

Without truth, without trust
and love for what is true,
there is no social con-
science and responsibility
(Pope Benedict XVI., *Caritas in veritate*)

Various views of the EU migration crisis among Czech Catholics

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Introduction

I believe in one holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, so proclaim Catholics all over the world. We all are part of one body, one Church, where Christ is the head. Yet our unity does not necessarily mean that we are all the same. God created each of us as a unique person and each of us is different. This is true also regarding our opinions. We all follow the path of Christ but with different approaches. Yet it is possible to build *unity in diversity*, as Pope Francis says. However, there are also times where there is more diversity than unity. This situation can nowadays be observed among Catholics in the Czech Republic regarding the migration crisis.

An examination of this diversity among Czech Catholics is the topic of this article. Our task is not to present a complex analysis, given space constraints; the goal is rather to provide important insights into the issue, especially for those who are not so familiar with the Czech environment. All arguments mentioned here are based on a content analysis of previous research, or on public polls, interviews and personal experience. The time period for which the sources have been analysed is marked by the outbreak of the crisis, i.e. 2014, until now. Preference is given to the most recent documents, provided they are relevant.

When we analyse all relevant sources mentioned above, we can identify four different sets of opinions of Czech Catholics towards the migration crisis. First of all, thinking of the people, whether they are conservative or liberal plays key role. Sympathies towards conservatism or liberalism determine to large extent how Czech Catholics search for and interpret information. A second cause is rooted in the political and media coverage of the crisis. Based on framing theory, this article shows how Czech media tend to create an almost exclusively negative picture of immigration. A third cause of this division of opinion can be identified in speeches of the Pope and other Church authorities. These speeches are quite often misunderstood or even misused in pro- or anti-immigration rhetoric in public debates. The article concludes that Czech Catholics are at risk of being formed and divided according secular ideas, which may not always be in line with Catholic Social Teaching (CST). Better knowledge of CST could lead to more unity among Czech Catholics.

At the end of this introduction, I would like to define some key terms used in the article. Unless otherwise stated, the topic concerning the migration crisis is meant *only* as it regards *accepting or rejecting migrants in the Czech Republic*. I use the general term (*im*)migrants because, for the purposes of this article, it is not necessary to explicitly mention *refugees*. In this case, by the term *migrants* I mean people who are coming via the southern borders of the EU, i.e. migrants from Ukraine etc. are not included. Unless otherwise stated, by the term *Church authorities* I mean clergymen as individuals, not institutions (e.g. Bishops' Conferences, Dicasteries etc.). Finally, there are disputes over the term *crisis*, pointing out that migration has always been present in Europe. However, the term is widely used in the Czech media, so to make it easier for further reference, I will also use the term *migration crisis*.

Czech society and the migration crisis

Since there are no concrete numbers regarding only Catholics, I will illustrate the mood within society as a whole. This fact might not be so problematic, since the Church is embedded in society, and to some extent reflects its mood.¹

Simply put, Czech society is perceived increasingly xenophobic. This is how the foreign media present it, and what we can also find in some Czech newspapers.² According to long-term polling, Czechs have become even less tolerant than they were before. In 2017, 60 percent of respondents claimed they do not want to have foreigners as their neighbours. In 2008, when the previous round of these questions was made, only 20 percent answered that way. However, stating that Czechs are becoming xenophobic is only partially true. It is truer to say that Czechs are less and less tolerant towards Muslims and immigrants from the South coming to Europe these days. On the other hand, Czech society is quite tolerant towards people coming from countries like Ukraine or Vietnam.³ One of the main reasons is that these people usually integrate well into society. According to Czech respondents, that cannot be said about Muslims. Yet there are very few Muslims in this society, as experts usually agree.⁴ How did this fear (or hatred) emerge, when there is almost no experience with Muslims? The answer can be found in the way the media and public figures cover the issue.

Media coverage and the public opinion

The media is a powerful tool, with undeniable influence over public opinion. As Berry puts it, “[m]edia has the power of helping people make meaning of their situation, consequently having the power of setting agendas and tones.”⁵ The way that media *helps people make meaning* is well described by framing theory. The relevant part of this theory can be explained in plain English in the following way: *t* is the way in which, and the perspective from which, the media present (i.e. frame) events to the public. Consequently, the public can make meaning of events.⁶ Mentioning this the question emerges: How has media influenced the perception of the migration crisis in the eyes of Czech society and Czech Catholics?

