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THE DECLINE OF CHURCHES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND THE QUESTION OF SOCIAL IDENTITY

-Abstract-

At first, the paper outlines the advancing secularization of society in the Czech Republic in the last 25 years. This movement shows itself especially by reducing the number of believers of the traditional churches. This rapidly declining trend occurs nowhere in the world in this scale as neither evangelicals nor new religious movements achieve any great success. Since 1990s, there has been a noticeable intensive increase in numbers of members of these communities and since the beginning of millennium, there is only modest growth, stabilization, or even a loss of membership bases. Some more permanent growth in the number of believers records only the Churches that are spiritually related to immigrants. Unorganized spirituality becomes gradually religious mainstream. The vast majority of the population, however, accustomed to look for social identity outside the realm of religion. The paper draws on data mainly from the statistics of the last three censuses in the Czech Republic in 1991, 2001 and 2011. It sees main reasons in the troubled past, which is burdened with many misinterpretations. Vague and negative perceptions of religious past create a barrier to social identification with traditional and new religious communities.

Keywords: secularization, church, social identity, decline of churches, Czech Republic.

Part I. Introduction

The Czech Republic can be considered as a country in which the vast majority of the population keeps religious indifference or direct negative attitudes. According to the Pew Research Center, the percentage of this type of population is

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even higher than that in North Korea, which has religious freedom in comparison with the Czech Republic restricted by the state.¹ Although from global point of view, scholars sometimes speak about signs of desecularization², it obviously doesn't go for this country. It is clear from last census in 2011, the Czech Republic has just over 10.5 million inhabitants, but only 1,467,438 inhabitants claimed allegiance to some church or religious society.³ This paper will demonstrate a phenomenon of intensified religious belonging in the immediate aftermath of communist rule in the Czech Republic, and it will try to find reasons of declining of churches and religious communities in recent decades.

Part II. Churches and religious societies after the census in 2011

In census 2011, most people claimed traditionally their affiliation to the Roman Catholic Church—altogether 1,082,463 believers. But the Roman Catholic Church alone lost most of its members since 1990s. In the census of 1991, the church signed up 4,021,385 believers, which represented approximately 40% of the Czech population. But in 2001 only 2,740,780 believers. This descending trend still continues. It is evident also from some other surveys. For example, in the same year when the last census took place, the Czech statistical agency STEM found out that about 30% of Catholics consider their own church as a useless organization.⁴ The

¹ See *Pew Research Center* [online]. P [cit. 2016-07-04]. URL: <http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/religions/unaffiliated>

² Peter L. Berger, “Desecularization of the World: A Global Overview”, in: P. L. Berger (ed.), *Desecularization of the World. Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Michigan, 1999, pp.1-18.

³ The statistical data contained in the text are taken from Czech Statistical Office which organized and compiled the results of the census in 1991, 2001 and 2011. The data presented by other statistical offices are often inaccurate or outdated. An example may be the *Association of Religion Data Archives* [online]. P [cit. 2016-07-04]. URL: http://www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_65_1.asp. According to this statistical office, 55% of the population signed up to Christianity. For much more accurate data, see: *Pew Research Center* [online]. P [cit. 2016-07-04]. URL: http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/countries/czech-republic/#/?affiliations_religion_id=0&affiliations_year=2010®ion_name=All%20Countries&restrictions_year=2013. These are apparently based on data from Czech Statistical Office, from the census in 2001. For detailed comparisons of the census in 1991, 2001 and 2011, see the document: “Population by religious belief and sex by 1921, 1930, 1950, 1991, 2011 and 2011 censuses”. *Czech Statistical Office* [online]. P [cit. 2016-07-04]. URL: <https://www.czso.cz/documents/10180/20548149/4032130118.pdf/e161cf74-4650-424c-b276-154bdcd6ec31?version=1.0>

⁴ The percentage of people with this type of answer reached, in case of some Protestant churches, almost 50%. See INFORMACE Z VÝZKUMU STEM TRENDY 12/2011.

