
Religious Processes in Contemporary Czech Society*

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Abstract: Regardless of the role religion plays in the contemporary world, and the fact that there has occurred a massive de-privatisation of religions and de-secularisation of societies, in the Czech Republic the state of religion remains considerably understudied. This paper attempts to fill in this lack of knowledge. The subject is analysed with special regard to the values that are based on culture, symbolic representations and socio-economic institutions. Owing to the lack of empirical research, with the exception of some quantitative surveys and censuses, in this article the author works mainly with his own observations, which also incorporate historical arguments and analyses. He maintains that the developing trends in contemporary Czech religiosity are both similar to and distinct from those in Western Europe. The similar trends include out-of-church movements and even strong anti-clericalism, along with a process of de-traditionalisation and the rise of new spiritual outlets, connected either with 'New Age' spirituality or with the new charismatic and Pentecostal movements. The distinct trends involve a certain de-privatisation of traditional Christian beliefs, which is a reaction to the over-secularised suppression of the public sphere under the communist regime, and even before that. The paper reflects arguments that many of these processes, which have an important influence on Czech society as a whole, will undergo some changes with the state's entry into the European Union.

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Introduction

The role religions play in the public sphere around the world, affecting the socio-cultural space and politics, has greatly magnified in the last twenty or thirty years. As Samuel Huntington has pointed out, to a substantial extent religions define the cultural contexts of particular societies [Huntington 1997] in the world, which "is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever" [Berger 1999: 2]. Thus, even in secular Western Europe, one can see the resurgence of the role of

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religion(s) in the public sphere, among opinion leaders, and in the constitution of personal value scales and symbolic universes. Soper and Fetzer, for example, argue that religions and their mutual bias remain important in politics in France, Germany and the United Kingdom to a degree that secularisation theory had not predicted [Soper and Fetzer 2002: 187]. Due to this 'religious backlash', the secularisation theory, once the core theory in the sociology of religion, has become quite outdated and many scholars have turned their attention to the new or renewed social roles religions play in the modern world. To be sure, in our times the sociology of religion and affiliated disciplines have experienced a great upsurge, although they have altered many of their a priori premises (for personal testimony on this, see e.g. Berger [1999: 2–4]). This seems to be an indisputable fact and one that can be observed all over the world – except in the Czech Republic, and possibly also in some other post-communist Eastern European countries, though certainly not all of them. Given that under the communist regime public religiosity was suppressed while violently atheistic propaganda was disseminated, organised religions have come to play only a small role in the post-communist countries today. This fact has usually been wrongly understood as signifying non-religiosity, and thus it has led to the virtual non-existence of the sociology of religion, which was also the result of other factors, including the legitimacy of the communist regime and inner problems of discipline.

Since the Velvet Revolution in 1989, a small number of Czech scholars have specialised in the sociology of religion, and these scholars have emphasised either the resurrection of new religious movements and church-state relations, or have focused on the historical and methodological dimensions of religion. Among the scholars in the former group are Tomáš Halík, Dušan Lužný, Milan Mrázek, Odilo I. Štampach and others, while the latter group includes, for example, Jan Horský and the author of this article. However, the two groups share an exclusively particularistic orientation. They only focus their attention on some kinds of 'exceptional cases' in the field of religion. The reason for this stems from the institutional lack of opportunities, the unfeasibility of conducting empirical surveys and broader research studies, and the negative approaches other scholars have adopted towards a subject as 'obscure' as the sociology of religion in their eyes appears to be. Interpretative sociology in this field has thus been reduced to explanations of quantitative statistical research, like censuses and some ready-made value surveys (ISSP, EVS), with little or no possibility of establishing a deeper understanding of the Czech religious scene and its internal development, and of unorganised forms of religion. Although some authors have pointed out that contemporary Czech religiosity is largely unaffiliated with church organisations [Hamplová 2000: 43; Nešpor 2003: 95], quantitative research has unfortunately, but understandably, been oriented mainly towards studying church membership, church attendance and some other 'official' indicators of religiosity. To this end many authors have used the only religious question (on self-professed affiliation with a church) that appears in censuses, deeper value surveys and, especially, in the *International Social Survey Programme* (ISSP), which in 1999 specialised in religion, or have used different combinations of these sources [Hamplová 2000; Lužný 1998; Lužný and Navrátilová 2001; Mišovič

