

The Views and Attitudes of Czech Christians on the Refugee Crisis: Results of a Survey Among Czech Christians

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The present study presents selected elementary results of the social investigation *Christians and Refugees*, realised in August 2016. This survey focused on interpreting some of the topics associated with the so-called refugee crisis in the EU by practicing Christians. It is essentially a theological study, which employs certain elements of social scientific methodology. From the point of view of sociology it is therefore an instance of so-called religious or pastoral sociology.¹ In the first part the theoretical foundation of the research is elaborated. In the second part selected findings of the survey are presented, which are then in the third part theologically interpreted with respect to the theoretical assumptions of the investigation.

1. Theoretical points of departure

The survey *Christians and Refugees* was theoretically inspired by the survey conducted by the Austrian theologian Paul Michael Zulehner in the second half of 2015. Its material inspiration was the Czech public discussion, in which very different views sounded from the various churches in reaction to the refugee crisis. Widely disparate views were also sounded within the individual churches, being frequently opposing and sharply formulated. When speaking of churches, it is necessary to emphasise that here they are understood in the theological sense of the word, i.e., that a church is constituted by its representatives and its 'members'. In the course of the public discussion as well as within the churches it could not be clearly identified whether and how the expressed views are shared among Christians, to what extent members of the churches incline for example to the view that refugees ought to be received, or that refugees ought not to be permitted inside the EU at all. The survey *Christians and Refugees* wanted to focus on this problem.

In this it differs partially from its inspiring source – Paul M. Zulehner's survey. His survey focused on how the citizens of Austria react to the refugee wave that swept over Austria in late summer and autumn 2015. The survey therefore dealt primarily with the issue of indistinct (diffuse) fear and its impact on the solidary or unsolidary attitudes of the respondents. The publication that came out of this survey is not only descriptive in character, but is to a great extent interventional:

¹ Cf. Michal OPATRŇÝ, Teologická reflexe praxe: Ke vztahu praktické teologie a sociologie náboženství, *Studia theologica* 2/2012, pp. 74–98.

“When the (indistinct) fear decreases, (loving) solidarity can increase.” Then the main requirement of the present time is “Get rid of fear” (in German “Entängstigt euch!”, author’s comment).²

If the survey *Christians and Refugees* dealt with the issue of how different attitudes to the refugee crisis are shared by Christians, or in the individual churches, then at least within Catholic theology it was also a theological issue, since interpreting historical events and the general course of the world is not reserved to ordained clergy and theologians, but a task for all Christians.³ Precisely that was the basic intention of the survey – how an event like the refugee crises is interpreted by Christians. In theological discourse, interpreting historical events by Christians is customarily designated as reading the signs of the times. In Catholic theology, the concept of signs of the times is interpreted in several ways. Their common point of departure is Mt 16:1–4, where Jesus Christ designates himself as a sign of the times.⁴ The meaning of his assertion is that he himself is a sign from God, which many do not want to discern and understand his message. In a metaphorical sense, the concept is used in the sense that, through historical events, God communicates his will or expects Christians to react to them in an adequate way. Christians, or human beings in general, can identify this message in a certain way, interpret it and deduce practical consequences from it in the form of particular action, or life practice.⁵ Before the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), Pope John XXIII made use of the term ‘signs of the times’ to refer to historical events that made the dialogue of Christians and non-Christians possible.⁶ But for the Council advisors, who were ideologically close to John XXIII, the ‘signs of the times’ were rather social events and changes, especially global and social in character, which challenged Christians to take a stance on them and react to them.⁷ Later, other interpretations appeared, for example the conception of Christoph Theobald, for whom signs of the times as situations in which non-Christians fail to understand the Christian message. In his view these situations challenge Christians to try to grasp their doctrine again and better so, and then search for more understandable ways of communicating and transmitting it.⁸ According to Hans-Joachim Sander, signs of the times are events that force people to decide whether to behave humanely, or inhumanely. The human reaction is a solution that is in accordance with God’s will, because God identifies with those whose human dignity is endangered.⁹ So the criterion of – at first sight rather vague – humaneness is human dignity. So to act humanely in reaction to a certain event means to protect and uphold human dignity.

That is why Sander’s conception of signs of the times theology was selected as the theoretical point of departure of the survey *Christians and Refugees*. So the aim of the study was not merely to ascertain the Czech Christians’ views of the refugee crisis, but to interpret their answers from

2 Paul Michael ZULEHNER, *Entängstigt euch!: Die Flüchtlinge und das christliche Abendland*, Ostfildern: Patmos, 2016, pp. 6–8.

3 Cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, art. 44 (online), at: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html, accessed 13th January 2017.

4 ‘And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. He answered them, “When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’ And in the morning, ‘It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.” So he left them and departed.’

5 Cf. Michal OPATRŇ, *Sociální práce a teologie: Inspirace a podněty sociální práce pro teologii*, Praha: Vyšehrad, 2013, pp. 139–153.

6 Cf. JOHN XXIII, *Pacem in terris*, Praha: Zvon, 1996, art. 39, 45 and others.

7 Cf. Marie-Dominique CHÉNU, *Volk Gottes in der Welt*, Paderborn: Bonifacius, 1968, p. 20.

8 Cf. Christoph THEOBALD, *Zur Theologie der Zeichen der Zeit: Bedeutung und Kriterien heute*, in: *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil und die Zeichen der Zeit heute*, ed. Peter HÜNERMANN, Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 2006, p. 71.

9 Cf. Hans-Joachim SANDER, *Theologischer Kommentar zur Pastoralkonstitution über die Kirche in der Welt von Heute Gaudium et spes*, in: *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*, vol. 4, ed. Peter HÜNERMANN and Bernd Jochen HILBERATH, Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 2005, p. 726.

the point of view of Sander's conception of the theological category of signs of the times. For the refugee crisis is an eminent historical situation, which challenges each inhabitant of Europe to decide whether to face it with respect to human dignity, protecting and upholding it, or not.

2. Method and mode of execution

The data was collected in 2016. As a result it was probably influenced by the murder of a Catholic priest in France (26th July 2016). But as the results presented later will show, while the murder influenced the interest in the issue, it apparently had no or minimal effect on negative attitudes to refugees.

