



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on September 29, 2015

Hungarian Bishop Disagrees With Pope's Views on Refugee Crisis

Laszlo Kiss-Rigo, the bishop of the Roman Catholic diocese of Szeged-Csanád in southeastern Hungary, made a public statement back on September 7 that took issue with Pope Francis' call on European Catholics the previous day to help refugees from Syria and elsewhere by opening their churches, monasteries, and homes as sanctuaries. The pope asked the faithful throughout Europe to shelter refugees fleeing "death from war and hunger."



The pontiff made similar remarks during an address before a joint meeting of Congress on September 24, when he asked American lawmakers to follow the "golden rule" in dealing with immigration and the refugee crisis that affects the world. In that address, Francis said:

To respond in a way which is always humane, just and fraternal. We need to avoid a common temptation nowadays: to discard whatever proves troublesome. Let us remember the golden rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

While no true Christian would reject the golden rule (In Matthew 7:12, Jesus told his disciples in His Sermon on the Mount: "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."), in his statement, Kiss-Rigo expressed a different take on the crisis. He warned:

[The migrants entering Europe are] not refugees. This is an invasion, They come here with cries of "Allahu Akbar." They want to take over.

While the phrase "Allahu Akbar" is generally translated as "God is great," its frequent use by Islamic jihadists, or holy warriors while engaged in acts of terrorism (including the 9/11 hijackers) has caused many to interpret it as a battle cry — similar to the "Tenno Heika Banzai" ("Long live the Emperor") used by Japanese soldiers before an attack.

The diocese of Szeged-Csanád is located on Hungary's southern border, where many of the refugees cross on their way to further destinations in Austria or Germany. Hungary recently built a 110-mile-long fence along its border with Serbia in that area, to help stem the tide of migrants. Most of them first entered Europe to refugee camps in Turkey, then crossed northward through Bulgaria, then Serbia, and finally into Hungary.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban has been openly critical of the efforts by European Union leaders to impose immigration quotas before the continent's borders are made secure. During an emergency EU summit held in Brussels on September 22, heads of government from the European Union approved a plan to distribute 120,000 of the migrants fleeing turmoil in the Middle East across Europe.

Writing in an opinion piece for Germany's *Frankfurt Allgemeine Zeitung*, Orban addressed the potential



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impact that the new migrants would have on the historically Christian culture of Europe, noting that they “are mostly not Christians, but Muslims.”

“That’s an important question,” Orban said, “because Europe and Europeanism have Christian roots.”

The *Washington Post* noted in a September 7 report that Kiss-Rigo is in basic agreement with Orban’s position that the large number of migrants crossing Hungary and continuing onwards across Europe represents “a direct challenge to Europe’s Christian character.”

“I’m in total agreement with the prime minister,” the *Post* quoted Kiss-Rigo, who also stated that in contrast with Orban, the pope “doesn’t know the situation” that exists in Hungary.

Might not some people interpret Kiss-Rigo’s rejection of the pope’s competence to assess the refugee crisis in Hungary as a rejection of papal authority, or the greater issue of papal infallibility? As the Catholic Church understands such doctrinal authority, it would apparently not apply to this situation. To answer this question, we might consider what was said about such teaching in an online article that was given an *imprimatur* (approval) by Robert H. Brom, bishop of San Diego and published by Catholic Answers, a San Diego-based Catholic apologetics organization:

Infallibility ... applies only to solemn, official teachings on faith and morals, not to disciplinary decisions or even to unofficial comments on faith and morals. A pope’s private theological opinions are not infallible, only what he solemnly defines is considered to be infallible teaching.

While Kiss-Rigo and all faithful Catholics, of course, have the highest regard and respect for the pope, the bishop is also entitled to his own opinion on a practical matter with which he has firsthand knowledge and which affects his flock.

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