Roman Catholic Church has in the Czech Republic two ecclesiastical provinces consisting of eight dioceses, headed by bishops and administrated by 1,800 diocesan priests. In the life of the Catholic Church we found a large number of active participants of deacons, laymen and also about 2,700 monks and nuns, among whom we find Salesians, Jesuits, Dominicans, Franciscans and Clarisses, Premonstratensians, Carmelites, Knights of the Cross with the Red Star, the Order of Malta, Borromean Sisters, School Sisters of Notre Dame, Merciful Sisters of the Holy Cross, Daughters of St. Paul etc.⁵

Table 1

Traditional Churches in Decline			
Census (Czech Statistical Office)	1991	2001	2011
Roman-Catholic Church	4,021,385	2,740,780	1,082,463
Czechoslovak Hussite Church	178,036	99,103	39,276
Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren	203,996	117,212	51,936
Old Catholic Church	2,725	1,605	1,730
Silesian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession	33,130	14,020	8,158
Lutheran Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession	-	5,412	2,589
Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession	-	14,885	6,645

STEM.CZ [online]. P, 2011 [cit. 2016-07-04]. URL: https://www.stem.cz/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/2304_1442.pdf

⁵ ČBK, *Katolická církev v České republice*, Kostelní Vydří, Karmelitánské nakladatelství 2013. See Table 1.

These numbers do not include members of the Apostolic Exarchate Greek-Catholic Church, which has its own structure and acts more or less independently within the Catholic Church in the Czech Republic. In this church we can see on the contrary an increase. While in the censuses in 1991 and 2001, this Church signed up regularly around 7,000 believers (7,030, 7,675); in 2011 it was almost 10,000 believers. This situation is not caused any significant activities of the Church in the society, nor an increased interest in Eastern spirituality, but immigration from countries east of the Czech Republic.⁶

Table 2

Traditional Churches in Growth – due to immigration			
Census (Czech Statistical Office)	1991	2001	2011
Greek-Catholic Church	7,030	7,675	9,883
Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands	19,354	22,968	20,533
Russian Orthodox Church	-	-	5,817

The Old Catholic Church in the Czech Republic has currently about 1,700 members. In 1990s, the church has lost more than a third of its believers, but since the last census its membership has been stabilized and showed a slight increase.⁷ The growth of the membership base in the Greek-Catholic Church has its analogue in the Orthodox Church. Also in the Orthodox Church was registered significant membership growth especially in the penultimate census in 2001. In 1991, 19,354 believers claimed allegiance to the church; in 2001 it was 22,968. At the next census in 2011, the number of believers went down to 20,628. The membership base grew

⁶ For the history of this church see also: Václav Vaško, *Likvidace řeckokatolické církve*, Kostelní Vydří, Karmelitánské nakladatelství 2007; Milan Hanuš, Ladislav Hučko, *10 let Apoštolského exarchátu*, Apoštolský exarchát v ČR, Praha, 2006. See Table 2.

⁷ For the history of this church see also: Karel Koláček, *Vznik a vývoj starokatolického hnutí na území severních Čech do roku 1946*, L. Marek, Brno, 2006. See Table 1.

mainly due to immigration, which has recently increased again because of the war in Ukraine. In official statistics this increase has not been registered yet. The Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia is one of 14 canonical autocephalous churches. The beginnings of Orthodoxy in the Czech lands are closely linked with some ideas of national revivalists in the 19th century and with their reminiscences on the east mission of Cyril and Methodius (9th century). In 1920, Czechoslovak Church constituted as a consequence of a schism in the Czech Catholic Church. This new Church has gained in the early 5 years up to half a million members. In order to get apostolic succession and to enter into fellowship with one of the world's major churches, close relations were developed with the Serbian Orthodox Church, which offered the ordination possibility of three bishops to the Czechoslovak Church. The Serbian Church found in the end as the suitable from the three proposed candidates only Matej Pavlik (1878-1942), who was closest to Orthodoxy. Mutual misunderstanding and especially incompatibility of the orthodox conservatism with modernist mentality of young Czechoslovak Church led in the end to a split in 1924, in which Matej Pavlik (Bishop Gorazd) went from the Church to follow like-minded believers.⁸ In Slovakia the Orthodox Church has its modern roots in the movement which sought to return to orthodoxy within the Greek-Catholic Church. During the communist period in Czechoslovakia all Eastern Rite churches were subordinate to the Orthodox Moscow Patriarchate which gave this Church in 1951 the status of autocephality. Estimated number of believers in the Slovak Republic is around 49,000.⁹

Because of increased immigration from the former Soviet Union, Russian Orthodox Church has recently registered¹⁰ subordinated to the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia in the Czech Republic with the center in Karlovy Vary, where there is a large Russian community. 5,844 believers signed up to this Orthodox Church in the last census 2011.¹¹

According to the last census, 39,276 believers signed up to Czechoslovak Hussite Church. This Church lost similarly to Catholic Church three-quarters of its members over the past 25 years. In the census of 1991, 178,036 people claimed

⁸See Metropolita Kryštof, *Naše pravosláví. O pravoslavné víře a životě pravoslavné církve u nás*, Pravoslavná církev, Praha, 2009. See Table 2.

