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Migration: Dangers and Opportunities for the Family in the Light of John Paul II's Messages for World Migrant Day

Abstract

The phenomenon of migration has become a subject of numerous sociological, economic and political analyses. It has also become an issue of interest for Catholic Social Teaching. The complexity of this subject, its topicality and a need for a diagnosis in the light of ethical and social rules are contained within the consecutive messages for the World Migrant Day by the Holy Father John Paul II. A particularly interesting dimension of the discussion of the phenomenon of migration is the analysis of this problem in terms of its influence on the modern family. John Paul II notices that owing to the dignity of the family and its significant role in the process of upbringing of the young generation, the decision to migrate by members of a family or entire families must be well thought-out and carefully considered in the context of a necessity to undertake such steps. The necessity condition is related to a wide array of threats, which a family would have to face if they chose to take the migration path. The Pope also points out that migration is, at the same time, a justifiable opportunity for the development of a family, which should be provided ample assistance by the Church and state in a new environment.

Keywords

migration, family, state and migrants, Church and migrants, ethical and moral rules.

Migration, as a social phenomenon, poses a challenge for the international community and individual countries.¹ For this reason, it has also become an issue of interest for Catholic Social Teaching. The variety of human experiences related to this process is so vast that Catholic Social Teaching treats them in a frequent and decisive manner. On the one hand, topics connected with the right to inhabit one's own country emerge; on the other hand, the right to leave one's own country and settle in another is stressed. This right is based on the fact that the same person, together with their family, is a citizen of a particular country as well as the whole world. The social teaching of the Church emphasizes the right to migrate since it facilitates integration, creates new avenues for professional development and obtaining decent accommodation, while it criticizes tight nationalisms. Nationalism renders real fraternity – the foundation of true and just peace – impossible. The only reason for limiting migration is the common good of the state which is experiencing the situation of emigration or immigration.

The involvement of the Holy Father John Paul II, as well as the wealth of the subject included in the messages for the World Migrant Day, allow for perceiving the problems related to migration as important and highly relevant – both for particular individuals, as well as the communities, the most significant of which is the family. They also reflect a number of principal theses of the social teaching of the Pope. The main reason for addressing this topic by the Holy Father is the defence of human dignity, and social solidarity, which is directly related. The analysis of problems connected with this phenomenon of social life allowed the Holy Father to appeal to various groups whose integral activity helped the phenomenon of migration to become more dignified for the person and for the family in which they live. This was a call to the Church which is responsible for the state and depth of migrants' faith; a call to the State which is responsible to create laws, structures and social cohesion;² it was also a call to migrants themselves who feel responsible for their families but also for the socio-economic growth of their nation. The messages by the Holy Father are also an expression of a conviction that the difficult situation of migrants and their families is not only a result of invariable fortune, but may reveal itself as more humane thanks to responsible decisions of people of good will.

¹ Cf. John Paul II, *The migrant's laws should be neither violated nor ignored. Message of the Holy Father for World Migrant Day 1996*, "L'Osservatore Romano" 6 (1996), p. 8.

² Cf. M. Zajęc, *Emigracja wyzwaniem duszpasterskim dla Kościoła*, Lublin 2009, p. 62.

The phenomenon of migration was given a lot of attention in the teachings of Pope John Paul II. Of particular renown is the Pope's teaching included in the messages directed at societies on the occasion of the World Migrant Day. The contents of these messages will constitute the primary material for the present considerations. While posing a question regarding the fate of families in the migration period, it worth drawing attention to the assessment of this phenomenon in terms of the dignity of the family and its role in building every community. The aim of the first part of the considerations is to indicate the threats relating to the functioning of families in conditions of migration and present solutions offered by the Author of the messages.

1. The dignity of the family as a criterion for migration evaluation

The Pope's attention to the complex situation of migrants and their families ought to be viewed with the entirety of John Paul II's social teaching in mind. The person always holds the central position in the papal teaching – with his or her natural and supernatural dignity at its fullest. It is worth noting at this point that human dignity, presented in the Pope's teaching as a specific value of a human being, refers to personal existence and is considered in terms of two aspects: natural and supernatural. The former dimension is understood as the ability of a person to act freely and consciously. In the Holy Father's teaching this truth is reflected in stressing the greatness of the person due to freedom and rationality of the human nature. The latter dimension of dignity reveals the human being's participation in transcendental reality, in the life of God himself. The Pope reminds us that human dignity is an irreducible value. What is more, from dignity he formulates the truth of the obligation of self-development,³ fulfilment of one's best interests. All of the above entails that the person cannot be submitted to social structures, economy or any material goods.

