

Is the Czech Republic an atheistic nation?

## **ATHEISM IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC**

Are Czechs Atheists?

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## Atheism in the Czech Republic

### Introduction

The Czech Republic belongs to those countries where Christianity is declining and according to a few studies, it is even labelled the most atheistic country in Europe.<sup>1</sup> Zdenek Nespor, a sociologist, identifies the Czech Republic as an extreme case of European uniqueness.<sup>2</sup> Petr Fiala, a rector of Masaryk University, agrees that the Czech Republic is “a special case” when compared to the European area.<sup>3</sup>

Religion in the Czech Republic is viewed as a spiralling transformation in relation to the effects on the entire society following the fall of Communism in 1989. Decline in religiosity is evident in relation to a certain confession projected in individual behaviour, but also in the sphere of society.<sup>4</sup> This trend is proved by the national censuses of 1991 and 2001 showing an increase of the number of citizens without any religious confession from 39.9% to 58.2% of respondents.<sup>5</sup>

The next significant feature belongs to the category of pluralisation. The Czech Republic is a secular state with religious freedom, allowing the activities of different religious groups. So, a unique form of religiosity becomes all the more evident for the Czech when compared to other European countries. The Czech Republic, with its 33.5% of people belonging to a concrete confession, occupies

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Georg Ziebertz and Ulrich Riegel, *How Teachers in Europe Teach Religion* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2009), p. 45

<sup>2</sup> Z. Nešpor, *Sekularizace politiky a veřejné správy a jejich nebezpečí* (Praha: Sociologický ústav akademie věd ČR, 2006), p. 112

<sup>3</sup> P. Fiala, *Laboratoř Sekularizace. Náboženství a politika v ne-náboženské společnosti: český případ* (Brno: Centrum demokracie a kultury, 2007), p. 12

<sup>4</sup> D. Lužný, ‘Náboženská situace v České republice po roce 1989’, *Revue pro religionistiku* 6 (1998), pp. 213-225

<sup>5</sup> T. Havlíček, ‘Příspěvek k výzkumu religiozní geografie Česka’, in M. Balej and M. Jeřábek (eds.), *Geografický pohled na současné Česko* (Ústí nad Labem: UJEP, 2004), pp. 118-125

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the penultimate place. A similar situation might be recognised in former East Germany.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, a completely different situation is found in neighbouring Poland, where a vast number of people claim to belong to a certain religious confession. Relatively high religiosity is found in another neighbour: Slovakia. Though Hungary has slightly lower numbers than Slovakia, it reports numbers much higher than the Czech Republic.<sup>7</sup>

The Czech Republic holds a unique position among the European states on the European map of religion. What is the cause of such a unique situation? A majority of cases relate the cause of a low religiosity to the period of the Communist regime and its forty years of propaganda and influence.<sup>8</sup> However, this argument can not stand alone it is realized that the churches in neighbouring the countries of Poland and Slovakia faced the same kind of repression and still have a diametrically contrasting level of religiosity in terms of confession and of church attendance. Therefore, it is necessary to identify the origin of Czech's uniqueness by delving deeper in its history, national identity, and in the process of secularization.

In this paper I want to determine the levels and types of Atheism in the Czech Republic. Understanding atheism together with determining its root causes, will help the church to be more effective in the methods it uses to preach the Gospel with discipleship programs and with the sending of missionaries. The first part is devoted to introducing the theme and then describing the history of Christianity in Czech lands. The second part is devoted to Czech Anticlericalism and national identity. The third part compares religiosity between Poland, Slovakia and the

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<sup>6</sup> D. Lužný and J. Navrátilová, 'Religion and Secularization in the Czech Republic', *Czech Sociological Review* 9 (2001), pp. 213-225

<sup>7</sup> Lužný and Navrátilová, 'Religion and Secularization in the Czech Republic', pp. 213-225

<sup>8</sup> Gert Pickem and Olaf Muller, *Church and Religion in Contemporary Europe: Results from Empirical and Comparative Research* (Viesbaden: VS Verlag, 2009), p. 153

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Czech Republic. The fourth part deals with individualization and private religiosity. The fifth part will describe the alternative religiosity and current situation. The sixth part summarizes the importance of a correct understanding of the roots of Atheism in the Czech Republic, together with possible solutions. The final part is devoted to summary conclusions of the most prominent facts. The paper is written from a protestant perspective taking the Catholic view in consideration.

Religion provides people with the means to worship God corporately, often in particular gatherings and with certain rituals.<sup>9</sup> Religion can create, establish, and influence the climate or worldview within a society as a whole. It, therefore, has an influence on social behaviour, with its norms and values, regardless of whether or not the corporate religion is Christianity. Religion, much like Communism, affects the personal values of many people and, therefore, has an enormous impact on the whole society. Current western society is influenced by the cultural, historical, and, therefore, religious roots much more than is evident at the first look.

The current stage of religion in the Czech Republic is mostly influenced by events from its history. All the radical changes it underwent determined the picture of today's religiosity. In studying the current situation and in search for possible future development, it is important to understand the fundamental social-religious changes within Czech society during the last decades and centuries as well as the reasons for these changes. Other important reasons are found in better understanding Czech history, culture, mentality, habits, and traditions. On the other hand, the secularization has been influencing the Czech society the same way as other European countries. Therefore it is not possible to claim that the Czech Republic religiosity is influenced merely by history or social-religious reasons.

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<sup>9</sup> Z. Nešpor and D. Václavík, *Příručka sociologie náboženství* (Praha: Sociologické nakladatelství, 2008), p. 149

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## Religion in Czech history

### Religion in Czech lands until 1620

The earliest sources of Christian religion in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, can be traced from indirect testimonies and preserved artefacts. The religiosity in Czech lands was definitely much stronger in the past compared to the present. People had a tendency to believe and explain all the supernatural acts as God's acts.<sup>10</sup> Religion was a part of the everyday life of common people.

A significant fact in Czech history is related to the acceptance of Christianity and elimination of old Slavic pagan polytheism. There are not many sources preserved, but it is evident that the Slavic tribes worshiped many gods whose actions were attributed to natural phenomena. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, God became a transcendental figure that a man may approach through Jesus Christ. The Christian liturgy was established by an Eastern (Byzantine) and a Western (Latin) mission. The first holders to bring Christianity to Czech lands were Eastern Slavic missionaries, Constantine and Methodius, who came to Great Moravia in 863 as ambassadors of Byzantine Cesar Michal III.<sup>11</sup> They established Slavic liturgy and lettering. Western Christianity swept through the Frankish Empire and established the Latin liturgy. Even though the Slavic liturgy was much more identifiable for the common people of Great Moravia, there was an enormous pressure from the western influences to use Latin. After the fall of Great Moravia in 973, a new Catholic bishopric was established in Prague.<sup>12</sup>

The position of the Catholic Church was growing in strength and power through the increased number of churches, monasteries, and buildings which belonged to the church. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Czech lands were the first to enforce the

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<sup>10</sup> Jiří Novotný, *Process of religiosity in the Czech Republic* (Brno: Masarykova Univerzita, 2011), p. 16

<sup>11</sup> Hugh Agnew, *The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown* (Chicago, Illinois: Hoover Press, 2004), p. 1832

<sup>12</sup> Pavel Filipi, *Malá encyklopedie evangelických církví* (Praha: Libri, 2008), pp. 117-118

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Catholic monopoly and created the first European reformation of middle age, known as *Hussite movement*.<sup>13</sup> The Czech preacher and theologian, John Hus, and his adherents, refused to submit to the Pope. John Hus was burnt as a martyr at the Church Council in Constance in 1415, but his ideas were released to the masses. Furthermore, after his death, 20 years of riots, fights, and battles began.<sup>14</sup> This period is known as *Hussite movement*. During this time, the Pope sent 5 crusades to the Czech lands with the purpose of defeating the Hussite tribes. The Czech nation was called a nation of heretics.<sup>15</sup> As a result of the Catholic violence on the Czech nation, a majority of the people attached to Hus's Reformation ideas. A century later, 90% of Czech inhabitants were non-catholic.

Due to the Reformation, there were many non-catholic churches operating in the Czech lands in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Religious wars caused by conflicts between catholic and non-catholic streams led to radicalization. Despite the appearance to other countries, by 1575, Czech churches were living in religious freedom. However, in everyday life there were still significant conflicts, causing this period to be known as The 30 Years War.<sup>16</sup> This war was started by a Bohemian revolt in 1618 against the Catholic Habsburg Emperor. The revolt was called the Second Prague Defenestration.

At the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the population of the Czech kingdom consisted of 2,000 000 people; only 300,000 people considered themselves to be Catholics. In the Moravian region, there were only 70,000 Catholics of 750,000 inhabitants and in Prague itself there were merely 2,000 Catholics of 40,000 inhabitants (which was 5% of the population in Prague).<sup>17</sup> There were 1,366 churches, but

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<sup>13</sup> Pavel Filipi, *Malá encyklopedie evangelických církví*, pp. 117-118

<sup>14</sup> Jiří Novotný, *Process of religiosity in the Czech Republic* (Brno: Masarykova Univerzita, 2011), p. 16

<sup>15</sup> Helen Nicholson, *The Crusades* (Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), pp. 69-71

<sup>16</sup> Jiří Novotný, *Process of religiosity in the Czech Republic*, p. 16

<sup>17</sup> David Václavík, *Náboženství a moderní česká společnost* (Praha: Grada Publishing, 2010), pp. 53-54

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only 300 of them belonged to the Catholic Church. In the Moravian region, there were only 70 Catholic churches of 636 churches.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, 150 years of a strong re-catholicization, began in 1620, had completely changed the religious map of Czech lands.<sup>19</sup>

## **Religious development in the Czech lands until 1918**

Religious disputes caused the European conflict that started in Prague in the summer of 1618. The battle on White Mountain in November 1620, when the Bohemian forces were defeated by the Habsburgs, changed the entire situation in the Czech lands. This defeat was followed by re-catholicization and Counter-reformation (related to Monarchy Absolutism and the limitation of land freedoms) that radically influenced the development of religion.<sup>20</sup>

This Monarchical-enforced re-catholicization forced all the evangelical Christians either to flee the country or to stay illegally. Furthermore, their properties were confiscated. If the entire group of non-Catholic aristocratic church was not executed or if it did not convert to the Catholicism, it was forced to leave. This was also implemented among the serf class. There were some remote areas where Christians confessed their original protestant faith secretly; however, until the end of 17<sup>th</sup> century, all the inhabitants of Czech lands were officially re-

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<sup>18</sup> Václavík, *Náboženství a moderní česká společnost*, pp. 53-54

<sup>19</sup> After releasing the Tolerant patent there was only 1% of the population, that claimed to be protestant and in 1900 and 1910, there was only 3% of the population. The rest of 97% of the population reported to be Catholic. Václavík, *Náboženství a moderní česká společnost*, pp. 53-54

<sup>20</sup> Filipi, *Malá encyklopedie evangelických církví*, p. 155

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catholicized.<sup>21</sup> Particularly, the return of the intense Jesuit order into Czech lands countersigned the success of re-catholicization.<sup>22</sup>

By 1781, the situation was changing due to the Tolerant Patent released and implemented by Joseph II. He permitted only two non-Catholic confessions (Lutheran/Augsburg and Helvetic/Calvin).<sup>23</sup> Catholicism was encouraged to adapt to ideas stemming from the Enlightenment and void middle age myths, baroque pilgrimage, or useless Catholic monk orders. Therefore, Josef II abolished many churches and monasteries.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, the Catholic Church kept the dominant influence due to its close relation to the ruling dynasty of the Habsburgs. These religious changes coupled with other events, such as the Napoleonic wars and the state bankruptcy in 1811, resulted in an identity crisis which ended the primacy of the Czech's view of religion on the world. As a result of these changes, the secular National revival was birthed<sup>25</sup> and spurred a modern Czech National movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>26</sup> The Concordat agreement rendered the Catholic Church with almost monopolistic impact on the educational system and on the culture, strongly influencing every day life and

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<sup>21</sup> Z. Vojtíšek, *Encyklopedie náboženských směrů a hnutí v České republice.*

*Náboženství, církve, sekty, duchovní společenství* (Praha: Portal, 2004), p. 166

<sup>22</sup> P. Černej and M. Bartlová, *Velké dějiny země Koruny české VI. 1437-1526* (Praha: Paseka, 2007), p. 399

<sup>23</sup> T. Dacik, *Církevně-politický vývoj u nás od konce 80. let do současnosti* (Brno: CERM, 2000), pp. 7-21

<sup>24</sup> J. Novotný, *Process of religiosity in the Czech Republic* (Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2011), p. 18

<sup>25</sup> The Catholic Church remained a state church even after the Tolerant patent was released in 1781. All the taxpayers had to contribute financially. State schools were allowed to teach religion only according to the official Catholic teaching. J. Novotný, *Process of religiosity in the Czech Republic*, p. 18

<sup>26</sup> During the Metternich absolutist era the Catholic Church became one of the pillars of absolutist regime. The principle of throne and altar connection reached its peak, and was criticised by liberal civic Czech parties. The Position of Catholic Church was strengthened in 1855 by signing the Concordat between Austrian Empire and Holy See. P. Marek, *Klerikalismus a jeho interpretace ve volebních zápasech katolických stran před 1.světovou válkou: Teorie a praxe politického katolicismu 1870-2007* (Brno: Centrum pro stadium demokracie a kultury, 2008), p. 8

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political arrangement in the government. The Catholic Church (an equally Absolutist regime) resented this agreement and with apprehension, observed modernist society trends.<sup>27</sup>

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, religion ceased to play a significant role in international politics as well as in inner politics in individual European states. Though there was a rise of Christian political parties, they did not have a significant influence on everyday life. During the 1860s, Czech society was in a process of dynamic development based on civic principles, liberalism, and honour to the constitution.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the Catholic anti-modern endeavour led to the alienation of the Catholic Church from the liberal thinking Czech society.<sup>29</sup> The option to choose religions other than the Roman Catholic confession, together with the industrial revolution and national revival in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, significantly influenced Czech society. The official religious monopoly was declining and the

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<sup>27</sup> The peak of Catholic anti-modernization efforts was the 1st. Vatican council between 1869-1870, which released the dogma of Pope infallibility. After the fall of Bach Absolutism in 1861, a Protestant patent was released, that equalized only two still tolerated non-Catholic denominations. Definitive equality enabled December Constitution from 1867 and abolishment of Concordat in 1970.

D. Václavík, *Náboženství a moderní česká společnost* (Praha: Grada Publishing, 2010), pp. 54-67

P. Marek, *Klerikalismus a jeho interpretace ve volebních zápasech katolických stran před 1.světovou válkou: Teorie a praxe politického katolicismu 1870-2007* (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2008), pp. 79-92

<sup>28</sup> Foundation of Czech national identity in the period of national revival did not become and even could not become Protestantism, because majority of Czechs were Catholics and significant protestant elites of national revival (e.g. Palacký) their religious affiliation did not emphasize. Czech national emancipation did not build on confessional foundation as for example in Serbia or Poland.