The survey was conducted by means of a questionnaire, the questions of which were for the most part adopted from other surveys. This was first of all the survey of Paul M. Zulehner;¹⁰ the results of the Czech survey were to enable at least a partial comparison with the results of the survey in Austria. However, Zulehner's survey reacted to the situation at the turn of summer and autumn 2015, especially in Austria, and further in Germany, Hungary and in those countries along the so-called Balkan route – Greece, Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia. So its questions and answer suggestions were for the greater part non-transferable, not only due to the time lapse of almost one year, but also by reason of differences between the Czech and Austrian context.¹¹

That is why the survey *Christians and Refugees* in 2016 used some of the questions that renowned public opinion research agencies presented in the Czech Republic. Due to the limited scope of a journal article, this study will only report on the questions from the survey conducted by the agency CVVM (Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění - Public Opinion Research Centre) in February 2016.¹² This will make it possible to compare the answers of Czech Christians with the majority opinions in Czech society, which appears to be an important moment for a theological interpretation of the results with respect to the theoretical starting points described above. A further section of the questions dealt with the attitudes of Czech Christians to the theses of the foundation Generace 21¹³ and with the interpretation of a key Biblical text dealing with solidarity and practical assistance to the neighbour, viz. the Parable of the Good Samaritan. In the case of the Generace 21 theses it was tested whether and to what extent the survey respondents agree with them. It is again a key moment with respect to the theoretical background of the survey, because the project Generace 21 was a certain practical response of some Christians to the refugee crisis. With the Good Samaritan parable the question was how it is to be interpreted with respect to Moslem refugees. Since it is a key text for Christian charity,¹⁴ the Christians' answers make it possible to see how they read the signs of the times.

The data collection method employed was the 'snowball' method. The questionnaire was created

10 Paul Michael ZULEHNER, *Entängstigt euch!*, pp. 157–165.

11 This study does not reflect on the answers to questions taken over from Zulehner's research. Since it is a fairly complex issue a separate study will be devoted to it.

12 Martin BUCHTÍK and Jarmila PILECKÁ, *Postoj české veřejnosti k přijímání uprchlíků, únor 2016*, press report, Centrum pro výzkum veřejného mínění, published 29th March 2016.

13 © NADAČNÍ FOND GENERACE 21, *Dokumenty: Koho a proč je vhodné přijmout do ČR jako uprchlíky ze Sýrie a Iráku* (online), at: <http://www.gen21.cz/dulezite-dokumenty/>, accessed 31st August 2016.

14 Cf. Michal OPATRŇ, Podobenství o milosrdném Samaritánovi a proprium křesťanské charitativní práce v kontextu tzv. teorie charity, *Studia theologica* 3/2016, pp. 167–184.

in the system Google Forms. The link to the questionnaire was then spread by means of email, the author's Facebook profile and the website of the Faculty of Theology of the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice. The procedure was therefore analogical to the procedure employed in Paul M. Zulehner's survey in 2015 (using Google Forms and the 'snowball' method). Another reason to employ the 'snowball' method was that it was necessary to obtain information from a specific target group. A quota selection based on the data of the ČSÚ (Český statistický úřad - Czech Statistical Office)¹⁵ and allowing for obtaining representative data, would require the use of church structures or extensive financial means for carrying out a poll in the Czech Republic, which of course was not available. The possibility of making use of church structures was rejected in the survey preparation, because it would require the cooperation of the individual churches' representatives. So it seemed more appropriate to bypass the church structures altogether and rely rather on a viral spreading of the questionnaire – even at the cost that the data obtained would not be representative, and only those respondents answering the questionnaire would be those necessarily familiar with using a PC.

In this way 944 answers were obtained. Of these, only the answers of respondents who regard themselves as Christians (93.2%) and who practise their faith were selected. The selected criterion of practising faith was the criterion generally accepted in the Czech sociology of religion discourse, which is Sunday service attendance at least once a month.¹⁶ These two criteria were met in 74.6% of the respondents, who were a sample of practising Christians in the Czech Republic (ČR), of whom 75.8% were Catholic. The survey results were first presented to a control group, which was formed by the members of the Czech Bishops' Conference workgroup for social issues taking part in a seminar of this workgroup in Hejnice (30th September – 2nd October 2016).

The results showed that the majority of the respondents were tertiary educated. This finding differs markedly from the results of the Population and Housing Census (PHC) in 2011. The Census took into account whether those who regard themselves as believers also profess membership in a church. The first row of the following table shows how many of the believers who in the Population and Housing Census of 2011 professed membership in a church were of what education. The second row states how many practising believers in the survey *Christians and Refugees* declared their education.¹⁷

Table 1: Education of PHC 2011 respondents professing membership in a church and of practising believer respondents of the survey *Christians and Refugees* (in %)

	tertiary	secondary	vocational	primary
PHC 2011 (professing membership in a church)	15.2	31.8	31.2	21.2
Christians and Refugees (practising believers)	61	32.4	5.6	1

The table shows that there is agreement within statistical error only in the percentage of sec-

¹⁵ The ČSÚ data is used by the CVVM agency.

¹⁶ Cf. Dana HAMPLOVÁ, *Religiozita dospělých v České republice na počátku 21. století*, in: *Náboženství v menšině: Religiozita a spiritualita v současné české společnosti*, ed. Dušan LUŽNÝ, Zdeněk R., NEŠPOR et al., Praha: Malvern, 2008, p. 29.

¹⁷ In the Czech Republic, the term 'primary' education covers the education of children from 6-15 years of age, with 'secondary' and 'vocational' education coming straight after this [translator's note].

ondary educated respondents. There were four times as many tertiary educated respondents in the *Christians and Refugees* survey and six times fewer vocational school educated respondents. Primary educated respondents were virtually absent.¹⁸ It is therefore possible that the survey results were distorted due to the high number of tertiary educated respondents. However, the press report of CVVM points out that the willingness to accept refugees increases only very little with increasing education.¹⁹ As will be shown later, this was eventually confirmed by the data from the investigation *Christians and Refugees*.

3. Results

As already stated, in what follows the basic results of the investigation *Christians and Refugees* will be presented. Due to the limited scope I will only discuss attitudes to accepting war refugees, the agreement with the theses of the foundation Generace 21 and the interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan with respect to the Moslems.