The papal teaching about the dignity of particular individuals is related to the truth about the dignity of the family as a community – owing to its irreplaceable role of preserving the dignity of conceived and born life. These truths are reflected in messages for the Migrant Day. Taking into account the unique

³ Cf. John Paul II, *Message of the Holy Father for World Migrant Day 1992*, "L'Osservatore Romano" 10 (1992), p. 6.

value of man, the papal messages contain a number of calls to quit the practice of treating migrants instrumentally. It is connected with granting them the right to work, cultural identity, communicate with their own nation as well as the opportunity for integral development.⁴ The Pope sees the need to create a code to describe how to deal with migrants, which would, by acknowledging all their rights, enable their personal and professional self-actualization – particularly in situations when the whole family or its part are subject to migration. Countries in which the phenomenon of migration has begun to develop into a problem are called to resolve it in harmony with human dignity.⁵

Taking into consideration the respect for human dignity, owing to its supernatural dimension, the papal messages include suggestions with regard to the right of particular migrants and their families in professing their faith. This dimension of the unique values of man demands providing the family the means to perform their religious practices in their native language, pastoral service within the migrant community, as well as the appropriate religious dialogue in cases when migrants face religious confrontation. Preventing the performance of religious practices, as well as religious syncretism, serving as foundation for the activity of sects,⁶ frequently causes problems for entire migrant families. It is undoubtedly in violation of human dignity in its supernatural dimension.⁷

Out of this highlighted principle of human dignity in John Paul II's teaching, there emerges another theme, which is, as though, its consequence – human solidarity. As a moral stance, it is understood as the “strong and long-lasting will to engage oneself into efforts towards the common good of everyone”.⁸ In his teaching, the Pope emphasizes the correlation between solidarity and human nature, and thus, also dignity. Solidarity solely depends on the unity of humankind. It grows with the feeling of common fate. It is not without

⁴ H. Skorowski, *Imigracja a prawa człowieka*, in: *Migracja jako nowa kwestia społeczna*, ed. J. Balicki, Katowice 2003, p. 23.

⁵ Cf. John Paul II, *Message of the Holy Father for World Migrant Day 1991*, “L'Osservatore Romano” 9–10 (1991), p. 38.

⁶ Cf. John Paul II, *The danger of proselytism of religious sects. Pope's Message for World Migration Day 1990*, “L'Osservatore Romano” 7–8 (1990), p. 8.

⁷ Cf. P. Kaczmarczyk, *Migracje zarobkowe Polaków w dobie przemian*, Warszawa 2005, p. 48.

⁸ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 38.

significance for the situation of migrants, their families and societies in which they live. It has been observed that as the quality of education and interest in other nations' cultures become greater, the feeling of solidarity with the human family and desire for unity grow as well. We may also observe an increase in sensitivity to other human beings and their non-negotiable rights – particularly those related to the functioning of the family – as well the sense of accountability for international problems. The Holy Father draws attention to phenomena positive for migration, whose authors are various groups of people: state authorities, scientists, tradesmen, technicians, entrepreneurs, as well as individuals promoting culture and information. Another fact worth pointing out is that there are international organizations and cultural institutions which offer young members of families affected by migration a possibility to choose various ways of formation at universities of many countries.⁹

Solidarity of people worldwide acquires a unique character in the context of the community of faith. While the above remarks concerning solidarity of people of the world are based on natural reasons, the unity of people, stemming from the fact that God created man in his own image, discovers in this calling a new motivation, a new sensitivity. It allows the contemporary man to overcome all kinds of discrimination, it reminds of equality of all nations and encourages respect for other human beings – as brothers in faith – even more.¹⁰ Thus, as stressed by the Holy Father, faith does not only concern the private world of a person but rather is reflected in the involvement in the life of neighbours and their families.¹¹

Solidarity springing from fraternity in Christ and belonging to the family of God is a challenge for Christians who are involved in solving the problem of migration. John Paul II reminds us this: “Solidarity means assuming responsibility for someone who is in a difficult situation. For a Christian, an immigrant is not only a person whom we ought to respect in accordance with regulations imposed by the law but a person whose presence poses a challenge and whose needs are our responsibility. “Where is your brother?” (Genesis 4:9). The answer to this

⁹ Cf. John Paul II, *Message of the Holy Father for World Migrant Day 1991*, “L'Osservatore Romano” 9–10 (1991), p. 37.

