

ROMAN CATHOLICS AND MUSLIMS IN GREECE: INTERRELIGIOUS AND INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE IN A BALKAN COUNTRY¹

Costanza Salvatore, PhD²

Abstract: *This paper is intended to analyse Islamic presence in Modern Greece especially under the perspective of interreligious dialogue between Muslim refugees and Christian majority of Greek population. In this context, many initiatives held by Roman Catholics in Greece, especially Jesuits, Franciscans, local Caritas, Sisters of Mother Theresa, are devoted to Muslim refugees and people of different migratory background. Humanitarian activity promoted by Roman Catholics favours an interactive process with immigrants but also a fight for justice with the result of establishing an interfaith dialogue with Greek Orthodox Christians. The meeting with refugees is aimed not only to give them the possibility of making an income, but also to restore the dignity of migrant people. So, for example, the Jesuit Refugee Center (JRS) and the Jesuit Welcome Center (JWC) are meant to answer the urgent needs of people from Central Asia (Pakistan, Afghanistan), Northern and Sahel Africa (Morocco, Egypt, Somalia, Nigeria) and other countries with Muslim majority. On the other hand, these initiatives favour a regular daily routine through work and/or learning. This goal inspired the “Pedro Arrupe Center”, a social justice and educational project, aimed to help young refugees or children of families with migratory background to better pursue their school integration process.*

Keywords: *Religion, immigration, refugees, inclusion, humanitarian initiatives, Jesuits.*

¹ I dedicate this paper to the blessed memory of Fr. Dimitrios Dalezios SJ (Hermoupolis, Syros 1936 – Athens, 2024). I owe the warmest thanks to Fr. Pierre Salembier SJ and Fr. Petros Hong SJ for useful information about charity works for vulnerable people held in Athens under their supervision.

² National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece, e-mail: sotiriasal@phil.uoa.gr

Introduction: Modern Greece and its historical background

In Greece, the Orthodox Church still keeps a dominant role according to its historical role, as Greek Constitution (Article 3) states by recognizing the “Eastern Orthodox Church of Christ” as the “prevailing religion” (*epikratousa thriskia*) in Greece (Prekas, 2021, 40-41). Anyway, religious freedom is guaranteed by law (Anagnostopoulou, 1999; Roudometof, 2008, 77-89; Id., 2010, 25-36). Yannas (2010,124) foresees, however, that this *status quo* is also predictable as far as concerns Greek ethnic and religious context envisaged for the next decades: “The interpenetration of church and state will continue in Greece in the foreseeable future. Historical reasons and political considerations dictate that the Orthodox Church of Greece will continue to be the ‘prevailing religion’ of the country and be accorded state privileges vis-à-vis other religions”.

Undeniably, the overwhelming majority of Greek population (about 92%) practices Orthodox Christianity and shares the spiritual, religious and cultural legacy of Eastern Church (Bleeker, 1965, 111-123). Not-Christian immigration, especially through recent waves of Muslim refugees, represent an inescapable defy for this Balkan country. On the other side, Islamic presence does not correspond only to a trend emerging in the last decades, as Middle and Northern European countries experienced since the mid-20th century. The Ottomans occupied Greece for more than four or five centuries as a result of their expansionism at the expense of Eastern Roman Empire. Since late 11th century, Byzantine lands were progressively conquered by Seljuk and Turkish sultans who promoted the increasing process of Islamization in their dominions (Coles, 1968, 77; Goffman, 2002, 27-30; Beihammer, 2011, 611-613, Id., 2017, 285-295; Costanza, 2023a, 166-169; Balhan, 2024, 864-866). In Central Greece and Peloponnese, Turkish rule started since the early decades of the 15th century and lasted until the 30ies of the 19th century. Ottoman armies departed from Thessaly only after 1881 and from Northern Greece (Epirus, Macedonia) after the Balkan wars (1913). Thrace was acquired to the Kingdom of Greece in 1920, as well as further territories in Asia Minor (Ionia around Smyrne, Turkish Izmir) and some islands such as Imbros (Gökçeada) and Tenedos (Bozcaada). All these newly acquired territories except Western Thrace were lost after the military and political disaster of Greek campaign into Anatolia, which is known as the “catastrophe of the 1922”. As a result, the still existing borders were established between Greece and Turkey in land and sea.