⁹ For more information see the document of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic: *Obyvateľstvo podľa náboženského vyznania. Štatistický úrad Slovenskej Republiky* [online]. P, 2011 [cit. 2016-07-04]. URL: <https://slovak.statistics.sk>

¹⁰The church or religious community gains by registering some special rights such as: to found church schools, to practice the seal of confessions, etc. See “Act 3/2002 on Freedom of Religion and the Position of Churches and Religious Associations” [online]. P [cit. 2016-07-04]. URL: <http://specp.prf.cuni.cz/aj/3-02enb.htm>

¹¹ See Table 2.

allegiance to the Church. In the census of 2001 this Church had only 99,103 members. Just for comparison, in 1949 the estimated number of members was around 1,000,000.¹² As mentioned above, the church was founded because of the schism in the Catholic Church at the beginning of 1920 after an unsuccessful attempt to reform the Church in spirit of thoughts of Catholic modernism movement and to try to restore national tradition of the Czech Reformation. In 1924, approximately a half million inhabitants of the Czech Republic already signed and this growing trend continued into 1950s. In the first thirty years a large number of socially engaged laymen participated in enlargement of the Church and its administration mainly by creating or intensively cooperating with a number of social, charitable, sports, educational, musical, theater and cultural communities and societies. The onset of the totalitarian regime in the late 1940s stopped social involvement of Church members and restricted religious activities to worship, for Bible study and catechesis, etc. This process contributed to the subsequent loss of meaning of laymen activities in the Church. After the Revolution in 1989, the Church has failed to recover the social laymen involvement.¹³

The second largest church in the Czech Republic is the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, to which 51,936 believers claimed allegiance in the last census in 2011. Also this Church lost in the last 25 years about three-quarters of its members. At the census in 1991 signed up to it 203,996 and 117,212 believers in 2001. The Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren was established in 1918 by unification of Lutheran and Reformed Confessions in the Czech lands. Approximately 126,000 members of Reformed and 24,000 of Lutheran churches entered into the union. The people in these churches were considered to be descendants of the old Czech reformation movement which could publically confess their faith after the Patent of Toleration (1781). This law, however, allowed them to choose only between two permitted confessions: Lutheran and Reformed.¹⁴

The union of Czech Brethren in 1918, however, did not enter the church in Silesia (northeast of the Czech Republic) which is present in this region from the beginning of the Reformation and belongs to the oldest Lutheran churches. This church survived the recatholization pressure in the 17th century and in 1709 acquired its own temple due to the Swedish King Karl XII. After the Patent of Toleration (1781), these Lutherans could again set up its churches and chapels. In 1991, 33,130 believers claimed allegiance to the Silesian Evangelical Church of the Augsburg

¹² Vladimír Srb, *Statistická příručka církve československé*, ÚR ČČS, Praha, 1949. See Table 1.

¹³ See Jiří Vogel, *Služba laiků v ČČSH – project*, “Theologická revue”, 86/2015, 1, pp.46-53.

¹⁴ See Pavel Filipi, *Křesťanstvo. Historie, statistika, charakteristika křesťanských církví*, CDK, Brno, 1996, pp.177-179. See Table 1.