3.1 Attitudes to accepting refugees in ČR

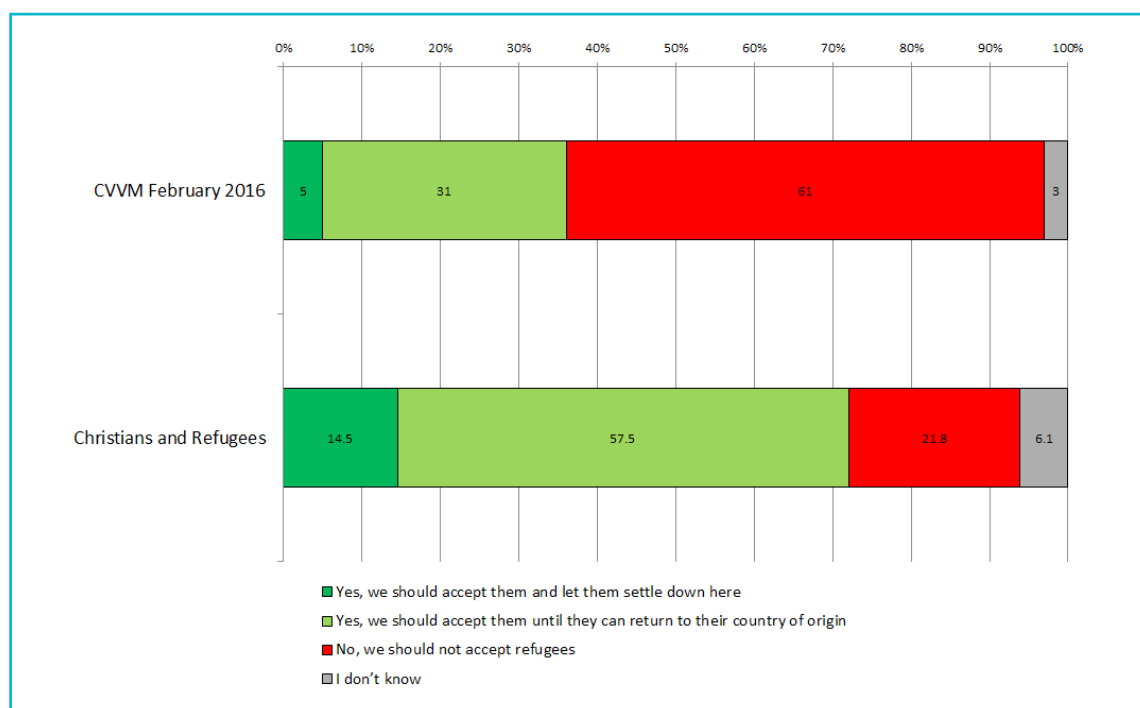
In February 2016 the agency CVVM carried out an investigation dealing with attitudes towards accepting refugees in ČR.²⁰ As part of the investigation several questions were asked, of which three were selected for the investigation *Christians and Refugees*, concerning accepting war refugees, accepting refugees from other EU countries and accepting refugees from the Ukraine.

In March 2016 the results of the CVVM research were echoed by the media, which focused on the finding that the majority of citizens (61%) refuses to accept even war refugees in ČR. The answers to this question in the survey *Christians and Refugees* were in virtually the opposite proportion, as shown by Graph 1.

18 In the investigation *Christians and Refugees* these were underage respondents who had not taken the leaving certificate or vocational examinations yet.

19 Cf. Martin BUCHTÍK and Jarmila PILECKÁ, *Postoj české veřejnosti k přijímání uprchlíků*, p. 2.

20 Cf. *ibid.*

Graph 1: Attitudes to accepting war refugees in all of ČR and among practising Christians²¹

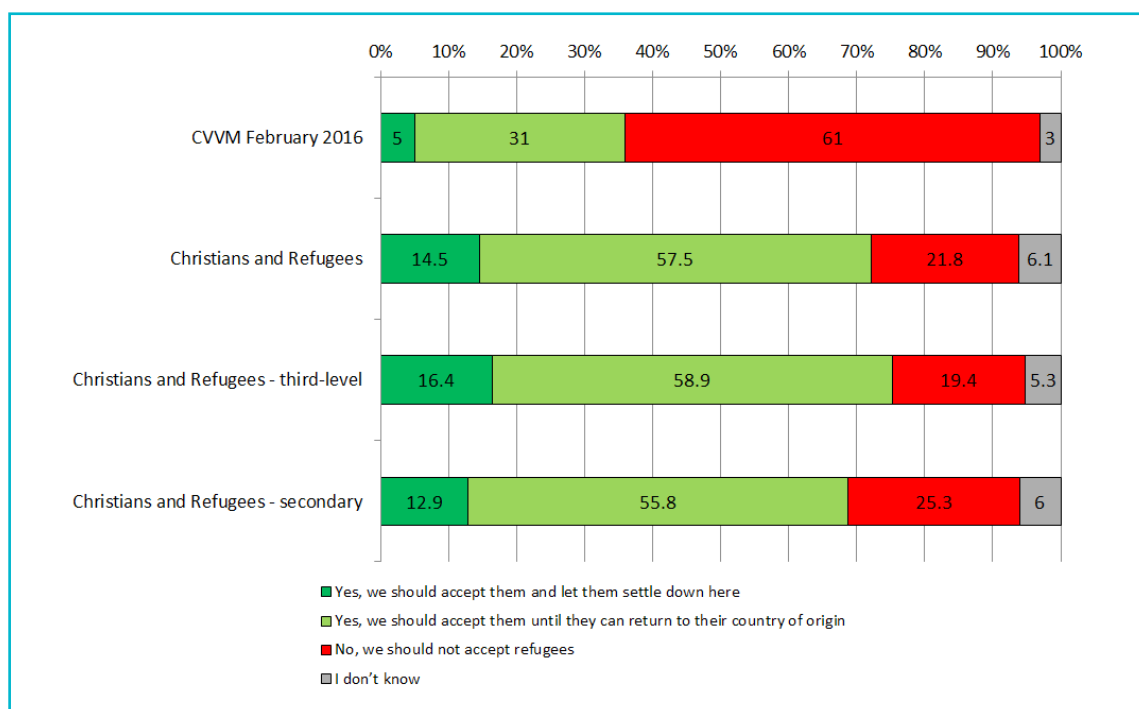
As the graph shows, among the practising Christians in ČR there is apparently a fairly high willingness towards the temporary acceptance of war refugees. It is almost double the value as compared with all of ČR. Although the willingness to a permanent acceptance of war refugees is only just under 15%, it is nonetheless three times higher than in the population as a whole. On the other hand, rejecting the acceptance of war refugees has a three times lower representation among practising Christians than in all of ČR. It is also worth noticing that among Christians there were twice as many undecided or those who did not wish to answer the question unambiguously. As will later be shown, it is a concomitant phenomenon of the entire *Christians and Refugees* investigation. It also appears that the persons who took part in the survey were not only those who focus on this issue and therefore take a clear stance on it (put in a simplified way: to accept vs. not to accept).

So, the answers to this question in the investigation *Christians and Refugees* led to the finding that 72% of Czech practising Christians agree with at least a temporary acceptance of war refugees in ČR. So the view of Christians is, for one part, fundamentally different from the views of the majority of society (61% reject acceptance), but at the same time it stands in contrast with some statements of church representatives, especially of the Catholic Church.

The answers to this question also show that in the survey *Christians and Refugees* the respondents' education had only a minimum effect on the expression of their attitudes. The comparison of the results of the CVVM investigation and the results of the *Christians and Refugees* investigation including answers categorised according to the respondents' education is shown by Graph 2; (for the sake of perspicuity only tertiary and secondary education is shown).

