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Invisible Religion in a “Non-believing” Country: The Case of the Czech Republic

The authors analyse contemporary ir/religiosity and spirituality in the Czech Republic using data from national censuses, international surveys and a specialized national survey on the de-traditionalization and individualization of religion from 2006. The authors conclude that the influence of socio-demographic characteristics on a respondent's religiosity, both traditional and alternative, is weak; a more important factor in the determination of a person's world-view was found to be his/her religious socialization or the absence thereof. The effectiveness of religious socialization differs significantly between the various churches; the least effective being the Catholic Church and Czechoslovak Hussite Church. For historical reasons, attitudes towards Catholicism also influence the Czech mind-set on religion in general. The out-of-church movement became established very early in the country's history and was subsequently strengthened by Communist anticlericalism resulting in today's predominance of “non-believers”, the highest proportion in Europe.

Key words: anti-religious memory · atheism · Czech Republic · post-communist religion · religiosity and spirituality

Les auteurs analysent l'(ir)religiosité et la spiritualité contemporaines en République tchèque, en utilisant des données issues de recensements nationaux, d'enquêtes internationales et d'une enquête nationale spécialisée portant sur la “dé-traditionalisation” et l'individualisation de la religion à partir de 2006. Les auteurs concluent que l'influence de caractéristiques sociodémographiques sur la religiosité, autant traditionnelle qu'alternative, du répondant est faible. Un facteur plus important dans la détermination de la vision du monde d'un individu a été situé dans sa socialisation religieuse ou dans l'absence de celle-ci. L'efficacité de la socialisation religieuse diffère de façon significative entre les différentes Églises, les moins efficaces étant l'Église catholique et l'Église hussite tchécoslovaque. Pour différentes raisons historiques, les attitudes à l'égard du catholicisme influencent également la perception tchèque de la religion en général. Le mouvement de sortie de la religion s'est très précocement développé dans l'histoire du pays et a ultérieurement été renforcé par l'anticléricalisme communiste, qui aboutit à la prédominance actuelle des non-croyants, dont la proportion est la plus élevée d'Europe.

Mots-clés: athéisme · mémoire anti-religieuse · religion post-communiste · religiosité et spiritualité · République tchèque

If there is a case that proves the secularization thesis in the contemporary world, which is “as furiously religious as it ever was” (Berger, 1999: 2), it is Europe (Davie, 2002). Within Europe, however, there are very different religious settings both in terms of inner religiosity and in terms of legal and institutional backgrounds, which vary from state churches on the one hand to the system of *laïcité* on the other. Whatever the religious measurement criterion chosen, the former East Germany and the Czech Republic (and sometimes Estonia) usually rank amongst the most secularized countries in what is generally seen as a non-religious continent. The Czech Republic, more than the other two countries cited, proves the (almost) redundant rule that secularization goes hand in hand with modernization—at least at first glance. It is therefore not surprising that Steve Bruce, one of the most prominent recent defenders of the secularization theory, dedicated one of his books to the Czech religious sociologist Erika Kadlecová, whose findings support his opinions (Bruce, 2002).

For a better understanding of the role of religion in modern societies and the secularization theory, it is important to know whether the Czech Republic is really so non-religious and, if it is, why it should be so. Until religious researchers are able to explain the “furious atheism” of the Czechs, neither the rejection nor the acceptance of the secularist paradigm is apt; moreover, whilst the religious situation in other post-communist countries has been widely discussed in *Social Compass* (2002, 49:4), and elsewhere (e.g. Borowik and Tomka, 2001; Gautier, 1997; Pollack, 2003; Zrinščák, 2004), not much is known about the case of the Czech Republic despite its unique character.

This paper aims to fill this gap. Our goal is to (1) provide the reader with information on contemporary ir/religiosity in Czech society, (2) compare the Czech Republic’s historical and recent development with those of a number of other European countries, and thus (3) contribute towards a theoretical discussion on the role of religion in late modern societies. We begin with a presentation of the most recently obtained “hard” sociological data and conclude with a theoretical discussion of the subject.

1. Data sources

Empirical evidence is predominantly based on data from a project entitled the *De-traditionalization and Individualization of Czech Religion*, collected by the Institute of Sociology in 2006 (hereafter DIR 2006). The sample is representative of the adult population of the Czech Republic and respondents were selected through a random stratified framework¹. In total, information on 1,200 respondents was compiled (61% women, mean age 50).