P. Marek, *Klerikalismus a jeho interpretace ve volebních zápasech katolických stran před 1.světovou válkou* (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2008), pp. 13-33

<sup>29</sup> National-liberal ideas and Anticatholicism were reactions to the existing society's organization and primary role of Catholic Church in its maintenance, including its antimodernism and ultra conservatism. Václavík, *Náboženství a moderní česká společnost*, p. 66

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plurality of ideas increasing. Nevertheless, in 1910, a majority of the Czech population (96.5%) was reported as belonging to the Catholic Church.<sup>30</sup>

## Changes of Religion in Czechoslovakia until 1948

The fact that the Roman Catholic Church was closely related to the ruling dynasty of the Habsburgs meant a significant weakening of its position as well as its credibility in newly-emerged Czechoslovakia after 1918.<sup>31</sup> Nationally liberal anti-Catholicism and anti-clericalism became a significant part of the political system in Czechoslovakia. It also became a key factor for the interpretation of Czech identity and its desire to be legitimately recognised as a newly formed state. Catholics were not considered as an integral part,<sup>32</sup> which caused an even deeper separation when the new state was established

Another fact that affected the decline in religion was the First World War. The dread that Czech citizens experienced during the war was intensified by the official attitudes of the Catholic Church during the war conflict. The Catholic Church lost more than 1.2 million members between 1910 and 1921.<sup>33</sup> This decline of the Catholic's influence, including the position of the first Czechoslovakian President Thomas Garrigue Masaryk, resulted in the establishment of both the Czechoslovak Hussite Church and The Evangelical

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<sup>30</sup> Václavík, *Náboženství a moderní česká společnost*, p. 66

<sup>31</sup> Secretary of the first republic people's deputy club Vladimír Červenka states: 'Catholic Church was at that time considered as a fragment of broken power of Austrian monarchy and...hated by masses. Motto: Rome must be judged and is judged by masses...'. Michal Pehr, 'Československá strana lidová a její vztah k demokracii v době první československé republiky', in M. Pehr (ed.), *Teorie a praxe politického katolicismu 1870-2007* (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2008), p. 152

<sup>32</sup> Petr Fiala, *Laboratoř sekularizace. Náboženství a politika v ne-náboženské společnosti: český případ* (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2007), p. 33

<sup>33</sup> In 1910, 96.5% of the population confessed the Catholic faith, while in 1921 only 81.97%. A similar decline might also be seen during 1990 till 2000. Václavík, *Náboženství a moderní česká společnost*, pp. 89-92

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Church of Czech Brethren. Both denominations were a continuation ideologically of the reformation of the statehood of the Czech nation. At this time, a considerable percent of the population reported to be without any religious confession. On the basis of statistics in 1921, there was an increase of the number of people without a religious affiliation.<sup>34</sup>

In the period between 1918 and 1938, full religious freedom was legalized in Czechoslovakia. The Catholic Church remained the most populous church. Nevertheless, the other denominations were fortified, mainly the new denominations: Czechoslovak Hussite Church and The Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren. Since newly formed Czechoslovakia consisted also of Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia, the Eastern Orthodox added a significant dynamic. During the National census in 1930, there were 9.84 million citizens who were reported as belonging to a church, 92% of all citizens. The highest increase, in comparison to the census in 1921, was noted from the Czech Hussite Church.<sup>35</sup> The most dominant mentalities were an increasing mistrust towards religious institutions, a controversial understanding of the Catholic Church, and an increasing religious dissimilarity intensified by luke-warmness and apathy.<sup>36</sup> The establishment of Czechoslovakia brought ambiguity into the relationship between religion and politics<sup>37</sup>. Separation between the church and state was not enforced, despite the anti-clerical declaration of the majority of the political representation.

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<sup>34</sup> Religious confession of inhabitants due to the National census in 1921-1991 (Praha: Czech Statistical Office, 1995), p. 302

<sup>35</sup> P. Daněk and V. Štěpánek, *Územní diferenciacie náboženského vyznání obyvatel českých zemích 1930-1991* (Praha: Česká geografická společnost, 2000), pp. 129-145

<sup>36</sup> Novotný, *Process of religiosity in the Czech Republic*, p. 21

<sup>37</sup> Novotný, *Process of religiosity in the Czech Republic*, p. 21

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## Religion in Czechoslovakia until 1992

The religious development in this period was influenced by the Second World War. There was a general shift to the left ideologies after the war. The most influential ideas were associated with the Soviets defeating the Nazis. The Soviet victory gained popularity in eyes of masses. The Nazis were defeated and, therefore, communist ideas had easy access to society. As a result, even more Czechs deflected from religious ideology and became more involved in spreading the ideas of materialism or Marxism.<sup>38</sup>

The religious pluralism and freedom of confession, established in 1918, were gradually replaced after February 1948. Marxist and atheistic ideology was officially established. In 1950, there was only 5.8% of the population without religious confession and 90% (more than 8.3 million of citizens) claimed church affiliation. However, this situation began to change rapidly. Marxist-Lenin atheists considered religion a result of false consciousness, the nature of which was exposed by the Marxist's science worldview.<sup>39</sup> Hand in hand with this ideology, the activity of church was suppressed and, therefore, the number of official believers declined too. A certain revival of church and religious life took place at the end of 1960s, in relation to Prague Spring<sup>40</sup>. A more distinctive attribute was the subsequent pressure, which limited church activities and religious associations in the 1970s and 1980s. Some representatives of churches, who did not emigrate, identified themselves as a part of the dissent. The National Censuses in 1961, 1971 and 1981 did not inquire of their religious loyalties. Religion was considered a private matter<sup>41</sup> and the law banned state organizations from investigating.

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<sup>38</sup> Novotný, *Process of religiosity in the Czech Republic*, p. 21

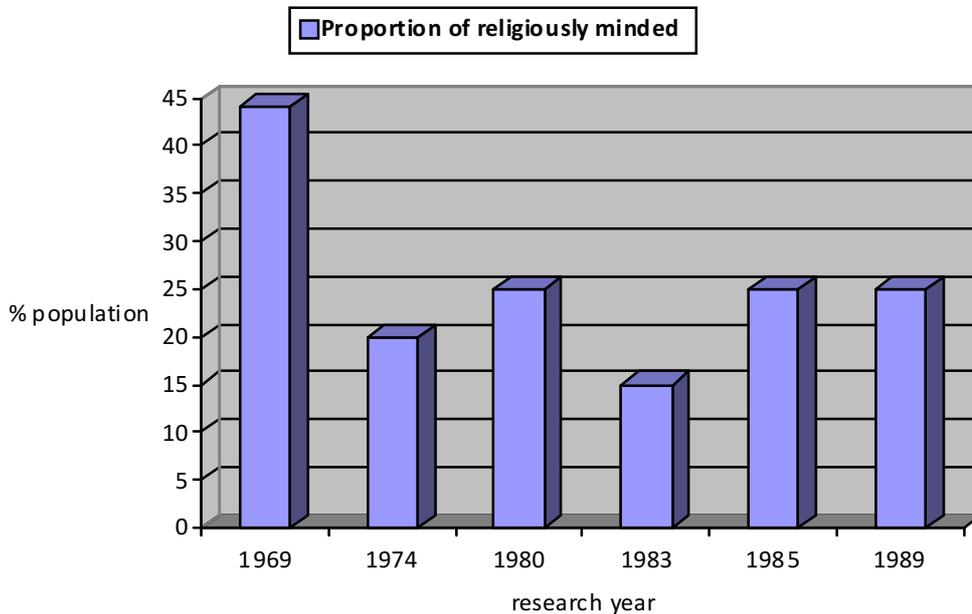
<sup>39</sup> Vladimír Srb, *1000 let obyvatelstva českých zemí* (Praha: Karolinum, 2004), p. 162

<sup>40</sup> Prague Spring was a period of political liberalization during the era of domination by the Soviet Union in 1968.

<sup>41</sup> Ivan O. Štampach, *Přehled religionistiky* (Praha: Portál, 2008), p. 46

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Chart 1. Proportion of religiously minded citizens between 1969 till 1989 <sup>42</sup>



Although Czechoslovakia, unlike other Communist countries, such as Albania and Mongolia, did not declare itself an *atheistic nation*, the rate of religiosity during the Communist regime was very low. Czechoslovakia had one of the lowest rates among the Eastern European countries. John Paul II, who was Polish and became Pope in 1978, did little to change this situation<sup>43</sup>. This was a significant point for Poles, as it provided for Catholicism to again become their most significant social and national unifying aspect. The situation in the Czech was completely opposite<sup>44</sup> and, therefore, it was not influenced so much by the Polish papacy. The Velvet Revolution<sup>45</sup> of 1989 contributed temporarily to the renaissance of religion in Czechoslovakia after 1989. The Communist regime

<sup>42</sup> Václavík, *Náboženství a moderní česká společnost*, p. 121

<sup>43</sup> It is necessary to mention that John Paul II devoted a great deal of support to activities of religious organizations in Communist countries in Eastern and Central Europe.

<sup>44</sup> Novotný, *Process of religiosity in the Czech Republic*, p. 22

<sup>45</sup> Velvet Revolution was a non-violent revolution in November 1989, dominated by students against the government of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. It saw to the collapse of the Communist regime.

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suppressed and limited religion and church activity and the new freedom of religion resulted in an increasing number of official believers. A majority of them reportedly belonged<sup>46</sup> to the most populous church, the Roman Catholic Church, which before November 1989, was not the case.

This had not been the case for a long time as in 1991 the seventh census since Czechoslovakia had been established, was taken and the question of religious confession was once again added, after 40 years of absence. The question was defined as 'participation at religious life of a church or a relation towards it'. All citizens got the right to freely express their religious confession. The final report cited that of 4.5 million citizens (44%) confessed Christianity, 4.1 million claimed to be without confession and 1.7 million did not answer the question.<sup>47</sup> This rebirth of the Christian religion proved to be only a temporal facet of the Czech's history. To conclude the historical overview, it is evident that Catholicism has played a negative role in connection to the society's view on religion during crucial periods of the Czech's history. In the following part, we will examine the role of anticlericalism and national identity in the Czech nation.

## **The historical roots of Czech anti-clericalism**

Anticlericalism is a collective term for a movement that opposes the clergy. Properly understood it describes 'attitudes and behaviour which in medieval and early modern Europe engendered literary, political or physical action against what were perceived unjust privileges constituting the legal, political, economic, sexual, sacred or social power of the clergy.'<sup>48</sup> Some scholars believe that the

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<sup>46</sup> Petr Fiala, *Laboratoř sekularizace. Náboženství a politika v ne-náboženské společnosti: český případ* (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2007), p. 48

<sup>47</sup> *Religious confession of citizens 1921-1991* (Praha: Czech Statistical Office, 1995), pp. 128-129

<sup>48</sup> Peter A. Dykema and Heiko Augustinus Oberman, *Anticlericalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), p. 10

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reason for Czech anticlericalism is related to the Hussite movement in the 15th century<sup>49</sup> and Catholic scholars consider that as a *cliché*,<sup>50</sup> claiming that the Czech has always been an anti-religious or anti-clerical nation. Nevertheless, such a claim oversimplifies a few other reasons playing significant role.

First of all, after the Counter Reformation in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Catholicism became a personal faith of many Czechs.<sup>51</sup> (However, there existed secret groups certain in their anti Catholic attitude). Secondly, due to their existence, the Emperor Joseph II eventually issued the Tolerance Patent, allowing the existence of Protestantism in Bohemia and in Moravia (1781).<sup>52</sup> He also introduced other religious reforms to Catholicism believing that church needed to be modernised, enlightened and all the *magical practices* needed to be condemned in the process of the rationalisation of faith.<sup>53</sup> However, all enlightenment reforms reflected no respect for the will of the people, or for their cognitive abilities. This fact, in conjunction with the religious propaganda, resulted in a massive weakening of religious authority. Thirdly, Professor Hroch claims that this development, along with other external reasons such as the Napoleonic wars, the end of Holy Roman Empire and the bankruptcy of the Habsburg state resulted in an identity crisis, which destroyed the primacy of religious identity that existed in the *ancien régime* and led to national mobilisation and to the constitution of the modern Czech national movement.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, this explanation describes how Czechs became 19<sup>th</sup> century nationalists, but it does

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<sup>49</sup> R. Rémond, *Náboženství a společnost v Evropě* (Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové Noviny, 2003), p. 278

<sup>50</sup> Tomáš Halík, *Společnost v přerodu. Češi ve 20. století* (Praha: Masarykův ústav AV ČR, 2000), pp. 144-158

<sup>51</sup> Zdeněk Nespór, *Religious Processes in Contemporary Czech Society* (Prague: Institute of Sociology, 2004), p. 282

<sup>52</sup> Nespór, *Religious Processes in Contemporary Czech Society*, p. 283

<sup>53</sup> Nespór, *Religious Processes in Contemporary Czech Society*, p. 283

<sup>54</sup> Miroslav Hroch, *Die tschechische national Mobilisierung als Antwort auf die Identitätskrise um 1800* (Köln: Verlag, 2003), pp. 191-205

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not demonstrate much about the loss of national religiosity during those times. The following paragraph provides some reasons.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Czechs considered themselves as an independent and formerly great nation. On the other hand, they realised that this national greatness was not related to the Catholicism but to the Protestant faith of their predecessors.<sup>55</sup> Czech nationalism was built specifically on historical pillars. It legitimised itself by looking back on the historical magnificence of the Czech medieval state and its legal, social and religious institutions. What became evident is that the above mentioned institutions were not Catholic but mainly Hussite.<sup>56</sup>

This self-identification led the shift from religious to national and humanistic identities. It was further strengthened towards the end of 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>57</sup> The national revival led to the deeper devastation of Czech Catholicism and to the Catholic clergy (usually of Austrian origin) being accused of *anti-Czechism*. As a result, the Catholic Church became the usurper in the eyes of the people, although no significant pro-Protestant movement appeared. *Pro-forma Catholicism* with its liberal world-view and no religious participation,<sup>58</sup> became more common. In my opinion, Anticlericalism has been widely spread among the Czech nation due to religious conflicts in Czech history. It is a matter of interpretation how much it was caused by the Catholic Church. Interestingly, when there is a movie, drama, book or a song the religious person is a Catholic priest, who plays a negative character. The church is usually associated with bigoted Catholics without any intellection for human life, while continually defending church politics. In some cases grandparents testify to being beaten by priest for not being obedient.

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<sup>55</sup> Nešpor, *Religious Processes in Contemporary Czech Society*, p. 283

<sup>56</sup> Nešpor, *Religious Processes in Contemporary Czech Society*, p. 283

<sup>57</sup> J. Rak, *Zrod novodobé husitské tradice* (Tábor: Husitské muzeum, 1979), pp. 103–105

<sup>58</sup> Nešpor, *Religious Processes in Contemporary Czech Society*, p. 283

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## **Religious identity replaced by national identity**

Within the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Czech nation has become strongly secularized. All religions were considered too sectarian, restrictive on individuality in terms of teaching, but also in terms of social practices. The Czech nation distanced itself from the Catholic faith as was described in previous chapter.