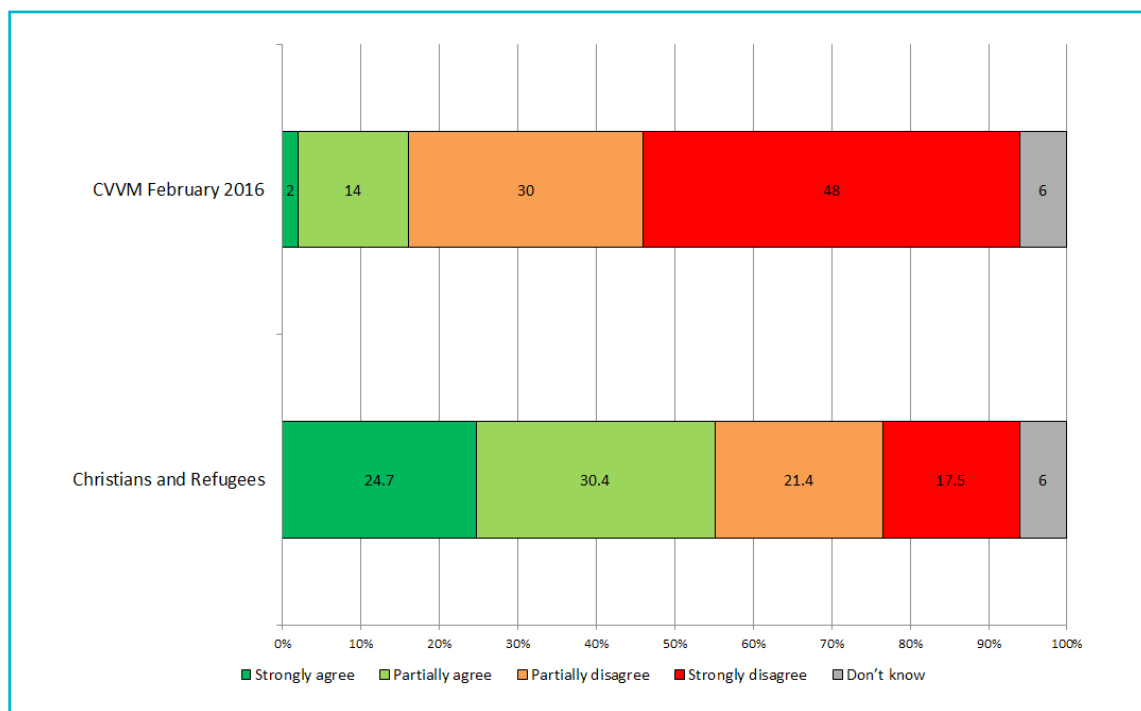
²¹ The question's wording in the *Christians and Refugees* investigation: 'Last year the EU faced an increasing number of refugees as a result of military conflicts. Seeing the instability of Turkey the situation may be repeated. In your opinion, should ČR accept refugees from countries afflicted with military conflicts?'

Graph 2: Attitudes to accepting war refugees in all of ČR, among practising Christians and according to practising Christians' education



In the *Christians and Refugees* investigation only the representation of secondary educated respondents corresponded to the finding of the 2011 census on the education of those inhabitants of ČR who profess membership in a church (see point 1). Secondary educated practising Christians take a very similar stance to the issue of accepting war refugees as most other respondents in the *Christians and Refugees* survey. 68.7% of secondary educated respondents and 72% of all respondents is for at least temporary acceptance. Of the tertiary educated respondents 75.3% are for this. On the other hand, 25% of secondary educated and 19.4% of tertiary educated Christians reject accepting war refugees; 21.8% do so in the overall results; however, in the CVVM investigation it was up to 61% of the inhabitants of ČR. So the answers of secondary educated practising Christians in the survey *Christians and Refugees* do not deviate markedly from the overall results, or from the answers of tertiary educated Christians. It is therefore evident that also in this investigation the respondents' education had only a moderate effect on their attitudes to the refugee issue.

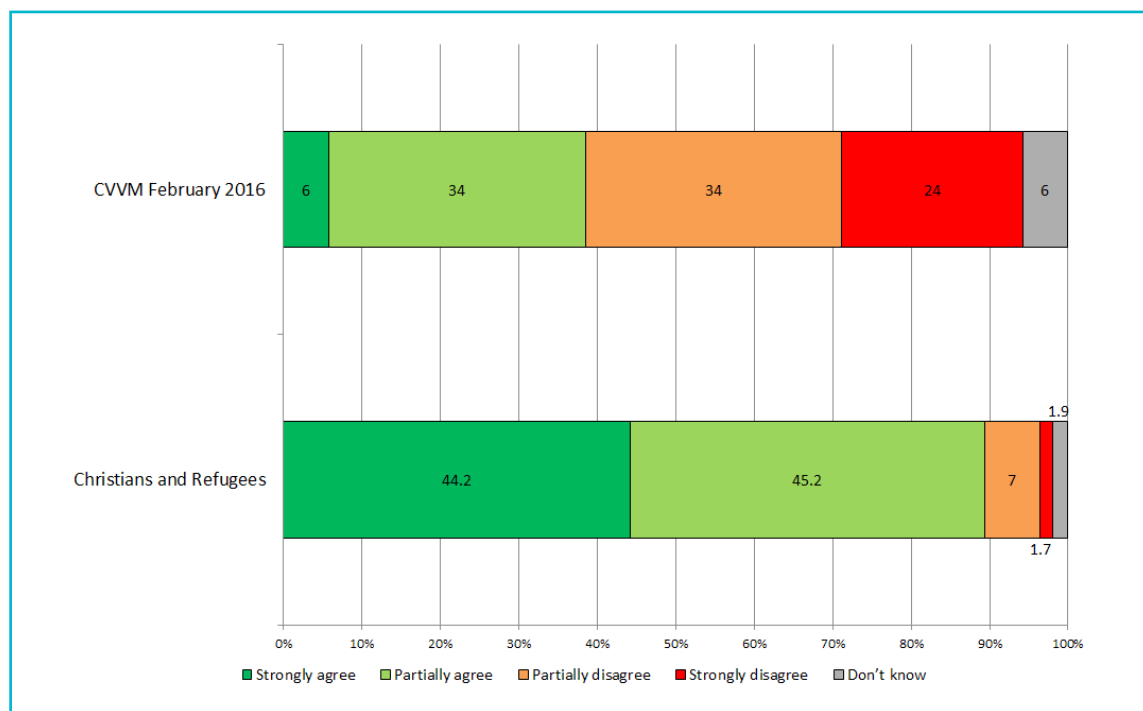
The second question in the *Christians and Refugees* investigation that was taken from the CVVM survey conducted in February 2016 focused on taking refugees from other EU countries. It did not explicitly mention refugee quotas, only indirectly indicating solidarity among the EU states. The answers and their comparison with the answers in the CVVM investigation are shown by Graph 3.

Graph 3: Attitudes to taking refugees from the EU in all of ČR and among practising Christians²²

As can be observed, the answers of practising Christians on this issue are much more differentiated. 55.1% of the respondents agree with accepting refugees from other EU countries, while 38.9% disagree. Compared with the answers in the CVVM survey there is more than three times a greater willingness at least temporarily to take refugees from other EU countries. The partial and strong unwillingness to take refugees from other EU countries among Christians (38.9%) also does not reach the same value as the strong unwillingness among all inhabitants of ČR (48%). So concerning this issue, it is also possible to state that the attitudes of Czech practising Christians differ from the attitudes of the majority of society markedly.