The authors propose to compare this data with the various outcomes of the International Social Survey Programme 1998 module on religion (ISSP, 1998; the Czech data was collected in 1999) and Czech Censuses. ISSP respondents were selected using the multistage random stratified sampling method². In total, 1,223 people participated in the survey (52% women). Both pre- and post-communist Czech censuses include a question on religious affiliation; the last three censuses to register church membership/affiliation were those of 1950, 1991 and 2001.

In addition, Czech ISSP data sets from 1992 to 2005 have been used to document changes/stability in church attendance and ISSP 2005 data was used

for international comparison. Although the latter survey did not focus on religion, it is the latest international module available containing information on the religious affiliation of respondents.

2. Description of Czech ir/religiosity

According to ISSP 2005 data, the Czech Republic has the highest proportion of its population without any religious affiliation of the 17 European countries which participated in the survey (see Table 1). Moreover it should be pointed out that not only is the country in top position but the proportion of those non-affiliated is the highest by a wide margin. In total, 61% of Czech respondents declared no religious affiliation. This number is nearly 20 percentage points higher than the corresponding number in the United Kingdom, the second most non-religious country (42% of British respondents declared no religious affiliation).

Czech census data provides a similar picture. Czech church affiliation is weak and, moreover, in further decline due to what might be termed an “over-declaration” of religious belief shortly after the fall of the communist regime (see Table 2).

TABLE 1
Non/believers in European countries; ISSP 2005, valid per cent

	B*	CY	CZ	DK	FIN	F	D	H	IRL	LV	N	P	SLO	E	S	CH	UK
Non-affiliated	24	0	61	12	14	42	35	23	3	34	10	7	18	11	28	15	42
Christians	55	100	38	86	85	55	62	77	96	66	88	92	80	89	70	43	54
Other religions	1	0	1	2	1	3	4	0	0	1	2	1	2	0	1	3	3

*Flanders only.

TABLE 2
Church affiliation in the Czech lands; censuses in 1950, 1991, 2001

	1950	1991	2001
Roman Catholic Church	6,792,046	76.4 %	4,021,385
Protestant Church of Czech Brethren	401,729	4.5 %	203,996
Czechoslovak Hussite Church*	946,813	10.6 %	178,036
Other churches	212,694	2.4 %	105,661
Atheists	519,962	5.8 %	4,112,864
Total	8,896,133	100.0 %	10,302,215

*Nationalist “semi-Protestant” church established in 1920 through a secession of certain Catholics; until 1971 it was called the Czechoslovak Church.

The established churches have lost members, and the only churches with increasing membership are some (certainly not all) small denominations, many of which have a deeply evangelical background, including the Apostolic Church, the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Church of the Brethren; however, these albeit fast-growing churches boast a very small proportion of the total population. Thus, it seems that the data presented in Table 2 confirms the secularization thesis.

Undoubtedly, the decline in church affiliation between the 1950s and 2001 was dramatic, the proportion of the population declaring no religious affiliation increasing from 5.8% to 59%. The proportion of those non-affiliated in 1991 appears to be relatively low (compared to the 2001 census) but we should be careful to interpret this fact as evidence that a great deal of change occurred in the 1990s. A relatively high proportion of the “affiliated” might well have been driven to such a declaration by the fact that the 1991 census was conducted only a short time after the collapse of the communist regime, at which time claiming church affiliation was seen by many as a political rather than a religious statement.

Unfortunately, for a number of reasons census data provides just one view of contemporary religiosity. Nešpor argues elsewhere that such data is only partially comparable in the long term, is insufficient for any in-depth analysis, and may even be inapplicable due to the fact that it is impossible to distinguish the reasons for different respondents declaring church affiliation, no affiliation or refusal to answer (Nešpor, 2004). Therefore, attention must be turned to other measures of religiosity: church attendance and the religious beliefs of the Czech population.

Figure 1 shows church attendance according to Czech ISSP surveys from 1992 to 2005 and DIR 2006 data. It compares those who have never attended a