2001: 110–185; Spousta 1999]. Contemporary formalised and organised forms of religions in the Czech lands would thus seem to have been studied enough. But as I pointed out above, this is certainly not the most important religious sphere to be studied. Experiences from Western Europe tell us that privatised belief structures, along with their implicit forms, now demand much more attention.

In this article I would like to introduce a somewhat broader view of religion. I would conceptualise it as a kind of symbolic universe, producing major and fundamental cultural values and norms, and for some people affecting almost every form of personal and social behaviour, including the behaviour in political and economic spheres. In other words, first, the spiritual and religious sphere – although not always and not explicitly for all to whom it pertains – generates the general ‘value climate’ of a society, and second, it greatly influences the behavioural norms and standards of certain social groups, which include more than just the members of churches alone. Although this is not the main subject of the article, an example of it can be seen in the recent accession of the Czech Republic to the European Union. Since EU accession refers not just to legal norms and methods of economic performance, but also to current habits of work and consumption, attitudes to individual responsibility, expectations of the nation(s), state(s) and other collective entities, and their symbolic legitimacy (though none of this has yet been ‘unified’ within the EU to date), the issue of the ‘Europeanisation’ of Czech faith(s) and religion(s) would appear to be important, and more so than just with regard to the imposition of institutional and legal rules and regulations.

Unfortunately, a study of this kind has virtually no tradition in contemporary Czech sociology of religion, and that is why there are almost no related empirical data sources of relevance. Given this fact, in my study I will combine different kinds of qualitative and quantitative data, both historical and contemporary, and multiple research methods to describe the situation. I will also use historical and comparative approaches, the reason for doing so being that religion is among the most ‘stable’ institutional spheres, at least to some degree. The contemporary situation of religion and its future development will be partly explained by looking at historical opportunities, challenges and changes. This is especially relevant, of course, in the case of the post-communist countries, where religious faiths were massively suppressed and/or influenced by the state and by the communist party’s repressive powers. However, this historical dimension of research should not lead to any omission of contemporary and future religious development. From my point of view just the opposite is necessary. I will therefore try to describe certain important processes and tendencies developing in the Czech spiritual and religious scene and compare them with processes identified by Western colleagues in this field. Given the significant current lack of relevant Czech studies and data, it seems to me that the only possibility is to start with a broad form of research in the field of religion, spirituality and social and symbolic values, and that is what I would like to offer.

Are Czechs atheists? – A quantitative answer

Although, unlike some other communist states, the Czechs did not declare themselves to be an 'atheist nation' under the previous regime, the relative degree of religiosity was quite low in the country and fell rapidly during that time. On the contrary, the Catholic Church in particular and its Polish pope John Paul II (since 1978) drew attention to the Soviet block and tried to strengthen the resistance of members of this religious organisation to atheism and anti-Christian propaganda. For the Poles, for example, Catholicism thus became one of the most important social identities, negatively oriented against the 'others', i.e. the Soviet occupants, and an encouragement to leaders in society [Byrnes 2002: 27; Kepel 1991]. The Czech situation was never this unambiguous; nevertheless, there were high expectations with regard to certain changes in public religiosity after the eventual fall of the communist regime. Some of these were even fulfilled, as the canonisation of Agnes the Czech (1989) and the pope's visit to Czechoslovakia turned into nationwide manifestations of the strength of Czech Catholicism and Christianity. Some commentators thought that during the forty years of communism this faith had just been suppressed and in the early 1990s was again rising to the surface, while others interpreted the situation as a great value shift away from Marxism, which had functioned as secular or implicit religion, but which had recently shown itself incapable of replacing (resurgent) Christianity. It is not our purpose here to determine which explanation is more fitting (though in my opinion it is the second, and I would add that the phenomenon was also due to the minimal knowledge about Christianity among the population; see Nešpor [2003: 95]), but according to a 1991 census an increase in church-organised and church-affiliated religiosity became a fact in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In 1991 'only' 40% of the Czech population declared themselves atheists (or more precisely – belonging to no religious faith), while another 39% declared themselves to be Catholic, and 16% did not answer the question at all (see Table 1). Ten years later, however, the situation was quite different. There was no 'religious resurrection', and membership in nationwide Christian churches, both Catholic and Protestant,¹ fell rapidly.

