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INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AS THE PEDAGOGICAL RESPOND TO THE MIGRANT CRISIS

Summary: In the text authors explore some possibilities of the interfaith dialogue as a pedagogical approach to the migrant crisis. Different examples of learning from one another show the process of discursive identity formation. Its elements may be used in social work and education in the sphere in between cultures.

Key words: *migrant crisis, Religion, Islam, Christianity, interfaith dialogue.*

The European migrant crisis that began more than ten years ago changed the social *status quo* of many EU countries. The crisis has many dimensions but one of them is religious prejudice and fear of Islam. The tension caused by growing social polarization should be addressed by both theoretical and practical propositions for education and social work with immigrants. Some countries in Europe are more open towards immigrants, other refuse to fulfill European Union obligations in this sphere. Partly it is connected with positive or negative experience with different minorities or with the social structure. For example Catholic Poland is very monolithic as far as the religion is concerned.

At the same time Poland has a long and positive tradition of Christian-Muslim integration concerning so-called Lipka Tatars. Christian-Muslim intermarriages were allowed in Poland long before it was common in other European countries (Tyszkiewicz 2010, 133-146). Shared responsibility for upbringing in family is one of the examples of Muslim-Christian integration process that took place in history of Polish Tatars. In mixed marriages fathers were responsible for Muslim education of their sons and mothers were responsible for Christian education of their daughters. At the same time, Polish Tatars never practiced polygamy which is an evidence of jointly found respond for problematic difference between two cultures (Bohdanowicz 1943, 98). Another example is connected with language – in almost whole eastern part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth Ruthenian language was used in administration and trade matters. Also Tatars were using it while keeping their native language in private sphere. Without any problem they could cultivate Muslim tradition concerning Friday as a holy day and other feasts, places of worship, food habits, specific outfit (Tyszkiewicz 1997, 30-31). After the partitions of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth at the end of XVIII century Tatars took part in national uprisings and experienced persecutions (Konopacki 2010, 161-163). This type of peaceful and creative co-existence was continued in the Republic of Poland before WWII when Muslim chaplains served in Polish army and Muslim cultural and educational associations got support from the state budget. As Leon Bohdanowicz – the researcher of pre-war Tatar community wrote, “despite their reduced numbers the Polish Tatars have, thanks to the considerable proportion of intellectuals among them, played quite a noticeable role in the cultural and political life of Poland. Among them have been judges, university professors, officers of high rank, senators, etc.” (Bohdanowicz 1943, 98). Besides that Tatars played an important role in diplomatic, cultural, and business relationships between Poland and Muslim countries in the Middle East and North Africa (Miśkiewicz 1990, 139-147). Therefore, there is an historical basis for achieving social integration through interfaith dialogue among Christian and Muslim community members.

Philosophers referring to Georg Hegel’s idealism and Karl Marx’s methodology in social sciences, like Max Weber and representatives of the Berlin School of Experimental Psychology developed an approach that can be described as an integrative. In Weber’s sociology religion plays a very important role in the process of activation but it is crucial to distinguish here meaningful (conscious) actions from instinctive actions (Weber 2011, 136). Kurt Lewin’s social theory portrays a person and a group in terms of organism which is parallel to writings of Alfred North Whitehead and American pragmatists but also to other social philosophers like

Karl Mannheim, Gregory Bateson and Jürgen Habermas. For all of them religion plays an important role in social processes. In *ecology of mind* it is a sphere where a man can express himself or herself fully and reach the satisfaction and complementarity of mind (Bateson 1972). Also Karl Mannheim – one of the key theorists of the sociology of knowledge – at the end of his life turned toward Christian experience and theology as a platform for social dynamism processes (Mannheim 1950). Today, the key figure of Marxist *critical theory*, Jürgen Habermas, also incorporates religion into his concept of communicative rationality. In this perspective theological language bears not only subjective meanings but has the creative power for social structures (cognitive interactionism).

Religion is an extremely important factor in these processes. It seems to be a crucial, if not the only, platform of communication with strongly religious immigrants. The analysis of Émile Durkheim (2011) points out the integrative role of religion in social life. Religion can strengthen social structure; Max Weber (2011) indicated its inspiring role for social change. Binding these two vectors we would receive a positive picture of religion in the process of immigrants integration in Western societies. There is one condition: an ontological and gnoseological assumption about truth as a processual idea.