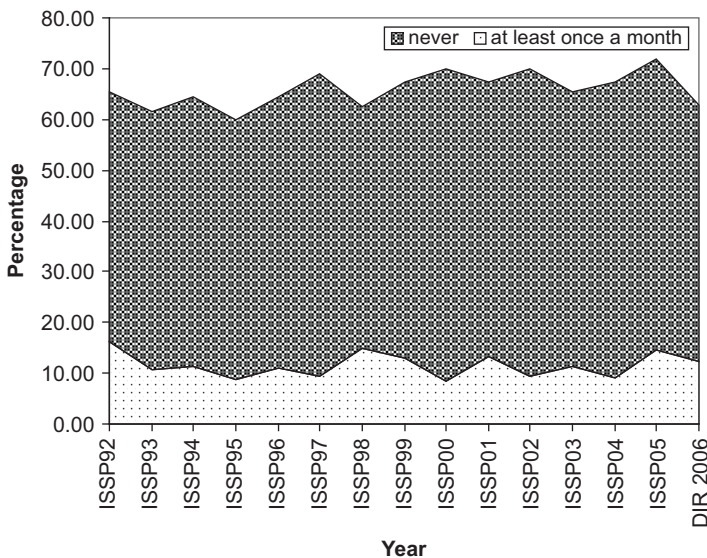


FIGURE 1
Church attendance in the Czech Republic 1992–2006

religious service with those who go to church at least once a month. It indicates relative stability in the proportion of respondents involved in church activities even though the 1992 total might be slightly underestimated due to differences in measurement criteria³. Generally, approximately 10% of respondents in the period 1992 to 2005 attended religious services at least once a month, the proportion of respondents who had never attended church fluctuating between 50 and 60%.

Previous statistics show only the level of church attendance but do not say much about religious belief. DIR 2006 survey respondents were, however, asked to express the extent to which they agreed with selected religious beliefs. Table 3 shows the distribution of responses and compares it with corresponding data from the 1998 ISSP revealing that the proportion of respondents who agreed with selected beliefs are similar in both surveys. Thus, approximately 11% of individuals strongly believed that “some fortune tellers really can foresee the future” or that “a person’s star sign at birth, or horoscope, can affect the course of their future”. Similarly, relatively stable numbers of respondents were found to believe in religious miracles, heaven or hell.

TABLE 3
Agreement with religious contentions; weighted data in per cent

Do you believe in . . .	ISSP 1998				DIR 2006			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
	Strongly	Agree	Strongly	Agree	Strongly	Agree	Strongly	Agree
Afterlife	11.9	24.2	26.4	37.5	17.1	25.9	23.8	33.2
Heaven	10.2	16.0	49.3	24.5	11.0	18.7	22.4	48.0
Hell	8.3	13.2	24.8	53.7	8.2	14.1	22.5	55.3
Religious miracles	8.4	18.6	26.1	46.8	11.2	21.1	24.8	42.9
Good luck charms	5.6	37.0	27.0	30.3	8.4	41.2	31.5	19.0
Horoscopes	9.6	36.5	26.3	27.6	10.9	39.1	30.2	19.9
Fortune tellers	10.8	42.2	24.0	23.0	11.9	57.8	20.9	9.5
Some faith-healers have God-given powers	9.3	31.8	25.3	33.6	13.1	48.1	23.4	15.4
Supernatural power	13.9	36.8	22.1	27.2	–	–	–	–
Efficiency of a prayer	13.4	24.8	23.1	38.6	–	–	–	–
New Age coming	6.4	16.9	38.3	38.4	–	–	–	–

Source: ISSP 1998, DIR 2006.

If we take into consideration all of those who subscribe to such beliefs, i.e. those who consider that a particular belief is definitively true or probably true, it is evident that the proportion of the population which is open to some kind of religious/spiritual belief is much higher than at first indicated; faith in the skills of fortune tellers, the existence of an undefined supernatural power, and a belief in star signs and horoscopes are the most popular forms of belief. In 2006 more than half of respondents agreed that some fortune tellers can foresee the future or that some form of supernatural power exists (53.0% and 50.7% respectively). Nearly half of respondents believed that star signs or horoscopes can influence the course of life (46.1%). On the other hand, the concept of hell was the least popular notion and appears to be acceptable to a mere 21.5% of respondents.

Whereas Czechs in general exhibit poor church affiliation and church attendance is low, many of them believe in the existence of supernatural phenomena and/or in some form of transcendence. Belief in reincarnation was also found to be high not only in those with no church affiliation but also, perhaps surprisingly, amongst a large number of regular churchgoers.

3. Who is religious and how?

Czech society seems therefore to fit in well with those of other Western European nations i.e., “un-churched populations rather than simply secular” (Davie, 2000: 8). Before turning to an explanation thereof, it is desirable to present a deeper sociological analysis of contemporary Czech religiosity and/or spirituality—the latter, as might be expected, being much preferred by non-church believers.

Table 4 shows the results of factor analysis which estimated the relative proximity of beliefs in various supernatural phenomena. The analysis disclosed the existence of two religious dimensions, or factors, that explain 77% of the variance.