If what the censuses tell us is true, then the religiosity of the Czech population rapidly declined in the 1990s. The number of atheists grew and the number of

¹ As elsewhere, Czech Protestants are also divided into a variety of churches, which differ significantly in their teachings and size; the largest is *Českobratrská církev evangelická* (Protestant Church of the Czech Brethren), overwhelmingly Calvinistic (though it officially uses four Protestant confessions, Augustana, the Second Helvetic Confession, Czech Confession and the confession of Czech Brothers). *Církev československá husitská* (Czechoslovak Hussite Church), which was established in 1920 through a secession of some Catholic clergy, has recently also become more Protestant-like (in 1994 it signed Leuenberg Concordiae). For the purposes of the census the Greco-Catholic church (a Uniate section of the Catholic Church) is calculated separately, but its membership is so small that it makes no significant difference.

Table 1. Inhabitants of the Czech Republic according to religion, 1991 and 2001

Church	1991	1991 (%)	2001	2001 (%)
Roman Catholic Church	4021385	39.0	2740780	26.8
Greco-Catholic Church	7030	0.1	7675	0.1
Orthodox Church	19354	0.2	22968	0.2
Protestant Church of the Czech Brethren	203996	2.0	117212	1.1
Czechoslovak Hussite Church	178036	1.7	99103	1.0
Silesian Lutheran Church	33130	0.3	14020	0.1
Jehovah's Witnesses	14574	0.2	23162	0.2
Adventists	7674	0.1	9757	0.1
Other churches	23899	0.2	4277	2.5
No answer	1665617	16.2	106673	8.8
Atheists	4112864	39.9	6039991	59.0
Total	10302215	100	10230060	100

Sources: *Náboženské vyznání 1995*; *Sčítání lidu 2003*.

people who did not answer the question became less significant. Among the few religious organisations profiting from this development were small churches, usually of a sectarian kind of faith or of a specific traditionalism, used as a way of interpreting Christian Scripture. The Jehovah's Witnesses increased membership by 60%, the Apostolic Church grew to be threefold in size, and the Church of the Brethren (the Free Reformed Church) even became three and a half times larger; on the other hand, with the exception of the Jehovah's Witnesses, all these churches comprise less than 0.1% of the population. The same seems to be true for membership in the Pentecostal movement and the new religious movements (NRMs), especially those of oriental origin, which have influenced a certain proportion of the population but not significantly enough to warrant quantitative research.

The fall in the number of Czechs affiliated with a church during the 1990s has several explanations, which include the deaths of elderly people with religious faith, better general informedness about churches, the relations of churches to the state (especially the unsolved case of property restitution²), and their political and civic

² A large part of the property of churches, especially that of the Catholic Church, which was among the major landowners in the state, was secularised after the communist take-over in 1948, in many cases illegally. In the 1990s the state returned a (small) part of this property to the Catholic Church, forced by different restitution laws, while the situation regarding the rest has remained unsolved.