In the aftermath of the Greek-Turkish conflict of 1922, a fundamental change was a decisive outcome both for Greek and Turkish national state. In particular, the Conference of peace imposed the population exchange between Muslim Greeks and Christian inhabitants of the former Ottoman Empire. This decision was sanctioned by the Lausanne treaty (1923). Given these premises, Turkish Republic was proclaimed at the end of the same year under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal, born in Solun (Thessaloniki/Salonikya) in Aegean Macedonia and a former student of the Ottoman military college of Bitola in Macedonia (Veremis, 2003, 55-59). Misallodoxy, that is, hate against different ethnic and religious groups, was a main trend in both Greek and Turkish national state in the following decades. After the Greek defeat in Anatolia, Muslims were regarded as ethnic Turks and the Greek Orthodox as ethnic Greeks. A consistent Muslim Greek speaking population was rejected from Crete, which the Ottomans captured from the Venetians in 1669 and ruled until 1899, that is, until very recent times. Greek Muslims were also obliged to depart from main Greece and Aegean Islands now belonging to the Kingdom of Greece. Indeed, Muslims of Western Thrace were exempted from the population exchange foreseen by Lausanne Treaty, as well as Greek Christian inhabitants of Constantinople, modern Turkish Istanbul (Katsikas, 2013, 153). Subsequently, religious and social demography of both states significantly changed. After 1923, a relevant autochthone Muslim community is still present until today only in both Western Thracian Greek provinces, Xanthi and Kommotini, where the ethnic exchange was not applied. On the contrary, the Greek State was obliged to protect all Muslim inhabitants of Western Thrace. In other Greek provinces, Muslim presence practically disappeared

from one day to the next. The historical legacy of Islamic rule (mosques, madrassas, hammam) was drastically obliterated in all country (Katsikas, 2013, 154-155). Lausanne treaty officially established a dominant religious component such as Orthodox Christianity in Greece and Islamic Sunna in Turkey. The ethnic cleansing highly increased national homogeneity of both Greece and Turkey. In early 20th century, around 20% of the inhabitants living within the today's borders of Turkey were still Christian. Today, Christians had dropped to a mere 0,15%, that is, less than hundred thousand people out of a population of 85 million: they are only a tiny minority concentrated in Istanbul, Izmir, in the south-western parts of the country and in a very few other places (Balhan, 2024, 867-868).

Humanitarian initiatives as a meeting between Muslims and Christians

Islam is largely present in contemporary Greece. Its Muslim population has now a prevailing migratory background, except in the above-named Western Thracian provinces. Masses of migrants coming from Northern and Sahel African countries, Near and Middle Asia are today confronted to the hard defy of political, social and economic inclusion in Greece. As Gerard Kester (2022) clearly pointed out, host communities in European Union have not reason to refer to contemporary migratory phenomenon just as to a social burden. Indeed, if Greeks as well as all European citizens interact with different ethnic and religious groups, this meeting may develop the better premises to build an inclusive society. The current idea of immigration as a crisis factor in itself should, thus, be rejected.

In this realm, significant initiatives are held in Greece held by Roman Catholics. This offers a meeting ground for peace and common good with the result of allowing Christians and Muslims to acquaint and reconcile each other. In team work praxis, it is noticeable that humanitarian initiatives carried out by Roman Catholics convince people of every age and social class to develop a dialogue with migrants and to interact with them in a respectful way. Immigrants are often the target of prejudices. Some members of the host community usually discriminate them in any way. In Western Europe, leaders of locals Churches and Christian denominations play a pivotal role in welcoming migrants to their new countries. Charismatic religious leaders may promote a social policy of inclusion among them fellow citizens, so to welcome newcomers without regard to ethnic or faith barriers, as it has been already remarked (Vishkin & Ben-Nu Bloom, 2022). Religious aptitude orientates a behaviour inclined to accept tolerance in host societies towards every minority group. In the U.S.A., organizations working to resettle refugees are mostly faith based. A similar context may be observed in the European Union (Nawyn, 2006).

Today, transnational mobility converges towards minimalizing ethnic, linguistic and cultural differences. Younger people with migratory background especially search for equal opportunities and equal rights: they demand their host societies to find uncompromising ways to be acknowledged and respected (Kwon, 2022).

In this respect, a significant encounter between Muslims and Roman Catholics is an everyday experience in Athens thanks to charitable initiatives held by Jesuit Fathers, members of the Society of Jesus (Latin *Societas Iesu*), founded by Saint Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) and his First Companions in 1540 (O'Malley, 1993, 25-34; Id., 2016, 113-114). There, refugees with different migratory background find first aid, once they arrived to Greece. The integration of immigrant families living in Greece is also a priority. Subsequently, such initiatives largely favour the interaction between migrants and Greek citizens who are mostly Orthodox believers, as we have also noticed. Roman Catholic charity network in Greece offers, however, the grounds for the ecumenical dialogue with Greek Orthodox, other Christians or even not-Christians. Activities destined to the migrants are often developed by teams, where Christians from various denominations work together side by side. It is not infrequent that not-Catholic denominations may support Catholic charity programs. Last year, Seventh-Day Adventist Christians decided, thus, to finance a Jesuit project in favour of migrant

women carried out by their *Women's Day Center*. Surely, the Jesuit Fathers focused their help on migrant women, in order to support the dignity of family life. As a consequence, such a Catholic charity project sponsored by a protestant denomination favours the wider ecumenical dialogue with Greek Orthodox and protestant Christians. Laymen interested to help refugees are usually ready to start cooperation. The hierarchy of the Church of Greece cannot remain indifferent to values which touch human existence down to the roots, such as the moral and spiritual dimension, peace and justice beyond any national boundaries.