TABLE 4
Factor loadings of religious beliefs, DIR 2006

	Factor 1	Factor 2
Afterlife	0.790	*
Heaven	0.910	*
Hell	0.912	*
Religious miracles	0.846	*
Efficiency of a prayer	0.788	*
Good luck charms	*	0.813
Fortune tellers	*	0.757
Horoscopes	*	0.844

N = 996

*Factor loading < 0.4

Note: In total, these factors explain 77% of variance (62% is explained by Factor 1, 15% by Factor 2).

The first factor relates to traditional Christian beliefs—in an afterlife, heaven, hell, miracles and the power of prayer—and explains 62% of the variance. The second dimension represents alternative privatized religiosity and is associated with belief in the power of good luck charms, the ability of fortune tellers to forecast the future or in the power of horoscopes and the stars to influence the course of life.

Since the authors were interested in establishing a profile of those individuals who incline towards both traditional and alternative spirituality, regression models were estimated (OLS regressions). Such regressions evaluate which socio-demographic characteristics increase one's inclination towards traditional beliefs and which tend towards alternative religiosity. Thus, the factor loading for traditional religiosity forms the dependent variable in the first set of regressions and loadings for alternative religiosity in the second set of models. Results pertinent to traditional religiosity are described initially whereupon attention is turned towards alternative religiosity.

Models which explain traditional religiosity are reported in Table 5: model 1 controls for standard socio-demographic characteristics, i.e. age, sex, education and the size of the community. This model demonstrates that older people and women tend more towards the traditional type than men and younger people.

Data also suggests that respondents who attain only a basic level of education incline towards traditional religiosity more than those with a higher level of education but that the overall effect of education is rather weak (the 90% confidence interval for the coefficient lies between 0.03 and 0.43).

The relationship between the size of the community and traditional beliefs is not linear. With the exception of large cities, interest in traditional Christianity declines as the size of the community increases (similarly Hamplová, 2000). Overall, model 1 explains only 6% of variance, suggesting that an inclination towards traditional religiosity is not strongly dependent upon socio-demographic characteristics.

Model 2 tests the importance of religious socialization and considers whether a respondent took part in religious services at the ages of 11 or 12. Childhood religiosity consists of three categories: the respondent attended church (1) at least once a month in his/her youth, (2) rarely (i.e. a few times a year, once or twice a year), (3) never (less than once a year). “Never” forms the comparative category.

DIR 2006 data suggests that religious socialization in childhood plays a key role in promoting belief in traditional religious phenomena, i.e. heaven, hell, miracles and/or the power of prayer. Controlling for childhood religious experience raises the explained variance from 6 to 18% and the model's BIC drops from -16.4 to -153.1. Even though all levels of church attendance in childhood are influential, the key difference is that between those who attended church at least once a month as children and others.

This model suggests another important fact, i.e. that if religious socialization is taken into account, age loses its significance, meaning that the higher level of traditional religiosity of older Czech people can be explained in terms of socialization and the fact that they attended church when they were young.

As the type of religious milieu in which religious socialization took place cannot be ignored, the authors also look at the question of which religious traditions and organizations are successful in the inter-generational transmission of their beliefs. In the next model therefore (model 3, Table 5) the religious affiliation

TABLE 5
OLS regression with dependent variable “traditional religiosity”, DIR 2006

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Coef.	s.e.	Coef.	s.e.	Coef.	s.e.
Constant	-0.047	0.162	0.016	0.150	-0.003	0.149
Age	0.010**	0.002	-0.002	0.002	-0.003	0.002
Male	-0.185	0.064	-0.129*	0.059	-0.128*	0.059
<i>Education</i>						
Primary	0.231*	0.103	0.216*	0.095	0.247**	0.095
Vocational						
Upper secondary	-0.086	0.073	-0.085	0.068	-0.086	0.067
University	-0.111	0.106	-0.079	0.098	-0.075	0.097
<i>Size of community</i>						
linear term	-0.178	0.063	-0.152**	0.058	-0.180**	0.058
Quadratic term	0.019**	0.007	0.018**	0.006	0.022**	0.006
<i>Church attendance in childhood</i>						
once a month or more			0.934**	0.074	0.787**	0.084
rarely			0.248**	0.084	0.100	0.091
<i>Mother's religious affiliation</i>						
Roman Catholic					0.310**	0.080
Czechoslovak Hussite					0.042	0.158
Other Christian					0.514**	0.138
Adj R2	0.06		0.19		0.21	
BIC	-16.4		-153.1		-158.4	
N	991		990		987	

of respondents in their childhood was taken into account. The mother's affiliation was split into three categories: Roman Catholic, Czechoslovak Hussite and other Christian. “No church affiliation” was used as the comparative category and included those who were unable to answer the question⁴.