The same holds for the third question concerning accepting refugees in ČR. It was again a question originally from the CVVM survey, focusing on accepting refugees from East Ukraine. Although in the CVVM investigation the greatest willingness to accepting refugees was found in the case of this question, the attitudes of the majority of society and of practising Christians differ here as well (see Graph 4).

²² The wording of the question in the *Christians and Refugees* survey: 'A high number of refugees from the Near East and North Africa have come mostly to South European countries, which are unable to accommodate such numbers of refugees. In your opinion, should the Czech Republic accept some of these refugees coming from the EU?'

Graph 4: Attitudes to accepting war refugees from the Ukraine in all of ČR and among practising Christians²³

Of the whole population, 40% were for accepting war refugees from the Ukraine, which is 4% even more than in the case of accepting further unspecified war refugees (see also Graph 1). 54% were against this. Among practising Christians, 89.4% of the respondents at least agreed with accepting refugees, which is more than double the value in the CVVM investigation. On the other hand, only 7% of the respondents partially disagreed with accepting them and 1.7% strongly disagreed. The number of undecided or evasive answers to this question was also markedly lower among practising Christians. It is therefore necessary to state a very high level of willingness to accept Ukrainian war refugees in ČR among Czech practising Christians.

3.2 Agreement with the theses of the foundation Generace 21

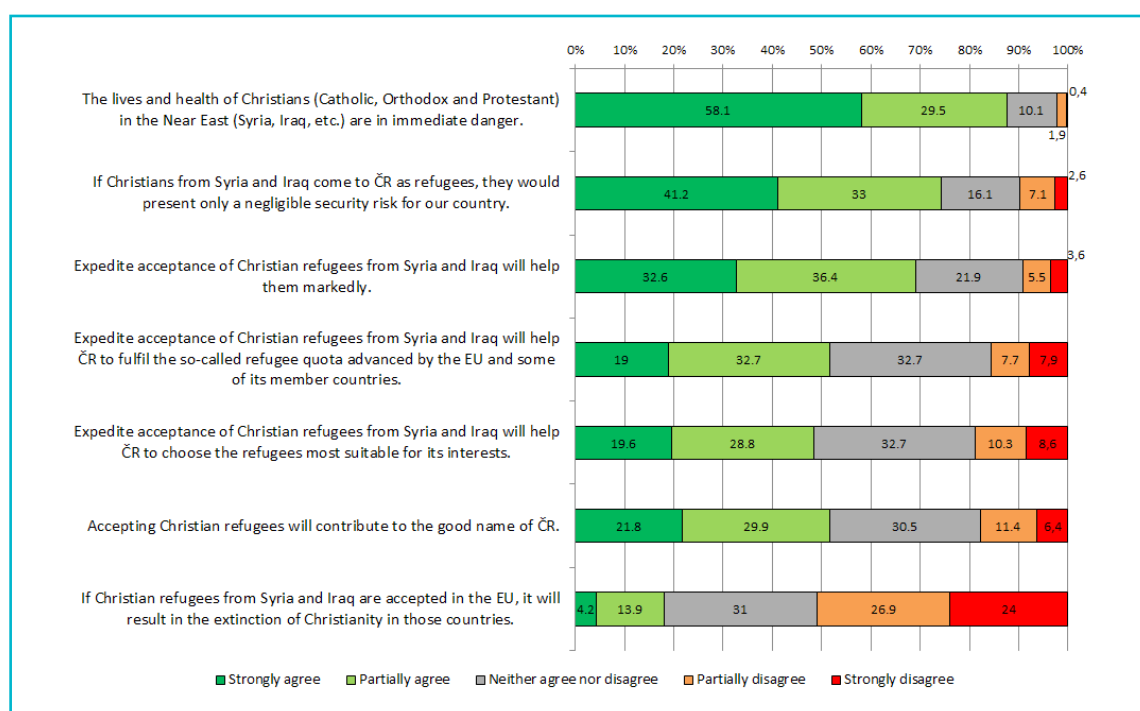
Generace 21 is a foundation that is active in ČR, whose main project was relocating 153 Iraqi Christians to the Czech Republic. At present there are 40 refugees in its care in ČR. The project was begun in reaction to the refugee crisis in the EU and the development of the war with the so-called Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. In 2015 the foundation negotiated a process of resettling Iraqi Christians with ČR representatives, because developments in the war-inflicted area resulted in an endangering of their lives. No financial support was required from the state, or from the EU. The cooperation consisted in a process of the resettlement and security checking of the refugees and the asylum procedure in ČR. In April 2016 the project went through a crisis, because 49 refugees left it and either departed for Germany or returned to Iraq. In reaction to that, ČR terminated administrative support of the project and the project had to be stopped altogether. So the remaining refugees chosen for the project did not leave Iraq at all.²⁴

²³ The wording of the question in the *Christians and Refugees* survey: The conflict in East Ukraine has also brought about a rise in the number of Ukrainian refugees. Should the Czech Republic accept Ukrainians from areas afflicted by military conflict?

²⁴ Cf. © NADAČNÍ FOND GENERACE 21, *Výroční zpráva 2015* (online), at: http://www.gen21.cz/nadacni_fond_generace_21_pribeh/, accessed 31st August 2016.

In communication with the public, the foundation formulated six reasons why it is necessary for Christian refugees from Iraq and Syria to be accepted in ČR and to be accepted without apprehension.²⁵ In the *Christians and Refugees* survey these reasons were presented to respondents in the form of theses for agreement or disagreement. These six theses were supplemented by a seventh which was based on the opposite view, which sometimes appears in public discourse and was repeatedly stated by official representatives of Syrian Christians, namely that accepting Christian refugees from the Near East will result in the gradual extinction of Christianity in the area.²⁶ By asking the respondents of the *Christians and Refugees* investigation whether and to what extent they agree with these theses, it was tested as to what extent they identify or do not identify with reasons for or against accepting Christian refugees, viz. refugees who are not to be suspected of acting destructively in Czech society based on their faith. The theses and answers are shown by Graph 5.