In turn, the Jesuits have always been involved in carrying out a missionary apostolate among the different categories of people over the centuries. Their work reaches every social class, but especially concerns the less fortunate.

All this ascertained, it is useful to examine charitable institutions in Athens such as the *Jesuit Refugee Service* (= JRS, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) - Accompany, Serve, Advocate) and the *Pedro Arrupe Center*, which are devoted to the most wretched people, as reports from various local sections of this international Catholic agency around the world largely attest (Vella, 2000; Jesuit Refugee Service New Delhi, 2000; Lehomela, 2006).

Jesuit Refugee Center in Greece applies the guiding principles of the JRS, which is meant to the service of accompaniment and advocacy destined to forced migrants and is involved in justice reform and social works in partnership with the State authorities. In today's societies, refugees are the most vulnerable people, whose rights have been trampled. JRS' foundation was the prophetic intuition of the General Superior of Jesuit Society Fr. Pedro Arrupe (Bilbao 1907 – Rome 1991). As Superior (1965–1983), Father Arrupe developed the great force of traditional Ignatian discernment by having at the same time an unequalled ability to face dramatic events with courage and prophetic insight (Calvez, 1997; La Bella, 2009). His idea of founding the JRS in the 80ies answered to contingent needs of migrant people at that time. This agency was, thus, able to benefit until now thousands people in the five continents (O'Brien, 2005; O'Neill, 2022).

In Greece, the agencies related to this international network of solidarity faced the epochal refugee crisis of 2015 (Spindler, 2015), when thousands of people crossed the Aegean Sea in rubber dinghies from the Turkish ports with the hope of escaping war and persecution in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan. 2015/2016 refugees had mostly not idea to settle in this Balkan State, but to use it as a transit country to move later to other countries of European Union, primarily German, Austria, Netherlands and Sweden (Tsardanidis, ..., 90-92). In fact, migrants coming in these years wanted to find a better life in the European Union. For this purpose, they reached the nearest safe ports of Greek islands: Kos, Chios, Lesbos, Samos. The distance between the coast nearby Izmir (Smyrne) or Bodrum (Alikarnasos) and the Greek islands are only a few sea-miles (Brady, 2021, 77-85).

The JRS–Greece agency was established by Jesuit Fathers in Athens in November 2015 with the aim of helping Muslim refugees and all migrant people by accompanying them to the effective inclusion in Greek and further European host societies, just after they crossed the borders of European Union. Inclusive services were enacted to solve logistical, administrative and practical problems of these newcomers.

Certainly, the Jesuits did not arrive in Greece in the aftermath of this migrant crisis. Indeed, they founded their mission in Athens between the end of the 19th century and the early 20th century and from then until now they are based near the main railway station of Athens. Moreover, The Society of Jesus was already present before Greek independence through a network of Jesuit missions and apostolates scattered in the Cyclades (Syros, Tinos, Andros) and other Aegean islands (Chios, Samos) since the last 16th century / early 17th century (Hofmann, 1935, 144; Papadopoulos, 1977, 24-25; Roussos-Milidonis, 1989). In Ottoman times, the Jesuits were extremely active to teach Humanities (Ancient Greek, Latin, rhetoric) and sciences in these Aegean islands, where they benefited of more freedom than in Greek mainland. Obviously, the Society played until now a crucial role to the Greek

cultural development in many fields and promotes it until our days through specific institutions, such as the *Institute of Humanistic Sciences* founded in 2008 to integrate humanistic studies with the of contemporary society (Ινστιτούτο Ανθρωπιστικών Επιστημών - Jesuits.gr.), periodicals of cultural relevance (*Anichti Orizontes* "Open Horizons", founded in 1900, *Synchronea Vimata* "Contemporary Steps", 1970–2007), and the most well-equipped library specialising in Patristic in all Balkans. This library was founded in 1970 and grants free access to rare books, collections and historical archives for researchers (Freris & Loukos, 2023). All this considered, Jesuit's knowledge of Greece and more generally of Middle East results from a grass roots experience over the centuries.

The Jesuit Community of Athens is part of French province until 2017 and, thus, of the newly created Jesuit French-speaking Province of Western Europe (EOF), whose Provincial Superiors, firstly Fr. François Boëdec and thus his successor Fr. Thierry Dobbstein (appointed on 31 July 2023) greatly encouraged the initiatives of the JRS–Greece and did not stop to support them. As a social service agency, the Jesuit Refugee Service in Greece offers a concrete response to the most urgent needs of people coming to Europe from different countries with Muslim majority such as Northern and Sahel African (Morocco, Egypt, Somalia, Nigeria) or Central Asian (Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan) States. Face to different problems of social placing, the Jesuits significantly favour social inclusion programmes beyond any ethnic, linguistic and religious differences. Muslim newcomers generally mistrust national policy and official staff of host countries. Indeed, the Church is often the only place that they can really trust, as it has also been remarked for migrants at their first arrival to U.S.A. (Mooney, 2006, 169). Conversely, the charitable work enacted by JRS–Greece demonstrates how the Society of Jesus is able to provide a precious mediation between government policies and first-generation immigrants in social affairs. The JRS especially monitored legal frameworks of asylum seekers and mobilized with other organization to ensure the protection of migrant population's rights. In this respect, a great attention is devoted to the key principle of advocacy. Jesuit Fathers assert the leading principle that forcibly displaced people retain unalienable rights under the international law.