Regression suggests that the smaller Christian denominations and communities are the most successful in the inter-generational transmission of their beliefs. In contrast, the Czechoslovak Hussite Church appears to provide the weakest level of religious socialization. Respondents whose mothers were affiliated to this church did not significantly differ from those who had no religious background in terms of traditional Christian beliefs.

In the next step, the above analysis was repeated for alternative religiosity (model 1, Table 6). The first model controls for standard socio-demographic characteristics, i.e. age, sex, education and the size of the community. Again, women tend to believe more in so-called alternative religious phenomena than men. However, in contrast to the analysis of traditional religiosity, alternative religious concepts are more popular among younger people. Having a higher level of education appears to decrease belief in horoscopes, good luck charms or fortune tellers but the overall effect of education is small as it was in the case of traditional religiosity (the 95% confidence interval for the coefficient lies between -0.41 and 0.00). Contrary to traditional belief, the size of the community, i.e. whether respondents live in urban or rural areas, was found to be unimportant. Even though the effect of three variables (age, sex and higher education) was statistically significant, the model accounts for only 3% of the variance and

TABLE 6
OLS regressions with dependent variable “alternative religiosity”, DIR 2006

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Coef.	s.e.	Coef.	s.e.	Coef.	s.e.
Constant	0.251*	0.125	0.272*	0.123	0.281*	0.125
Age	-0.004*	0.002	-0.009**	0.002	-0.010**	0.002
Male	-0.331**	0.065	-0.304**	0.064	-0.305**	0.064
<i>Education</i>						
Primary	-0.028	0.104	-0.017	0.102	0.019	0.103
Vocational						
Upper secondary	0.020	0.074	0.006	0.073	0.020	0.073
University	-0.211*	0.107	-0.200	0.106	-0.192	0.105
Size of community	0.024	0.015	0.025	0.015	0.023	0.015
<i>Church attendance in childhood</i>						
once a month or more			0.369**	0.080	0.346**	0.090
rarely			0.479**	0.090	0.448**	0.098
<i>Mother's religious affiliation</i>						
Roman Catholic					0.037	0.086
Czechoslovak Hussite					0.448**	0.171
Other Christian					-0.135	0.149
Adj R2	0.02		0.06		0.08	
Bic	1.9		-20.53		-9.24	
N	991		990		987	

is therefore unacceptable by BIC standards (BIC = 1.9). It must therefore be concluded that attraction to alternative religiosity is not strongly linked to standard socio-demographic factors.

The second model adds information on whether the respondent attended church as a child. As with the findings from the analysis of traditional religiosity, controlling for religious socialization significantly improves the model. Religious socialization at church thus not only increases the probability of believing in religious traditions but also the probability of believing in supernatural phenomena. However, an interesting difference was observed between those who attended church often (at least once a month) in childhood and those who merely attended from time to time. Belief in good luck charms, horoscopes and fortune tellers was most frequently detected amongst those who attended church, though still only occasionally (see model 2, Table 6). Conversely, belief in heaven, hell, miracles and the power of prayer was found to be most common amongst those who attended church regularly (see model 2, Table 5). This finding suggests that occasional contact with church and religion in childhood increases interest in the supernatural but is not sufficient to initiate the notion of specific religious belief.

The last stage involved adding information on the mother's religious affiliation, thus controlling for the religious tradition in which the respondent was raised. The results were found to be the exact opposite to those concerning traditional religiosity. Individuals socialized in the Roman Catholic tradition or in the smaller Protestant churches were found to believe in the power of good luck charms, horoscopes and fortune tellers to more or less the same extent as those whose mothers belonged to no religious denomination. An inclination towards alternative religiosity can be found only amongst those who grew up within the Czechoslovak Hussite Church.

Such analysis suggests that socio-demographic characteristics do not have a significant influence on whether a respondent professes to a traditional or alternative religion. Traditionalist and alternative believers were not found to belong to any specific sector of the population. Religious socialization and associated religious education were found to be the most important factors in encouraging adherence to traditional religious beliefs or subsequently substituting them for alternative religiosity. Those churches which maintain a firmer religious tradition and oppose (at least to some extent) "secularized" society (the smaller Protestant churches) have been more successful than the inclusive Roman Catholics or the religiously ambiguous Czechoslovak Hussite Church. In this respect, Danièle Hervieu-Léger's (1993) concept of religious "memory" is valid in the Czech milieu. It is conceivable that the same would be true concerning those declaring themselves "atheist" or non-affiliated; however, the data available does not allow this hypothesis to be tested.