¹⁰ Cf. R. Dzwonkowski, *Jan Paweł a emigracja i Polonia*, Lublin 1991, p. 64.

¹¹ Cf. John Paul II, *Catholic laity and emigration. Pope's Message for World Emigration Day*, “L'Osservatore Romano” 9–10 (1987), p. 3.

question should not be limited by the boundaries of law, but be guided by the logic of solidarity”.¹²

2. Threats in the migratory journeys of families

The annual messages of John Paul II for World Migrant Day contain an analysis of problems faced by immigrants and their families. As the Pope indicates, hardships and problems that immigrants have to endure are of diverse natures. For the sake of clarity in the present analysis, we may group them into several general categories. The first one includes all the difficulties which impede or prevent the integral development of immigrants and their families.¹³ It directly violates the principle of respecting human dignity.

The Holy Father reminds us of the difficult fate of migrants, considering this situation within the categories of suffering, privation and uncertainty. Migrations, often motivated by economic reasons, are viewed with reluctance by the developed countries. The stratification and structure of countries, into which immigrants come, enable the integration of visitors only to a small degree, thus causing them, and their families, problems which they cannot resolve themselves. The Pope’s critical voice mainly concerns the situations in which only the simplest, the most gruelling and the lowest paying jobs are available for large numbers of migrants. In such a case, immigrants and their families are still the poorest group in terms of acceptance, security, laws as well as social and professional advancement. The Holy Father also points out that this, in turn, limits the chances of finding employment, housing and negatively affects opportunities of attending higher education institutions.¹⁴

One of the key topics touched upon by John Paul II in his World Migrant Day messages is the issue of work.¹⁵ The Pope argues that due to the difficulties connected with employment, migration is often regarded as equivalent to the

¹² Cf. John Paul II, *The migrant’s laws should be neither violated nor ignored. Message of the Holy Father for World Migrant Day 1996*, “L’Osservatore Romano” 6 (1996), p. 8.

¹³ Cf. R. Dzwonkowski, *Jan Paweł a emigracja i Polonia*, p. 82.

¹⁴ Cf. John Paul II, *Pope’s Message for World Migration Day 1989*, „L’Osservatore Romano” 9 (1989), p. 4.

¹⁵ Cf. B. Andrees, *Praca przymusowa jako forma handlu*, in: *Handel ludźmi – zapobieganie i ściganie*, ed. Z. Lasocik, Warszawa 2006, p. 198.

violation of human dignity and deprivation of due rights. This is the only way in which we may perceive migration related to finding a job offered to young men and women by pseudo-agencies. People arriving in their country of dreams must face challenges and obstacles of which they did not know, or which were previously presented to them as easy to overcome.¹⁶ It results in further problems connected with long-term unemployment or taking up low-wage occupations. John Paul II describes this situation “the new slave trade”.¹⁷ The family deprived of income is not able to perform its fundamental functions.

The integral development of the person is based on satisfying material, as well as spiritual, needs. Among the spiritual needs, the Pope stresses the ones relating to the supernatural life. The state of migration gives rise to legitimate concerns.¹⁸ The Holy Father notices an increased focus of sects and religious movements on migrants and their families. Their difficult social situation, instability and eradication of their native culture create favourable conditions for the work of sects which employ intrusive and aggressive methods. It is difficult not to mention the fact that “migrants, taken away from the social life of their home country, socially alienated in the place where they have settled, are frequently forced to live outside the objective order which would protect their rights and pay by abandoning their own faith since they are in need and do not want to be the underclass of the society...”¹⁹ This kind of price is an insult to human dignity and a severe blow to the stability of families.

Another group of problems present in the reality of migrants which are pointed out by John Paul II are impediments in family life, in the case when one of the spouses has migrated or when the entire family is anxious about the migrant life. John Paul II believes it to be paradoxical that married people, having the prosperity of their family in mind, decide to migrate and expose themselves to a number of hardships and put themselves as well as their families to difficult tests. It suffices to mention the long separation, which necessitates assuming new duties, the separation of parents and children, the insecurity and lack of stability, difficulties in the education of children, poor housing in impoverished

¹⁶ Cf. John Paul II, *The problem of refugees. Message for World Emigration Day*, „L'Osservatore Romano” 8 (1984), p. 28.