Of course, JRS' staff works with migrant children and adults, in order to offer various social projects. The beneficiaries of the aid appreciate the friendly atmosphere established by volunteers under the careful supervision of the Center's Director, Fr. Pierre Salembier SJ, who has a great international experience as former vice-Superior of French province and all best qualities to supervise an international team of volunteers. Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit were also active in JRS Greece. These Catholic sisters coming from Asian (Philippines, India) and European countries (Poland, Ukraine) moved to Greece in 2017 to join JRS team and to work side by side with Jesuit Fathers and volunteers until last year. Missionary Sisters' true love towards refugees offered a service of charity accompanied by maternal tenderness. Besides Jesuit Fathers and Missionary Sisters, volunteers are mostly young people coming from Europe (French, Italy, Germany, Spain), U.S.A., but also from Near Eastern countries. Some Muslim volunteers from Arabic (Syria, Egypt) or Asian countries (Afghanistan) were also present during last years. Their presence is extremely useful to bridge not-Muslim volunteers as well as Muslim refugees and unit them with brotherly bonds. Religious, cultural and social profile of these peacemakers is very diverse. They generally spend a semester or a year working on voluntary projects as members of JRS staff under the direction of Jesuit Fathers from Greece. Moreover, Jesuits in formation (novices, young priests) also actively cooperate with JRS mission during their temporary stay in Athens. They may also discover Greek society and compare its specific context with relation to other apostolates and JRS centers around the world. All Fathers deeply interact with the beneficiaries of their aid. Their presence brought a burst of motivation to the mission at the service of Muslim migrants. Greek Orthodox people involved in their international team apply new mind-sets by discovering a different approach to the Other that surmounts ethnic and religious prejudices. Everyone is confronted to a transforming experience that also puts migrant people in the

perspective of intercultural dialogue which is alien from psychological violence of forced assimilation or Westernization (Annual Report JRS – Greece 2023, 18).

Indeed, we cannot dismiss that national migration policy was until recently aimed to discourage refugees to reach this country. Generally, irregular migration was considered by most influential opinion makers and mass-media as a threat against the defence of national Hellenic identity, a legacy from Classical Antiquity and Christian Roman Empire to safeguard at any cost (Tsardanidis, 2021, 94). The evidence that contemporary Hellenism is the final outcome of migrations from different ethnic origin could be seen still today as heretical or nonsensical, as the long-dating anathema against Fallmerayer's book about Modern Greek ethnogeny derived from various invaders' streams (Illyrians, Slavs, Albanians, Turks) shows (Costanza, 2023b, 303, 307-309).

The need of keeping Christian values in Greek society by granting at the same time religious freedom for Muslim migrants suggested controversial solutions. Political parties and ecclesiastical leaders showed a deep disagreement on this subject which often reveals a not adequate understanding of migratory phenomenon within Greek and more generally Balkan context. We may follow how sensitive was the debate about the plan of establishing a mosque for Muslims in Athens not to speak of violent and prejudicial opposition to any project of Islamic cult centers in the Greek capital (Anagnostou & Gropas, 2010, 99-105).

In this respect, we notice that Greece was a country with an ethnically homogenous population until the end of Cold war, as a consequence of the above-discussed Lausanne treaty, a small amount of minorities and a large outflow of Greek emigration to U.S.A. and Northern European countries. On the contrary, Greece was a largest recipient of migrants in the European Union since the 1990s. An increasing influx of people was coming at first from Albania, Eastern Europe and former Soviet Union with the idea of settling in Greece. Despite of economic and financial crisis in 2008, many immigrants and asylum seekers fleeing wars entered in Greece, mainly by sea, as we remarked, with the hope of gaining access to Northern European countries. Since 2015's epochal crisis, the Jesuits worked hard with the utmost commitment, in order to respond to the primary needs of migrant population at its first entry into the European Union after crossing the Aegean sea or Eastern Thracian land borders. During last years, Jesuits involved themselves with greatest generosity in performing this task. We may usefully analyse some results of charitable activities pursued by the Jesuits last year (2023) according to the evidence from the Annual Report published by the JRS–Greece (Annual Report JRS–Greece 2023, 4-11). Some numbers are indicative about increased inclusion policy towards Muslim refugees. The Jesuits feel committed to especially help Muslim migrant women. The above-named *Women's Day Center* is aimed to empower migrant women in difficult situation. In 2023, this Center provided 2153 services and 525 social accompaniment services and was opened to 335 new registered women and 368 children. The women also had the chance to stay in the Living Room with their children and to enjoy recreational and social activities with them. Agencies such as *Medical Volunteers International* (MVI) and the *International Refugee Committee* (IRC) also worked at the Centre. Hygiene services such as shower and laundry services with free use of washing and dryer machine were, thus, at disposal of migrant women (Annual Report JRS–Greece 2023, 12).