4. Secularized nation in a "believing" continent—past and present

Table 1 shows that in comparison with the widespread lack of interest in religion in the Czech lands, other European countries might still be considered relatively religious (although it might be more correct to talk in terms of church

affiliation in both cases). More importantly, this has been the case during the whole of the 20th century. In contrast to other Central and Eastern European countries (including Eastern Germany and Estonia), Czech irreligiosity cannot be explained as a direct result of the communist regime, strongly antireligious though it was (see e.g. Němec, 1955).

The reason for the lack of such belief is that shortly after the creation of an independent Czechoslovakia in 1918, large-scale religious shifts occurred in the Czech lands. As many as 1.5 million people (of a total 13.5 million) left the Catholic Church, of whom only 20,000 were non-Czechoslovak. Such an exodus from the Catholic Church occurred in no other European country at that time (Czakó, 1925: 69–70). Only half of the dissenters eventually found a new religious affiliation in the newly established Czechoslovak Church (Czechoslovak Hussite Church since 1971), the others choosing “atheism” or non-affiliation. Moreover, this was only the visible opposition; many of those wishing to leave the church did so informally, simply unwilling to expend the effort to formally withdraw from it. Where did such strong opposition to the church from formal Catholics (pertinently known as “birth-register Catholics”) originate?

Some authors go as far back as medieval times, when the Czech reformation (Hussitism) created almost nationwide opposition towards the Church (e.g. Rémond, 1998: 278), but such an opinion is questionable. Hussitism merged subsequently with the Reformation but its followers almost completely disappeared following forced re-Catholisation in the 17th and 18th centuries. More credence should be given to those explanations which emphasize Czech nationalism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (e.g. Martin, 1978; Ramet, 1998: 113–5); since Czechs were broadly opposed to the Hapsburg dynasty and ethnic “Germans” in general, they also rejected the Catholic Church, which had enjoyed privileged status within the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and which was closely associated with the state. The establishment of a “national Catholic” church—i.e. the Czechoslovak Church—after the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was thus obvious. However, the new Church did not fulfil the anti-churchian attitudes of all; only half of the 1.5 million Catholic Church dissenters (i.e. around one fifth of the population of Bohemia, less in Moravia and Czech Silesia) joined the new religious organization while the rest, as mentioned above, were without confession as early as in the 1920s.

Nationalistic opposition towards an “alliance of throne and altar” was only one reason for the movement away from the church resulting in (declarative) “atheism”. If European secularization has three dimensions, as José Casanova argues, i.e. differentiation of secular and religious institutions, decline in religious beliefs and practices, and the privatization of religion (Casanova, 1994: 211), only the first and third elements were affected by so-called anti-Church nationalization. At this point, we can adopt the core aspects of the “Enlightenment critique of religion”, proposed by the same author: the cognitive critique of traditional religious worldviews, the moral critique of religious legitimization ideologies, and the subjective critique of religious alienation (Casanova, 1994: 233), all of which have emerged in Czech society during the last 150 years; whilst it is evident that the Czech reformation preceded the European reformation, enlightened ideology established itself in the Czech lands somewhat later—albeit quite strongly and with a significant impact on church religiosity.

Cognitively, such ideology was connected with a view of religion as “medieval”, morally corrupt and alienated from the people as a result of the “Hussitic past” rediscovered in the 19th century (Nešpor, 2006). The very combination of the enlightened critiques of religion, which were equated with Catholicism—the major and only visible confession at the time (Nešpor, 2007)—, and its widespread following, which came about as the result of the activities of the Czech intelligentsia and political and cultural leaders, led to a unique early “de-ecclesialization” (a similar, but briefer, explanation can be found in Greeley, 2003: 131) which, in the late 19th century, was disguised as formal Catholicism but which was disseminated, within the out-of-church movement, at the earliest opportunity, i.e. after the creation of an independent Czechoslovakia.

Admittedly, the majority of those claiming to be non-affiliated or non-believers (as well as many of those formally remaining in the Church) at the time were in fact searching for a modern, privatized form of religiosity, for a “mystic” religion in Troeltschian terms or for something we might today call “spirituality”. Whereas the anticlerical observer of the time favoured the Czechoslovak Church and even spoke of “a new Reformation in Bohemia” (Czakó, 1925: 78–9), the rejection of church and organized religion—as well as the term “religion” as such—was much more prevalent. Moreover, this remained the case throughout the 20th century, strengthened by communist anticlericalism, which had a negative effect on churches and churchgoers (further reducing their numbers) but not on privatized beliefs and their proponents. Paul Heelas, amongst others, describes contemporary European attitudes towards religion as “in the middle ground; people do not consider themselves to be members of any church or involved in any kind of traditional religion. They do not even identify themselves with agnostics and atheists” (Heelas, 2002: 358). This was precisely the case in the Czech lands 100 years ago. The Czechs had lost their traditional (church) religiosity, but at the same time they were not unreligious altogether—they opted for a kind of “non-church religion”.

