium et spes*, was one of the most important outcome of the Council. The document is an overview of the Catholic Church’s teachings about humanity’s relationship to society, especially in reference to economics, poverty, social justice, culture, science, technology and ecumenism. Also, there are some important indications about the emigrants and refugees.

First of all, the Council sees that the person, living in the modern world, encounters many problems and suffering “*Never has the human race enjoyed such an abundance of wealth, resources and economic power, and yet a huge proportion of the worlds citizens are still tormented by hunger and poverty, while countless numbers suffer from total illiteracy. Never before has man had so keen an understanding of freedom, yet at the same time new forms of social and psychological slavery make their appearance*” (The Second Vatican Council, 1965, no. 4). Therefore, the Council calls everybody to respect for human dignity. This respect must apply to all and everybody should care for every of his or her brothers and sister with no difference who they are. The above-mentioned Constitution states “*In our times a special obligation binds us to make ourselves the neighbor of every person without exception and of actively helping him when he comes across our path, whether he be an old person abandoned by all, a foreign laborer unjustly looked down upon, a refugee, a child born of an unlawful union and wrongly suffering for a sin he did not commit, or a hungry person who disturbs our conscience by recalling the voice of the Lord*” (The Second Vatican Council, 1965, no. 27). In that text we have direct and strong indication that we should care for people who left their country to work in different places and for those who had to escape their own country. In addition, there is a call to the international community to take all necessary effort to meet the needs of people in need among whom there are migrants and refugees (see: The Second Vatican Council, 1965, no. 84).

The special care for emigrants and refugees by the Catholic Church is expressed also in the fact of creation the special institution dedicated to this issue. In 1970, the pope Paul VI called to life the Pontifical Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migration and Tourism. In 1988, this institution was raised to the rank of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People in 1988. Also, in 1971, another Roman institution was created. The pope Paul VI established the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum* which aim was to stimulate the charity works, also those for emigrants and

refugees (Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People and Pontifical Council Cor Unum, 2013, no. 17).

The issue of caring for emigrants and refugees is also preset in the teaching of three last popes – John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis. There are numerous examples of popes' documents, messages or speeches that directly or indirectly talk about the issue of the immigration and refugee. Due to some limits of this study, we will point out only some of these papal statements.

First of all, John Paul II talked many times about refugees. During one of his apostolic visits to Pakistan, Philippines, Guam, Japan and Anchorage in February 1981, he visited the refugee camp in Morong, Philippines where among other he said: *“The fact that the Church carries out extensive relief efforts on behalf of refugees, especially in recent years, should not be a source of surprise to anyone. Indeed this is an integral part of the Church’s mission in the world. The Church is ever mindful that Jesus Christ himself was a refugee, that as a child he had to flee with his parents from his native land in order to escape persecution. In every age therefore the Church feels herself called to help refugees. And she will continue to do so, to the full extent that her limited means allow”* (John Paul II, 1981, no. 3). Those papal words can be recognized as very important indication about Church mission. They state that every Christian should see Christ in refugees care for this group of people.

In 2001, during his speech to the members of the Council of the International Catholic Migration Commission, he said: *“Today, therefore, I wish to invite you to an ever deeper awareness of your mission: to see Christ in every brother and sister in need, to proclaim and defend the dignity of every migrant, every displaced person and every refugee. In this way, assistance given will not be considered an alms from the goodness of our heart, but an act of justice due to them”* (John Paul II, 2001, no. 2). The pope underlines the issue of dignity of every emigrants and therefore the help to these people cannot be recognized as some alms but as the sign of justice.

The important statement of pope John Paul II may be found in his message delivered on the occasion of the 90th World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2004. The message says: *“As regards immigrants and refugees, building conditions of peace means in practice being seriously committed to safeguarding first of all the right not to emigrate, that is, the right to live in peace and dignity in one’s own country. By means of a farsighted local and national administration, more equitable trade and supportive international cooperation,*

it is possible for every country to guarantee its own population, in addition to freedom of expression and movement, the possibility to satisfy basic needs such as food, health care, work, housing and education; the frustration of these needs forces many into a position where their only option is to emigrate. Equally, the right to emigrate exists. This right, Bl. John XXIII recalls in the Encyclical Mater et Magistra, is based on the universal destination of the goods of this world (cf. nn. 30 and 33). It is obviously the task of Governments to regulate the migratory flows with full respect for the dignity of the persons and for their families' needs, mindful of the requirements of the host societies. In this regard, international Agreements already exist to protect would-be emigrants, as well as those who seek refuge or political asylum in another country. There is always room to improve these agreements" (John Paul II, 2003, no. 3). The pope underline here several important issues related to the refugees. He states that every person has the right to live in his own country and everything what is possible should be done in order to fulfill this right. But, he stresses that the right emigrate also exists and this problem should be regulated on the international level with the participation of governments and with paying respect to the rights and dignity of refugees and emigrants.