Another essential relief services promoted by the Jesuits was the JRS free-shop with a great number of indirect beneficiaries: clothes, shoes, household items, toys, food baskets were largely distributed to vulnerable families. The Food Basket project provided a monthly support service. Moreover, a social worker was engaged to follow the disadvantaged households, to provide guidance to them and to support their primary needs. In all, 89 families benefited this project in 2023, they were mostly asylum seekers (33%), refugees (34%) or migrants without documents (27%), just a few amount migrants under temporary protection (3%). Disadvantaged households with no income or very low income were mainly from Muslim-majority countries such as Egypt (34%), Afghanistan (9%), Morocco (3,5%), (Annual Report JRS–Greece 2023, 15).

As far as concerns education for adults, 111 more people enrolled last year to English, German or Modern Greek courses and/or to employability workshops. These initiatives are meant not only to favour better economic integration of migrants, but also to offer them the opportunity to take an active part in host society, that is, to give their contribution in social, cultural and political life of Greece.

In this respect, we must stress the JRS' learning effort provided by *Pedro Arrupe Center*, an educational project aimed to improve the future of the children of migrants by helping them through a daily after-school program. Notoriously, the Jesuits are engaged in higher and academic education and had always the greatest success as educators, as well as missionaries, polemicists, artists. The *Pedro Arrupe Center* is aimed to cope the challenge of education for refugees and children of migrant families, whose unfamiliarity with Modern Greek language made it hard for them to communicate effectively. In a multicultural context, linguistic misunderstanding contributes to miscommunication. Language barriers produce a significant stumbling block in the learning process, as it clearly appears in educational challenges of education for refugees, as the *Common European Framework of References for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment* published by the Council of Europe in 2020 states (Stathopoulou, 2021, 39-46). Teachers of the *Foreign Language Education for Adult Refugee Students* (FLEARS), a programme of National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (EKPA), also experienced how difficult is, to teach Greek as a second language for refugees. The teacher must previously develop a careful methodology's planning, as well as an identification of each student's profile, in order to find a suitable learning procedure on individual basis (Iakovou *et al.*, 2021, 74-94).

Addressing the great divide in language proficiency is essential for integration, as the *Pedro Arrupe Center*' Center, Father Petros Hong SJ, was well aware. Father Hong is himself a Greek citizen with migratory background, since he was born in South Korea and moved to Greece as a child. He, thus, experienced as a pupil the difficulties of integration in the Greek public school system that today migrant children experience in their turn (Pedro Arrupe Center - ACCMR | ACCMR). This educational programme shows how to really promote the social integration and mutual interaction of migrant student regardless of different religious affiliations and nationalities. Didactic training under the tutorship of Fr. Hong allows young people to trust their teachers and encourage their responsible behaviour. As far as concerns 2023 Center's students, they come from more than sixteen countries, but essentially from two Muslim-majority countries such as Egypt (45%) and Bangladesh (32%).

In Greece, as well as in other European countries, the educational system is obliged to find effective ways to include refugees in multicultural teaching in classrooms (Rentzi, 2017, 48-55). Migrant children's lack of education because of insufficient support for learning the language of their host-society is often the main ground of isolation and exclusion. Hence, refugee students are largely disappointed by their welcome to European host societies (Ager-Strang, 2008, 166-191; Vlachava-Stavropoulos, 2019, Stathopoulou, 2021, 39). Fr. Hong maintained his commitment to his social justice project of educational challenge for immigrants since the beginning. Beyond any doubt, the Athenian Superior, Father Pierre Salembier, and other confreres greatly supported this initiative: last two years 2022-'23 and 2023-'24, more than 180 children received after-school support through *Pedro Arrupe Center*. One half of its students attended primary school, the others high school and secondary school, 40 children also participated to language courses, summer camps and further educative projects (Annual Report JRS-Greece 2023, 7). Beneficiaries are mostly children from migrant families that have already settled in Greece, but there are also refugees and minors under protection. *Pedro Arrupe Center* offered all them not only learning support, especially in mathematics, physics, language (Ancient and Modern Greek), history, arts, but also various activities to develop problem solving, creative thought, conscience about human rights. Each student may, thus, discover the importance of cultural roots to define his or her own identity. Briefly, *Pedro Arrupe Center* promoted the education for peace starting from developing a mind-sets based on social justice among those children, who followed its courses. Learning was regardless of ethnic and religious differences.