Confession (SCEAV). In 1991 the extraordinary synod of Silesian Lutheran deposed bishop and his deputy from leadership of the Church allegedly due to collaboration with the communist regime and its State Security. However, the Bishop who was also in the lists of collaborators with communist State Security was chosen into the leadership of the Church. In the background of these disputes was conflict between traditional spirituality and new revival movement that began to dominate this Church in the early 1990s. In 1995, there took place an internal schism in which approximately one third of mostly traditional believers who founded the Lutheran Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the Czech Republic (LECAV) left the Church. In the most recent census in 2011, 8,162 believers claimed allegiance to the Silesian Evangelical Church and 2,589 believers to the Lutheran Evangelical Church.¹⁵

In the Czech Republic, the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession (ECAV) was also constituted after the division of the Czechoslovakia in 1993 from the congregation of the Slovak Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Prague. 14,885 believers signed up this church in the census of 2001 and 6,645 in 2011.¹⁶ At first glance it may seem strange that such a large number of believers claim allegiance only to several congregations. Their role here is probably played by two factors. In the Czech Republic, there live many people of Slovak nationality which are with the Church internally identified, although they do not attend church services. But it is also very probable that people confuse the similar names of all three Lutheran Churches when filling out census questionnaires.

The Brethren Church can—along with Czech Brethren—partially count to churches of the Calvinist tradition. This Church was established in 1882 by the unification of the Free Evangelical Church of Czech and the Free Reformed Church. The Free Evangelical Church of Czech was founded by a group believers from the tolerated Reformed Church in 1868, who were not satisfied with the discipline of their Church. The Free Reformed Church was constituted in Prague in 1880 under the influence of American missionaries. In 1918, the church refused to enter the union of Czech Brethren on doctrinal reasons. The Church is currently a member of the International Federation of Free Evangelical Churches. The Church of Brethren belongs to the few churches in which the number of members is increasing. 2,759 believers claimed allegiance to the church in the census of 1991, 9,931 in 2001, and 10,872 in 2011 respectively.¹⁷

¹⁵See Zdeněk R. Nešpor, Zdeněk Vojtíšek, *Encyklopedie menších křesťanských církví v České republice*, Karolinum, Praha, 2015, pp.403-409. See Table 1.

¹⁶See Ibidem, pp.318-330. See Table 1.

¹⁷See Ibidem, pp.209-247. See Table 3.

Table 3

Evangelical Protestant			
Census (Czech Statistical Office)	1991	2001	2011
Unity of Brethren	2,269	3,426	2,152
Brethren Church	2,759	9,931	10,865
Baptist Union in the Czech Republic	2,544	3,622	3,208
Evangelical Methodist Church	2,855	2,694	1,949
Brethren Assemblies (Open Brethren)	3,017	6,927	3,450
Christian Fellowship Church	-	4,012	9,387
Apostolic Church	1,485	4,565	4,934
Seventh-day Adventist Church	7,674	9,757	7,391

In the Czech Republic there are also Baptist and Methodist communities that were formed under the influence of the missions organized by American churches. Baptists got to the Czech lands in the second half of 19th century. After World War I, a union called the Chelcicky Unity of Brethren (Baptists) was formed by a 25 Czech, Moravian, Slovak, Hungarian and German congregations. After 1949, the church was renamed to the Unity of Brethren Baptists (Baptist Union in the Czech Republic). Like most of evangelical churches, the Unity of Brethren Baptists was growing, especially in 1990s. 2,544 believers claimed allegiance to this Church in the census of 1991. Almost 30% growth to 3,622 members was registered

in 2001. On the contrary there was a slight decrease to 3,208 members in the most recent census in 2011.¹⁸

The Evangelical Methodist Church was founded under the influence of American missionaries from Texas after World War I. It is a member of the World Methodist Council, which brought together 90 churches with nearly 50 million members. First Methodist congregations were based on today's territory of Czech Republic in 1921. In 1990s, its membership base was relatively stable. 2,855 believers signed up to this Church and 2,694 in 2001. According to the last census in 2011, however, the church lost almost 25% of its members and it had 1,952 believers.¹⁹

The Brethren Assemblies can also be counted to stream of evangelicals in the Czech Republic. This Church follows the revival movements of 18th and 19th centuries, especially the so-called "Plymouth Brethren" who emerged in Britain before 1830 and the German Brüderbewegung from mid-19th century. In 19th century, this movement internally differentiated on the issue of access to the believers of other churches. This created two independently evolving branches of the Brethren movement, "Open Brethren" and "Closed Brethren". The emergence of the Christian Congregations in the territory of today's Czech Republic fell in 1909 and was affiliated to missionary action "Open Brethren". 3,017 believers claimed allegiance to this community in 1991. In the following decade, the church increased more than twice to 6,927 members. At the last census, however, it went again down to 3,458 members.²⁰