Graph 5: Identification with reasons for and against accepting Christian refugees in ČR



The results show several interesting facts. First of all, the six theses of Generace 21 can be divided in two halves, as the first three attain a markedly higher level of agreement than the others, for which there was agreement around 50%. In the case of the first thesis the agreement is almost 90%. Similarly, disagreement with the first three theses is not higher than 10%, while disagreement with the second half of the theses is between 15% and almost 20%. One can notice that the first three theses concern primarily the refugees themselves – their vulnerability, whether they present a negligible risk for us and whether accepting them in ČR will help them. There was a fairly high agreement with these theses. The other three theses rather concern ČR and the polit-

25 Cf. © NADAČNÍ FOND GENERACE 21, *Dokumenty*.

26 Cf. © ČESKÁ SEKCE Vatikánského rozhlasu, O. Firas Lutfi: *Utíkat či zůstat – nejčastější otázka syrských křesťanů* (online), at: <http://radiovaticana.cz/clanek.php4?id=23855>, accessed 31st August 2016; © ČESKÁ SEKCE Vatikánského rozhlasu, *Arcibiskup z Aleppo: pomozte nám zůstat v Sýrii* (online), at: <http://radiovaticana.cz/clanek.php4?id=23204>, accessed 31st August 2016; © ČESKÁ SEKCE Vatikánského rozhlasu, *Biskup Aleppo: Masový odchod syrských obyvatel je účelový* (online), at: <http://radiovaticana.cz/clanek.php4?id=22425>, accessed 31st August 2016.

ical solution of the refugee crises in the EU. Although agreement prevails over disagreement, the percentage of undecided respondents increased markedly and there was also an increase on the part of disagreement. So, as far as the refugees themselves are concerned, practising Christians have a fairly clear idea of whether it is necessary to help them and why. But where political and social solutions are concerned, scepticism and uncertainty take over. So the idea that the problem associated with refugees can be coped with in ČR socially and within the state, the Merkelian 'Wir schaffen das!' or Obamian 'Yes, we can!', is apparently not something that Czech Christians identify with much.

The answers to the seventh thesis expressing the Syrian Christian representatives' scepticism to accepting Christian refugees in the EU stand in sharp opposition to the first theses of Generace 21. So it is possible to say that although Czech Christians regard Christians in the Near East as endangered (87.6%), or seriously endangered (58.1%), they at the same time don't think that accepting Christian refugees in the EU will result in the extinction of Christianity in these countries. Only 18.1% of Czech practising Christians think that accepting refugees will lead to the extinction of Christianity; 50.9% disagree (24% strongly). This contrast can be interpreted by the experience of diaspora, which Czech Christians undoubtedly have and due to which they know that being endangered and few in number does not mean that Christians will disappear from the region altogether. But it is necessary to point out that in evaluating this thesis, 31% of the respondents were undecided, or chose the middle answer inclining to neither of the crystallised positions.

3.3 Interpretation of the refugee issue with respect to the parable of the Good Samaritan

In his letter on the Christian meaning of human suffering *Salvifici doloris* John Paul II stated that 'the parable of the Samaritan of the Gospel has become *one of the essential elements of moral culture and universally human civilization*'.²⁷ For its immediacy, plasticity and non-encumbrance with the complex religious problems of Judaism or Christianity this pericope from the Gospel according to Luke (Lk 10:25–37)²⁸ is a familiar and favourite text not only in the purely ecclesial milieu. The text is a favourite not only in the catechesis of children, but also as an artistic subject.²⁹ It is therefore not surprising that it has always been regarded as a norm of philanthropy, a source of motivation, or even a set of instructions for it.³⁰ Among other things, the parable deals with the problem issue of the concept of *neighbour*, or *love of neighbour*. In the course of telling the parable

27 JAN PAVEL II., *Salvifici doloris*, Praha: Zvon, 1995, art. 29. Further only SD and section number.

28 The text of the parable according to the English Standard Version: 'And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live." But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, "Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back." Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

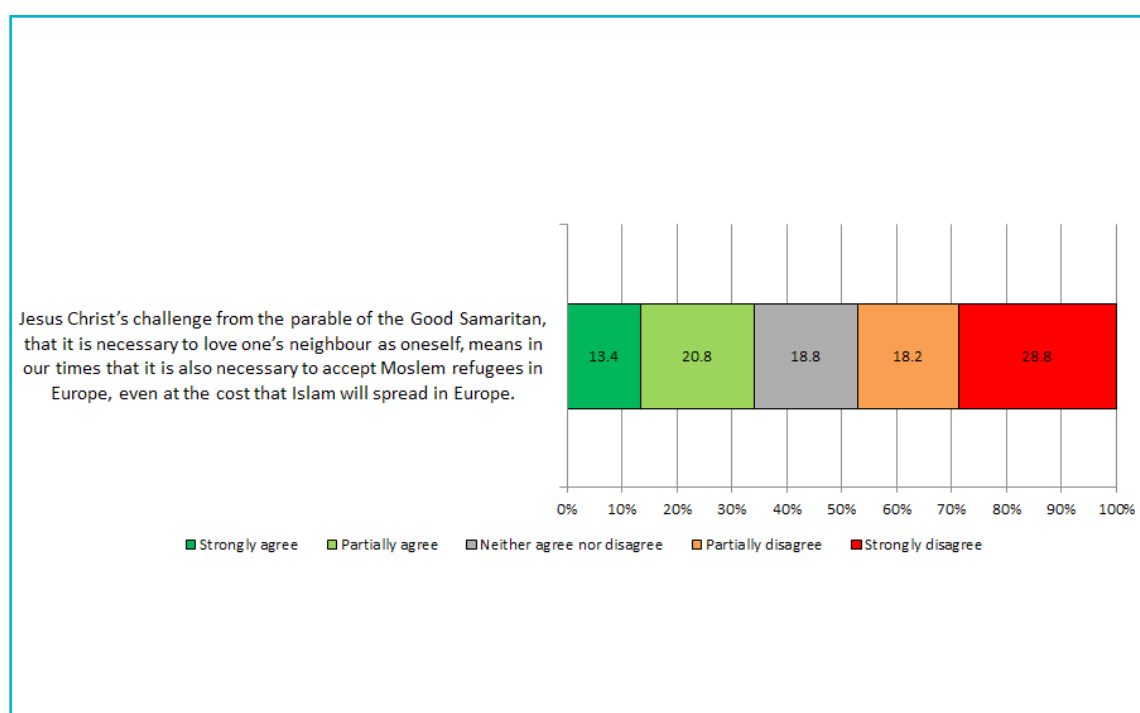
29 Cf. François BOVON, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, III/2, Ostfildern: Patmos, 2008, pp. 95–96; Heinz SCHÜRMANN, *Das Lukasevangelium*, Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, III/2/1, Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 1993, p. 143.