On this purpose, Fr. Hong also organizes educational trips to museums, antiquities and archaeological sites for his students, in order to show them the cultural heritage of their host country. Similarly, they attend workshops based on theatre performances with regard to crucial points of Greek national history such as Independence fight against Ottoman rule, Anti-fascist opposition in Second World War or other significant episodes. As educational experience, theatre stages under the direction of Fr. Hong was precious for all participants to build feelings based on mutual collaboration and to surmount ethnic conflicts. Last years, theatrical plays performed by migrants and refugees' children had dynamic approach to Greek national heritage, but also approached religious themes, such as the Life of 16th-century Jesuits' Founder, St Ignatius of Loyola. In this case, theatre experience really overcomes religious differences, with the aim of promoting unity based on the values of cultural humanism.

Finally, another meeting point between Muslims and Christians, local Greeks as well as foreign volunteers, is granted by the *Jesuit Welcome Center*, another social service, which offers to anyone free Wi-Fi access, a charging station, a cup of coffee or tea and free conversation during the "welcome hours". Over all, this is an appreciated meeting ground which are extremely useful for dialogue and exchange between Greek citizens and migrant people in friendly atmosphere of pleasant familiarity. Also neighbours and students really enjoy such encounters: mutual acquaintance help visitors of the *JWC* to bypass prejudice against Muslim newcomers. At this times, educators broke cultural barriers with Muslim migrants.

Conclusions

Mind-sets of inclusive societies must be promoted as an essential factor in coexistence, stability and peace, according to a future vision of the common interest of hosts and newcomers. Social inclusion of Muslims in contemporary Greece is a challenge, but is not out of reach. As Zoran Matevski (2007, 52) pointedly remarked: "Islam and Christian are part of the Eastern faiths, but they do not exclude each other. Judaism, Christianity and Islam use different names for same God". We must favour the dialogue between the host population of Western countries and religious minority groups with migratory background. The goal to build an inclusive society is not utopic, but necessary, in order to fight against xenophobic or Islamophobic aptitudes through mutual respect and sharing of cultural values. Charitable initiatives supported by Roman Catholics in Greece answer to most urgent needs of Muslim migrants. Jesuit Fathers in Athens scheduled a plan for welcoming them. Beside the services towards most vulnerable people, these agencies are valuable educational centers to promote mutual dialogue and cooperation. By doing it, Jesuit teamwork benefits not only Muslim refugees, but the whole Greek society.

Jesuits' selflessness for helping refugees enlightens how to build a more inclusive society. This key factor goes beyond all divisions and witnesses how Christians may stay at the service of Muslim migrants to build a welcoming society. In fact, multicultural diversity is a coherent perspective for our countries, whose inhabitants are appealed to finally accept the wealth of the differences (Matevski, 2005; Id., 2007, 52-54). Considering the cultural heritage of Western Balkans as a model, religious pluralism suggests a leading principle also to Greece. In this respect, the case-study of a neighbouring state such as Macedonian Republic provides a paradigm of interpreting actual crisis among monotheistic believers by adhering to a practice of mutual interaction and interreligious dialogue without any prejudices (Costanza, 2024, 67-73).