In the Czech Republic, there are also communities related to the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, in whose structure Presbyterian and Congregational principles are often mixed. Some of them can be characterized as an independent congregation, which creates the larger free associations of congregations. The biggest of them is the Christian Fellowship Church which has its origins in the charismatic movement of 1970s and 1980s and partially also in so-called World of Faith movement. It is a free association of independent congregations which got the state registration in 2002. In the census of 2001, a year before registration 4,012 believers claimed allegiance to the Church and in the census of 2011 already 9,387. Shortly after the census, several congregations seceded and formed a so-called Church of Faith which was recognized by the state in 2012. According to the records

¹⁸See Ibidem, pp.125-154. See Table 3.

¹⁹See Vilém Schneeberger, *Metodismus v Československu (1918-1992)*, ECM, Praha, 2003. See also Nešpor, Vojtíšek, *op.cit.*, pp.331-356. See Table 3.

²⁰See Ibidem, pp.381-402. See Table 3.

of internal documents of the Church, there is also a slight decline in membership in recent years.²¹

Typically Pentecostal and a member of the American Church Assemblies of God are the Apostolic Church. Also in this Church the number of members significantly increased in 1990s. 1,485 believers signed up to the Church in 1991 and 4,565 in 2001. This significant increase was not repeated in the last census in 2011 when 4,934 people signed up to the Church.²²

Moravian Church (Unity of Brethren) is also associated with Pentecostal and Charismatic movement. This Church followed the tradition of the original *Unitas Fratrum* and also renewed Unity of Brethren from Herrnhut (Germany). But during the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in 1980s and 1990s the Church in the Czech Republic went through a significant transformation, which led in the end to a division. The non-charismatic traditional minority seceded and joined the Czech Brethren as an autonomous seniorat of Moravian Brethren. To the charismatic Unity of the Brethren claimed allegiance 2,152 members in the census of 2011.²³

The Seventh-Day Adventist Church in the Czech Republic would be classified as evangelical too. Also this church increased especially in 1990s. 7,674 believers signed up to the church in 1991 and in the following decade the number of members grew up to 9,757. On the contrary in the next decade there was a roughly equal decrease to 7,391 followers.²⁴

The Religious Society of Jehovah's Witnesses and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) could be also included in the communities of the Christian spectrum. Jehovah's Witnesses started to evolve their missionary's activities in the Czech lands in late 19th century. In 1990s, their membership base significantly grew, similarly as in all churches which put great emphasis on mission and evangelization. In 1991, 14,575 followers signed up to them and in 2001 their number increased up to 23,162. But according to the last census, their numbers extensively declined. According to data from the year 2011, their membership decreased even below the level of 1991 to 13,069 followers.²⁵

²¹ See *Církev Křesťanská společnost* [online]. P [cit. 2016-07-04]. URL: <http://kaes.cz/dokumenty/vyrocn.html>, and *Křesťanské společenství Praha* [online]. P [cit. 2016-07-04]. URL: <http://sbor.kspraha.cz/ke-stazeni/dokumenty-1>. See also Nešpor, Vojtíšek, *op.cit.*, pp.263-277. See Table 3.

²² See *Ibidem*, pp.90-113. See Table 3.

²³ See *Ibidem*, pp.357-380. See Table 3.

²⁴ See *Ibidem*, pp.155-208. See Table 3.

²⁵ See *Ibidem*, pp.436-472. See Table 4.

Table 4

Other Christian			
Census (Czech Statistical Office)	1991	2001	2011
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints - Mormon	549	1,366	926
Jehovah's Witnesses	14,575	23,162	13,069

Mormons were also active in the Czech Republic in the late 19th century. Their church was recognized by the state in 1929. During the totalitarian period, the church was banned and practically ceased to exist. Shortly after the revolution in 1989 in the Czech Republic, many Mormon missionaries and the Church successfully grew. 549 followers signed up to Church in 1991 and in 2001 the Church has more than doubled to 1,366 members. The following quantitative development of the membership base is similar to development of Jehovah's Witnesses. Census in 2011 showed declining back to 926 followers.²⁶

Table 5

Other Faiths			
Census (Czech Statistical Office)	1991	2001	2011
Jewish	1,292	1,515	1,474
Muslim	495	3,699	3,358

²⁶See *Ibidem*, pp.248-262. See Table 4. For basic information about the other religions in the Czech Republic, see Table 5.