Next pope – Benedict XVI also many times undertook the problem of emigrants and refugees. Short after being elected, he made the reflection during Sunday's prayer Angelus in which he said: *"Tomorrow, 20 June, we will be celebrating World Refugee Day, promoted by the United Nations to keep attention focused on the problems of those who are forced to leave their Homeland. This year's theme: "The courage to be a refugee", lays the emphasis on the strength of spirit demanded of those who have to leave everything, sometimes even their family, to escape grave problems and dangers. The Christian Community feels close to all who are experiencing this painful condition; it endeavors to encourage them and in various ways shows them its interest and love, which is expressed in concrete gestures of solidarity so that everyone who is far from his own Country will feel the Church as a homeland where no one is a stranger"* (Benedict VI, 2005a). The Pope underlines the value refugees and calls on the Christian community to perform works of love and mercy in relation to refugees.

The issue of refugees is also present in the encyclical letter – Deus Caritas written by Benedict XVI. Pope says that taking care of people who are in need is one of the most important part of the Church mission together with

the ministry of sacrament and preaching the Gospel. Pope says “*As the years went by and the Church spread further afield, the exercise of charity became established as one of her essential activities, along with the administration of the sacraments and the proclamation of the word: love for widows and orphans, prisoners, and the sick and needy of every kind, is as essential to her as the ministry of the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel*” (Benedict XVI, 2005b, no. 22). Many times in the Church teaching in general and in the statement of Benedict XVI there was said that refugees and emigrants belong to the group of people who are in the need. In the same document, the pope adds that in the Church, which is called the God’s family, there should not be anybody who suffers the lack of necessary measures to live with the dignity – “The Church is God’s family in the world. In this family no one ought to go without the necessities of life. Yet at the same time *caritas- agape* extends beyond the frontiers of the Church. The parable of the Good Samaritan remains as a standard which imposes universal love towards the needy whom we encounter ‘by chance’ (cf. Lk 10:31), whoever they may be” (Benedict XVI, 2005b, no. 25).

The teaching of the Catholic Church on caring for refugees and emigrants is continue by the current pope – Francis. This subject is very present in Francis document, messages, speeches and different kind of statements. The richness of the teaching of the Pope about the proper treatment of people who need assistance, including immigrants and refugees is so great that it would be possible to create a separate book on this subject. It is a response of the Pope and the Church on the ongoing refugee crisis. Almost every Francis’ statement is a reference to the subject of refugees and the great concern of the Pope about their fate.

In order to give some idea about the pope’s teaching on the refugees and emigrants issue we can use the Message of pope Francis for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees celebrated on 17th January 17, 2016. The theme chosen by pope Francis for this day was: *Emigrants and Refugees Challenge Us. The Response of the Gospel of Mercy*. Francis states that “*Migrants are our brothers and sisters in search of a better life, far away from poverty, hunger, exploitation and the unjust distribution of the planet’s resources which are meant to be equitably shared by all. Don’t we all want a better, more decent and prosperous life to share with our loved ones?*” (Francis, 2015a). It is important indication that says that those people who look for the better life and therefore they

decided to emigrate are our brothers and sisters. We all care for our brothers and sisters and we are willing to help them so if we understood that those people belong to our family, it will be no problem for us to care for them and to help them. The pope says that receiving the refugees is the same as receiving God – *“Biblical revelation urges us to welcome the stranger; it tells us that in so doing, we open our doors to God, and that in the faces of others we see the face of Christ himself”* (Francis, 2015a). The pope also gives some very specific indications *“Faced with these issues, how can the Church fail to be inspired by the example and words of Jesus Christ? The answer of the Gospel is mercy. (...) Each of us is responsible for his or her neighbor: we are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers, wherever they live. Concern for fostering good relationships with others and the ability to overcome prejudice and fear are essential ingredients for promoting the culture of encounter, in which we are not only prepared to give, but also to receive from others. Hospitality, in fact, grows from both giving and receiving”* (Francis, 2015a).