30 Cf. Joseph A. FITZMYER, *The Gospel according to Luke (X-XXIV)*, New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Auckland: Doubleday, 2005, p. 885.

and the dialogue with his opponent, Jesus turns the question ‘who is my neighbour’ into the question of whether one acts as a neighbour. And precisely the fact that an outcast of society behaves correctly wants to show that no one can talk himself out of the commandment of neighbourly love.³¹

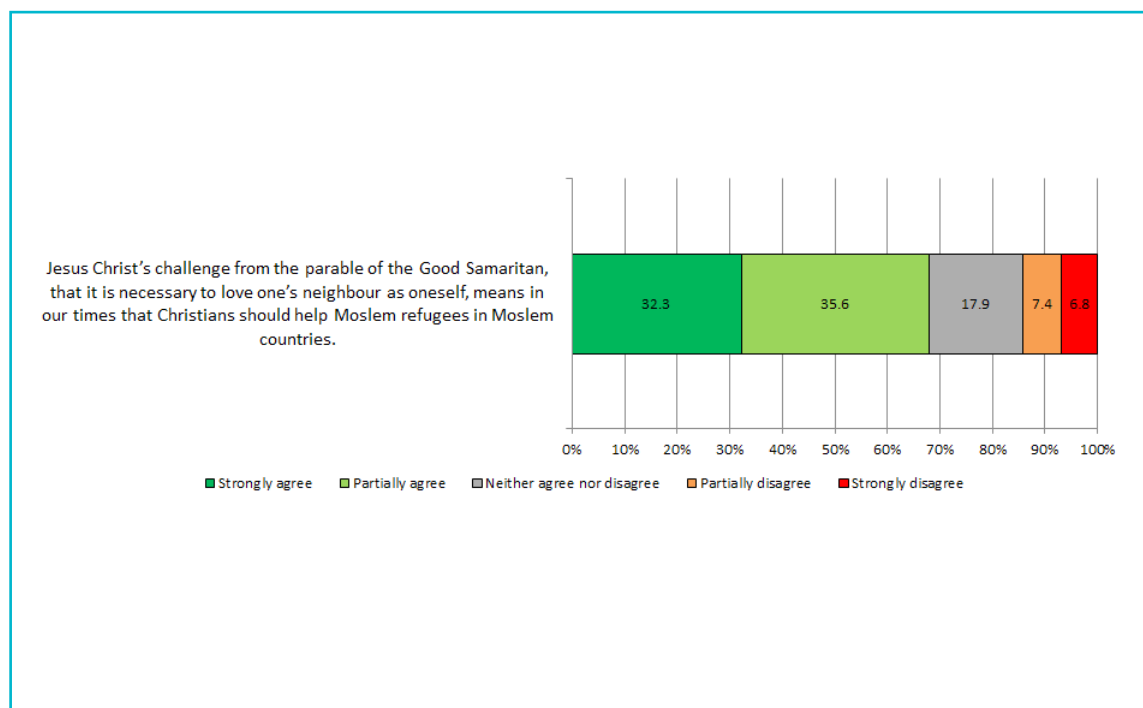
With respect to this specific role which the parable of the Good Samaritan has, and since it directly opens the topic of solidarity, two questions were posed to the respondents of the *Christians and Refugees* survey with the aim of testing what interpretation of the parable the respondents – and therefore practising Christians – will incline to when face to face with the refugee crisis. The questions were explicitly focused on helping Moslem refugees and the spreading of Islam in Europe. The first concerned accepting Moslem refugees and the spreading of Islam in Europe, and the second asked about helping Moslems in Moslem countries. The precise wording of the questions and the answers are shown by Graph 6 and Graph 7.

Graph 6: The parable of the Good Samaritan and accepting Moslem refugees in Europe



In the case of the first question, one third (34.2%) of practising Christians were for accepting Moslem refugees in Europe in confrontation with the Good Samaritan story. Almost a half (47%) were against accepting them. Those who declared the agreeing position are therefore also ready to accept the spreading of Islam in Europe. Disidentification with accepting Moslem refugees must be read in the context of the question as disidentification with the spreading of Islam in Europe. So the respondents who agree with accepting Moslem refugees place the imperative of neighbourly love above the fear of the spreading of Islam, while those who do not want to accept Moslem refugees place the defence against the spreading of Islam in Europe above this imperative. In the latter case the imperative of neighbourly love is therefore not interpreted as absolute.

31 Cf. Heinz SCHÜRMANN, *Das Lukasevangelium*, p. 144.

Graph 7: The parable of the Good Samaritan and helping Moslem refugees in Moslem countries (in %)

The answers in Graph 7 stand in sharp contrast with the answers in Graph 6. Up to 67.9% of the respondents from among practising Christians were for helping Moslem refugees in Moslem countries. Only 14.2% were against. The number of those who were undecided was approximately the same for both questions (ca 17–19%), which, however, is not insignificant. That shows that a large part of the respondents very strongly perceives the refugees' situation and are ready to help them, if the form of extending help does not contain the risk of the spreading of Islam. The imperative of neighbourly love is therefore now interpreted as absolute. In the view of that part of the respondents who would not accept Moslem refugees in Europe, but would nonetheless help Moslem refugees in Moslem countries, the criterion that changes the imperative of neighbourly love from absolute to relative is a threat to themselves. So in their conception the absolute character of the imperative from the parable of the Good Samaritan is contingent on whether the one who helps is threatened by the help he extends or not.

4. Theological interpretation

With respect to the answers to questions concerning accepting refugees in ČR, whether war refugees from the Near East, from other EU countries or war refugees from the Ukraine, it is obvious that in this Christians form a contrasting minority within Czech society. The opinion spectrum on this matter among Christians is practically the reverse than it is in society as a whole. From the point of view of the selected conception of signs of the times theology (see point 1) it is therefore necessary to say that they perceive the refugee crisis as a situation in which it is necessary to decide whether they will behave humanely or inhumanely, i.e., whether they will or will not support and protect human dignity. This interpretation is also supported by the expressed attitudes to the theses of the Generace 21 foundation, or the attitudes to the first three theses that concern refugees directly. On the other hand, the scepticism with respect to social issues and solving the

refugee crisis in the next three theses shows that only half of the respondents trust in them. So there is a certain tension between perceiving the refugees' situation and the notion that it could be solved at the level of the state, or by whole-society involvement.

But this image is to a great extent disrupted by the answers to the first question on the Good Samaritan parable, which associates helping Moslems in Europe with the spreading of Islam in Europe. Here the number of Christians willing to accept Moslem refugees in Europe is reduced markedly; from 72% (see Graph 1) to 34.2% (see Graph 6), i.e., to one half. Almost half of the respondents at least partially disagree with accepting Moslem refugees here, while originally it was just below 22%, i.e., it is approximately double the value. So it is possible to observe a spectrum of willingness to accept refugees from the almost absolute openness for war refugees from the Ukraine (89.4%), through a great openness for war refugees from Syria and Iraq (72%), down to the fairly low openness for Moslem refugees in general (34.2%). In that it is not without interest to note that in the CVVM survey of February 2016 the willingness towards at least the temporary acceptance of war refugees from the Near East in the whole of the ČR population was 36%. So if accepting refugees is associated with the spreading of Islam in Europe for Christians, their view in fact does not differ from the majority view at all.

But on the other hand the answers to the second question concerning the parable of the Good Samaritan³² have shown that Christians find it important to help Moslem refugees in Moslem countries. If we take a closer look at the parable's message, it could appear that Christians in fact quite rationally differentiate between help that is needed and necessary and help that would endanger the helper. Since the parable employs the Greek concept *eleos* – compassion (literally 'he was moved inside') it is possible to say that the Samaritan's compassion consists in the ability to grasp the situation of the one who needs help, stand by his side, sympathise with him and take the *most necessary* steps to alleviate his suffering.³³ From this angle the answers to the second question (Graph 7) can be interpreted as expressing compassion with Moslem refugees.