Thus, neither the union between the Czech Calvinists and Lutherans, which established the Protestant Church of Czech Brethren (1918), nor the founding somewhat later of the Czechoslovak (Hussite) Church drew much attention, unlike the *Los von Rome* movement that had occurred somewhat earlier in Germany and had there led to an inclination towards Protestantism. In its function as a personal symbolic universe, religious identity was replaced by national identity.<sup>59</sup>

Later the religious identity was replaced by class identity, as well as by a scientific world-view. Sociologist, David Martin, supports Nešpor's claim that Catholicism was excluded from a national identity and that as a result Czechs became atheists.<sup>60</sup> Religion ceased to play any role for them, except for its role as a relic of folklore. On the contrary catholic sociologist Tomáš Halík recognises the problem in interpretation of history.<sup>61</sup> According to my view, Martin and Nešpor are correct since the difference in church and national identity is evident as was demonstrated previously in this paper. Additionally, the folklore description fits perfectly as Folklore has been closely related to Catholicism as is evidenced in the majority of their religious celebrations. For example it is possible to be a part of wine festivals, feasts and carnivals where people celebrate, dance, drink alcohol and at the same time pray to the Saints, pray to Mary, bow down and venerate the relics of saints and even kiss religious sculptures and objects. This development was even more emphasised by the European

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<sup>59</sup> Nešpor, *Religious Processes in Contemporary Czech Society*, p. 283

<sup>60</sup> D., Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), pp. 107-108

<sup>61</sup> T. Halík, *Společnost v přerodu*, pp. 144-158

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secularization in the following century. Hereafter, the communist regime only furthered existing anti-religious tendencies. As a result, Czech society became the perfect example of European secularization. The victory of secularism can be described by the words of J. Casanova, 'better in terms of the triumph of the knowledge regime of secularism, than in terms of structural processes of socioeconomic development such as urbanization, education, rationalization, etc.'<sup>62</sup>

After the Velvet Revolution in 1989, Czech society experienced a rebirth of the religiously governed services. The church was allowed to provide medical care, social work, certain access to media and schools, and ministry in prisons and the army. Some of these changes brought discontent and even criticism among the majority of the population. The church was not considered good enough to have a significant social impact, primarily at schools and in the media. However, a majority believe that 'the existence of churches ... is necessary or useful only for the care of old and sick people.'<sup>63</sup> According to my opinion, this statement can not be fully accepted due to the main fact that after the fall of Communism there was an enormous chance for the church to expand and influence the entire society. Clearly, the Czech church was not ready to implement its values and ideas.

Today, the Czech church is allowed to do what nobody else wants to do. Even anti-clerical people grant church its existential rights, though certainly not outside the range of activities indicated here. Of course there is a possibility for expanding the scope of activities tolerated by the society in the future. In such a case, the Christian churches will have a chance to prove their presence and activity in social and cultural spheres. 'Consequently, churches or organisations connected with them will, through their work in such spheres, at least partially de-

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<sup>62</sup> José Casanova, 'Das katholische Polen im nachchristlichen Europa', *Transit Europäische Revue* 25 (2003), pp. 50-55

<sup>63</sup> Dušan Lužný and Jolana Navrátilová, Religion and Secularization in the Czech Republic, *Czech Sociological Review* 9 (2001), p. 95

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secularise society and impose new spiritual outlets, such as the hospice movement of our day.<sup>64</sup> It is not apparent whether these shifts in Czech society would lead to a move boosting Christianity or if they would emphasize some kind of 'amorphous' privatised religiosity. The latter appears to be more probable.

To conclude this part, it is necessary to point out that Czech religious scepticism cannot be directly related to atheism. This would insinuate denying everything else in a person's normal perception. The fact is that intelligent Czechs seem to be far away from such a claim. Still, what results from this engrossment is that 'he is usually unwilling to place himself within a church framework,<sup>65</sup> which is subordinate to some higher authority. Czech Anticlericalism is deeply rooted in its history when the protestant nation was violently changed into a Catholic nation. It is evident that Catholicism for Czechs is strongly related to Germanization, violence and unrighteousness and therefore refuted as a pillar in creating the modern national identity within the 19th century. Furthermore, this fact is the most prominent cause of religious and national identity split. In the following part there will be more space devoted to examining the Czech national identity in comparison to that in Slovakia and Poland.

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<sup>64</sup> Nešpor, *Religious Processes in Contemporary Czech Society*, p. 283

<sup>65</sup> Ladislav Frýbort, *Czechs in the Eyes of an Immigrant, or the Eighty-Eight Views from the Outside* (Prague: Annonce, 2000), p. 16

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## **Comparison of Religiosity between Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic**

This part of the paper compares the religiosity of the Czech Republic to that in Poland and Slovakia. All three countries share a portion of very similar history. In the case of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, their history is nearly identical, since they were a part of Great Moravia, the Austria Hungarian monarchy and a part of Czechoslovakia in 1918 – 1938 and again in 1945 – 1989. Since all three countries share similar history, culture, Slavic background, language and borders, it is predictable that they also share common religiosity. The following lines describe the religiosity of all three countries.

The Czech Republic is very well known for a unique attitude towards religion. Robert Kulminski, from Warsaw University, states that it is possible in Czech to hear: 'I believe in atheism.'<sup>66</sup> But it is not atheism in terms of no belief at all. Faith in God is substituted with faith in other ideas that are mostly grouped with this proclamation. For example, a former social-democratic prime minister Milos Zeman is well known for hugging trees, because he believes in the energy that influences human life.<sup>67</sup>

Therefore, in Czech, the term atheism is more related to a mixture of other philosophies and religions. A more accurate definition might be found in the term New Age. This religious mixture is influenced by secularization. However, despite secularization of the Czech Republic, the values that Czechs confess do not differ from religious countries. The most important values Czechs hold is to live in a content family (98%), have good friends (98%), live a healthy life style (95%), and experience a pleasant life and to enjoy life (80%). The respondents of this survey were given 20 values. The value 'Life according to religious principles'

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<sup>66</sup> Robert Kulminski, *Smierc w Czechach. Wizje smierci w prozie czeskiej 1945-1989* (Varšava: Wydział Polonistyki Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2008), pp. 3-15

<sup>67</sup> Mariusz Szczygiel, *Udelej si raj* (Praha: Dokořán, 2011), p. 84

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was in the 19<sup>th</sup> place.<sup>68</sup> The results of the European Value Study perfectly describe the attitude and priorities of Czechs.

The following paragraphs examine fulfilment or satisfaction in Czech culture, which helps to understand the Czech national spirit. To Czechs, contentment is as necessary as oxygen. Benjamin Kuras, British dramatist of Czech origin, notes in his analysis that an Englishman accepts what sounds good since they are hearers. A German accepts what looks nice and clean since they are observers. Italian is fond of elegancy. On the contrary Czech accepts when he feels good in it.<sup>69</sup> Contentment in Czech culture is sought after more than ideology or honour. Contentment in a Czech's perspective is a good mood, peace, an affable personality, a cosy place, a non conflict relationship.<sup>70</sup> Czechs do not welcome inconveniences. This description accurately describes the entire issue of Czech mentality. The Polish writer and journalist Mariusz Szczygiel describes Czech as a unique country. He states that even socialism in Czech was socialism with a human face. The Revolution that ended socialism in Czech in 1989 was done without killing people – therefore it is called the Velvet Revolution. In Czech there are some pubs named Contentment. Kuras states that 'If you ask Czechs for loyalty, you have to offer contentment first of all.'<sup>71</sup> The Czech publicist Balaban adds, 'Czechs view their own feelings with the utmost of importance.'<sup>72</sup> Contentment plays a prominent role in the life of an average Czech citizen and it is a significant feature of Czech culture. The Czech contentment and the attitude of peace and a search for non conflict relationships might be traced to the national anthem. The British in their national anthem ask God to save the Queen. Hungarians ask forgiveness of their sins. The Dutch ask God not to leave them. Germans aim at unity, freedom and right. Russians praise

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<sup>68</sup> Mariusz Szczygiel, *Udelej si raj*, p. 88

<sup>69</sup> Benjamin Kuras, *Češi na vlásku. Prirucka narodniho prezivani* (Praha: Baronet Publishers, 1999), p. 32

<sup>70</sup> Mariusz Szczygiel, *Udelej si raj*, p. 92

<sup>71</sup> Benjamin Kuras, *Cesi na vlasku. Prirucka narodniho prezivani*, p. 32

<sup>72</sup> Benjamin Kuras, *Cesi na vlasku. Prirucka narodniho prezivani*, p. 32

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their powerful will of their holy power. Ukrainians go to a bloody fight. Portuguese are marching under gunfire of enemies. Italians are ready to die. Irish will defend their country. Lithuanians want to be led by light and truth. Slovaks stop thunders and lightning. Even the dependent countries such as the Faeroe Islands want to rise up their flag and want to face danger.<sup>73</sup> On the contrary Czechs sing in their Anthem that their country is paradise. All nations go, march, conquer and carry flags. In the Czech anthem they are probably lying, since they are singing about paradise. These facts help to understand the Czech mentality and national perspective, which is based on contentment, peaceful relationship and independence.

The next paragraph is focused on a comparison of the numbers of believers in the Czech Republic and in Slovakia. The results of a European value research demonstrate that there is a huge difference in religiosity between the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In Slovakia there are nearly double the number of believers than in the Czech Republic (82% Slovakia, 45% Czech Republic). The number of people who report to be members of a certain confession is slightly lower. However, the percentage remains higher in Slovakia (77% Slovakia, 35.5% Czech Republic).<sup>74</sup> People's attitudes in both countries significantly differ in all areas of the research. Nearly 60% of Czechs never attend church services, while 20% among Slovaks do attend faithfully. These findings correspond with my personal experience while visiting Slovakia. Slovaks naturally believe in the Christian God when there is a discussion on religiosity, while Czechs have no direct association with the Christian God at all. More details and charts proving significantly higher degree of religiosity among Slovaks are available in appendix.

When comparing religion in the Czech Republic and Slovakia it is well known that these countries differ quite a lot. Often it is claimed that Slovakia is more

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<sup>73</sup> Mariusz Szczygiel, *Udelej si raj*, p. 196

<sup>74</sup> Miroslav Pauler, *Srovnání a stav náboženství v České republice a na Slovensku v současnosti* (Brno: Masarykova Univerzita, 2009), pp. 17-18

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religious,<sup>75</sup> that faith is playing a significant role in people's life and that the church keeps some power in its hands. Media often reports that it would be advantageous for a politician to have a good relationship towards church and his expressions must have an evident relation to God, otherwise it would not be possible to gain the people's popularity. However, this argument can not be fully accepted since there is a lack of evidence for such a claim. The goal of this part is to find why there still is a significant difference in people's attitudes in both of these countries towards religion.

According to Kamil Krofta (a historian of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) hardly any nation, except that of the Czech, dedicated such a major part of its history to religion, nor was any other nation so vigorously immersed, so deeply connected and sacrificed so much of national energy to religion.<sup>76</sup> Historian Ort emphasises the importance of accepting Christianity at the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Curiously, Christianity was introduced through messengers sent from the Byzantine Empire who made available the most significant texts, particularly the Bible, translated into an Old Slavonic language which was intelligible to Czechs.<sup>77</sup> In this period full of ideological strives Slovakia was reached in a similar way, while in other European countries common people gained Christian knowledge vicariously from priests who knew Latin and therefore also Bible texts.<sup>78</sup> This religious development in Czech lands was terminated by the defeat on White Mountain in 1620.<sup>79</sup> After 1918, religion helped to unify Czechs and Slovaks in a common state.<sup>80</sup> More detailed information is described in the previous section on history in this paper.

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<sup>75</sup> Miroslav Pauler, *Srovnání a stav náboženství v České republice a na Slovensku v současnosti*, p. 4

<sup>76</sup> Kamil Krofta, *Náboženská otázka v našich dějinách* (Praha: Národní rada československá, 1936), pp. 73-80

<sup>77</sup> Alexandr Ort, *Češi a Evropa* (Praha: Ideal, 2005), p. 5

<sup>78</sup> M. Pauler, *Srovnání a stav náboženství v České republice a na Slovensku*, p. 8

<sup>79</sup> K. Krofta, *Náboženská otázka v našich dějinách*, pp. 73-80

<sup>80</sup> J. Chmelař, *Národní otázka v dějinném vývoji*, pp. 38-58

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The following lines describe the relationship to religion. There was a huge difference in the perception of Catholicism for several reasons. First of all, on the Czech side, Catholicism was related to Germanization from 1620 until the end of Austria-Hungarian Monarchy. Therefore, the problem had a national form. German nobility that seized the ruling power was also cloaked in Catholicism. Through this nobility the re-catholicization against Protestantism was established. The situation in Slovakia was completely different, since tolerance towards non-Catholic religions was guaranteed.<sup>81</sup>

Secondly, the Czechoslovakian Republic was in strong opposition against the Vatican, and in essence, also again Catholicism. Czechs perceived the Vatican negatively due to the strict demands from re-catholicization and its intolerant process until the ruling period of Maria Theresa. Catholicism was, in their minds, associated with Germans. On the other hand, Slovaks did not experience imposed religion as the Czechs did. Furthermore, the Catholic Church was not so tightly related to the Hungarian monarchy. That was a reason why the Catholic Church was much more popular among Slovaks after establishing Czechoslovakia. Many Slovak Catholics lived their Catholicism and their Slovakianism with a less problematic and conflicting identity.

Thirdly, the process of establishing the Czechoslovak republic was multilateral from perspectives pertaining to values as well as perspectives pertaining to culture. The Czech nation established under new democratic conditions was able to continually develop affluent results because of previous cultural changes and development. The Slovak society gained unimaginable benefits and resources for its own cultural national cultural development and self-realization.<sup>82</sup> According to Kamenec Czechs helped to develop Slovakian education

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<sup>81</sup> M. Pauler, *Srovnání a stav náboženství v České republice a na Slovensku*, p. 11

<sup>82</sup> Ivan Kamenec, *Živé hodnoty Masarykova Československa* (Brno: CCB, 2008), p. 117

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massively.<sup>83</sup> The Slovak culture was accepting more assistance than it could offer to others, leading to misunderstanding and conflict among the nations.<sup>84</sup> There was a definite group of the population that preferred the idea of independent Slovakia; until 1938 these separatist streams were in minority.

Fourthly, an important milestone in the development of Czech-Slovak relations is the signing of the Munich Agreement in which the representatives of Germany, Italy, Great Britain and France agreed that Czechoslovakia must cede the Sudetenland to Germany, the eastern part of the Czech part of Cieszyn to Poland and the southern part of Slovakia and Ruthenia to Hungary.<sup>85</sup> Slovaks loss of territory developed into insecurity and they were not guaranteed security and independence in Czechoslovakia any more. Hungary offered Slovakia the possibility to become an autonomous state, with a national independence.<sup>86</sup> In 1938, Slovaks decided to negotiate patronage of Hitler's Germany that supported Slovakia's separatism and established an independent state. They succeeded on the 14<sup>th</sup> of March 1939, when the Slovak state was established. Therefore, it is evident that the history of Czechs and Slovaks was different between 1939 and 1945. In Czech lands, religion and church were on a decline, but in Slovakia, their influence was increasing.<sup>87</sup> Slovakia was ruled by a priest regime which was still in connection with the Vatican

Lastly, after World War II, Czechoslovakia, was restored, but in 1948, when the Communist party overtook the country, there was considerable tension between

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<sup>83</sup> Kamenec states that after 1918 there was a severe absence of Slovak schools, since the Hungarian school system did not serve Slovak interests and could not be accepted by the new state. Therefore, 1,400 Czech pedagogues were sent. Those educators brought individual conviction about unity within the Czechoslovakian nation, history, language and literature.

<sup>84</sup> Ivan Kamenec, *Živé hodnoty Masarykova Československa*, p. 117

<sup>85</sup> Ján Mišovič, *Víra v dějinách zemí Koruny české* (Praha: Sociologické nakladatelství, 2001), p. 123

<sup>86</sup> Juraj Stracelský, *Druhé dělení Česko-Slovenska: Živé hodnoty Masarykova Československa* (Brno: CCB, 2008), p. 187

<sup>87</sup> Miroslav Pauler, *Srovnání a stav náboženství v České republice a na Slovensku*, p. 14

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the Communists and the Vatican. The regime that was established was completely hostile towards Christianity. In this context, it is necessary to highlight that Communists continued in the anti Catholic tendencies introduced into Czech society before the Second World War.<sup>88</sup> Despite the proclaimed unity, differences between the churches in the Czech and Slovak territories existed. Furthermore, they had deep historical roots stemming from the Habsburg Monarchy, the First Republic, wartime and post-war period.<sup>89</sup> These differences were reflected in the 1990s when Czechoslovakia was peacefully dissolved.