There is some research addressing the issue of how media has covered, or covers, the migrant crisis. One study was conducted by Masaryk University, where they analysed the reporting of the two biggest TV stations, ČT and Nova. Česká televize (ČT) is the only public television in the Czech Republic, whereas Nova is one of the most influential commercial stations. Using content analysis of individual reports, this research examined from which perspective the migration crisis was covered. In most cases, reports covered security issues and the

possible impact of migrants on the Czech Republic (up to 40 percent of all reports).⁷ There were no reports about the roots of migration, i.e. about the situation in the countries of origin. Coverage of the life of migrants or humanitarian aid was marginalised (less than 2 percent). In other words, the media has framed migrants not as people who left their countries for various kinds of problems, but as a security threat. Other polls came to similar conclusions.⁸

Despite media framing, not all Czechs (and so Catholics) perceive migrants as a security threat. Some of them even condemn the media coverage as being biased.⁹ What makes these people say that media coverage does not provide the public with a complete picture of the crisis? There are obviously plenty of reasons which, unfortunately, cannot be addressed here due to space constraints. One of the main drivers is the basic thinking of each person. When applied to migration, we can see two different approaches, as mentioned at the beginning of the article. One is to be sympathetic to people in need, hence to welcome them in the destination country. The other does not oppose humanitarian help but welcoming is not perceived as the right form of help. This basic thinking determines how each group will search for and accept information on the issue. Pareto describes such behaviour with the term *derivations*. “Derivations give a certain foundation to value judgments relative to the purposes of the action. [...] By legitimizing both the objectives and the means, by filling in and systematizing the gaps in our knowledge, derivations give an apparent form of truth to the values, beliefs and convictions of social actors. They precede feelings and contribute to strengthening them.”¹⁰ When applied to our case, we can say that people with the conviction of *not welcoming migrants* (i.e. with this foundation to their value judgments) will believe that the *media coverage* (i.e. filling the gaps in their knowledge) gives an apparent *form of truth* (i.e. migrants are a security threat) which justifies their *stance of not welcoming*. Similarly, Pareto’s derivations can also be applied on the people willing to welcome migrants, meaning that they do not accept the media coverage, since it does not provide them with the desired form of truth (i.e. migrants are people in need). At this point, it is trust and not truth what matters.¹¹ In other words, people do not necessarily seek for truth, but they look for arguments which are in line with their stance. Consequently, the question now is: Where do people take their arguments from, and whom do they trust? At this point, I will focus only on Czech Catholics as a part of society.

The approach of the Czech clergy, the perception of lay people and Catholic Social Teaching

In this section, I will concentrate on how Church authorities talk about migration (or the migration crisis), and how do Czech Catholics perceive what they say. Since the article aims to focus on the stance of Czech Catholics, I will not deal with what secular actors say, i.e. politicians, academics etc. Regarding Church authorities, we will look at three main people, those who are the most influential: Pope Francis, Cardinal Duka and the best-known priest, Mgr. Tomáš Halík.¹²

Pope Francis is framed by the media (and hence by a large part of lay Catholics) as supportive of welcoming migrants. According to people’s own stance towards the issue, they either support Pope Francis or not. Such divergent stances towards the Pope are rooted in how the media presents his words. Simply

put, the media only deliver one side of the Pope’s messages. They usually spread those parts of his speeches where the Pope speaks about the necessity of helping and accepting refugees. The parts where the Pope talks about repatriation or makes appeals to migrants to respect the culture of the hosting countries are usually not mentioned. This problem can be illustrated in the case of the document *Towards the Global Compacts on Migrants and Refugees* published by the Holy See in 2018. The media summarized the document by claiming that, according to the Pope, *states should prioritize migrants’ dignity over national security*.¹³ This statement is highly misleading, since the sentence originally says that “The value of each person’s safety [...] should be correctly balanced with national security concerns.”¹⁴ Similarly, the Pope’s Message during the World Day of Migrants and Refugees was also misinterpreted by the media. According to them, the Pope said that people should (some even wrote *must*) welcome, protect and integrate refugees.¹⁵ The sentence that “[t]hese people [i.e. migrants and refugees] must be ensured adequate assistance for repatriation and effective reintegration programmes in their home countries”¹⁶ was not mentioned. Cardinal Duka tries always to promote the whole message of the Popes’ speeches, although without visible success.¹⁷

Cardinal Dominik Duka is one of the most influential Czech clergymen, together with Fr. Tomáš Halík. Each of them has a different stance on accepting refugees. Duka warns against possible cultural problems should we welcome migrants. Yet, he stresses the moral duty to help those in need.¹⁸ Such help should, however, be provided by delivering humanitarian aid to the places of conflict. Although many Catholics are supportive of his thought, there is also a visible group of Catholics who disagree with him and even accuse him of xenophobia.¹⁹ Duka’s approach towards migration was one of the main reasons why some Czech Catholic laymen asked Pope Francis to accept the Cardinal’s request to resign.²⁰

Fr. Halík, a holder of the Templeton award, has a different view on the migration crisis. He has a rather intellectual approach. According to him, well-educated and informed people cannot be afraid of welcoming migrants. Only people who have never encountered Muslims or are not self-confident enough can be afraid of them. He is generally known for his tendency to look down on people who are cautious with regard to accepting changes or new situations. He has also criticised Duka for being too old-fashioned: “Mgr. Duka has two hobbies – politics and history. In both areas, he has some ideological schemes and his high interest in history may prevent him from proper understanding of current affairs.”²¹ Fr. Halík’s supporters are mainly in the (Catholic) academic community, especially among young intellectuals and students.