Among many others statement of the pope Francis, there is also very significant message given by pope during the Sunday prayer Angelus on 6th June 2015. After the prayer, the pope Francis said: *“Faced with the tragedy of tens of thousands of refugees who flee death from war and hunger, and who have begun a journey moved by hope for survival, the Gospel calls us to be ‘neighbours’ of the smallest and the abandoned, and to give them concrete hope. It’s not enough to say, ‘Take heart. Be patient’... Christian hope has a fighting spirit, with the tenacity of one who goes toward a sure goal. Therefore, as the Jubilee of Mercy approaches, I make an appeal to parishes, religious communities, monasteries and shrines throughout Europe, that they express the Gospel in a concrete way and host a refugee family. A concrete gesture in preparation for the Holy Year of Mercy. May every parish, every religious community, every monastery, every shrine of Europe welcome one family, beginning with my Diocese of Rome. I address my brother bishops of Europe, true pastors, that in their dioceses they endorse my appeal, remembering that Mercy is the second name of Love: ‘What you have done for the least of my brothers, that you have done for me’ (cf. Mt 25:46). In the coming days, the two parishes of the Vatican will also welcome two families of refugees”* (Francis, 2015b). This is very clear and strong call to the receiving the refugees. This is also very important in the situation when many European countries have doubts receiving refugees.

The pope Francis not only talk about refugees and about the necessity to give them help. Francis does not only teach Christians about caring for refugees but most of all this teaching is done through his actions. In April 2016, the pope went to visit the refugees on the Lesbos Island in Greece, where there is the huge refugee camp. Francis not only visited those people, not only bent over their fate and not only talked to them but he brought from Lesbos three families of refugees. The director of the Holy See Press Office, Fr. Federico Lombardi, S.J., has issued the following statement: “*The Pope has desired to make a gesture of welcome regarding refugees, accompanying on his plane to Rome three families of refugees from Syria, 12 people in all, including six children. These are all people who were already in camps in Lesbos before the agreement between the European Union and Turkey. The Pope’s initiative was brought to fruition through negotiations carried out by the Secretariat of State with the competent Greek and Italian authorities. All the members of the three families are Muslims. Two families come from Damascus, and one from Deir Azzor, in the area occupied by Daesh. Their homes had been bombed. The Vatican will take responsibility for bringing in and maintaining the three families. The initial hospitality will be taken care of by the Sant’Egidio Community*” (Holy See Press Office, 2016).

The pope Francis as the head of the Catholic Church is very sensitive to the fate of refugees. There is much more of pope’s words and acts showing his and Church concern for refugees. The limited form of this study does not let us to discuss all of them.

Presented above different documents and different statements of the Catholic Church teaching are only examples of what is Church thinking about immigrants and refugees. Of course there is much more. I would be worthy to see also same of the provision of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (see for example: Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1993, no. 360015–361) or the regulation written down in the canon law of the Catholic Church (see: The Code of Canon Law of the Catholic Church, 1983, no. 529 and 568). The care for refugees is also based on the principles of the social teaching of the Catholic Church. This topic is broadly described in the publication of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace of 2004 (see for example: Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004, no. 160). Finally, in this study, two Roman institutions were mentioned. They are the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People and the Pontifical Council Cor Unum.

Those councils published, among many others, two main documents which can be seen as kind of summary of catholic teaching about Christian approach to emigrants and refugees (see: Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, 2004 and Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, Pontifical Council Cor Unum, 2013).

3. Conclusion

The problem of immigration and refugees is so current and so actual in the modern world. Many people must struggle with the fact that they cannot live and develop in their own homeland. The reasons for such situation are very different. One of them is the war going on in some part of the world. Because of those, more and more people emigrate. This brings some difficult to the other countries – where those poor and experienced by suffering people arrive to. The problem of refugees is so serious that we are saying about the refugee crisis.

Many people and institution try to help and take care of immigrants and refugees. There are also some people and event entire countries with their elites and governments which are against refugees, they do not want to help them and also they do not want to receive refugees in their lands.

The Catholic Church has been one of the most important player in the area of dealing with the issue of emigration and refugees. The Catholic Church was calling to take of the emigrants and refugees in the past times as well as is very active in the current situation.

The Catholic Church teaching on this issue is based on the word of God contained in the Bible. Both, the Old and New Testaments have very clear message about caring for people who are aliens, foreigners, immigrants or refugees. The Israelites had very clear provisions regarding care for people who are in different needs also for strangers and aliens. The New Testament teaches us to see Christ in those people who need help. Jesus was also refugee and says that if we take care for aliens, this will be recognized as acts done for God. This means that if we are merciful we will receive the merci of God.

This biblical teaching is repeated in the teaching of the Catholic Church. The Church's documents and many papal statements and messages call Christian to take the word of God and live according to it. The Church teaching underlines that people have the right to live in their own country but also they have the right to emigrate. Also, the dignity of refugees

must be taken into the consideration. Finally, the Church teaching call all Christians and other people, institutions, organizations, governments and entire countries to take all necessary effort to help people who are emigrants or refugees.

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