But this interpretation turns out to be problematic when we take into account the parable's geographical and historical context, which is explicitly expressed in it. For the story takes place on the way from Jerusalem to Jericho, i.e., on the so-called Bloody Path, which not only had a demanding terrain and an unfavourable climate, but was also known for frequent robber assaults.³⁴ So when the parable speaks of an event when someone was robbed on this path, it speaks of something quite common. That means that the Samaritan took great risk when he stopped by the robbed person to help him. The robbers could attack again and the whole situation could have been set up as a trap. That makes it necessary to say that the parable conceives the imperative of neighbourly love quite absolutely. The fact that extending help puts the helper in danger does not relativise the imperative of helping a neighbour. On the other hand the parable shows that the imperative of neighbourly love goes beyond endangering the helper.

When this conclusion is related to the issue of the refugee crisis, it means that because of the imperative of helping the neighbour, Christians ought to be ready to help refugees even if they put themselves in danger, and even in case if it turns out that the refugee crisis has been staged

32 I.e., to help Moslem refugees in Moslem countries.

33 Cf. François BOVON, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, p. 90.

34 Cf. Joachim JEREMIAS, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984, p. 135; François BOVON, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, p. 89.

to enable attacking those who extend help – i.e., to enable smuggling terrorists to the EU, or generally disintegrate the EU. Naturally, it does not follow from this that accepting Moslem refugees into Europe is the best solution for their situation, or what they need most. For the parable first of all says that the Samaritan helped the robbed man at a moment when the others were ignoring him, and helped him in the way that was at that time most needed. Then he handed him over to the innkeeper, who was better equipped to extend help.³⁵ And it seems that precisely this question of what the refugees need is not asked in the common debates, and the answer to it is not searched for, because it is overshadowed by the emotions, fears and populism of the debating Europeans.

5. Conclusion

Despite the interpretation introduced above, it holds that in the answers of practising Christians one can read a declared willingness towards solidarity. So the refugee crisis is interpreted as a challenge as to whether to support and protect human dignity or not. The Christians' position is for the greater part on the side of supporting and protecting the human dignity of the refugees. From the point of view of signs of the times theology it is therefore an interpretation that follows God's will. But it must be read in a differentiated manner. For this willingness apparently erodes when face to face with the notion of the spreading of Islam in Europe. Its further reinforcement is an imaginary line that, according to most Christians, should not be crossed in helping the refugees. But thereby the Christians place themselves in a position in which they relativise the supporting and protecting of human dignity – i.e., they read the signs of the times only as if between the lines, not literally.

It is therefore an expression of a *dread and fear* of Islam, or its strengthening in Europe. Paul M. Zulehner explains that the problem is not so much protecting Europe from Islam, but rather the weakness of its own faith – viz. Christian faith that cannot stand up to fear and overcome it.³⁶ So fear is understood as a certain contrast or even opposite to Christian faith. John Paul II had dealt with this issue already in his inaugural encyclical, so it is not some merely marginal topic or the mere construct of some theologians. The Pope identified the cause of human fear in the power that humans have in their hands, because their power and governance eventually turns against themselves.³⁷ This phenomenon can be observed in connection with wars and also in connection with religions, which are abused for power and controlling others. That is why as early as in the short speech upon being elected to the position of Roman bishop John Paul II emphasised that Christians need not fear: "The certainty must be reinforced that one exists who holds the fates of this perishable world in his hands, who holds the keys of death and the underworld, who is Alpha and Omega. (...) Only he can fully warrant the words "Do not be afraid" (Mt 28:10)."³⁸

It therefore seems that the willingness to accept refugees declared by practising Christians in the survey is not grounded so much in the essentials of the Christian faith, but rather in a sense of

35 Cf. SD 28; Markus LEHNER, Caritas ist Politik, *Theologisch-praktische Quartalschrift* 145/1997, p. 396; Markus LEHNER, Konkretion: Diakonie-Institutionen, in: *Handbuch Praktische Theologie*, vol. 2 (*Durchführungen*), ed. Herbert HASLINGER, Mainz: Grünewald, 2000, pp. 410–411; Petr ŠTICA, Podobenství o milosrdném Samařanovi (Lk 10,25–37) jako inspirativní text pro étos sociální a charitativní práce – Biblické podněty pro praxi pomáhání, *Theologos* 2/2010, pp. 68–73.

36 Cf. Paul Michael ZULEHNER, *Entängstigt euch!*, p. 135.

37 Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptor hominis*, Praha: Zvon, 1996, art. 15.

38 © VÍRA.CZ, „Nebojte se“ je poselství pro každého: Ze slov Jana Pavla II. při jeho uvedení do úřadu v říjnu 1978 (online), at: <http://www.vira.cz/Texty/Clanky/Nebojte-se-poselstvi-pro-kazdeho.html>, accessed 31st August 2016.

duty to declare a sufficiently moral attitude face to face with the challenge of whether to behave humanely or inhumanely. If the classical distinction of key ethical concepts according to Jan Sokol is employed, then it must be said that this attitude is not guided by morality, but by mere custom. A moral action would be one that does not side with the majority when it is committing an evil (Ex 23:2a). On the other hand, an action guided by custom consists in accommodating to the surroundings,³⁹ so in our case apparently a part of the respondents, although they clearly identified the signs of the times, did not declare their own personal answer to them, but attitudes that 'are expected of a Christian'.

The Views and Attitudes of Czech Christians on the Refugee Crisis: Results of a Survey Among Czech Christians

Abstract

The study presents selected elementary results of the social investigation *Christians and Refugees*, which was realised in the Czech Republic in August 2016. This research focused on the interpretation of several issues associated with the so-called refugee crisis in the EU by practising Christians. It is essentially a theological study, which makes use of certain elements of social scientific methodology. In the first part the theoretical foundation of the investigation is elaborated, of which its basic lens is the theology of signs of the times. In the second part, selected findings of the survey are presented, which are then theologically interpreted in the third part, with respect to the theoretical starting points of the study. The study shows that the – at first sight fairly high – openness of practising Christians in the Czech Republic towards refugees must be perceived in a differentiated manner with respect to whether the refugees come from Moslem countries. It thus turns out that despite evident identification of the refugee crisis as a sign of the times Czech Christians respond to this sign in an ambiguous manner.

Keyword: refugees, migration, refugee crisis, diakonia, charity, caritas, solidarity, signs of the times, Generace 21, Good Samaritan, fear, xenophobia, Czech Republic

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39 Cf. Jan SOKOL, *Etika a život: Pokus o praktickou filosofii*, Praha: Vyšehrad, 2010, pp. 66ff.