The existence of various opinions on the migration crisis is not a problem *per se*. Although Card. Duka puts emphasis on different aspects (risk of cultural clashes) than Fr. Halík (informed people cannot fear migrants), they do not attack each other for their different views. However, their supporters among the laity tend to do so. In other words, people associate with one approach (Duka’s or Halík’s) according to their personal preferences. Then, they tend to disrespect *the others* and label them e.g. as “naïve” (in the case of pro-immigrant) or “immature” (in the case of anti-immigrant).²² With such labelling a new problem arises: not only do people not respect each other, but they do not listen to the others. Lack of dialogue eventually leads to misunderstanding among people.

The problem could be solved to some extent if people knew the underlying ideas embodied in Catholic Social Teaching

(CST). Firstly, they would not be exposed so much to media framing, especially regarding Pope Francis' speeches. Secondly, they would realise that CST in general has always embodied both aspects, i.e. welcoming as well as helping in the place of conflict.²³ Already in 1952, Pope Pius XII in his Apostolic Constitution *Exsul Familia* stressed the need to „allow exiles and refugees to return finally to their homes and to allow those in need, whose own lands lack the necessities of life, to emigrate to other countries“.²⁴ In *Pacem in Terris*, John XXIII writes that “[i]t is therefore the duty of State officials to accept such immigrants and—so far as the good of their own community, rightly understood, permits—to further the aims of those who may wish to become members of a new society.”²⁵ Other Popes have also dealt with the issue of migration, emphasizing the moral duty of rich states to help the poorer to prosper, so that people do not have to migrate. On the other hand, each person has the right to move if s/he cannot live her/his life in dignity and self-fulfilment.²⁶

Conclusion

There are various stances among Czech Catholics regarding accepting refugees. One group stresses the moral duty to help people in need. Their main argument is based on the human dignity of each person. However, they do not talk so much about the eventual return to the state of origin. A second group warns against cultural clashes and favours delivering humanitarian aid to the places of conflict. However, they do not mention the possibility of accepting refugees at least for some of the time. From the perspective of CST, both groups are right, but CST can be fully implemented only if these two opinions converge. In other words, Christians have a moral duty to help others to live their lives in dignity and to recognise their right to migrate freely, if they cannot find self-fulfilment in their home country. At the same time, Christians shall strive to create such conditions in a world order so that people could exercise their right *not* to migrate. Although Czech Catholics share common sense in helping people in need, they rather highlight their different approaches on how to provide such help. This not only sidelines unity, but also complicates constructive co-operation towards an effective solution.

NOTE

¹“Kázání O Homosexuálistech? Piřha Mluvil Jako Prorok, Kázání Musí Mít Silu, Říká Kněz”, online, *Aktuálně*, 2018,

<https://video.aktualne.cz/dvtv/dvtv-23-10-2018-jan-balik-libor-stejskal-lubomir-zaoralek/r~cd08db50d6d311e89de10cc47ab5f122/?redirected=1543172126>.

²“Xenophobia In The Czech Republic?”, online, *DW*, 2014,

<https://www.dw.com/en/xenophobia-in-the-czech-republic/av-17590237>, “Why Is The Czech Republic So Hostile To Muslims And Refugees?”, online, *Europenow*, 2017,

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<https://video.aktualne.cz/dvtv/dvtv-6-10-2016-xenofobie-cechu-ruskevlyvy-v-cesku/r~f2f2ef908bdf1e6bc7c0025900fea04/r~3effe6ac8b3d11e69966002590604f2e/?redirected=1542561035>, “Události, Komentáře”. Online. *Česká Televize*, 2018.

<https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ivysilani/1096898594-udalosti-komentare/218411000370924/obsah/646115-rasismus-a-xenofobie-v-cesku>

³“Vztah České Veřejnosti K Národnostním Skupinám Žijícím V ČR – Březen 201 8”, online, *CVVM*, 2018,

https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c2/a4584/f9/ov180409.pdf.

⁴There are no concrete numbers since people do not have to fill this information in statistical poll.

⁵<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/role-media-during-european-migration-crisis-jelena-starcevic>

⁶For deeper elaboration of Framing Theory related to mass media, see e.g.: Gamson, William A., and Andre Modigliani. “Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach.” *American Journal of Sociology* 95, no. 1 (1989): 1-37.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2780405>. , Framing Theory as such is well described by E. Goffman in Goffman, Erving. 1974. *Frame analysis: an essay on the organization of experience*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

⁷Tkaczyk, Michal & Pospěch, Pavel & Macek, Jakub. (2015). *Analýza mediálního pokrytí uprchlické krize* (výzkumná zpráva). 10.13140/RG.2.1.4957.5764, pp. 1.