activities in the democratic society. Eva Morawska argues that, even in Catholic Poland, while the agenda of the Catholic Church has remained basically consistent over the years, the public response to the church has been fundamentally inconsistent, and the church has become widely suspected of being inappropriately 'sectarian' and anti-democratic [Morawska 1995]. The same is true, of course, in the agnostic Czech Republic; the Catholic Church was unable to profit from its popularity in the early 1990s and consequently lost it. As D. Lužný has pointed out, its desire for the restitution of (all) its property has played a role in this process [Lužný 1998: 216], 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 [Grajewski 2002: 33–89]. All of these explanations seem to be relevant to a certain degree, even though they are not wholly true. Despite the higher degree of religious self-declaration in 1991 than in 2001, attendance at religious services, worship and other rituals was low throughout the 1990s, and it was only higher among the older population [Hamplová 2000: 42–43; Lužný and Navrátilová 2001: 90]. 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 unawareness about what Christianity (and especially Catholicism – for many synonymous with Christianity) really means. However, this outcome does not mean that the majority of Czechs are, as Max Weber would put it, 'religiously unmusical'. According to Hamplová, "the dispassionate approach to traditional [= popular] churches and Christianity doesn't mean that Czechs refuse the existence of supernatural as a whole"; it results in their man-centred beliefs in 'fatalism' and 'occultism' [Hamplová 2000: 43–48].

To conclude, for Czechs, privatised forms of religion are important in the search for spirituality; what Grace Davie refers to as "believing with no belonging" [Davie 1999], many times even accompanied by strong anti-church feelings, overwhelmingly prevails. 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. Bohemia has traditionally been one of the most 'secularised' countries in the world, not just today but even one hundred years ago. To understand the contemporary situation, we have to turn our attention to certain changes that occurred a long time ago.

The historical roots of Czech anti-clericalism

Many Catholic scholars and even some European historians have shared the belief that the roots of Czech anticlericalism reached as far back in history as the Hussite movement in the 15th century [e.g. Rémond 1998: 278]. According to them, no positive promotion of religion is possible in the Czech Republic, as Czechs have always been primarily an anti-religious and anti-clerical nation. However, such an explanation oversimplifies the facts; it pays little attention to Czech religious development after the Battle of White Mountain (1621) and following the relative success of the

enforced Counter-Reformation and the spread of baroque Catholicism. After the Counter-Reformation, over the course of the 17th century, Catholicism became the personal faith of the great majority of Czechs. The Hussite movement, however, led to some problems with this Catholicism.

We could find in the Czech lands in the 18th century a few secret non-Catholic groups whose religious faith was not completely clear. They were, however, certain in their anti-Catholicism and in their closeness to the Lutheranism of that period, i.e. the Pietistic movement. Because of their existence, and in keeping with the principles of Enlightenment, the Emperor Josef II eventually issued the Tolerance Patent, allowing the existence of Protestantism in Bohemia and Moravia (1781). Among the other of his well known religious reforms there were also the great changes he introduced to Catholicism, which, as he referred to it, needed to be 'modernised' and especially 'enlightened'; all the 'superstitions' and 'magical practices' of the baroque era, such as pilgrimages that mushroomed to excessive forms, monastic orders, religious brotherhoods, devotional practices and other such conduct, had to be condemned in the process of the rationalisation of faith. Enlightened piety was thus just the antithesis of the piety of the baroque era; it left no space for the formerly held belief in the supernatural and at the same time was a deeply individual, mystical and 'orthopractical' way of serving God. Equally, however, like all other enlightenment reforms, this one too was made from 'above', with no respect for the will of the people, or for their cognitive abilities. This fact, in conjunction with the religious propaganda put out by the newly allowed Protestant churches, resulted in a massive weakening of religious authority. M. Hroch has recently argued that this development, along with other external reasons – mainly the Napoleonic wars, the end of Holy Roman Empire and the bankruptcy of the Hapsburg state (1811) – led to serious crisis of identity, 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 [Hroch 2003].