5. Discussion: what kind of secularization occurred in the Czech lands?

Philip Gorski and other contemporary observers of the debate on the secularization thesis emphasise historical approaches which have been somewhat neglected, for many years, by the sociology of religion (Gorski, 2003). In doing so, with regard to Czech society, one must adopt Jose Casanova’s view on European secularization occurring as a result of the enforcement of the knowledge regime of secularism, rather than as the outcome of structural processes such as modernization, urbanization or even rationalization (Casanova, 1994).

The (hidden) de-ecclesialization of Czech society took place before these processes occurred and was undoubtedly connected with the nationalist movement and modern scientism (understandable as a form of implicit religiosity according to Durkheim), while in certain other countries—e.g. Poland—the situation was rather the opposite. In early modern and modern Poland, including the post-Second World War period, Roman Catholicism emerged as a constitutive component of the national identity, in opposition to the Protestantism of

the Germans and/or the Orthodoxy (later atheism) of the Russians. In the Czech lands, on the contrary, to be a “real Czech” included being anti-Catholic, which manifested itself popularly as irreligiosity or “atheism” in general.

It is important to note, however, that such “anti-religiosity” does not mean a lack of personal spiritual need and expression. Czechs have always been suspicious of church-organized religion, but not of privatized religion or “neo-Durkheimian” forms of religion, which transfer piety to ethnic, class or state entities (Taylor, 2002: 78).

Recent research shows that even during the communist period many people searched for religion-like symbolic universes, which could be found, for example, in the form of so-called protest songs (Nešpor, 2006). Similarly, one observer points out that with regard to Czech “religious scepticism . . . one cannot talk directly about atheism; this would assume a denial of everything transcending the usual sensitive perception. The intelligent Czech seems to be a long way from this point; he leaves himself enough space for engrossment to move into transcendence. Nevertheless, the result of such engrossment is that he is usually unwilling to place himself in the church context in which he is subordinate to a higher authority” (Frýbort, 2000: 16).

In terms of the place of religion in society, the modern Czech Republic might be compared with other Western European countries, France particularly, rather than Poland and other Central European countries including Slovakia which, of course, was once part of the Czechoslovak state. In both the Czech Republic and France, modernistic and nationalistic ideologies led to conflict with the dominant Catholic confession, ideologies which were only strengthened as the result of strong socialist movements (in France at the beginning of the 20th century, in Czechoslovakia some 40 years later) and which, in both cases, led to anticlericalism becoming an integral part of the national identity. Moreover, both countries have witnessed the forced suppression of certain Protestant minorities, minorities which were eventually tolerated (in the enlightened era of the late 18th century) and which then acquired a much greater cultural and social influence than their numbers might have suggested.

However, there is one important difference between the two countries in this respect: in France (historical) Protestantism never constituted a national form of self-identification as it did in Czech society. Subsequently, Czechs rejected modern Protestantism as being “too Germanic” and “too church-oriented”, preferring to establish a national ideology based on the historical legacy of Hussitism, the “great epoch” of the nation, which, interestingly, encompassed not only the (marginal) Protestant churches but also the liberal modernists, and even part of the Catholic Church itself.

Comparisons between the Czech Republic and France have an important theoretical significance. With regard to French society, Danièle Hervieu-Léger argues that de-ecclesialization/secularization did not lead to greater rationalization, as the old secularist theorists thought, but rather to a differentiation, subjectivization and de-traditionalization of belief, describing the ideal types of religionists as “convert” and “pilgrim” (Hervieu-Léger, 1993, 1999). Her definition of religion as a “chain of memory” allows an understanding of the secularization of French/European minds as a breaking of the chain through changes in the teaching of religion in families, churches and schools (or even the total

abolition of such teaching). Could it be argued that this has also happened in Czech society?

It is evident that the “Catholic chain” was broken and only partially replaced by a “Hussitic” philosophy supported by the education system, social and cultural leaders, and the media in the late 19th and almost the entire 20th centuries. As elsewhere, this not only weakened personal faith but also resulted in a kind of religious illiteracy. However, Stephen Prothero is not totally accurate when he argues that whilst Americans are quite religious but have little knowledge of the subject, Europeans are secular and know much more (Prothero, 2007). At least as far as Czechs are concerned, they know something of how “bad” religions were in the past, thus strengthening current irreligiosity and leading to a broad feeling of indifference towards the various churches, their teaching and even their former influence on society, culture and the arts.