¹⁷ John Paul II, *The problem of refugees. Message for World Emigration Day*, p. 28.

¹⁸ Cf. B. Andrees, *Praca przymusowa jako forma handlu*, p. 200.

¹⁹ John Paul II, *The danger of proselytism of religious sects. Pope's Message for World Migration Day 1990*, „L'Osservatore Romano” 7–8 (1990), p. 8.

districts of large metropolies, long work shifts, low earnings preventing from achieving harmonious and proper development of the family, the inability to transmit their native language and culture to their own children, which, as a consequence, distance parents from their offspring.²⁰ This state of affairs, in which children live by different, frequently opposing systems of values, is another source of troubles for families. Such problems are common in the case of mixed marriages.²¹

Hindrances which the migrated family has to face have encouraged a beautiful comparison of their fate with the fate of the Blessed Virgin Mary. John Paul II sees in Mary's life the anticipation and reflection of migrants' life: "Nevertheless, Mary has tasted the hardship of exile and emigration to a foreign land (...) It was an unexpected, sudden escape, in the middle of the night, accompanied by anguish and anxiety, well familiar to you – emigrants: the pain of separation from the beloved people and things, abandoning hope, journey into the unknown, problems with finding roof over your head in the foreign land where everything is alien, uncertainty whether it is possible to find a job that would secure their income, the atmosphere of suspicion, discrimination which is frequently felt in the environment in which they live, temporariness of the situation in which great life plans, both personal and those of members of the family, particularly those with regard to children, are uncertain."²²

3. Solutions to assist the migrating family

The messages delivered on the occasion of World Migrant Day contain an in-depth analysis of the situation of the migrants' life. However, the message which the Holy Father tries to convey is not limited only to describing the state of affairs. Having examined the reality, the Pope formulates specific recommendations which he directs at various groups – also including communities of families in the state of migration. The synthetic analysis of the contents of the messages allows for indicating that John Paul II expects the solution of the complex situation

²⁰ Cf. John Paul II, *Marriage and Family. Pope's Message for World Emigration Day*, „L'Osservatore Romano” 9 (1986), p. 22.

²¹ John Paul II, *Marriage and Family. Pope's Message for World Emigration Day*, p. 24.

²² John Paul II, *Pope's Message for World Emigrant Day*, „L'Osservatore Romano” 10–11 (1988), p. 32.

of migration to be worked out through the collaboration of three groups: the Church, the state and the societies experiencing the migration. It is analogous to the call from the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* in which Leo XIII addressed similar groups and required prompt actions to be taken to resolve the difficult situation of labourers.

The Holy Father reminds us of the fact that by settling in a place with their family, an immigrant-Catholic becomes a part of the local Church. Therefore, he or she is granted all due rights and obligations. The Pope specifies that the way in which this Church accepts this immigrant is a testimony and a test to its Catholic character. Selfless care, the atmosphere of kindness and understanding are frequently the most precious signs of kindness which an immigrant can experience in this complicated and unknown situation. In this way, the care of the Redeemer himself is reflected, as he came with the message of love, and this is the message he left his Church as the testament. However, we must avoid the situation when the Christian community, by welcoming migrants, feels dissatisfied because it was disturbed in its normal, everyday routine. The Pope expects the atmosphere of joy and acceptance.²³ This kind of atmosphere, often beyond economic, political or cultural divisions, stems from the fact that “every man is loved by God and potentially saved by Christ, thus deserves respect, love, service and care...”²⁴

The undeniable task of the Church with regard immigrants is the pastoral care encompassing all activities aimed at preserving and deepening the faith.²⁵ This is the goal of the catechesis of adults, the involvement of immigrants in the active liturgical life of the community of faith, the participation in celebration of sacraments – starting from Christening – establishing prayer groups and, consequently, giving a testimony of love. It allows for building the unity of faith within the diversity of the migrants’ life.²⁶ According to the Holy Father, this assignment should be taken up, in particular, by the specialized emigrational chaplaincies which care for the family. These organizations are required to assist,

²³ Cf. John Paul II, *The danger of proselytism of religious sects. Pope’s Message for World Migration Day 1990*, “L’Osservatore Romano” 7–8 (1990), p. 8.