To answer the given question at the beginning, it is possible to claim that there is evidence that Czechs and Slovaks hold different points of view towards religion. Religion influenced both nations regarding the perspective on an institutionalised form of church. Because the Austria-Hungarian Empire was associated with using religious factors and Catholicism to establish lands, the Czechs perceived this as a negative approach and preferred to avoid this element as they established their regions. In Slovakia, there existed a more moderate process of re-catholicization and the country was ruled by wider religious freedom. Their different approaches towards dealing with church continued and escalated in the era between two world wars, during the WW2 and the period of the Communist regime.<sup>90</sup>

The difference between the Czech Republic and Slovakia in religiosity and the number of believers is the result of historical development, and if the current trend continues, the number of people who believe in God or who are members of any religious organization will continue to decrease. According to some prominent figures of social science, the role of religion in the world is increasingly important. According to Z. Müller<sup>91</sup>, Europe has to deal with Islam and the

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<sup>88</sup> Balík and Hanuš, *Katolická církev v Československu 1945-1989*, p. 10

<sup>89</sup> M. Pauler, *Srovnání a stav náboženství v České republice a na Slovensku*, p. 15

<sup>90</sup> M. Pauler, *Srovnání a stav náboženství v České republice a na Slovensku*, p.16

<sup>91</sup> Z. Müller, *Svaté války a civilizační tolerance* (Praha: Academia, 2005), pp. 17-25

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political crisis related to it. This might help Czech notice and appreciate their Christian values, culture and background, but it will not change the society.

A current situation refers to a comparison of the 1991 census results, where it was evident that the process of secularization was quite prevalent in the Czech Republic. Christianity and Catholicism in the Slovak Republic are still popular. When we consider the populations of the both Republics and the values and attitudes of people who live in them, we must take into account the difference shown by this census. The Slovak people's opinions will heavily correspond to the direction that Christian religion and practical teachings are leading the society. But in the case of the Czech Republic, the attitude toward this doctrine is much less enthusiastic. This does not imply that people's values are significantly different; it only shows that although Christianity was a factor in the history of both countries, their development due to this religious influence followed two different veins in the last two centuries.

## **Czech individualisation and private religiosity**

### **Private religiosity**

This part is devoted to private religiosity. Czech anticlericalism, which is deeply based on Czech history, has impacted personal faith in the way of privatised religiosity. Furthermore, it has been strengthened by the Western European shift away from religion to spirituality, in which 'the religious (for God) is giving way to the spiritual (for life).'<sup>92</sup> Many Czechs are therefore caught in the middle ground. On the one hand, they do not belong or consider themselves to be a part of any church and therefore, they are not involved in any type of church activity. On the other hand, they do not identify themselves with the ideas of agnostics or

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<sup>92</sup> Paul Heelas, *The Spiritual Revolution: From Religion to Spirituality* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 358

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atheists. Their understanding of religion and spirituality, both theistic and man-centred, is very often perceived in terms of a quest, a personal journey implying an anticipated destination and goal but also a sustained effort extending over a long time.<sup>93</sup> Nespov states that the goal seems to be even less important than the quest itself.

It includes spiritual searching, i.e. shopping in the spiritual supermarket, with the possibility of experiencing great and sudden changes, and strong personal opinions about transcendence (or its non-existence) and its transformations, in the form of the pro-life activities provided by religion.<sup>94</sup> The dispersion and plurality of personal spiritual needs and attitudes could be another source whereby the functioning of the spiritual market has been strengthened. Privatised religion could seem like an ideal solution to Czech anticlericalism, which currently in itself does not agree with the existence of anti-transcendental attitudes. This fact is proved in churches, where observing church orthodoxy does not play a prominent role. Results from the ISSP survey, state that: Faith in Christian teaching in the society is significantly less than the portion of Christian believers. Traditional Christian teaching was practised only by one fifth of Catholics, while only 4% of Catholics can be described as pure Christians.<sup>95</sup>

Private religiosity is also recognised in the difference between the amount of faith in Christian belief and the number of Christian believers. It supports the fact that a vast number of Christians in the Czech Republic are declarative believers without a deeper understanding of Christian teaching. It is not surprising in light of how many Czechs lack Biblical knowledge. Such a result is fruit of the long absence of Biblical teaching within Czech society, which was eliminated within

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<sup>93</sup> Nespov, *Religious Processes in Contemporary Czech Society*, p. 285

<sup>94</sup> Nespov, *Religious Processes in Contemporary Czech Society*, p. 285

<sup>95</sup> Dana Hamplová, *Religion and transcendence in society. An international comparison on the basis of the ISSP empirical survey* (Prague: Sociologický ústav AV ČR, 2000), p. 47

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the nation from 1948 to 1989.<sup>96</sup> This time period were influential on these generations and the trend has not yet changed, due to the fact that the Czech church has not been able to incorporate Christian teaching into modern society.

The next feature of private religiosity carries the idea of *believing without belonging*<sup>97</sup>, which is a consequence of the demonopolization and deinstitutionalization of religious life<sup>98</sup>. It is nothing exceptional in the Western European context; similar surveys provide nearly identical data in other countries.<sup>99</sup> However, there is one category with a special finding, which is the fact that the range of faith described above normally does not have a connection to social grouping, except in the case of small, sectarian religious groups. Thus, a vast number of Czech Catholics and Protestants declare themselves believers and some of them are even active and attend worship, but they mainly choose to think and believe what they want.<sup>100</sup> Such a statement illustrates the current situation and proves the lack of Christian faith in the society and emphasises the results in previous paragraph.

The next feature of privatized religiosity contents mystical and even occult ideas and practises. Even though there is a lack of sophisticated surveys in this field, it is nonetheless clear that a vast number of people (including formal Christians) believe in some kind of mystical or occult powers and subjects: for example 49.7% of the population believe in the power of amulets, 50% believe in horoscopes and 69.6% even believe in predictions made by fortune tellers.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, these kinds of privatized mystical beliefs are more common among

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<sup>96</sup> My personal experience, while teaching at high school, confirms a lack of basic Bible knowledge. Currently, it has been the fourth generation of students without Bible knowledge.

<sup>97</sup> Václavík, *Náboženství a moderní česká společnost*, p. 158

<sup>98</sup> Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 94

<sup>99</sup> Grace Davie, *Europe: The Exception That Proves the Rule?* (Washington: Grand Rapids, 1999), p. 70

<sup>100</sup> Nešpor, *Religious Processes in Contemporary Czech Society*, p. 285

<sup>101</sup> D. Hamplová, *Religion and transcendence in society*, p. 47

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the young, well-educated population, so they seem to form a kind of trend in Czech religiosity, which will become stronger in the future.<sup>102</sup> Privatised piety and spirituality functions as a *solution of Czech anticlericalism*.<sup>103</sup> Once again – the Czech Republic is not unique in comparison to the broader European context, except for the extent of these mystic beliefs, and probably also for the deeper historical roots that influence the situation of faith in the Czech lands.

The final part deals with a personal defence against religious groups. It is perceived by some that people have chosen to privatize their belief as a defence against pressures from official religious groups. In this mindset, no one has to be afraid of being accused of any kind of unacceptable behaviour nor will there be any pressure to strive according to official doctrine. Furthermore it provides a vast area for creating one's own doctrine without any possible punishment. More than that it provides the opportunity for creating one's own rules and laws. A private, subjective approach is significant in determining what is right and acceptable and what is not. In the previous part about Czech, Slovak and Polish national identity there was mentioned that if Czechs are going to accept something, it is crucial that they first feel good about it. Therefore, privatized religion creates the optimum setting for positive feelings, since a person can bend any doctrine or spiritual principle according to his own will.

## **Individualization**

The following part is related to individualization. Individualization is highly related to the process of secularization, characterized by being a product of the society's labour division and reproduced by the market system within modern post-industrial societies. We can say that at the time when the country reaches a certain economic level, there is a significant change in an individual's values, and

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<sup>102</sup> Nešpor, *Religious Processes in Contemporary Czech Society*, p. 285

<sup>103</sup> Nešpor, *Religious Processes in Contemporary Czech Society*, p. 29

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these values are then reproduced by the market system.<sup>104</sup> The core of the revised value scale becomes individual happiness and an emphasis on the development of personal values.

There is a logical assumption that the traditional forms of individualisation secularise the Church. And the main thing is that these churches are pushing to reflect the wishes and needs of individuals in a deeper way. Those which focus more on the interests of individuals in the temporal world, end up emphasising the secular realm of the world.<sup>105</sup> In keeping with this trend, churches are forced to reflect societal changes. This echoes the fact that churches are not institutions which rule the society's development but rather they attempt to adapt situations which emerge in the society, in essence, it is the society's development that rules the churches. Any church not reflecting the societal changes becomes more or less separated, losing its relationship to the rest of the society. Berger supports these ideas claiming that individualisation is in direct contradiction with the functions of classic churches.<sup>106</sup> While churches emphasize what common people have, individualization reproduces consideration of differences and specialities.

The first reason for individualization is that today's common man is no longer interested in the collective classic form of religion. This is the reason why people reject such religions, institutions and companies that adhere to this collective way of life. Postmodernist chaos does not satisfy. Identity in terms of doctrine or cult ceases to be important. The stepping stone to the sacred becomes the fact that the other person is different. These factors are widely spread among the Czech citizens. The fact that Czechs are not interested in any kind of collective sharing

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<sup>104</sup> P. Ester, L. Halman, R. Moor, *The Individualizing Society: Values change in Western Societies* (Tillburg: Tillburg Univerzity Press, 1995), pp. 21-36

<sup>105</sup> Katerina Pletichova, *Individualism and religiosity in Czech and Slovak Society* (Brno: Masaryk Univerzity, 2008), p. 10

<sup>106</sup> P. L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: elements of a sociological theory of religion* (Garden city: Doubleday, 1969), p. 138

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lays a foundation for individualisation. There are at least two reasons for their tendency to refuse collective forms of religion. First of all there is the history of forced re-catholicization of the Czech nation after 1621 when the majority of the nation was Protestant. Furthermore it is related to Germanization within the rule of Habsburg Monarchy. Secondly during Communism, people were forced to put their farms into collective farming<sup>107</sup>. They lost the opportunity to be economically independent and free. There is no doubt that these facts resulted in general scepticism and refusal to be a part of collective or hierarchical forms of religiosity.

Secondly, individualization proposes freedom. The fact that postmodernism rejects formal symbols, icons and theory, allows people of today to arbitrarily mix religious symbols, characters, languages, forms of religious experience and spiritual experiences. This is why they can be known as religious surfers or floating, because they offer a completely arbitrary, unsystematic and unexpected religious experience, called 'snowballing of religious experience'.<sup>108</sup> Individualization delivers freedom in two areas of life. At first it provides space for individual freedom of self-realization. It is achieved in the entire spectrum of human possibilities that might be freely expressed. Secondly, individualization provides faith without any restrictions or correction. There is practically no authority that has an executive role in a person's life. Individualization provides space to excuse any behaviour; this fact plays a significant role for postmodern Czechs since there is no control, no punishment, and no restrictions. Furthermore there is an absolute freedom to make the Christian absolute truths relative according to an individual's desire or need. It is a very powerful combination of theories that are in the contradiction to Christianity.

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<sup>107</sup> During the Communism people were forced to participate in state interests. Nobody was able to have his own farm or run a private business. There used to be even common brigades on Saturdays when people were supposed to work together for society (e.g. cleaning cabbage etc.)

<sup>108</sup> Tomáš Bubik, 'Postmoderna a fundamentalismus', *Dingir* 2 (2003), pp. 39-40

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Thirdly, in postmodernism, various spiritual identities can be bought in the spiritual supermarket.<sup>109</sup> By simply signing a check you can purchase a book, t-shirt and movie. In postmodern spirituality, the body is recognised as a key moment (and the main viewpoint) of religious knowledge. As something that is certain, but not outwardly celebrated in the period of modernity. In modernity an individual was certainly aware of their own body, but this has not yet been publicly celebrated. In postmodern spirituality, the body and sexuality are hailed as potentially constructive forces for spiritual renewal.<sup>110</sup> In contrast Christianity does not consider sexuality or other forms of physical display as constructive or even conducive for spiritual renewal. Again it is evident that individualisation supports a lifestyle and a belief contrary to Christianity, but that is widely accepted among the Czech citizens.

Individualisation seems to be the most suitable form of religion in the era of social networks; this is especially true for the young generation who are well versed and comfortable in this type of atmosphere. These phenomena will be even more developed and spread among the common citizens and therefore it is probable to expect their increase. To conclude this part, it is important to mention that individualisation plays a significant role in the life of common Czech citizens due to the national history and the development of private religiosity.

## **Alternative religion and religiosity stemming from Christianity after the separation of Czechoslovakia in 1993**

This part will be opened by a quote from an interview with the Prague Archbishop and Cardinal Dominik Duka who states: 'It is a big mistake to think that when people lose faith in God they will believe in nothing. They will believe in

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<sup>109</sup> Ch. Partridge, *Encyklopedie nových náboženství* (Praha: Knižní klub, 2006), p. 364

<sup>110</sup> Ch. Partridge, *Encyklopedie nových náboženství*, p. 364

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anything. We became dirty, joyful, mixing paganism, Christianity, new age, esotery and eastern religions.<sup>111</sup>

In the Czech Republic there is a transformation of religion in terms of a shift towards alternative religion and spirituality. This shift has been enhanced in Czech culture due to its history of anticlericalism. Anticlericalism influences a form of religion in the Czech culture and morphs into a form of private religion. A vast number of Czechs have been wavering somewhere between having a religion and the opposite of that expression. They do not consider themselves Christians, but also do not consider themselves agnostics or complete atheists either.<sup>112</sup> As sociologist Halík states the Czech society is not atheistic, but rather religiously neglected.<sup>113</sup>

The following part is devoted in search of more data concerning Czech atheism in relation to spirituality. Spirituality means a way, a process that strives to achieve an outcome. It represents spiritual searching or shopping on a spiritual market. It is strengthened by religious plurality the heterogeneity of personal religious needs, as well as an abundance of ideas, churches and religious organisations.<sup>114</sup> The Czech Republic is very often considered as the most atheistic country in Europe. Nevertheless, according to Jandourek's observation, it is not possible to call Czechs atheists, since there are no public claims in which Czechs are denying the existence of God.

Such a claim would be a very weak argument and I can not imagine the practical side of it. The only possible circumstances for me would be an autocrat leader ruling his country by power and totalitarian means. Otherwise, the claim itself would not have any real background. A great example is China, which has an

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<sup>111</sup> D. Duka, 'Duchovní profesionál', *Hospodářské noviny* 16 (2011), p. 10

<sup>112</sup> Jan Jandourek, *Vzestup a pád moderního ateismu* (Praha: Grada Publishing, 2010), p. 12

<sup>113</sup> T. Halík, *Společnost v přerodu*, pp. 144-158

<sup>114</sup> Jan Jandourek, *Vzestup a pád moderního ateismu*, p. 12

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official position of atheism and at the same time is a country where Christianity is present on a massive scale. Fortunately, there are more features supporting the argument that Czechs are not atheists.

First of all, since 1989 there has been a boom of spiritual shops, magazines, books and music. Spiritual history, astrological and therapeutic programs as well as articles became very popular in book shops and in mass media. The religious market is operating very well in the major cities in the Czech Republic and it is still spreading across the entire nation. Unlike other nations the growing spirituality in the Czech Republic is not related to Christianity and churches. Rather, it is a reaction from commercial companies due to the demand in the market. In Czech society this encompasses the individualistic, materialistic and consumerist part of society with its creed 'I am - what I buy' became the new popular religion.<sup>115</sup> In the Czech setting, this fits perfectly, because the Czech national identity has been influenced by the spiritual market and thus became a perfect reflection of such a statement. Needless to say that spiritual situation in the Czech Republic is not rare from this perspective; several European countries might be applied to this comparison. There are, however, some factors which prove that the Czech Republic does not fit this model.