Buddhist	-	6,817	6,101
Hindu	-	1,061	1,981

Part III. The historical background of the decline of religious life in the Czech Republic

The decrease in the members of traditional religious mainstream can be seen in many regions of Central and Western Europe. This downward trend, which affects not only religious communities but also secular communities, is due to a variety of reasons. First, increasing individualism that is associated with new ways of entertainment, communications and information retrieval is one. Second, others believe that traditional religious mainstream crushed itself in its adapting to modern society. Third, others were convinced that their Churches failed to adequately cope with modern society as they used an incomprehensible language and excruciating ways of worship and they are intolerant, etc. Fourth, some others point to the influences of globalization, cultural and religious confrontation which weaken the awareness of the uniqueness of their own community. These reasons are all to a certain degree right.²⁷

However, there must be other reasons for the situation in the Czech Republic. Otherwise it is not possible to explain the decline of membership in traditional churches. This decline has not any parallel in other European countries. I believe that these reasons are related to the unsettled religious history of the Czech lands and to the different interpretations of the past which make it almost impossible to identify oneself with traditional mainstream nor with new missionary active religious groups.

The Czech lands are too marked by religious conflicts in the late Middle Ages. In the end of 14th century in Bohemia a reform church movement began to take shape and revolution and reformation broke out after the conviction and burning of two of its leaders at the Council of Constance–Jan Hus (1415) and Jerome of Prague (1416). In the following two centuries, in the Czech lands several religious groups coexisted, among which there were tensions but also tolerance. The situation changed after the defeat of the Czech non-Catholic nobility in the Battle of

²⁷ See Stijn Latré, Walter Van Herck and Guido Vanheeswijck (ed.), *Radical secularization? An inquiry into the religious roots of secular culture*, Bloomsbury Academic, New-York, 2015; or Detlef Pollack, Olaf Müller, and Gert Pickel (ed.), *The social significance of*

White Mountain in 1620. People had to accept the Catholic faith; thousands of them had to flee their country and memories of the specific Czech religiosity between the 15th and 17th century began to be systematically erased.²⁸

The situation began to change following the issuing of the Patent of Toleration (1781) by Emperor Joseph II of Austria who legalized the Lutheran and Reformed faiths in the Czech lands. It was very surprising that after 150 years of hard recatholisation the confession signed up 78,000 people. Often idealized reminiscences of the specific Czech religiosity between the 15th and 17th century became foundation stones for the construction of Czech national identity in the 19th century in the period of romanticism and national awakening. This movement regenerated main figures of Czech reformation like Jan Hus, Jan Zizka, Petr Chelcicky or Jan Amos Comenius etc.²⁹

This led to the damage of the image of the Catholic Church in the history of the Czech lands and to the gradual weakening of the connection between national and Catholic identity. At the end of 19th century, it was evident especially in the growth of traditional Protestantism, but also on the emergence of new protestant churches. Although many of these new churches were established under the influence of missionaries from abroad, for example from the United States, very often made reference to personalities and to the ideas of Czech reformers between 15th and 17th centuries.

Also in the Catholic Church reform movement that gained its inspiration from often idealized reminiscences of the Czech Reformation period and of its leading figures emerged in the 19th century. After the disintegration of Habsburg monarchy at the end of World War I and after the constitution of independent Czechoslovakia in 1918 the ideological pressure on the Catholic Church was intensified. Tomas Garrigue Masaryk, a prominent Czech sociologist and philosopher, an expert on and a great admirer of the Czech Reformation was elected the first president. Among the symbols of the Czech statehood a series of items of the Czech Reformation were obtained. And at the beginning of 1920 a schism occurred in the Catholic Church from which the Czechoslovak Church was constituted, which later added to its name the term "Hussite" to express close

religion in the enlarged Europe: secularization, individualization and pluralization, Ashgate, Burlington, 2012 etc.

²⁸ See Geoff Mortimer, *The origins of the Thirty Years War and the revolt in Bohemia, 1618*, Palgrave Macmillan, New-York, 2015.