This explanation tells us why Czech intellectuals, and later Czechs as a whole, became 19th-century nationalists, but it does not tell us much about the loss of their religiosity during those times. Here we will fill in this gap and provide some reasons. 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. While in the 19th century the Czechs felt themselves to be an independent and formerly great nation, they at the same time found out that this national greatness was not connected with the Catholic faith of their own times but with Hussite (or semi-Protestant) faith of their predecessors.³ J. Rak has pointed out that Hussitism thus came to be painted

³ This self-identification, which had led to the shift from religious to national, 'realistic' and 'humanistic' identities (T. G. Masaryk), and even class identities, was further strengthened later in the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century. Masaryk and some other

in much brighter colours [Rak 1979: 103–105], which led to the even 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’ (or in Masaryk’s words, ‘Catholicism of birth-registers’ or the ‘*böhmisch-katholisch*’ faith), with its liberal world-view and no religious participation, became more common.

Since the 19th century the Czech nation has become strongly secularised. Over time it distanced itself from the Catholic faith, which was found to be ‘too medieval’, but not for the sake of any other religious confession. All religions were deemed ‘too sectarian’ and restrictive on individuality in terms of teachings and religious social practices. 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 and later by class identity, as well as by a scientific world-view. Czechs as a result became atheists, liberals, nationalists, and even socialists in the 19th century, and at the same time religion ceased to play any role for them, except for its role as a relic of ‘folklore’. It became the ‘reflection of medievalism’. Clearly this development was only strengthened by the European secularisation in the following century. The First Republic (1918–38) tried to follow the pattern of the church-state relationship in France, though not always successfully. Later on, communist rule only furthered existing anti-religious tendencies. Czech society thus became the perfect example of European secularisation, functioning as a self-fulfilling prophecy; its eventual victory can be explained in the words of J. Casanova, “better in terms of the triumph of the knowledge regime of secularism, than in terms of structural processes of socio-economic development such as urbanization, education, rationalization, etc.” [Casanova 2003].

What is important, and what we must keep in mind, however, is the fact that this ‘anti-religiosity’ does not mean a lack of religious or quasi-religious personal spiritual needs and expressions. Czechs have long been suspicious about church-organised religion, but not about the ‘neo-Durkheimian’ forms of religiosity, transferring piety to ethnic, class or state entities [Taylor 2002: 78], and not about privatised religious matters. My recent research has shown that even in the period of communism many people searched for religion-like symbolic universes, which they found, for example, in what was expressed by so-called protest songs [Nešpor 2003].

intellectuals (L. Kunte, R. Máša, some of the so-called Catholic modernists) tried to establish a new religion, or initiated a certain revival of ‘pure’ Christianity [see Horyna and Pavlincová 1999: 197–223], while others actually succeeded in doing so (the founding fathers of *Církev československá/Czechoslovak Church*). The process of identity shifts is to be thoroughly investigated in a forthcoming study by the author [Nešpor 2004].

Similarly, as one observer has pointed out, in the case of Czech “religious scepticism ... one cannot speak directly of atheism; this would assume a denial of everything that transcends usual sense perception. The intelligent Czech seems to be far away from this, he leaves himself enough space for his engrossment in transcendence. Still, what results from this engrossment is that he is usually unwilling to place himself within a church framework, which is subordinate to some higher authority” [Frýbort 2000: 16].

Privatised religiosity and spirituality as a solution

This Czech anticlericalism of historical origin nowadays influences both social forms of faith and matters of people’s personal faith (world-views) in the form of privatised religiosity, and 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)” [Heelas 2002: 358]. Many people are therefore ‘in the middle ground’; they 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 or atheists. Spirituality, as they understand it, both theistic and man-centred, is usually constructed in terms of the metaphor of a quest, a personal ‘journey’ implying not only an anticipated destination or goal but also a sustained effort extending over a long time. The goal seems to be even less important than the quest itself. It includes ‘spiritual searching’, i.e. ‘shopping in the spiritual (super)market’, 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. The dispersion and plurality of personal spiritual needs and attitudes could be another source whereby the functioning of the spiritual market has been strengthened.