References

- Ager, A. & Strang, A. (2008). Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21.2, 166-191.
- Anagnostopoulou, S. (1999). The Historicity of the “National Role” of the Church of Greece: Greek Nation or Greek-Orthodox Nation. Structures and Power Relations in Contemporary Greece. Athens: Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences.
- Anagnostou, D. & Gropas, R. (2010). Domesticating Islam and Muslim Immigrants: Political and Church Responses to Constructing a Central Mosque in Athens. In Roudometof-Makrides (Eds.). *Orthodox Christianity*, pp. 89-110.
- Annual Report JRS – Greece 2023, 18, ACTREP2023ENG.pdf (greecejrs.gr).
- Balhan, J.-M. (2024). Muslime und Christen in der Türkei. In *Stimmen der Zeit* 11, 863-873.
- Beihammer, A.D. (2011). Defection across the Border of Islam and Christianity: Apostasy and Cross-Cultural Interaction in Byzantine-Seljuk Relations, In *Speculum* 86,3, 597-651.
- Beihammer, A.D. (2017). Byzantium and the Emergence of Muslim-Turkish Anatolia ca. 1040-1130. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Bleeker, C. J. (1965). Christ in Modern Athens: The Confrontation of Christianity with Modern Culture and the Non-Christians Religions. Leiden: Brill.
- Brady, H. (2021). Openness versus Helplessness: Europe’s Border Crisis, 2015-2018. In Joensen, T. & Taylor, Y. (Eds.). *Small States and the European Migrant Crisis. Politics and Governance* (pp. 67-88). Cham: Springer.
- Calvez, J.-Y. (1997). Le Père Arrupe – L’Église après le Concile. Paris: Cerf.
- Coles, P. (1968). The Ottoman Impact on Europe, 1350-1699. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Costanza, S. (2023a). Normans in Anatolia after Manzikert’s Battle (Normanlar Anadolu’da Malazgirt muharebesi sonra). In A. Aytaç (Ed.). *III. International Balkans, Anatolia, Caucasia and Turkistan (Middle Asia) Geography, Art, Culture, History, and Folklore Congress* in honour of Prof. Dr. R. Zemon (Uluslararası Balkanlar, Anadolu, Kafkasya ve Türkistan coğrafyası sanat, kültür, tarih ve folklor kongresi. Prof. Dr. R. Zemon Armağanı), (pp. 165-170). Aydın: Aydın Menderes Üniversitesi.
- Costanza, S. (2023b). La traduzione di K. P. Romanos, *Περὶ τῆς καταγωγῆς τῶν σημερινῶν Ἑλλήνων* (1984) dalla *Storia della penisola di Morea*, vol. I, di J. Ph. Fallmerayer (1830). In J. Butcher, A. Blioumi & J. Butcher (Eds.), *Ein Südtiroler zwischen dem Peloponnes und Trapezunt. Jakob Philipp Fallmerayer (1790-1861)*, (pp. 301-310). Sesto S. Giovanni (MI): Mimesis.
- Costanza, S. (2024). Religious minorities interacting for peace: Islam, Orthodox Christians and Roman Catholics between Sicily and Macedonia. In Z. Matevski (Ed.), *Religious Conflicts in the World: Causes and possible Solutions* (pp. 61-76). Skopje: Faculty of Philosophy SS Cyril and Methodius University.
- Freris, S. SJ & Loukos, Ch. (2023), (Eds.). *Η βιβλιοθήκη των πατέρων ιησουιτών: η ιστορία της, ο πλούτος της και οι προοπτικές της* [The Library of the Jesuit Fathers: Its History, Wealth and Perspectives]. Athina: Instituto anthropistikón epistimón.
- Goffman, D. (2002). The Ottoman Empire and Early Modern Europe. Cambridge: University.
- Hofmann, G. (1935). Apostolato dei Gesuiti nell’Oriente greco (1583-1773). In *Orientalia Christiana* 1, 139-164.
- Hondagneu-Sotelo, P. (2006), (Ed.). Religion and Social Justice for Immigrants. Ithaca/NY-London: Rutgers University.

- Iakovou, M., Vlachou, F., Dima, O., Kavvadia, M., Katsina, T., Koutsoubou, M., Kytrou, S.-N. & Kostakou Ch. (2021). Από τον Ελαιώνα στο Πανεπιστήμιο: Μαθήματα Ελληνικών σε Πρόσφυγες [From Eleonas until University: Lessons of Greek to Refugees]. In E. Griva & M. Moumtzi (Eds.). *Migration and Language Education in Southern Europe. Practices and Challenges* (pp. 74-94). Cambridge: Scholars.
- Jesuit Refugee Service: 20 Years of Service to the Refugees, 1980-2000, New Delhi: Jesuit Refugee Service South Asia, 2000.
- Katsikas, St. (2013). Hostage Minority. The Muslims of Greece (1923–41). In B.C. Fortna, St. Katsikas, D. Kamouzis & P. Konortas (Eds.), *State-Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire, Greece and Turkey* (pp. 153-175). London-New York: Routledge.
- Kester, G. (2022). *The New Europeans: A Roadmap for Mutual Integration and Democratic Ownership*. Europe of Cultures 25. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Kwon, H. (2022). Inclusion Work: Children of Immigrants Claiming Membership in Everyday Life, in *American Journal of Sociology* 127.6, pp. 1842–43, <https://doi.org/10.1086/720277>.
- La Bella, G. (2009). Pedro Arrupe. Supérieur général des Jésuites (1965-1983) – Le gouvernement d’un prophète, suivi d’un témoignage d’Adolfo Nicolas : Huit rencontres avec le P. Pedro Arrupe. Bruxelles: Lessius.
- Lehomela, S. (2006). Exploring Mechanisms of Refugees at Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), Johannesburg, s.l.
- Matevski, Z. (2005). Religiska tolerancija u multietnickoj i multikonfesionalnoj R. Makedoniji. In: *Religija u multikulturnom drustvu*. Novi Sad: Filozofski fakultet.
- Matevski, Z. (2007). Religious Dialogue and Tolerance – Theoretical and Practical Experiences of Differences and Similarities. *Politics and Religion Journal* 1, pp. 43-57.
- Mooney, M. (2006). The Catholic Church’s Institutional Responses to Immigration: From Supranational to Local Engagement, in Hondagneu-Sotelo, P. (Ed.), pp. 157-172.
- Nawyn, St. J. (2006). Welcoming the Stranger: Constructing an Interfaith Ethic of Refuge, in Hondagneu-Sotelo, P. (Ed.), pp. 141-156.
- O’Brien, K. (2005) *Consolation in Action. The Jesuit Refugee Service and the Ministry of Accompaniment*. Boston: Seminar on Jesuit Spirituality.
- O’Malley, J. W., SI (1993). *The First Jesuits*. Cambridge/MA-London: Harvard University Press.
- O’Neill, W. R. (2022). *The “Jesuit” in Jesuit Refugee Service*. Washington/D.C.: Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States.
- Papadopoulos, Th. J. (1977). *Ο Βικέντιος Καστανιόλας και ἡ διερευνητική ἀποστολή (1592) τῆς πρώτης ἐγκαταστάσεως Ἰησουιτῶν στὴ Χίο* [Vincenzo Castagnola and the Exploratory Mission (1592) of the first Settlement of the Jesuits in Chios]. *Chiaka Chronika* 9, 18-40.
- Pedro Arrupe Center - ACCMR | ACCMR.
- Prekas, A.M. (2021). *Το σύνταγμα της Ελλάδος Σύνοψη συνταγματικῆς ιστορίας*. Athina: Ependysh.
- Rentzi, A. (2017). Ανάπτυξη στρατηγικών σχεδίων δράσης για τη συμπερίληψη των παιδιών προσφύγων στις σχολικές μονάδες της Ελλάδας [Development of Strategic Action Projects for the Inclusion of Refugee Children in Scholastic Units of Greece]. In Lionarakis, A., Ioakimidou, S. et al. (Eds.). *Πρακτικά 9^{ου} Διεθνούς Συνεδρίου για την Ανοικτή και εξ Αποστάσεως Εκπαίδευση. Ο σχεδιασμός της Μάθησης* [Proceedings of the 9th International Congress for the Open and Distance Education. *Teaching Planning*], (Athina, 23-26.11.2017), (pp. 48-55). Athens: EAP.