According to Karl Mannheim there is a direct correlation between the broad context an individual is immersed in and his or her way of grasping the world. The man's knowledge has always a discursive character and is a result of constant interaction of all the natural and cultural factors shaping this context. Different ideologies play here an important role. If we treat religion and its theoretical frameworks as a specific example of an ideology (Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Barth), it would be intriguing to create a project of sociology of theology with its main aim to search discursive theological constructs and its correlation with individual's consciousness and knowledge. In such an approach theology would be seen as knowledge according to its status in religious driven societies (Berger & Luckmann 1966).

Discourse analysis of such texts together with phenomenographic approach (Marton 1986) was the methodology of the research accomplished in 2007 among religion teachers (mainly Roman Catholic but also other Christian denominations) in the city of Gdansk, Poland. The assumption of the research was based on the structuralist theory of the language (Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Michel Foucault) and discursive way of understanding both the society and self-formation (Jacques Lacan). One of the asked questions concerned the figure of God. In the phenomenographic procedure, the following categories of meanings assigned by teachers to the examined phenomena were isolated: established and internalized theological construct; perfect father; the source of meaning and purpose of life; postulated ideal of man and moral pattern; bottomless mystery. Another question dealt with the openness towards other religions and their theological constructs (evaluation of changes in the perception of God). For most of the teachers changes were understood as a threat to their religious identity. It seems that same type of research done among immigrants and citizens of the receiving countries would give some hints for social work in the time of migrant crisis.

This part of the text is focused particularly on the content of the Christian communities message about the migration crisis. It is not just the official documents and positions of church hierarchies, but also the context of the media comments and social reactions. The climate and manner of interreligious and intercultural dialogue (especially between Christianity and Islam), as well as its presence in the sphere of border and crisis events (referring to comments on terrorist attacks) should be also reflected here.

The teaching of both the Bible and the Catholic Church is very clear (citations from the Bible according to *The World English Bible*): "The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the home-born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt: I am Yahweh your God" (Lev. 19, 34). "You shall not abhor an Edomite; for he is your brother: you shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you were a sojourner in his land" (Deut. 23, 7). "Man has the right to leave his native land for various motives and also the right to return in order to seek better conditions of life in another country. (...) Nevertheless, even if emigration is in some aspects an evil, in certain circumstances it is, as the phrase goes, a necessary evil. Everything should be done and certainly much is being done to this end to prevent this material evil from causing greater *moral harm*; indeed every possible effort should be made to ensure that it may bring benefit to the emigrant's personal, family and social life, both for the country to which he goes and the country which he leaves" (John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 23). "Another aspect of integral human development that is worthy of attention is the phenomenon of *migration*. This is a striking phenomenon because of the sheer numbers of people involved, the social, economic, political, cultural and religious problems it raises, and the dramatic challenges it poses to nations and the international community. We can say that we are facing a social phenomenon of epoch making proportions that requires bold, forward looking policies of international cooperation if it is to be handled effectively" (Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate*, 62).

The figure of Pope Francis, the head of the Roman Catholic Church, emerges on the first plan, due to his activity and his great commitment to the affairs of refugees. In addition to the official documents dealing with this issue: the encyclical *Laudato si'* (Franciszek, 2015a), the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*

(Franciszek, 2013a), or the apostolic letter *Misericordia et misera* (Franciszek, 2016a) there are many others. The attitude and actions of the pope in favor of arriving in Europe immigrants is very significant. The annual World Migrant and Refugee Day (18 December, by the UN), celebrated in the Catholic Church on the second Sunday after the Feast of the Epiphany (the beginning of January), was a chance for Francis to remind and encourage a dedicated attitude towards the needy who are coming to Europe.

The Proclamation in 2014 was devoted to the issue of "Better World", which can be built both by those living in highly developed countries and those who want to live here (Franciszek, 2013b). But such an attitude cannot be based only on economic or even demographic criteria. It is about co-operation, which should define the real opportunities of both sides, those who adopt and those who come from outside. However, the problem is that Christianity has a special task here. It follows from the story of Jesus Christ, who along with Joseph and Mary, experienced the tragedy of refuge (Franciszek, 2013b). In a similar tone there are words in 2015 where the prospect of seeing another man is to be "Church without borders, the mother of all who spreads in the world a culture of reception and solidarity, according to which no one should be considered unnecessary, not in own place or to rejection" (Franciszek, 2014).