The most significant argument is comparing the Czech Republic to other European nations. When comparing the intensity and frequency of traditional Christian dogmas represented in the Czech Republic to other nations of Europe (for example questions on God's existence, life after death, hell, heaven, sin) it is obvious that the value of the index 0.288 (oscillating between 0 = absence of faith and 1 = faith in all five Christian dogmas) ranks Czechs among the countries with the weakest Christian orthodoxy.<sup>116</sup> The index of Christian orthodoxy is described in the following chart.

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<sup>115</sup> Nešpor, *Religious Processes in Contemporary Czech Society*, p. 30

<sup>116</sup> Václavík, *Náboženství a moderní česká společnost*, pp. 159-160

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Chart 2. Index of Christian orthodoxy<sup>117</sup>

Orthodoxy	Null	Very weak	Weak	Middle	Strong	Very strong
Czech	37.2%	25.4%	15.6%	8.7%	4.2%	8.9%
East Germany	58.5%	12.6%	5.4%	3.1%	1.2%	7.7%
West Germany	16.4%	15.7%	13.8%	8.9%	5.7%	15.2%
Nederland	27.6%	21.1%	17.4%	11.7%	11.1%	11.2%
Austria	11.8%	22.1%	19.7%	17.2%	15.2%	14.0%
Slovakia	17.3%	13.2%	16.4%	11.2%	7.9%	34.0%
Poland	2.7%	9.0%	13.3%	10.1%	12.3%	52.6%

Czech Christians believe in the existence of sin (78.5%) and God (73.3%), meanwhile faith in life after death (47.4%), heaven (40.6%) and hell (28%) is not a valid belief for a majority of them.<sup>118</sup>

This fact confirms the direct proportional relation between religious orthodoxy (rate of orthodoxy, worship attendance, the proportion of believers etc.) and a strong position of an institutional religion (and its formal manifestations for example attending church services). In international comparison, the Czech Republic can be found in the position with the lowest percentage occurrence in

<sup>117</sup> D. Lužný and J. Navrátilová, *Religion and Secularization in the Czech Republic* (Brno: Masarykova Univerzita, 2011), pp. 1-15

<sup>118</sup> Lužný and Navrátilová, *Religion and Secularization in the Czech Republic*, pp. 1-15

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all the indicators (rate of orthodoxy, service attendance, the proportion of believers, etc.), which confirms the fact that the Czech Republic is one of the most secularised countries in Europe, and perhaps in the entire world.

Chart 3. International comparison of religion indicators<sup>119</sup>

Country	Portion of believers	People with confession	Believers in God	Attending service at least 1x week
Czech	40.4%	33.5%	33.1%	6.8%
East Germany	27.6%	33.9%	30.2%	5.8%
West Germany	58.0%	85.6%	69.0%	15.8%
Nederland	60.7%	44.9%	58.0%	13.9%
Austria	75.0%	87.0%	82.7%	22.7%
Slovakia	76.7%	76.8%	75.9%	40.5%
Poland	91.8%	95.7%	96.2%	58.7%

In other post-communist countries there was no significant decline in the importance placed on religion nor in the practice of it, such as was seen in the case of the Czech Republic. Secularisation in Czech society can be attributed to the period of state – endorsed atheism from 1948-1989.

The next argument is the decline of religiosity due to national censuses. As shown in SLDB data in 1921, 1930 and 1950, there was a consistent number of believers (92.82%, 92.19% and 93.90%, respectively). There was also a relatively low number of people without confession (respectively: 7.16%, 7.8% and 5.84%). The National census SLDB, in 1991 shows the decrease of

<sup>119</sup> Lužný and Navrátilová, *Religion and Secularization in the Czech Republic*, pp. 1-15

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believers to only 43.9% and 39.9% of the respondents are without religious confession. The National census SLDB in 2001 generated an even lower percentage, only 32.2% believers and 59% respondents without confession.<sup>120</sup>

After 1989, when the Communist regime collapsed and was defeated there was a general expectation for a massive growth of Christianity. The achieved freedom was supposed to be a guaranty for further development of Christianity, however, the years following did not prove this expectation. Halík describes how the Catholic Church was decimated after the period of Communism<sup>121</sup> and unable to profit from its popularity in the early 1990s and consequently lost the position in society it once had.<sup>122</sup> Even today there is an argument between Catholics and Protestants concerning the unaddressed *historical sins* of the Catholic church, including the collaboration of some priests with the communist regime.<sup>123</sup> In my opinion it is a matter of interpretation that must avoid generalization. In short, the relatively high number of *believers* in the 1990 census was both the result of a popular *mistake* and a result of their ignorance about what Christianity (and especially Catholicism – as for many synonymous with Christianity) really means. The National census in 2011 indicated the largest decline of the number of believers. Within the last 20 years, the number of believers declined from 4,523,707 to 2,175,087. Furthermore 1,467,438 respondents associated themselves with religious confession and 707,649 respondents considered themselves believers, but did not have any church affiliation. This fact supports the argument that Czechs are leaving traditional churches since it was the three most heavily populated denominations (The Catholic Church, The Czechoslovak Hussite Church, and The Protestant Church of Czech Brethren) that lost two thirds of their adherents within the last 20 years.

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<sup>120</sup> Lužný and Navrátilová, *Religion and Secularization in the Czech Republic*, pp. 1-15

<sup>121</sup> Halík, *Společnost v přerodu*, pp. 144-158

<sup>122</sup> Ewa Morawska, *The Polish Roman Catholic Church Unbound: Change of Face or Change of Context* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), pp. 47-75

<sup>123</sup> Andrzej Grajewski, *Judas' Complex* (Prague: Prostor, 2002), pp. 33-89

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Chart 4. The numbers of believers in the three largest denominations in the Czech Republic<sup>124</sup>

Denomination/year	1991	2001	2011
Roman Catholic Church	4 021 385	2 740 780	1 083 899
The Protestant Church of Czech Brethren	203 996	117 212	51 936
The Czechoslovak Hussite Church	178 036	99 103	39 276

On the contrary, Nešpor argues that the attendance of church services is rather stable.<sup>125</sup> He suggests that believers leaving churches are declarative believers, better explained as those who belong to a church as a result of family, national or social reasons and who do not practically live with churches. The declarative believers in western European countries usually remain in the statistics since they consider church to keep traditions, unite society, provide moral orientation and exert influence on social, educational and cultural areas.<sup>126</sup> In my opinion, this statement is too broad and oversimplifies the issue of declarative believers. Firstly, it is not possible to know all the proper reasons why people in western European countries remain in churches. Secondly, the entire issue of religiosity in European countries differs significantly, therefore such a claim can not be fully accepted.

The following chart describes the decline of the number of believers in the Czech Republic and also the increase of believers who, formally had no institutional affiliation which achieved difference nearly half million of respondents in 2011.

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<sup>124</sup> Zdeněk Nešpor, *Jaká víra? Současná česká religiozita/spiritualita v pohledu kvalitativní sociologie náboženství* (Praha: Sociologický ústav Akademie věd České Republiky, 2004), pp. 21-37

<sup>125</sup> Zdeněk Nešpor, *Příliš slabí ve víře* (Praha: Kalich 2010), p. 106

<sup>126</sup> Grace Davie, *Vyjimečný případ Evropa: podoby víry v dnešním světě* (Praha: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2009), pp. 65-83

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There was about half of the number of believers not affiliated to a religious organization as there were believers who were affiliated to a certain church. This is probably the most astonishing fact, since it is one third of the amount of people who claim to be believers. This increase of believers out of institutions correlates with the decline of church members. The national census does not precisely identify this group of believers. Definitely it is not possible to consider them Christians, but rather a mixture of religious groups. Nevertheless, an increase of believers who do not belong to church indicates a certain interest in religion. Therefore it is a matter of further research to examine why more than 1,800 000 respondents did not consider themselves believers any more. Suffice it to say that a certain number might be explained by the death of some respondents, or perhaps by a certain enthusiasm after the fall of Communism or by declarative believers. Yet, there are many who have different reasons. Either way it is a challenge for churches to create such a local church that is inspiring for its members, encouraging spiritual life and leading to deeper identification with the church as a whole.

Chart 5. Numbers of believers in 1991, 2001, 2011<sup>127</sup>

	1991	2001	2011
Believers – in total	4 523 707	3 288 088	2 175 087
Believers – with affiliation to a certain church and religious organizations	4 502 622	3 066 287	1 467 438
Believers – others not precisely determined churches and religious organizations	21 085	221 801	-
Believers – without affiliation to certain church or religious organizations	-	-	707 649

<sup>127</sup> Zdeněk Vojtíšek, 'Roste hlavně počet věřících mimo instituce', *Praktická víra* (2012), pp. 1-4  
[http://www.christnet.cz/clanky/4764/roste\\_hlavne\\_pocet\\_vericich\\_mimo\\_instituce.url](http://www.christnet.cz/clanky/4764/roste_hlavne_pocet_vericich_mimo_instituce.url)  
 [16/1/2012]

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To evaluate the presented facts it is evident that Czech religiosity is increasing in terms of spirituality mainly in areas outside of the church. Secondly, the comparison to other European countries proved one of the lowest religiosity in Czech. Thirdly, the same decline was found in censuses in 1991, 2001 and 2011. Despite these arguments it would not be right to claim that the Czechs are atheists. The dispassionate approach to traditional churches and Christianity doesn't mean that Czechs refuse the existence of the supernatural as a whole.<sup>128</sup> Rather the low religiosity is caused in undergoing intensive modernisation and industrialisation already in the course of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Other countries in central and Eastern Europe experienced a similar process, but in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and some countries even after 1945. This fact offers an explanation as to why the religious reality in the Czech Republic is not similar to countries of the former Eastern block but rather it is similar to the situation in the Nederland, France or Scandinavia. At the same time the cause of this fact refutes the partially ingrained, but mistaken belief that the reason for the high degree of secularisation and atheism in the Czech society was the previous communist regime.

### **Alternative religiosity**

Even though it is evident that secularisation in Europe is increasing it is not correct to consider that outcome is solely atheism, at least in case of the Czech Republic. The following part is devoted to examining religions alternative to those found in the church. The belief in the supernatural among most Czechs is relatively high overall. Concrete examples might be faith in horoscopes, amulets, fortune-telling, incarnation, interest in Eastern medicine (acupuncture, acupressure) or mental and religious orientation and philosophy coming from the

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<sup>128</sup> D. Hamplová, *Religion and transcendence in society. An international comparison on the basis of the ISSP empirical survey* (Prague: Sociologický ústav AV ČR, 2000), pp. 43-48

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East.<sup>129</sup> Mostly it is about religious or quasi-religious conceptions, ideas or activities, which are standing out of the official teaching of church. Therefore this field is known as alternative religion.

Novotný in his thesis about the development of religion claims that alternative religiosity is not a fresh phenomenon. Current movements of this type continue from the rich historical traditions of alternative religiosity (from Gnosticism, magic, alchemy, hermetism, Neoplatonism, witchcraft, Satanism, Kabbalah to occultism) in Europe.<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, sociologist Thomas Luckmann, explains that religiosity is present in every society and a lower interest in church does not imply a lower interest in religiosity, but it is only traditional religiosity being replaced by alternative forms.<sup>131</sup> Therefore it is very important to take this fact into consideration when evaluating the entire issue. Luckmann further considers religiosity as a natural result of a functioning specialisation of a modern society, where every individual must play a few different social roles and there are different rules for every single role. A new source of uniting meaning and sense of life is realised in a private life sphere. This sphere is not under control of institutions, but on the contrary it is open to subjective preferences. Everybody can choose his own satisfactory private transcendent system.<sup>132</sup> The given argument proves that there are some people in every country who have the tendency to be religious, but without any behavioural difference. In my opinion this also proves that being religious is completely different then being a new creature, as it is described in Bible.

The second feature proving the presence of an alternative religiosity is the conclusions of a body of recent research. The majority of religious researches that were carried out in the Czech Republic were focused on the institutional part

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<sup>129</sup> Jiří Novotný, *Vývoj religiosity*, p. 56

<sup>130</sup> Jiří Novotný, *Vývoj religiosity*, p. 56

<sup>131</sup> T. Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), p. 90

<sup>132</sup> Jiří Novotný, *Vývoj religiosity*, p. 57

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(affiliation to a church denomination, services attendance, etc.). Investigating the religious phenomenon in Czech society on a vast span was carried out in 2006 as a *'Detraditionalisation and individualisation of religion in the Czech Republic'* and in 2007 as a *'Religiosity in reformed countries of Eastern and Central Europe'*.<sup>133</sup> Their results, completed with information from related researches as an International Social Survey Program (1992-2005) or European Value Survey (1999) provide a detailed picture of alternative forms of religion in the Czech Republic. Results from these researches show that although Czechs are not interested in a traditional church religiosity, there is the widespread belief in the supernatural and magic phenomena to a considerable extent. The most surprising is the intensity of the results. These surveys prove that Czechs more readily believe in fortune tellers abilities, in the existence of the supernatural powers, in signs of the zodiac and horoscopes. In 2006 more than a half of the respondents from the research agreed with a claim that fortune tellers can foresee the future (54.7%), that the supernatural power exists (51.7%), and 47.6% believed that astrological horoscopes might influence the course of life.<sup>134</sup> The alternative religiosity is very popular among younger respondents, but also to those who, according to their own assertion only occasionally attend church services.<sup>135</sup> In conclusion, alternative religiosity definitely has been present in the Czech society. Therefore Czechs should not be called atheists, but rather they are more Church non-attendees.<sup>136</sup>

The third feature dealing with religiosity is the section describing new forms. One perspective observes religion as an answer to certain deeply rooted human

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<sup>133</sup> Hamplová, *'Čemu Češi věří: dimenze soudobé české religiozity'*, *Sociologický časopis* 4 (2008), pp. 709-711

<sup>134</sup> D. Hamplová, *'Čemu Češi věří: dimenze soudobé české religiozity'*, pp. 709-711

<sup>135</sup> D. Hamplová, *'Čemu Češi věří: dimenze soudobé české religiozity'*, pp. 709-711

<sup>136</sup> D. Hamplová, *Religiozita české mládeže na základě výběrového šetření* (Praha: Filozofická Fakulta UK, 2011), p. 7-29

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needs.<sup>137</sup> Therefore it can be hardly compensative. Expression of this need is a religious upsurge, thus an establishment of new religious movements and new forms of religiosity that are recognised, beginning in the 1990s in the Czech Republic. More is seen in the following chart.