Such an attitude is a long way from the reputed rationality of modern man, though the attitudes of “irreligious Czechs” to de-traditionalized forms of transcendence or the means of reaching them (e.g. healing practices and fortune telling) as outlined above are further away still. If one takes a broad view of religion, unconnected with churches and church attendance, modern Czechs might be seen as quite religious. At the same time, Czech religiosity/spirituality is heavily dependent on a range of “memory chains”, i.e. on religious education (or the lack of it) and socialization.

Some 40 years ago, Thomas Luckmann argued that “church-oriented religion is merely one and perhaps not even the most important element in religion in modern societies” (Luckmann, 1967: 28); this applies to both the past and the contemporary status of religion in Czech society to a much greater extent than any “strong” version of the secularization thesis dealing with automatic loss of religion due to modernization processes. If we understand secularization as pluralization and the decomposition of church affiliation, it has definitely occurred in the Czech lands, but as a result of the impact of elites imposing secularist thought on the people rather than as an “automatic” result of structural changes in society itself. Although such secularization predominantly affected church religion, de-traditionalized spirituality is still common in this outwardly non-religious country.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to empirically document levels of religiosity and spirituality in contemporary Czech society, to compare its development with that in selected European societies and thus contribute towards the discussion on the role of religion in today’s world. Firstly, the authors have shown that despite low levels of church membership and attendance, Czechs are not indifferent to religious and spiritual phenomena. On the contrary, a significantly high proportion of Czechs believe in some of the elements of so-called “alternative religiosity”. For example, over half of the respondents in surveys investigating the Czech religious landscape in 1999 and 2006 believed that some fortune tellers can foresee the future and that some form of supernatural power exists, and nearly half declared that one’s star sign or horoscope can influence the course of one’s life.

Importantly, the link between the religiosity of respondents and their socio-demographic characteristics, i.e. age, level of education and the level of urbanization of the community, is rather weak. Rather, data gathered by the authors indicates that religious socialization (measured by a respondent's church attendance in childhood and their mother's church affiliation) plays a key role in predicting the level as well as the type of religiosity in adulthood. The smaller (mainly Protestant) churches proved to be the most successful in the inter-generational transmission of beliefs. In contrast, respondents who grew up within the liberal Czechoslovak Hussite Church did not acquire any higher traditional Christian beliefs than those who had never attended church. The inclusive Roman Catholic Church seems to lie somewhere in between, i.e. its socialization practices are less successful than those of the smaller Protestant churches but are more effective than those of the Czechoslovak Hussite Church.

Furthermore, data suggests that alternative religiosity, i.e. a belief in fortune tellers, horoscopes, etc., is also linked with a respondent's religious socialization in childhood. Respondents who had some contact with a church, i.e. attended a service or mass from time to time but not regularly, acquired some notion of the existence of the supernatural but the infrequent contact (and presumably less clear-cut religious socialization) was not enough to transmit the relevant belief. It was also evident that even though the liberal Czechoslovak Hussite Church was not successful in transmitting traditional Christian beliefs, it raised awareness of the religious phenomena pertinent to alternative religiosity.

The authors also argue that the rise of Czech “atheism” is associated with Czech nationalism and the secularistic attitudes of the elites in the 19th and beginning of 20th centuries rather than with the impact of the Communist regime. The nationalist movement rejected the Roman Catholic Church due to its connection with the Austro-Hungarian Empire and portrayed Catholicism as a religion imposed by the Austrians or Germans and alien to the nation's more “natural” “Hussite past”. Moreover, the anti-church movement was strengthened by the enlightened critique of religion (understood as Catholicism). The sum of irreligious/anti-religious attitudes which had arisen before the Communist take-over, and which were strengthened by it, affected the nation's attitudes towards religion more strongly than modernization processes such as industrialization, urbanization and the growth of popular education.

NOTES

¹. The DIR survey achieved a response rate of 53%.

². The response rate of the Czech ISSP 1998 was 40%.

³. The ISSP 1992 used a different scale from that of later surveys. In 1992 the scale consisted of six categories: once a week, two to three times a month, a few times a year, once a year, less often, never—people in the first three categories being classed as “church-goers”. These categories were changed in later surveys, which distinguished between once a week, two to three times a month, once a month, a few times a year, less often, never—only those in the first two categories being considered “church-goers”. Thus, in 1992, respondents who went to church once a month might not have been included in the church-goers class.

⁴. This category also includes one respondent whose mother came from a non-Christian background.

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