The Proclamation for the same day in 2016 was about the issue of refugees and migrants as a challenge for Europe and the world. The answer lies in the gospel itself, as a good news of mercy, forgiveness, acceptance of God by man, and which international communities should even partially implement (Franciszek, 2015b). For the current year, the attention of the Roman Catholic Church has focused primarily on children and young people affected by migration and refugee problems. The message emphasizes that it is the most defenseless group in this global process of social change, but also this is the generation that should be most guarded and protected from suffering and pain, since it depends on the fate of the future and the shape of the present. Catholics and wider Christians have here a special task to do. They must create and implement both support initiatives - but also according to Francis - to participate in systemic changes to change the whole world (Franciszek, 2016a).

This position of Pope Francis has caused very ambivalent reactions, especially from Orthodox and right-wing Catholic circles. Both in Europe and Poland, the logic of involvement and help often encounters resistance and negation. Also, the media of the Catholic conservative current, avoid confrontation of their position with the position of the Vatican. This is even more interesting because arguments for the respect of the law on refugees, formulated by the leftist circles, paradoxically converge with the thought and message of Pope Francis. However it is more complicated correlation, requiring in-depth comparative analysis of texts and source statements.

There are also other consistent Christian churches in Europe that work together and work locally for migrants. An example, of such an initiative on Polish ground was the joint Proclamation of the Polish Ecumenical Council and of the Catholic Church signed in Warsaw on June 30, 2016. It was a declaration of cooperation to support the most needy migrants but also the moral involvement of Christianity in general as a community, in the processes of social and cultural integration (PREiCK, 2016). We have to deal with similar ideas across Europe. In Great Britain a common position of the Anglican and Catholic Church was announced. They declare cooperation for the exclusionary communities resulting from migration processes and international conflicts (Foxnews, 2016).

For the current crisis an interesting example of a landmark and cultural breakthrough is the Second Vatican Council in the Catholic Church and its implications for cultural and social change. This example does not stem from the adoption of Catholic centrism in the description and analysis of social phenomena in the world. This is rather an excellent illustration of intra-religious dialogue, whose effects have gone far beyond the area of theology and religion alone. The Council began in the second half of the twentieth century (1962-1965) – at the time of the deep European crisis, after the events of the war but also during the intense crisis of the Catholic Church and other Christian churches. In the middle of the twentieth century it seemed that the dispute with autocephalic churches, conditioned by political issues, was unlikely to pass. The Catholic and Protestant relations, especially on German ground, were conditioned by the difficult history of Nazism but also there were two separate worlds competing with one another. It was evident that the processes of ecumenical dialogue and the openness to understand the external had become the driving force behind internal changes for Catholic institutions. It talks about theology and the understanding of Catholic tradition but also about cultural processes going on. Changing the language and content of the message, the openness to interfaith and interreligious dialogue began to bring real changes in the field of social action. There were joint initiatives of Christian churches in the late twentieth century. Prayers for peace, youth meetings, statements of opposition about military aggression and disagreement over the processes of globalization leading to economic and social exploitation (Wojtyła, 2014). There was a paradigm shift in the Catholic Church from the exclusive model (exclusionary) to the inclusion model (inclusionary), which led to dynamic changes. Thanks to that, there could be events that many years ago, not only were not supposed to happen, but which in the previous logic of thinking would be considered incompatible with the Christian kerygma

(theology and tradition). It is also interesting to note that the Catholic Church itself benefited the most from these changes in terms of integration and image. From a closed institution, a traditional and totalized religious and social discourse has become a partner for discussion and exchange of views (Tobin, 2014).

There is a very real question of the possibility of establishing a similar initiative, for example from the Catholic Church and more broadly possibly the whole of Christianity. It could be an initiative that reads today's migration crisis as a challenge and opportunity for the development of Europe and the world. Development in the logic of value inclusion, listened to, in the fears and fright on both sides of the meeting, as well as the potential for progress and mutual enrichment. The whole project could appeal to the *philosophy of drama* in which the other person is a sower of good and evil. There is a chance for development but also a possible cause of destruction. Drama is at every level also communal. The other man can bring me justification or condemnation. What's important, I'm also the other one for him or her. Everything is determined at the moment of judging who *He/She* is for me in a *Meeting Situation*. The hermeneutics of dependence communal *I from You* indicates that any attitude of openness or closeness to external things has a dramatic structure. Openness, potential growth and widening of cognitive horizons, however, is fraught with the danger of what is different. Closing, paradoxically, gives a sense of security but inevitably threatens the regression of development. Daily life indicates that the ability to find the balance between opening and closing is the key to a happy life. Today's migrant crisis and its social assessment in democratic countries seem not to be in the direction of balance, but in the direction of extreme forms of thought, in the course of the collision of civilization (Huntington, 2005).

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Одержано 01.11.2017р.