- Roudometof, V. (2008). Greek Orthodoxy, Territoriality, and Globality: Religious Responses and Institutional Disputes, *Sociology of Religion* 69.1, pp. 67-91.
- Roudometof, V. (2010). The Evolution of Greek Orthodoxy in the Context of World Historical Globalization. In Id.-Makrides (Eds.). *Orthodox Christianity*, pp. 21-38.
- Roudometof, V. & Makrides, V.N. (2010), (Eds.). *Orthodox Christianity in 21st Century Greece. The role of Religion in Culture, Ethnicity and Politics*. London-New York: Routledge.
- Roussos-Milidonis M.-N. (1989). Ιησουίτες του 17^{ου} και 18^{ου} αιώνα περιγράφουν το Αιγαίο [Jesuits of the 17th and 18th century describe the Aegean sea]. Athens: Ekdoseis Dimou Ano Syros.
- Spindler, W. (2015). 2015: The year of Europe's refugee crisis | UNHCR.
- Stathopoulou, M. (2021). Language Education for Students from Migrant and Refugee Backgrounds: Exploiting the New CEFR Descriptor Scales for Mediation and Plurilingual Competence. In M. Mattheoudakis, E. Griva & M. Moumtzi (Eds.). *Migration and Language Education in Southern Europe. Practices and Challenges* (pp. 37-53). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars.
- Tsardanidis, Ch. (2021). The (De)Europeanization of Greece: Experience from the Eye of the Storm. In T. Joensen & I. Taylor (Eds.). *Small States and the European Migrant Crisis* (pp. 89-112). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Vella, D. (2000). Everybody's Challenge. Essential Documents of Jesuit Refugee Service, 1980-2000. Turin: Jesuit Refugee Service.
- Veremis, Th. (2003). 1922: Political Continuities and Realignments in the Greek State. In R. Hirschon (Ed.). *Crossing the Aegean. An Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey* (pp. 53-62). New York-Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Vishkin, A. & Ben-Nu Bloom, P. (2022). The Influence of Religion on the Acceptance and Integration of Immigrants: A Multidimensional Perspective. In *Current Opinion in Psychology* 47: 101-145, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022101421>.
- Vlachava, M. & Stavropoulos, V. et al. (2019). School and Social Integration of Refugee and Migrant Adolescent Students in Greece. Contemporary Insights and Trends towards Upper Secondary Education. In Tsichouridis, Ch. & Kolokotronis, D. et al. (Eds.). *Πρακτικά Εργασιών 4^{ου} Διεθνούς Συνεδρίου για την Προώθηση της Εκπαιδευτικής Καινοτομίας/4th International Conference for the Promotion of Innovation and Education* (Larisa 12-14 October 2018), <http://synedrio.epepe.gr>, vol. 2, 1213-1221.
- Yannas, P. (2010). Non-Orthodox Minorities in Contemporary Greece: Legal Status and Concomitant Debates between Church, State and the International Community. In (Ed.), *Orthodox Christianity in 21st Century Greece: The Role of Religion in Culture, Ethnicity, and Politics* (pp. 111-130). Ashgate: Farnham.