²⁹ See Eduard Winter, *Der Josefismus. Die Geschichte des österreichischen Reformkatholizismus, 1740-1848*, Rütten & Loening, Berlin, 1962.

ideological and spiritual connection with the figure of Jan Hus and the Hussite movement.³⁰

From 19th century to World War II several concepts of meaning of the Czech history competed. They had been moving from a literary clash to political collisions. One of the main dividing lines was formed in the conception of the importance of the Catholic Church in the period of the Czech Reformation. Despite this pressure, the vast majority of the population signed up to the Catholic Church at the end of World War II. The situation began to change with the totalitarian era after 1948. The new regime took advantage of ideological potential that was hidden in the Hussite movement. Jan Hus began to be presented as a social reformer and his followers as the first primitive communists. The spiritual content of the Czech Reformation movement was completely emptied.

The year 1948 can also be seen as the beginning of the program of atheists from all the people of the Czech society. The activities of some religious communities were completely banned, public presentation of the churches increasingly restricted, and dozens of clergy were arrested and imprisoned. Religion became subject to strict control of the State at all levels. Many church leaders were chosen as a *modus vivendi* collaboration with the new regime and the real religious life retreated in many places to the underground.³¹ People gradually stopped attending religious services and educating their children in religion. The generations born in 1950s knew about religion only a little, and generations born after 1970s almost knew nothing.

Religion returned to the public sphere of the Czech society after the fall of the old regime at the end of 1989. In February 1990, Dalai Lama came to Prague at the invitation of President Vaclav Havel, and less than half a year after the revolution in April of the same year the Pope John Paul II came to Prague also who served in Prague service, which was attended by half a million people. Religion had at this time a very mystical tinge. It was something new and many people were interested in religion. Series of missionaries from around the world began to be active in Czechoslovakia. And because of big interest in religion they occasionally had to hire a sports arena. Traditional churches and religious communities renewed their activities. A variety of religious groups came from underground to the public

³⁰ See Jiří Vogel, *Církev v sekularizované společnosti: studie k husitské eklesiologii*, L. Marek, Brno, 2005.

³¹ See Václav Vaško, *Neumlčená. Kronika katolické církve v Československu po druhé světové válce, I*, Zvon, Praha, 1990; Václav Vaško, *Neumlčená. Kronika katolické církve v Československu po druhé světové válce, II*, Zvon, Praha, 1990; Jiří Hanuš, *Křesťané a socialismus 1945-1989*, Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, Brno, 2012.

sphere and many completely new churches and religious communities were established.

The census from 1991 apparently reflected the increased interest in religion. Many people remembered their religious affiliation and began to sign up to churches that once their parents and grandparents visited. However, the number of people who regularly gathered on Sunday services in traditional churches was significantly lower than that which appeared in the census. Already in the second half of 1990s, a certain “oversaturation” with religion began to show and the interest in it gradually disappeared. Negative influence also played a series of scandals of various religious leaders and the endless effort of traditional churches for their restitution and compensation. It evoked in times of rising unemployment and later also economic crisis in many people angry reactions. Rising unemployment and homelessness, robbing of property of state enterprises and later economic crisis caused many people to rethink their negative attitudes towards old regime.

Along with these attitudes, a negative look at religion began to return which was in the citizens of the Czech Republic cultivated for four decades. Decline of members in traditional churches became apparent at the time of the census in 2001. And then the next census in 2011 confirmed how deep the broken ties between the inhabitants of the Czech Republic and its national religious traditions were. Identification with the religious tradition of the Catholic Church is for many people unthinkable because of its Counter-Reformation past. Identification with the Czech Reformation especially with the Hussite movement which survives in a number of traditional churches makes the Czech society easier. However, the society perceives this movement in its desecrated form that was created during socialism. Therefore, the identification with the tradition of the Hussite movement may not lead to identifying with any particular Czech non-Catholic churches.

Part IV. Social identity without organized religion

The majority of the Czech society has learned to live without religious communities just during the totalitarian period. Ideological pressure on the Czech religious landscape was one of the biggest in states of the former east European socialistic block. Already in the first decade after the fall of the old regime has proved that Czech society cannot identify itself with traditional religion and build on its religious past. It is particularly striking when we compare this situation with other countries of East Europe especially with Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria etc., where revitalization of traditional religions occurred after the fall of socialistic regimes.³² Although we can see the decrease of traditional

³² See Sabrina P. Ramet (ed.), *Religion and politics in post-socialist Central and Southeastern Europe. Challenges since 1989*, Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire, 2014.

membership base in some regions of these countries too, these reductions are not as dramatic as in the Czech Republic.