Chart 6. Numbers of church members of the small and new churches and religious associations<sup>138</sup>

Registered churches and religious associations in the Czech Republic	Number of believers	
	1991	2001
Apostolic church	1 485	4 584
Brethren unity of Baptists	2 544	3 641
Adventist church of the 7 <sup>th</sup> day	7 674	9 787
Brethren church	2 759	9 971
Church of Jesus Christ of Saints of the Last Days (estimation)	300 – 700	1 375
Greek catholic church	7 030	7 704
Evangelical church of Augsburg confession	4 151	14 914
Evangelical Methodist church	2 855	2 705
Federation of Jewish communities in the Czech Republic	1 292	1 527
Bohemian brethren	2 385	3 443
Christian congregations	3 017	6 955
Lutheran evangelical church in Czech	10 000	5 420

<sup>137</sup> J. Křivohlavý, *Psychologie smysluplnosti existence* (Praha: Grada Publishing, 2006), p. 204

<sup>138</sup> I. Štampach, *Přehled religionistiky* (Praha: Portál, 2008), p. 52

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Czech Unitarians	365	302
Jehovah witnesses	14 575	23 260
Neo-apostolic church in the Czech Republic	427	451
Eastern Orthodox church	19 354	23 053
Silesian church of the Augsburg confession	33 130	14 038
Old catholic church	2 255	1 614

After the fall of communism, new churches or religious organizations were established. They arose from different positions and faced certain conflicts with the state structures.<sup>139</sup> Some of them originated as a protest against something since they carried out a controversial form and their activity was often a subject of criticism. At the initial phase they were without official public support. Nevertheless, one of the basic principles of western democracy claims freedom of religious confession and protection of religious rights<sup>140</sup> and therefore they were established after 1990. The majority of established religious organizations are churches due to the lack of members of other belief. The situation of small religious organisations and churches is influenced by a certain intolerance towards the diversity and media manipulation.<sup>141</sup> In plenty of cases they are generally referred to as sects, a term that in Czech culture has a very negative connotation. Full freedom is hence a matter of legal interpretation.<sup>142</sup> Similarly to other European countries, there apparently exist hundreds of religious and spiritual groups that could be labelled as new religious movements. Partly, there

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<sup>139</sup> Z. Nešpor, *Jaká víra?: současná česká religiozita/spiritualita v pohledu kvalitativní sociologie náboženství* (Praha: Sociologický ústav Akademie věd České Republiky, 2004), p. 91

<sup>140</sup> Jiří Novotný, *Vývoj religiosity*, p. 58

<sup>141</sup> The Czech government approved the separation of the state and the church on 8<sup>th</sup> November 2012 while approving an ambitious plan to return billions of dollars worth of church property that was confiscated by the communists.

<sup>142</sup> Jiří Novotný, *Vývoj religiosity*, p. 59

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are some returning to traditional religions, but partly they are presented by alternative religious streams. They derive impulses either from pre-Christian religions and streams or from Eastern-Asian religions and philosophies mainly from Hinduism and Buddhism.<sup>143</sup> Generally, new religiosity in the Czech Republic is a part of a global change which societies are encountering. In this perspective, Czech lands are experiencing the same as their neighbouring countries, as well as the entire European continent.

Among the alternative religions within the Christian stream to be considered the Catholic and Protestant spiritual movements. If we neglect the movement of modernity at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there is an evident manifestation of different spiritual movements from the restoration of Catholicism since that time. Mainly they are the charismatic and the Marian revelations, very often with radical and apocalyptic content urging people to follow the traditional Christian values. In Protestant churches, recognised piety movements include private devotion, personal acceptance of Jesus and public faith confession. Additionally, there is wave of new Christian religiosity which belongs to a group of small churches and religious organizations. Some were already registered by the state: Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Fellowship, Russian Orthodox Church etc. others did not succeed in getting official registration from the Ministry of culture: Military Order of Rhodes and Malta, Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church etc.<sup>144</sup> Certainly, in addition there is a rank of similar movements without registration from the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic.<sup>145</sup> There are also some movements stemming from Christianity that are not typical, sometimes even

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<sup>143</sup> Jiří Novotný, *Vývoj religiosity*, p. 59

<sup>144</sup> Z. Nešpor and D. Václavík, *Příručka sociologie náboženství* (Praha: Slon, 2008), p. 254 and 328

<sup>145</sup> The Jehova Witnesses were established in 1916. In 2001 there were 23,000 people registred in their organization, which puts them on the 4th place according to numer of members. Nevertheless, it is arguable to call them a Christian church. Their Bible interpretation is unique compared to other churches. Z. Nešpor, *Ústřední vývojové trendy současné české religiozity*, p. 24

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apocalyptic streams such as Unitarianism or Rosicrucianism.<sup>146</sup> Still these streams are in minority and there is no essential interest among Czech citizens.

The last part of alternative religiosity is devoted to media presentation. Globalisation and modern communication have an enormous impact on the spread through media, internet etc. which have widely opened the door to new religions. The potential of mass media, including marketing methods was soon recognised and used by a few denominations. Using media to spread religion, through so called televangelism, meaning preaching on TV in a main time, combination of TV broadcasting with spreading Christianity, mostly spread in the U.S.A. use particularly new Christian oriented religious groups. Needless to say, that spreading religion messages in any kind of form requires a certain level of professionalism and knowledge. In the case of the Czech Republic, more is known than actually put into action. Spreading religious ideas through mass media is in the beginning stages. There is not enough knowledge, finances, trained and skilled experts and equipment to establish televangelism or TV broadcasting for the use of spreading Christian messages. The only exception is the Christian program of Catholic Church on Sunday afternoons. The remainder of the churches are not strong enough to exercise similar activity. Fortunately, there are a few radio stations producing their programs on a national level.<sup>147</sup> Smaller and non experienced churches fasten their attention to the Internet, since it provides a vast number of possibilities. Another advantage is that it requires little professionalism of produced materials since a majority of its productivity remains in personal relationship or in social networks. It is vital to develop and improve this aspect of media marketing for the development of churches in the future.

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<sup>146</sup> I. Štampach, *Přehled religionistiky*, p. 161-164

<sup>147</sup> Z. Nešpor and D. Václavík, *Příručka sociologie náboženství* (Praha: Slon, 2008), p. 254 and 328

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## **Current situation where Christianity is not referred to since 1992**

The previous part proved that Czech society is not atheistic but rather anticlerical, with significant features of secularisation. The following part is devoted to the current religious atmosphere in the Czech Republic. The Christian perspective is minimally referred to in this new religiosity, rather it is related to other spiritual sources. The resistance against new and non traditional religious streams in Europe is many times stronger compared to marginal Christian groups.

On the contrary, the criteria for establishing a new church are not uncomplicated. For example, legislative valid in 1990-2001, required 10,000 signatures for church registration or to be deemed a religious organisation. In case the religious organisation was a member of World Council Church, which is a Christian Ecumenical Organisation, only 500 signatures were required.<sup>148</sup> It is evident that church registration is basically not possible, unless there is a massive amount of support to accomplish this endeavour. As it was previously indicated, it is evident that plenty of them have less than 10,000 members. Therefore, if they applied for registration after 2001 they could not have succeeded. It is speculated, that the Czech government made this restriction due to the fear of new growing religions or due to financial expenses spent on the entire spectrum of registered churches or due to pressure from well established churches. Nevertheless, the following section describes the religious situation seen outside of the church.

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<sup>148</sup> Legal Act Nr. 161/1992 Coll., *Registration of churches or religious organizations* (Prague: Česká národní rada, 1992), p. 18, <<http://spcp.prf.cuni.cz/lex/161-92.htm>> [accessed 19/3/1992]

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## Western Esoteric

The esoteric (*esoteris* meaning internal) is wide spread in the Czech Republic. The western esoteric is tightly related to three religious systems (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), but also with a heritage of Hellenism (Gnosticism) and sometimes it is equated with Hermetism. It consists of Cabala, alchemy, astrology, horoscopes and tarots, numerology or magi.

Some scientists label not only faith in fortune-tellers, amulets and healers, but also astrology, horoscopes, numerology or tarot reading as magic religion.<sup>149</sup> Sociologist Thomas Luckmann, according to international researches, concluded with the statement that faith in magic is mostly spread in Slavic countries of central and Eastern Europe, where according to his findings, interest in fortune-tellers, healers, astrology and amulets is higher than elsewhere.<sup>150</sup> Reality supports this conclusion, since there are tens of astrological councils and schools as well as individual astrologists and numerologists (also fortune-tellers, tarot readers, palm readers etc.) offering astrological/numerological and other spiritual service and counselling. Very popular among Czech citizens, are personal or partner horoscopes.<sup>151</sup> There are a spiritual or pseudo-spiritual phenomenon in the Czech Republic, widely spread, particularly in literature with this content is frequently sold.<sup>152</sup> It is very well known that the occult is practiced and the worse fact is that they have become a part of standard behaviour. This is especially true among the young generation, which does not consider their occurrence peculiar, but more as something normal and that belongs to the inner life of an individual.

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<sup>149</sup> Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society*, p. 90

<sup>150</sup> Hamplová, *Čemu Češi věří: dimenze soudobé české religiosity*, p. 707

<sup>151</sup> Vojtíšek, *Encyklopedie náboženských směrů a hnutí v České republice. Náboženství, církve, sekty, duchovní společenství* (Praha: Portál, 2004), p. 152

<sup>152</sup> C. Partridge, *Encyklopedie nových náboženství. Nová náboženská hnutí, sekty a alternativní spiritualita* (Praha: Knižní klub, 2006), p. 331 [337]

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## Religious Eclecticism and New Age

A peculiar phenomenon of a new religiosity is connecting components of different religions, philosophies, practices and life styles. This eclecticism is widely spread in both terms of an individual belief and a collective belief. It includes some members of traditional churches (Some Catholics believe in reincarnation and other phenomena that are officially rigorously refused by the Catholic Church). Generally, syncretism appears when Christians accept elements as methods of meditation as a Christian-yoga etc.<sup>153</sup> A typical syncretistic movement is the New Age movement.<sup>154</sup> This movement was established in the second half of the twentieth century as a religion. This religious movement consists of Gnosticism, romanticism and theosophy. The concept of this movement is not completely clear and it includes a variety of elements.<sup>155</sup>

Since New Age began spreading in the Czech Republic, there has been an increase of industry and commercialisation of spiritual life.<sup>156</sup> There exists plenty of tea rooms that do not sell merely tea products, but they focus on organising different activities such as seminars, presentations, concerts or exhibitions which aim to educate. There is also a wide network of bookshops concentrated on spiritual literature. Furthermore, spiritual magazines are published and their names clearly state their purpose. (Publications sold include: Regeneration, Magic, Astro or Spirit). Also available in the Czech Republic are spiritual centres, clubs and even teaching institutions. It is possible to attend an astrological advice bureau or a school The Internet offers concrete institutions such as School of Oracle art, Oracle Emma or Centre of spiritual development.<sup>157</sup> The frequency of

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<sup>153</sup> Novotný, *Vývoj religiosity*, p. 60

<sup>154</sup> Z. Nešpor and D. Lužný, *Sociologie náboženství* (Praha: Portál, 2007), p. 130

<sup>155</sup> Z. Nešpor and D. Václavík, *Příručka sociologie náboženství* (Praha: Slon, 2008), p. 361

<sup>156</sup> Christopher H. Partridge, *Encyklopedie nových náboženství: nová náboženská hnutí, sekty a alternativní spiritualita* (Praha: Knižní klub, 2006), p. 53

<sup>157</sup> Partridge, *Encyklopedie nových náboženství*, p. 53

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these terms together with its presence in society prove that the New Age movement became a part of postmodern thinking, at least in the Czech Republic.

## **Buddhism**

Buddhism is a non theistic religion and therefore God as creator does not play a role. Most significant in this religion is Buddha's law.<sup>158</sup> Buddhism belongs among the new religiosity and since it does not carry the aspect of God as creator, it is very popular in the Czech society. Together with transcendental psychology and with New Age and yoga, plenty of young people in western countries including the Czech Republic, identify with this belief system.<sup>159</sup> Buddhists usually do not create organisations, but rather participate at meditations, rituals and seminars at Buddha centres. According to the book market, it is possible to estimate that the number of active adherents are in the thousands. There is one group that was registered in the Czech Republic in 2007: it is Karma Kagyu, that belongs to the lineage of Diamond Way Buddhism. Broadly speaking, it is firmly organised and operates in 49 centres across the Czech Republic.<sup>160</sup> In my opinion Buddhism attracts Czechs due to its private belief including individualism in spiritual development. Especially the generation born in 1960s and 1970s identifies themselves with ideas of peace, human goodness and the search for help in their spiritual development. The later generations are not interested in Buddhism so much since they were born into an age of material development and are influenced by secularization on a higher degree.

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<sup>158</sup> I. Štampach, *Přehled religionistiky*, p. 88

<sup>159</sup> Vojtíšek, *Encyklopedie náboženských směrů a hnutí v České republice*, p. 377

<sup>160</sup> Vojtíšek, *Encyklopedie náboženských směrů a hnutí v České republice*, p. 377

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## Hinduism

Hinduism is a major religion of the Indian subcontinent, but it has also spread to Europe. The Ministry of culture in the Czech Republic officially registered the Czech Hindu religious association in 2002 and in the same year the International Society for Krishna Consciousness and the Hare Krishna Movement in the Czech Republic.<sup>161</sup> Nevertheless, more popular than these registered groups emerging from Hinduism, is yoga. A majority of Czech yoga practisers consider yoga as physical exercise and partly a therapy. Yet, there are some adherents who relate it to the Hindu way of knowledge. Some of the groups that are devoted to this particular direction is the 'Yoga in daily life' association and the Czech Hindu Religious Society which was registered together with the Vishwa Nirmala Dharma society in 2007.<sup>162</sup> Hinduism and particularly Yoga have achieved the attention of the Czech nation mainly due to its peaceful motives. It is evident that the aspect of free will and self-development strikes the interest of Czechs who do not want to abide by traditional forms of religion.

## Chinese religions

In the post modern religiosity there are also aspects of religions from the Far East or at least some fragments.<sup>163</sup> The most often believed are Confucianism, Taoism, Tai-chi, together with belief in harmony with Yin and Yang poles.<sup>164</sup> Feng Shui, a popular idea, came about in hopes of establishing the household according to the World Order – a life encompassed in harmony. Nevertheless, the most wide spread idea related to the Chinese religion is the traditional

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<sup>161</sup> Partridge, *Encyklopedie nových náboženství*, p. 182-183

<sup>162</sup> Partridge, *Encyklopedie nových náboženství*, p. 182-183

<sup>163</sup> Z. Vojtíšek, *Encyklopedie náboženských směrů a hnutí v České republice. Náboženství, církve, sekty, duchovní společenství* (Praha: Portál, 2004), p. 392

<sup>164</sup> I. Štampach, *Přehled religionistiky*, p. 77-79

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medical method of acupuncture.<sup>165</sup> Another method of spiritual medical treatment is Reiki, operating with life-giving energy. That was popular in Western Europe in the 1980s and in Czech lands since the 1990s.<sup>166</sup> Acupuncture and Reiki represent a significant challenge for the Western type of thinking, including its beliefs. A common man in Czech is facing a certain crisis found in Western culture in terms of morality, but also in terms of physical health. Paradoxically, the quality of Czech medicine belongs among the best in the world and at the same time, there is an increase of those who are not cured within the framework of western medicine. Therefore, Czechs search for health in other areas - namely in Eastern religions that offer physical health together with curing the spiritual dimension. In my opinion, solving medical problems of an individual is heavily influenced when that person decides whether or not to accept the ideology. Many Czechs are interested in Eastern religions since they offered medical help together with non-controversial spiritual enhancements; they also offer a vast scope of individual improvement and acceptance. In other terms, a human being is naturally good and does not need a Saviour, as it is believed in Christianity.