⁸Tkaczyk, Michal. Between politicization and securitization : coverage of the European migration crisis in Czech online news media. *Communication Today*, Trnava: Univerzita sv. Cyrila a Metoda, 2017, roč. 8, č. 2, s. 90-110. ISSN 1338-130X, Slavičková, Tess, and Peter Zvagulis. 2014. “Monitoring Anti-Minority Rhetoric in the Czech Print Media: A Critical Discourse Analysis.” *Journal of Language & Politics* 13 (1): 152–70. doi:10.1075/jlp.13.1.07sla.

⁹Regarding this issue, ČT had its own study elaborated. The study shown that the law was not breached by biased coverage. This is true but the fact of framing migration crisis as a security threat is also undeniable. See “Způsob Informování O Migrační Krizi Na Programech Čt1 A Čt24”. Online. *RRTV*, 2016.

https://www.rrtv.cz/cz/files/monitoring/2016_monitoring_migracni_krize_CT1_a_CT24.pdf.

¹⁰Busino, Giovanni. “The Signification Of Vilfredo Pareto’S Sociology”. Online. *Droz*, 2009.

<https://journals.openedition.org/ress/730#text>, Pareto originally elaborated this term in his book *The Mind and Society: Pareto, Vilfredo, Arthur Livingston, Andrew Bongiorno, and James Harvey Rogers*. 1935. *The mind and society: <Trattato di sociologia generale>*

¹¹A lecture given by Žiga Turk during *New Horizons Symposium* held in October 22, 2018 in Brussels.

¹²Meaning, that they have the attention of the media and their stances are well-known across the country.

¹³“Papež: Zájmy Uprchlíků Stojí Výš Než Národní Bezpečnost Států”. Online. *Týden*, 2017.

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¹⁴“Towards The Global Compacts On Migrants And On Refugees 2018”. Online. *The Migrants And Refugees Section*, 2018.

<https://migrants-refugees.va/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Legal-size-ENG-2nd-Edition-Towards-the-Global-Compacts-2018-EMAIL.pdf>, pp. 15.

¹⁵“Migranty A Uprchlíky Musíme Vítat, Chránit, Podporovat A Integrovat, Řekl Papež”. Online. *Seznam Zprávy*, 2018.

<https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/migranty-a-uprchliky-musime-vivat-chranit-podporovat-a-integrovat-rekl-papez-41669>,

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<https://www.cirkev.cz/cs/aktuality/170822papez-ke-dni-migrantu-prijimat-chranit-podporovat-a-integrovat>.

¹⁶“Message Of His Holiness Pope Francis For The 104Th World Day Of Migrants And Refugees 2018”. Online. *The Holy See*, 2018.

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20170815_world-migrants-day-2018.html.

¹⁷“Komentář K Poselství Papeže Františka Ke Dni Uprchlíků”. Online. *Dominik Duka*, 2017.

<http://www.dominikduka.cz/vyjadreni/komentar-k-poselstvi-papeze-frantiska-ke-dni-imigrantu/>. ¹⁸“Svatováclavské Kázání 2017”. Online. *Dominik Duka*, 2017.

<http://www.dominikduka.cz/kazaniK/svatovaclavske-kazani-2017/>.

¹⁹“Duka Šíří Nacionalismus A Chová Se Jako Politik, Kritizuje Kardinála Spoluautorka Dopisu Papežovi”. Online. *Česk Rozhlas*, 2018.

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²⁰“Letter”. Online. *Odduka2018*, 2018.

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²¹“Halík: Kardinál Duka Si V 21. Století Hraje Na Baroko”. Online. *Česká Pozice*, 2016.

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²²This can be observed in debates dealing with the issue and on social media as well.

²³Vincent D. Rougeau, *Catholic Social Teaching and Global Migration: Bridging the Paradox of Universal Human Rights and Territorial Self-Determination*, 32 Seattle U. L. Rev. 343 (2008-2009). Available at:

https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/law_faculty_scholarship/695, pp. 359.

²⁴“Exsul Familia Nazarethana”. Online. *Papal Encyclicals Online*.

<http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius12/p12exsul.htm>.

²⁵“Pacem In Terris”. Online. *The Holy See*.

http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html, paragraph 106.

²⁶“Mission For Migrants April 1, 2014 Catholic Social Teaching And Migration”. Online. *United States Conference Of Catholic Bishops*, 2014.

<http://www.usccb.org/about/migration-policy/upload/FINAL-Catholic-Social-Teaching-and-Migration-Backgrounder.pdf> ■