It would seem that privatised religion (or spirituality) was the solution to Czech anticlericalism, which in itself does not suggest the existence of anti-transcendental attitudes, at least not in our times. This fact is demonstrated in the religious faith of members of established churches who are not dogmatic about observing church orthodoxy. Drawing on the findings from the Czech part of the ISSP survey, D. Hamplová pointed out that “faith in Christian teaching in the society is significantly less than the portion of [Christian] believers ... e.g. only one quarter of Catholics believed that God is a person ... Traditional Christian teaching was practised only by one fifth of people, while only 4% of Catholics can be described as ‘pure Christians’” [Hamplová 2000: 47]. With the exception of how many there are of them, there is nothing special about Czechs ‘believing without belonging’ in the Western European context, given that similar surveys provide quite similar results in other countries, too [see e.g. Davie 1999: 70, tab. 2]. However, one special feature could be the fact that the range faith indicated above has nearly no connection to social grouping (except for small, sectarian religious groups). Thus, a great number of Catholics and Protestants declare themselves believers, and some of them even at-

tend worship and other church sessions – but they mainly think what they want. Even though more sophisticated factor analyses of the surveys are not available, it is nonetheless clear that a large number of people (including formal Christians) believe in some kind of ‘mystical’ or ‘occult’ powers and subjects: 49.7% of the population, for example, believe in the power of amulets, 50% believe in horoscopes and 69.6% even believe in predictions made by fortune tellers [Hamplová 2000: 45, tab. 20; see also Lužný and Navrátilová 2001: 91–94]. In addition, these kinds of privatised ‘mystical’ beliefs are more common among the young, well-educated population, so they seem to form a kind of trend in Czech religiosity, which will become stronger in the future. Once again – there is nothing special about it in the broader Western European context, except for the extent of it, and probably also for the deeper historical roots that influence the situation of faith in the Czech lands.

One might ask about the social, political and cultural results the situation leads to. Even if privatised religion *ex definitione* does not take the form of any specific social group, it certainly does influence people’s perception of (Christian) churches, church-state relations, and cultural values, norms and habits in terms of their behaviour, thoughts and emotionality. Let me begin with its influence on perception. This can clearly be seen in the impact of business relations on the religious sphere. The conceptualisation of a ‘spiritual market’ and consumerism, taken from T. Luckmann’s hypothesis of the invisible religion [Luckmann 1974: 99–102] would thus seem to be more than just a mere metaphor. Both religious organisations and purely commercial organisations have found people’s spiritual needs to be worthy of their business and valuable enough to re-orientate their supply. Christian missions have changed into exercises in public relations to take in a wide range of consumers, like the Catholic advertising campaign promoting the traditionalism of Czech Catholicism run during the last census, and church life has transformed to encompass lobbyism in Parliament and fundraising among different state and private agencies. All of these practices seem to be important and will be discussed below. But even more important are the (profane) business activities that focus on meeting the spiritual demands of the individual.

Since 1989 the Czech Republic, like the Western European countries some years ago [Heelas and Woodhead 2001: 363–366] has been flooded with ‘spiritual’ shops, magazines, literature and music. ‘Secret’ and/or ‘spiritual’ histories (of anything) have ranked among bestseller books, not only in special spiritual shops, but also in supermarkets, while virtually every popular magazine or radio has adopted an astrological and/or ‘therapeutic’ section. Psychological and alternative-medicinal therapies for ‘sick souls’ and ‘yogic’ massages have also become widely known and used at least by a certain proportion of the population, whilst homeopaths, for example, have even been allowed to become members of the Association of Czech Physicians. As usual, the prices of such goods and services are quite high, definitely higher than what they are worth, but they are selling well. Just as in Western Europe, the spiritual market in the Czech Republic works well and probably embraces, at least to some degree, the social majority. The ‘spiritual revolution’ has thus become