## Islam

Islam is the second most populous religion in the world, counting about one fifth of the religious adherents in the entire world.<sup>167</sup> The two most significant streams are the Sunni and Shiite.<sup>168</sup> The number of Muslims living in the Czech Republic is not known. First of all, there is no single Muslim community publicising its

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<sup>165</sup> Partridge, *Encyklopedie nových náboženství*, p. 213 [254]

<sup>166</sup> Vojtíšek, *Encyklopedie nových náboženství. Nová náboženská hnutí, sekty a alternativní spiritualita*, p. 199 [231]

<sup>167</sup> Vojtíšek, *Encyklopedie nových náboženství. Nová náboženská hnutí, sekty a alternativní spiritualita*, p. 300

<sup>168</sup> Štampach, *Přehled religionistiky*, p. 123-125

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membership records.<sup>169</sup> The second factor is the option to conceal or to expose a person's personal religious confession. Nevertheless, there were 3,600 citizens in the Czech Republic, who espoused Islam in the National census in 2001.<sup>170</sup> Daniel Topinka, the author of Islam studies in the Czech Republic, operates with the number of 11,235.<sup>171</sup> Studies carried out by Mendel, a Prague professor of Arabic and Islamic studies, describes four major units within the Muslim community in the Czech Republic.<sup>172</sup>

The majority of Muslim population in the Czech Republic is the Turk-Sunni sub-civilization and is ethnically and linguistically diverse.<sup>173</sup> It hails from a variety of Balkan and former Soviet Union countries, as well as from Western Europe and from the Near East. The total number of Muslim immigrants in the Czech Republic is relatively low compared to other western countries.<sup>174</sup> It is easy to claim that there is no expectation for a massive growth of Islam in the Czech Republic. Current conditions, including the diversity within the Islamic community, together with a relatively low number of Muslims currently residing in the Czech, do not indicate an increase in terms of numbers. On the other hand, it would be a fatal mistake not to gain insight from the situations that influenced the Austrian society. Currently, the Czech society, including the church, does not consider the Muslim population a threat<sup>175</sup> due to the relatively low number of Muslims in the country. Nevertheless, the situation in Europe and also in the Czech Republic might change without any possibility to prevent it.

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<sup>169</sup> M. Mendel, B. Ostřanský, T. Rataj, *Islám v srdci Evropy* (Praha: Academia, 2007), p. 411

<sup>170</sup> Mendel, Ostřanský, Rataj, *Islám v srdci Evropy*, p. 411

<sup>171</sup> Daniel Topinka, *Integrační proces Muslimů v České Republice: Pilotní projekt* (Ostrava: VeryVision, 2007), p. 49

<sup>172</sup> Mendel, Ostřanský, Rataj, *Islám v srdci Evropy*, p. 409

<sup>173</sup> Mendel, Ostřanský, Rataj, *Islám v srdci Evropy*, p. 409

<sup>174</sup> K. Archick, P. Belkin, Ch. Blanchard, K. Ek and E. Mix, *Muslims in Europe: Integration and Counter-Extremism Efforts* (New York: Nova, 2012), p. 3

<sup>175</sup> T. Melicharek, *Brněnská mešita a muslimská obec očima Brňanů* (Brno: Ústav religionistiky, 2009), p. 59

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## Sects

The following part deals with sects within the Czech context. Next to the current liberal spirituality arises fundamental religiosity. There is a certain lack of values. Although the manifestation of religious extremism might be seen across the whole religious spectrum for some groups, labelled sects, they are the most characteristic. The term sect in the Czech context does not have a set and closed definition. Established churches consider sects as new and separated religious groups; it is a very controversial topic.<sup>176</sup> Sociologist Thomas Robbins claims that the term sect is more and more often used 'to label disparate range groups and movements, and therefore ceased to be suitable as a term for the precise legal or social science category... As a result any group is a sect when somebody brands it'.<sup>177</sup> Other authors strive to make another definition, for example Štampach who claims that: 'Sects are religious or quasi-religious societies, characterized by four characters. They are closeness, fundamentalism, authoritarian leadership and concealment.'<sup>178</sup> Nevertheless, a majority agrees on a simple definition of a sect. Thus, sects or sectarianism are deviations from previously set public or religious standards.<sup>179</sup> In the Czech context, the term sect is stabilised for marking something strange such as destructive religion. It carries not only the labelling, but also the evaluating function.<sup>180</sup>

There is a worldwide discussion concerning a growing religious fundamentalism. Catastrophic scenarios fill up mainstream media.<sup>181</sup> Many accusations against sects are giving high publicity. The ministry of interior elaborated in a report on

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<sup>176</sup> Václavík, *Náboženství a moderní česká společnost*, p. 141

<sup>177</sup> R. Enroth, *Průvodce sektami a novými náboženstvími* (Praha: Návrat domů, 1995), p. 9

<sup>178</sup> I. Štampach, *Sekty a nová náboženská hnutí: Naděje a rizika* (Praha: Oliva, 1994), p. 15

<sup>179</sup> J. Wolf, *Kdo je a kdo není v hnutí Nového věku* (Praha: Votobia, 2000), p. 21

<sup>180</sup> Štampach, *Přehled religionistiky*, p. 182

<sup>181</sup> M. Staněk, 'Eschatologická společenství. K recepci mariánských zjevení v České republice', *Sociologické studie* 5 (2004), pp. 56-74

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the development of extremism in the Czech Republic in 1995 where they dedicated a part solely for religious sects. They were determined in response to groups refusing the societal norms and laws of the country.<sup>182</sup> The most prominent sects were determined to be the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Jehovah's Witnesses, Unification Church, Grail movement, Pentecostal movement, The Hare Krishna movement, Satanists, Transcendental meditation, Osho movement etc. The most dangerous groups were labelled those based on a leadership principle with a high degree of hierarchy.<sup>183</sup> Practically, such a definition creates a negative attitude towards anything new or unknown; in establishing new churches, it obstructs any positive development and public acceptance. Therefore, a religious monopoly of *big traditional church* was established on a legislative platform. Even more serious harm was carried out on a mental level when the concept of 'strong well-established churches' was supported.

A majority of citizens consider sects as a new, unknown and young phenomena. In my opinion, it is a mistake. New religions are a phenomena that have accompanied humanity since the beginning. More or less it appeared in a majority of well known historical societies, where new religious movements were born. Even Jesus himself was considered an adherent of a sect since Christianity was a new occurrence.<sup>184</sup> Christianity was suspected of orgy, incest, ritual murders and other crimes.

A majority of the reactions towards new religions in the past have influenced our present day attitudes and outlooks towards those religions. Hopefully these examples will help us to understand that a fear of new religions is more based on archetypal reactions than on reasonable concerns based on reality.<sup>185</sup> It is equally difficult to predict in which direction these biases will go. In my opinion,

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<sup>182</sup> D. Lužný, 'Stát, média a nová náboženství', *Sociologické studie* 5 (2004), pp. 92-93

<sup>183</sup> Jiří Novotný, *Vývoj religiosity v České republice*, p. 66

<sup>184</sup> Jean-Marie Abgrall, *Mechanismus sekt* (Praha: Karolinum, 1999), p. 11

<sup>185</sup> Nesper, *Religious Processes in Contemporary Czech Society*, p. 59

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Czech society will remain the same until a young generation, which is not influenced by traditional models, will prevail in leading society. To evaluate this part it is evident that religiosity out of the church does not play a prominent role in terms of adherent numbers. There is no religion massively dominating the Czech scene. Rather, the occurrences of these religions prove a general interest in religiosity that is common in all countries. Probably the most important fact is the common interest in physical and spiritual health that is offered mainly in Buddhism, Hinduism and Chinese religions. A combination of good health together with striving to be a better person carries positive influence on a common Czech. For that reason it is recommended for a church to take these findings into consideration and search for means how to reflect them in Christian teaching and practice.

## **Potential means for reversal of the decline in Christianity**

The final part of this paper is devoted to finding possible solutions on reversing the decline of Christianity in relation with Czech secularisation. First of all, it is necessary to sum up the reasons or roots as to why Christianity in the Czech Republic is on the decline. After that, each reason attributing to the decline will be coupled with suggestion as to how to better situation.

The first fact causing secularisation that was previously described in this paper is the historical factor. It is evident that Czech lands have always been in the middle of the western and eastern influence. Therefore, many conflicts arose in Czech history. Unfortunately, the result of that was a violent re-catholicization after 1620.<sup>186</sup> It was a significant period, which directly affected all of the Czech lands throughout the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. Indirectly, the impact is evident in present days. One of the challenges of the church is associated with solving this historical issue that developed into a significant anticlerical attitude that the

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<sup>186</sup> P. Filipi, *Malá encyklopedie evangelických církví*, p. 115

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Czechs adopted towards the church. For this reason, it was recommended that the church focus its efforts on eliminating this attitude and build a new form of relationship towards the Czech society. Generally speaking, a majority of Czechs do not consider church as something profitable for the society.<sup>187</sup> Church is usually presented as an old institution, which owns a lot of property; it is also viewed as an archaic practice with old chorals, habits and led by old people who have no real connection with problems that people deal with today. Therefore, many think that there is no reason for the church to exist. For this reason, the church needs to clearly communicate and prove its purpose. Particularly, it needs to gain people's attention and respect. Achieving that will probably cost a lot of energy, finances and effort, but being active in society is the only way for the common citizen to realise what exactly the church does for others and all who are involved.<sup>188</sup> Definitely, ministries and projects helping in fulfilling community needs and troubles will influence people's attitudes towards church on the local level.

The second factor attributing to Czech secularism is the religious identity versus national identity. Earlier sections of this paper describe in detail the process of modernism and the loss of the relationship between the national and church identity. Therefore, the challenge lies in building the national identity based on Christian identity which will be not simple, but rather a long and ongoing process. Nevertheless, the church might take into consideration to raise up individuals with a specific gifting and anointing that would be used for the good of the entire

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<sup>187</sup> Jan Tuček, 'Užitečnost církví', *Centrum of Empirical Research* (2011), p. 1  
<<http://www.stem.cz/clanek/2304>> [ 27/12/2011]

<sup>188</sup> My personal experience with presenting Christian ministries to businessmen or state officers on a local level proves that people are surprised that church does so many good activities. It is especially recognized when church is involved in ministry with children and youth that is not organized or has problems with drugs, alcohol, bullying etc.

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society.<sup>189</sup> There is a lack of Christian professionals that would be considered by the entire society as professionals in their field. If these professionals are raised up, the church could have had a better platform on which to present its ideas and values through people who are generally recognised as national professionals. In these days, there are only a few individuals aspiring for such a position. Similarly, Christians with the gift of evangelism could have had a strong influence on national self-esteem and identity. Again, to emphasise this lack there is no national hero related to Christianity except John Hus or Comenius, but as it was presented in this paper, the Czech modern era builds its identity on anticlericalism and anti religious attitudes.

The third part is devoted to privatised religiosity. Czechs tend to avoid any kind of public, church-organised and hierarchical religiosity. Therefore, the challenge for Christianity lies in building non-traditional forms of church functioning. Its ministries are required to be organised to eliminate the non-attractive forms of religiosity. Recommended forms of ministries might be recognised in decentralising church activities. Home groups where the individual needs of people are fulfilled and where the development of individuals is concrete and recognised can eliminate the number of declarative believers that were mentioned in the past National censuses of 1991, 2001 and 2011. More than that, a focus on small groups showing an interest in the private life of a person carries the relationship frame that extracts the general religiosity out of church. Such an attitude corresponds with research finding that Czechs are not atheists in terms of not believing in God, but rather they do not recognise any reason for the church to exist in the current modern era.<sup>190</sup> Therefore, any church activity focused on the individual life of citizens will be more effective in reinforcing the reason for the church's existence. A concrete example of church activities might

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<sup>189</sup> The evangelical churches in Czech do not have any well known people in area of politics, sport, music, business, entertainment, education, sociology etc. Even none church leaders are known on a national level.

<sup>190</sup> Jiří Novotný, *Vývoj religiosity*, p. 76

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be recognised in the Alpha courses, home groups, organising local clubs for pre-school children or youth music festivals.<sup>191</sup> Special activities might be organised for Gypsy communities living in the Czech Republic. Gypsies living in the Czech Republic belong to the communities with the highest growth rate and their behaviour brings tension and conflict.<sup>192</sup> Therefore, church involvement in this area of society needs to offer a substantial chance to prove the importance of church existence. Success in this area would highlight Christianity, together with their positive influence on society. Concrete examples of these activities and experience on this field might be achieved in neighbouring Slovakia where the church began to work in this field. Needless to say, at least one of the Czech denominations<sup>193</sup> began to invest its efforts into this part of society.

The fourth part is focused on the national census from 1991, 2001 and 2011. It was documented in the early part of this paper that a number of believers in the Czech Republic is declining. The general tendency explains this decline in terms of losing declarative believers, the old generation dying out, and a loss of enthusiasm after the fall of communism.<sup>194</sup> Nevertheless, the last census in 2011 described about 700,000 believers who ceased to belong to a certain Christian affiliation. The census did not answer who the citizens are, but most probably, a majority of them are those who left the three most populous churches. 700,000 believers accounts for one third of the believers in the entire country. A question

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<sup>191</sup> Majority of evangelical churches in the Czech Republic are working on relational level, therefore have structure and potential to address individual needs and privatized religion.

<sup>192</sup> Pavel Navrátil, *Romové v české společnosti* (Praha: Portál, 2003), p. 56-73

<sup>193</sup> Jana Vávrová Mašková, *Religiosita Romů v městském prostředí*, Masaryk Univerzity (2011), pp. 9-20, <[http://is.muni.cz/th/7364/ff\\_d/VAVROVA\\_dizertace.txt](http://is.muni.cz/th/7364/ff_d/VAVROVA_dizertace.txt)> [accessed 5/10/2011]

<sup>194</sup> Dušan Lužný and Jolana Navrátilová, *Religion and Secularization in the Czech Republic*, *Czech Sociological Review* Vol. 9 (2001), pp. 85-98, <[http://sreview.soc.cas.cz/uploads/ef476b8bbbe630318d8d6cf7a7db122e01c17a67\\_316\\_085LUZNY.pdf](http://sreview.soc.cas.cz/uploads/ef476b8bbbe630318d8d6cf7a7db122e01c17a67_316_085LUZNY.pdf)> [27/9/2011]

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remains: Why did they decide to leave the church? There are two possible answers for this question.

At first, it might be said that it is not possible to know why such a number of people ceased to affiliate with any church. Proponents of this attitude claim that these people did not believe in God properly or they have other excuses to blame those who left church. As one top leader of a church after the census claimed: 'If people need church they will find the way to us'.<sup>195</sup> This statement assumes that those who are interested in God will come by themselves. More than that, it carries a certain kind of judgement on others, since they are removed from a certain class of individuals. It is necessary to acknowledge, that Jesus called the Christians to be fishermen of people. There was no assumed belief that people will come to God by themselves, but only when Christians bring or invite them to God. For this reason, the proclamation made by this top leader should not be accepted and the attitude of the church should have been the complete opposite. It is not possible to lead a church without creating platforms, options and situations which will serve to help people understand God, Christianity and church.