²⁴ John Paul II, *Message of the Holy Father for World Migrant Day 1991*, “L’Osservatore Romano” 9–10 (1991), p. 38.

²⁵ Cf. R. Dzwonkowski, *Jan Paweł a emigracja i Polonia*, p. 122.

²⁶ Cf. John Paul II, *Pope’s Message for World Migrant Day 1989*, “L’Osservatore Romano” 9 (1989), p. 4.

not only in deepening immigrants' faith, but also in establishing contact with the environment, accepting a new, often completely different culture,²⁷ as well as solving the problems of mixed marriages,²⁸ or those going through parting with their family due to migration.²⁹

The papal messages also emphasize the important role of the state in resolving migration problems. It should be stressed, at this point, that the responsibility of the country to provide care arises from its care functions. Therefore, they are understood as a direct result of the principle of subsidiarity. The Holy Father, when addressing the obligations of the state, touches upon the field of law and state structure. The law, as well as structures, should be established within the state activity of the country and ought to provide immigrants and their families with "adaptation to new conditions, orientation and social education, which will enable them to remove social isolation and gain knowledge in the field of the legal, social, educational and welfare policy of the host nation..."³⁰

In line with the papal social teaching, departing from these duties, legal and structural negligence are understood as actions disadvantaging the common good. They constitute an obstacle to the development of humanity, and violate dignity of the human being – thus contributing to expanding the structures of sin.³¹ A step in the right direction for the state is to acknowledge immigrants and their families, and treating them as full members of the society they are a part of, and to which they contribute economically and socially. Similarly, the authorities should care for "rebuilding the healthy environmental and social structure of neglected city districts in which immigrants often live as if they were pushed onto the margins of society. It is also obvious to everyone that we need to eradicate, e.g. by eliminating problems connected with unemployment,

²⁷ Cf. John Paul II, *Message of the Holy Father for World Migrant Day 1993*, "L'Osservatore Romano" 11 (1993), p. 4.

²⁸ John Paul II, *Message of the Holy Father for World Migrant Day 1993*, p. 5.

²⁹ Cf. John Paul II, *Marriage and family. Pope's Message for World Emigration Day*, "L'Osservatore Romano" 9 (1986), p. 22; John Paul II, *The problem of refugees. Message for World Migrant Day*, "L'Osservatore Romano" 8 (1984), p. 28.

³⁰ John Paul II, *Marriage and family. Pope's Message for World Emigration Day*, "L'Osservatore Romano" 9 (1986), p. 22.

³¹ Cf. John Paul II, *Pope's Message for World Emigrant Day*, "L'Osservatore Romano" 10–11 (1988), p. 32.

the entire discrimination in the access to jobs, housing and medical care”.³² In other words, the state ought to help immigrants by taking such legal and structural actions that will enable granting them the same privileges as those enjoyed by their own citizens and their families. It is, on the one hand, a form of defence against all attempts at marginalizing and racism; on the other hand, it also strengthens the culture of solidarity which provides immigrants with conditions for a comfortable life and development while respecting their dignity.³³ The state’s activities are, therefore, directed at resolving the issues of employment, accommodation, security as well as the diversity of the language, culture and education of each member of the migrating family.

The Holy Father John Paul II also directs a call at migrants themselves. This is a manifestation of concern for problems related with the phenomenon of migration. Assuming that the majority of motives for migration is of the economic nature, the Pope calls to improve the standards of living in developing countries. Societies of these countries should direct their development and care for the family themselves by decreasing, at the same time, the intensity of migrations.³⁴ The Holy Father encourages independent initiatives aimed at increasing the level of literacy and basic education. He also reminds us of the benefits of using natural resources and human potential, as well as the stability of families and the education received in the developed countries. Such actions are undoubtedly a key to economic and social advancement of developing countries, consequently, to reduce the phenomenon of migration itself.

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³² John Paul II, *Message of the Holy Father for World Migrant Day 1992*, “L’Osservatore Romano” 10 (1992), p. 6.

³³ Cf. John Paul II, *Message of the Holy Father for World Migrant Day 1993*, “L’Osservatore Romano” 11 (1993), p. 4.

³⁴ Cf. M. Bos-Karczewska, *Migracja czy zagrożenie*, Gdańsk 2005, p. 47.

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