a mainstream movement, even though, unlike in some other countries, these 'spiritual goods' are not usually connected with any kind of Christian legacy (including the de-traditionalised one). In this process of the 'disneyation' (A. Bryman) of supply it is possible to observe strong demand structures in the religious market, including thematicity, consumer equalising, advertising, and an artificial call for cheap sentimentality. But contrary to the situation in North America, these shifts are not primarily connected with Christian churches or interest groups. They are mainly the responses of business firms that have discovered the demand side of the market and have tried to fill it with their products. In these times of strong individualism, materialism and consumerism in contemporary Czech society, a characterisation demonstrated in other pieces of research [Nešpor 2002: 74–79], such an orientation appears self-fulfilling; the more expensive and more 'marketable' spiritual goods are, the better they are imagined to be and – of course – the better they sell. The Czech population is thus one of the best examples of the rule 'I am what I buy', which had led to consumerism establishing itself as the 'new religion' for thousands.

Outlets of religious de-privatisation

Although Czech society ranks among the most secularised societies in the world (the Bohemian population to a higher degree than the Moravian one), and although it has witnessed many varieties of privatised religiosity, a certain kind of religious de-privatisation managed to emerge in the 1990s. This is mainly a result of the fact that religion had been suppressed so much under communism and thus a certain religious comeback and de-secularisation of politics inevitably had to occur. However, these shifts are also been supported by the worldwide de-privatisation of faith and especially by the modern Catholic upsurge under Pope John Paul II (in the early 1990s it was also made stronger, as mentioned above, by the Catholics' contribution to the democratising process). Religion, and especially Roman Catholicism thus returned to politics, as in other Eastern European countries, and took part in policy making and parliamentary and governing coalitions. While it should not be considered 'too powerful', it is still 'highly visible' and influential in certain fields, like in attitudes towards the family (and in family legislation, including laws on abortion, sexual behaviour and so on), education, drug policy or relations to other, mainly non-Christian and 'sectarian' faiths. Although D. Lužný believes that there is relatively no religious de-privatisation in Czech society [Lužný 1998: 223–224], this is only true in comparison with some countries in the developing world (and the United States to some degree), which have witnessed a massive outbreak of religious de-privatisation. From any other point of view, the Czech Republic is undergoing a widespread and strong, albeit 'invisible', process of 'religionising' policy and the public space. Of course, mainly, and sometimes only traditional (Christian) churches and interest groups of that origin are involved in this process.

Among the most important changes has been the re-constitution of the Czechoslovak People's Party (*Československá strana lidová*) into the German-like Christian

Democratic Union (*KDU-ČSL*). Whilst the party was founded in the late 19th century as a political group of some (usually modernist and socially engaged) Catholics, today it has transformed itself into a party for all Christians. It facilitated the entry of some Protestant public leaders into Parliament, receives the electoral support of both Catholics and Protestants (and of some 'spiritual' opponents of pure materialism, individualism and the neo-classical economic mainstream). The party's policy, however, is still much closer to Catholicism. Its ecumenism though means that it is capable of integrating all Christian voters and those who sympathise with traditional and conservative values, like pro-family policy, the criminalisation of abortion, banning legal partnerships between homosexuals and strong anti-drug legislation, etc. Among the party's most important achievements is its successful introduction of the new family legislation in 1998. In the name of a pro-family and pro-child policy, the new family law has made it much more difficult to obtain a divorce.⁴ The architects of this policy would like to go even further, like their counterparts worldwide [Casanova 1994: 211–234]. They abandoned (three) clashes with the left over the legalisation of homosexual partnership and, as in Poland [see Byrnes 2002: 38–39], they have tried to introduce less liberal abortion rules, despite the fact that the number of legal abortions dropped during the 1990s. *KDU-ČSL* has also tried to impose other restrictions that would allow abortions only in cases of rape, fatal deformity or serious threats to a woman's life. It seems that there are many well-wishers behind this kind of policy owing to the negative demographical development in contemporary Czech society and some people's xenophobic fear of immigration. The same applies in the case of drug legislation and the party's 'strong attitudes' about this issue. *KDU-ČSL* leaders would not allow the legislative distinction that divides drugs into two groups, 'soft' and 'hard' drugs, because they think that all drugs are a serious danger to human health (and, of course, it drives users away from the path of God).