The second attitude considers the problem on the side of the church. If 700,000 believers cease to belong to church, it is a significant sign that indicates a negative response to the church, which the church needs to examine.<sup>196</sup> It is

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<sup>195</sup> Senior of Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren Joel Ruml commented. The denomination had 117,000 members in 2001 and 52,000 in 2011. Jan Jiříčka, *'Kdo nás potřebuje, ten si nás najde, komentují církve obří ztrátu oveček'*, Zprávy idnes (2011), p. 1, <[http://zpravy.idnes.cz/kdo-nas-potrebuje-ten-si-nas-najde-komentuji-cirkve-obri-ztratu-ovecek-1zc-/domaci.aspx?c=A111215\\_150807\\_domaci\\_jj](http://zpravy.idnes.cz/kdo-nas-potrebuje-ten-si-nas-najde-komentuji-cirkve-obri-ztratu-ovecek-1zc-/domaci.aspx?c=A111215_150807_domaci_jj)> [15/12/2011]

<sup>196</sup> Anon, *'Obyvatelstvo podle věku, náboženské víry a pohlaví'*, Czech statistical office (2011), <[http://vdb.czso.cz/sldbvo/#!/stranka=podle-tematu&tu=30719&th=&v=&vo=H4sIAAAAAAAAAAFvzloG1ulhBMCuxLFGvtCQzR88jsTjDN7GAlf3WwcNiCReZGZjcGLhy8hNT3BKTS\\_KLPBk4SzKKUosz8nNSKgrsHRhAgKecA0gKADF3CQNnaLBrUIBjkKNvcSFDHQMDhhqGCqCiYA\\_\\_cLCiEgZGvxlGdg9\\_Fz\\_\\_EMeCEgY2b38XZ89gllvLxTHEP8wx2NEFJM4ZHOIY5u\\_t7-MJ1OIP5ldEBkT5OwU5RgH5IUB9fo4ePq4ulDtZSxhYw1yDolzhXstJzEvX88wrSU1PLR](http://vdb.czso.cz/sldbvo/#!/stranka=podle-tematu&tu=30719&th=&v=&vo=H4sIAAAAAAAAAAFvzloG1ulhBMCuxLFGvtCQzR88jsTjDN7GAlf3WwcNiCReZGZjcGLhy8hNT3BKTS_KLPBk4SzKKUosz8nNSKgrsHRhAgKecA0gKADF3CQNnaLBrUIBjkKNvcSFDHQMDhhqGCqCiYA__cLCiEgZGvxlGdg9_Fz__EMeCEgY2b38XZ89gllvLxTHEP8wx2NEFJM4ZHOIY5u_t7-MJ1OIP5ldEBkT5OwU5RgH5IUB9fo4ePq4ulDtZSxhYw1yDolzhXstJzEvX88wrSU1PLR)>

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important to consider a few questions. Of course, there might be plenty of important questions arising from this situation, but that is a matter of further investigation. For the goal of this paper two questions will be taken into consideration.

First of all, whether the church is a trustful organisation or not. Although crucial, it is definitely not simple to determine a church's trustworthiness. A church is required to behave and present its activities in an upright manner, which will gain public trust. My personal attitude emphasises the lack of trustworthiness towards a church, mainly due to the historical facts, but also due to church's distance from the life of a common Czech. Secondly, an important issue lies in the question 'Is the form of church relevant and fulfil its function in present days?' As sociologist Spousta claims 'Many churches kept themselves in the same stage as that of 100 years earlier.'<sup>197</sup> Each local church has to answer the question whether they are a missional church, striving to reach more people for Christ or whether they are a closed community with their own Christian ideology, behaviour and culture. In my opinion, there is lack of interest and willingness among the church members to change significantly the function of church, since that means a change of a personal life style of every single minister and church member. To be honest, I do not recognise any type of anxiety among the three most populous churches described earlier in this paper. What is even worse, I do not feel any serious anxiety among the evangelical churches that would cause a massive change towards spreading the Gospel and making disciples, a fact which I am ashamed and concerned about.

The fifth part is focused on religion outside of the church that is not rapidly adding to the numbers of adherents, but rather in the aspect of ideology. Within the last

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<sup>197</sup> Jan Spousta, 'Changes in Religious Values in the Czech Republic', *Czech Sociological Review* 38 (2002), pp. 345-363

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20 years the Czech Republic became a free spiritual market with its unique features.<sup>198</sup> The entire spectrum of religions is recognised and the interest among Czech citizens towards different kinds of religions supports the fact that Czechs are not atheists. The rejections of Catholicism and the inability of the church to gain national attraction naturally resulted in searching out of Christianity. Needless to say, that Protestant churches are in the minority, very small in numbers and therefore also in a position not to influence Czech society considerably.

Nevertheless, it is a matter in which the Czech church is challenged to pray and to reach these people who naturally search for religious activities. Definitely, it is a spiritual fight or spiritual competition, but the church should not be afraid of this fight especially, when the church claims to have a living God among them. To open a spiritual market raises other significant battles for the church and it is not getting easier, since spirituality is rampantly available, as it has been quite developed and spread in magazines, books, advertisement etc. This would indicate that the best option in competing with different religions lies in improving the church's presentation of itself in society. This fact gains more support when we realise that the young generation accepts ideas based on what they feel has a good presentation. Of course, Christianity is not merely about presenting and the Christian message will always play the most prominent part of that, but without an appropriate presentation, its message will not reach the full potential that God gave the church. Therefore, publishing Christian materials in the Czech language might help to achieve better results in competition with non-Christian materials. In concrete terms it means more Christian books in the Czech language. A special branch might be successful in the use of magazines since

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<sup>198</sup> Nešpor, *Ústřední vývojové trendy současné české religiozity*, p. 21-37

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there is no single Christian magazine on the market that focuses on non-Christian citizens.<sup>199</sup>

Another possibility lies in creating TV programs focused on presenting Christian values and Christian ministries among the common people. The only Christian TV program available is produced by the Catholic Church, but it attracts only religious people, since it is presented from the Catholic perspective. The only exception which incorporated the Christian faith in a relevant way, was a programme called Exit 316.<sup>200</sup> It was produced by KAM (Academy for Christian youth) with contributions from popular figures. This program focused on the youth with the aim to discuss current issues from a Christian perspective. Even though it reflected the youth's cultural issues and had a concept of following up on its viewers, it only remained on the Czech scene for about 3 years.<sup>201</sup> Thus the field of TV production remains untouched by protestant denominations. The most probable reason for this state is a lack of vision, experience on this field and faith that God might reach people's hearts through quality presentations on television.<sup>202</sup> Needless to say, there is one operating program called Noe. On the other hand, it does not produce programs that would have a serious impact on non-Christian demographic.

The same might be applied in the area of the Internet where a majority of local churches have developed their web pages with a high standard of quality. On the contrary, it is necessary to say that these pages are mostly visited by church attendants seeking its content. The challenge in this area therefore, lies in

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<sup>199</sup> The whole spectrum of Christian magazines is focused on Christian itself, but there is a lack of those focused on the Gospel and personal testimonies.

<sup>200</sup> EXIT 316 is a Christian educational program for youth produced by Christian Academy for Youth and by Czech Television in 2006/07. The program chose certain social issues and brought solutions from a Christian perspective. It achieved a great success among students. <http://www.honzaskranka.cz/wp-content/prezentace.pdf>

<sup>201</sup> EXIT 316 was on Czech tv in 2006/07 and in 2008/09. <http://www.exit316.cz/sekce-archiv>

<sup>202</sup> Interestingly, Czech TV offer programs as fortune tellers.

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reaching the non-Christians through shifting the content. Again the entire issue of quality presentation on the Internet arises. If the church will not improve its presentation through videos, music clips and other types of presentation, then it will have a negligible impact on the entire society.

A special focus is required on social networks where the young generation spends its time. It is proved that social networks have the most influence on the attitudes of the young generation.<sup>203</sup> The battle of ideas is fought on social networks, which was proved when the Czech President was for the first time directly elected by citizens in January 2013. All media warned that the crucial field would be on the social network since the young generation is actively involved in this field. Therefore, church activities and presentations through videos, blog etc. will play a significant role in the near future. In addition, Czechs prefer privatised religiosity, alternative religion and individualism.<sup>204</sup> Therefore all the aspects that seemed to be contrary to Christianity might become more appealing. To conclude this part, it is possible to claim that people's attitude towards Christianity will remain the same or will become worse unless the church begins to invest into the areas that were highlighted in this part.

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<sup>203</sup> P. Ryvola, *Pro třetinu mladých lidí je internet stejně důležitý jako vzduch, voda nebo jídlo*, Cisco (2011), p. 1,

<<http://www.cisco.com/web/CZ/about/news/2011/092211.html>> [accessed 22/9/2011]

<sup>204</sup> Nešpor, *Religious Processes in Contemporary Czech Society*, p. 282-291

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## Conclusion

The trends that are developing in contemporary Czech religiosity are both similar to those in Western Europe and distinct from them, depending on the specific historical and socio-cultural circumstances of Czech society. The similarities include movements existing outside of the church, anticlericalism, privatised religion and movements away from traditionalism. The history of the Czech nation has been very much related to Christianity and the ongoing fight between the Catholics and Protestants negatively influenced the national attitude towards Christianity. The victory of the Catholic Church in 1620 shaped the entire nation until the era of modernism at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. That was a crucial period for creating a modern state with ties closely related to church. Unfortunately, in the case of the Czech Republic, the division between the state and church appeared so wide that when Czechoslovakia was established in 1918, after the split of Habsburg's monarchy, there was no relation at all. As a result of historical events, Czechs have become anti-clericals. Furthermore the national identity became completely separated from the church identity. The Catholic Church was unable to profit from its popularity in the early 1990s and consequently lost admiration it once had. As have the unaddressed *historical sins* of the church, including the collaboration of some priests with the communist regime and the unwillingness of the church to face former dissidents and persecuted persons over this issue. In short, the relatively high number of believers in the 1990 census was both the result of a popular *mistake* and a result of their ignorance about what Christianity (and especially Catholicism – as for many synonymous with Christianity) really means.

Unlike in case of Slovakia and Poland, the Czech Republic has never found any bond between the nation and the church after the beginning of the modern era. Therefore, the Czech Republic experienced the process of secularism much earlier and in a deeper sense compared to Slovakia and Poland. The anticlerical attitude is very strongly rooted in the spirit of Czechs. For these reasons, it is

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probable that the decline of Christianity will intensify, unless the Czech church will find a way how to change the negative attitude.

On the other hand, it is not possible to claim that Czechs are atheists. A very nice description is provided by Max Weber, when it is not possible to declare Czechs as *religiously unmusical*.<sup>205</sup> The Czech nation belongs among the nations that, historically, were closely related to Christianity. Therefore, surveys in 1991, 2001 and 2011 do not prove Atheism. The dispassionate approach to traditional churches and Christianity doesn't mean that Czechs refuse the existence of supernatural as a whole. Another descriptions employ *Czechs are not atheists*, they are more *Church non-attenders*. This description seems to be the most precise since it includes the entire spectrum of Czech's national identity and a national attitude directed towards the Catholic Church. Unsurprisingly, it results in their man-centred beliefs in fatalism and occultism.

Therefore, privatised religion and individualisation play a very significant role in Czech society. Although these aspects are a part of secularisation, they might be applied for building the opposite. If the Czech church recognises the potential within the privatised religiosity, including the features of individualisation, that might change the entire situation. The church is recommended to focus its strategy on local communities. Home groups and ministries where the individual needs of people are fulfilled and where individuals can be recognised and can concretely develop will favourably employ the idea included in privatised religion and individualism. It is possible to claim that church involvement in fulfilling societal needs provides a great chance to prove the importance of the church's existence. Success in social areas on a local level will highlight Christianity, together with their positive influence on society.

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<sup>205</sup> Hans Heinrich Gerth and Charles Wright Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (Oxford: Routledge, 1991), p. 289

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To evaluate the religiosity out of the church it is evident that it does not play a prominent role in terms of adherent numbers. Rather, the occurrence of these religions proves a general interest in religiosity that is common for all countries. The most important fact is the common interest in physical and spiritual health that is offered mainly in Eastern religions. This philosophy which combines the pursuit of good health together with striving to be a better person is viewed positively by the common Czech person. Therefore I would highly recommended that a church take these findings into consideration and search for appropriate means to reflect them in Christian teaching and practice.

Concerning this recommendation, each local church has to answer the question whether they are a missional church, striving to reach more people for Christ or whether they are a closed community with their own Christian ideology, behaviour and culture. If the church will not improve its efforts on the Internet, TV, through books, magazines and social networks, it will have negligible impact on the entire society. A special focus is required on social networks where the young generation spends its time.

Finally, privatised forms of religion are important in the search for spirituality; what Grace Davie refers to as *believing without belonging*, many times even accompanied by strong anti-church feelings. It even results in people declaring themselves non-believers, even though they simply mean that they are not church members. But there is nothing new about these characteristics of contemporary Czech society. The Czech Republic has traditionally been one of the most *secularised* countries in the world, not just today but even one hundred years ago. Therefore for the church to raise its profile in today's Czech society there is generation worth of work to do to re-establish relevance, authenticity and reality in the face of post-modernity and relativism invading from west into the post-Communist era.

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## Appendices

Fig. 1 Percentage of believers found in question 'Regardless of whether you go to church or not, could you say if you are: believer/non-believer?'

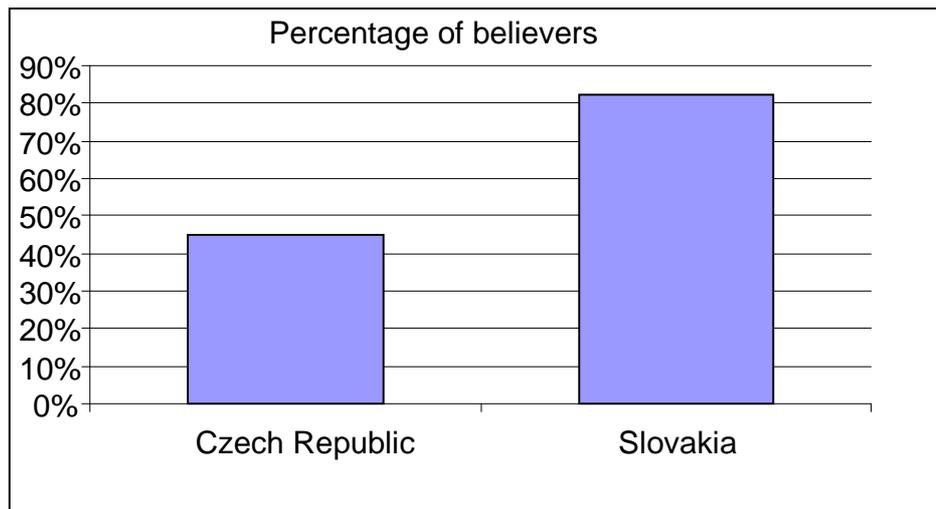
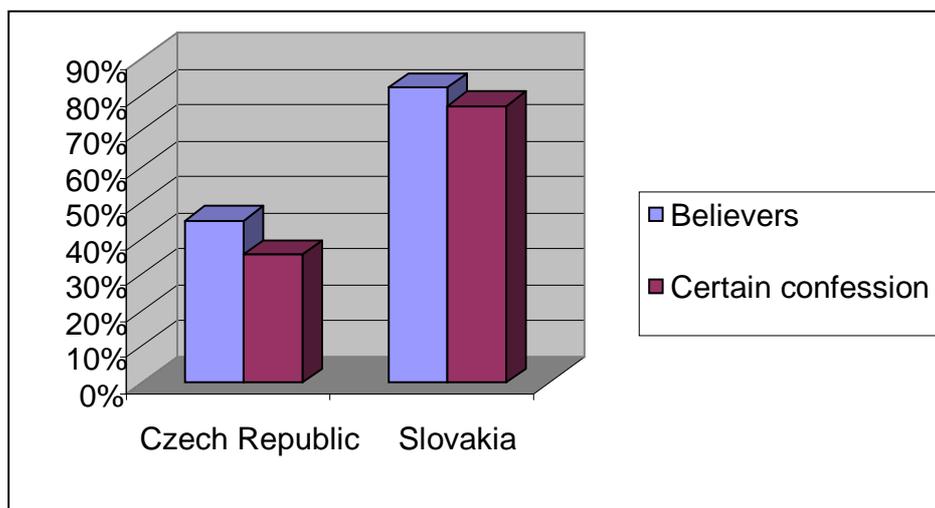


Fig. 2 Percentage of people with a certain confession compared to believers without confession



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Fig. 3. If you do not count weddings, funerals or christening, how often do you attend church services