A partial success in the spreading of religion experienced evangelical churches and some new religious movements in 1990s. But considering the overall population of the Czech Republic, it is not anything breathtaking. Their total numbers have never reached even 1% of the population and currently are even lower than 15 years ago. Since the beginning of the millennium, an interest began to wane in these religious groups. Some communities of this type in recent years saw only slight growth or stabilization in the number of members. However, many of these communities experienced a fatal loss of membership too.³³

That does not mean that Czech society is so nonreligious when we see at first glance the numbers of the last census. An interest in individual spirituality is growing especially. Census forms in 2011 included the category of “believers—without the church or the religious community” that signed up 705,368 citizens of the Czech Republic and another 65,593 stated that they are Christians or believers but without name of their community or with wrong name of community. There are also other people who are interested in personal spirituality, but they have never identified themselves as believers or religious. 8,266,550 people in fact did not specify anything or used expression “without religion”.³⁴ Therefore we do not know exactly how big a group of people can be which would be probably in the US named “spiritual but not religious”³⁵ and in Europe “a man who believe in something” (Etwasist)³⁶ or “active agnosticism”³⁷. But ever-increasing sales of esoteric and spiritual literature indicate that this group has to be really huge.³⁸ It can be presumed that in the Czech religious landscape this unorganized group can compete for first place with the Roman Catholic Church. It seems that there is a correlation between the inability to find its identity in traditional churches and growth of these specific forms of spirituality.

³³ See Tables 3 and 4.

³⁴ See Table 6.

³⁵ Wade Clark Roof, Nathalie Caron, “Shifting Boundaries: Religion in the United States”, in: C.W.E Bigsby (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Companion to Modern American Culture*, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 116.

³⁶ See Klaas Hendrikse, *Glauben an einen Gott, den es nicht gibt. Manifest eines atheistischen Pfarrers*, TVZ, Zürich, 2013, pp.36-37; Jiří Vogel, *Lze věřit v Boha, který neexistuje?*, “Theologická revue“, 2014, 85, 4, p.478.

³⁷ Karl Jaspers, *Die Chiffren der Transzendenz*, Piper, München, 1984, p. 9nn.

³⁸ Zdeněk R. Nešpor, *Spirituální podnikání v České republice: soukromý a korporativní sektor. (Spiritual Business in Czech Republic: Private and Corporate Sectors)*, “Lidé města

Table 6

Others			
Census (Czech Statistical Office)	1991	2001	2011
Believers–without the church or the religious community	-	-	705,368
Christian and other believers–without name of their community or with wrong name of community	-	180,769	65,593
Unaffiliated	5,778,481	6,941,972	8,266,550
Atheist	-	-	1,058

But the vast majority of the population is interested neither in the unorganized forms of religion nor “non-religious” spirituality. Is it possible that right here was fulfilled the “prophecy” of Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was thinking of the “adult world” which will have no interest in questions which aim beyond the horizon of our being?³⁹ It seems that the age of passive agnosticism which sometimes goes into a passive atheism is an ordinary reality in the Czech Republic.⁴⁰ The vast majority of the population is looking for their social identity outside the realm of religious organizations, in their jobs, in circles of friends, in politics, in sports, in tourism, in hobby activities and in social networks, etc.

Is it possible that the spiritual situation in the Czech Republic also indicates what is happening in some other places in the world which have not undergone this disintegration of social and religious identity yet? And is it not awareness of

(Urban People)”, 11, 2009, 1, [online]. P [cit. 2016-07-04]. URL: <http://www.lidemesta.cz/archiv/cisla/11-2009-1/>

³⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Widerstand und Ergebung. Briefe und Aufzeichnungen aus der Haft*, GV, Gütersloh, 2005, see the letters between 6. 6. 1944 – 18. 7. 1944.

⁴⁰ Citizens of Czech Republic could sign up to atheism in the census of 2011. However, only 1,058 citizens signed up to atheism. Active atheism is apparently not popular probably due to its close association with the ideology of the socialist regime.

religious diversity and its supporting of postmodern aversion to Universalist religious concepts which will help this disintegration?