While in many other political matters the Christian party behaves just as any political player with no core 'ideological' policy, in matters related to Christian and especially Catholic faith it visualises itself as the defender of 'real-Christian' and traditional norms and values, which are presented as the only medicine for saving society. This de-privatisation of religion (thanks mainly to the traditionally Christian voters in Southern Moravia and to a lesser degree also voters in Southern Bohemia, and last but not least to some Prague intellectuals) has evoked different reactions. It is strongly opposed by the liberally oriented modernists, believing (only) in economic growth, and the (usually aged) communists, who recall the 'golden age' of social security and ideological certainty. Both these groups, which represent the majority

⁴ Real social development has not however been so straightforward. Nevertheless, the number of divorces dropped right after the law was introduced (due both to the necessity of reopening all divorce trials under way and to the stricter rules imposed, for example with regard to the period of estrangement between partners), later the number reverted to the previous level and then even grown. This is a result of the fact the law's stipulations are largely by-passed.

of Czech voters, thus reject Christian policy as something 'medieval', old-fashioned and contrary to modernity, which implies the prosperity of humankind. However, these opponents in fact assist KDU-ČSL, at least to some degree, as such discussions provoke a wide reaction in the mass media and bring new 'traditional' voters to the party. While in the early 1990s the voting preferences for KDU-ČSL were dragged down by scandals and the party's strong support for the property restitution of the Catholic Church's real estate, the subsequent sundering of any direct connection to the church has changed this completely. The issue of restitution is as yet unsolved, just as the concordat with the Vatican remains unsigned, but both issues are by many considered more likely to be problems of the church, not of the Christian party. Thus these unsolved issues did not arouse strong criticism of the party, which presents itself more as being Christian as a whole⁵ than as being particularly Catholic.

The church itself is not really engaged in the policy of KDU-ČSL (though it used to be in the early 1990s), owing to the complexity of some cases and different interests. This separation resulted in many quite rational, bureaucratic and utilitarian politicians and intellectuals identified with the Catholic or Christian 'legacy' (as they – not the church – understand it) moving into a leading position in the political scene. In addition to the continual spread of Christian or Christian-like writers, essayists, media figures and broadcasters, special mention should be made of the serious thought given to the particular presidential candidates to replace Václav Havel as Czech president following his retirement in 2003. Owing to Havel's legacy as a moralist president, and to a number of other, mainly historical reasons, people in the Czech Republic usually imagine a non-party personality with a strong moral background in the presidential post. During the presidential elections in 2003 it was the former prime minister, the neo-classical economist and EU-opponent Václav Klaus, who won, but some other figures with a strong affiliation with Christianity – like the Catholic priest and thinker Tomáš Halík, or the Catholic philosopher Jan Sokol – were players in the game, too, at least in the eyes of some well educated, urban intellectuals. Although in the end they did not win (and Halík was not even nominated),⁶ the mere possibility of their victory in a prevalingly atheist state would seem to be significant.

In spite of the interest of the majority of people in policy-making and in religious de-privatisation in this sphere, mention should also be made of similar,

⁵ This 'traditional' and 'Christian' policy also means strong opposition to new religions, both NRMs and 'foreign' religions (like Islam). Among such examples, one could mention the Czech Muslims, which form a true minority, but who were not allowed to build their only mosque with minaret in Brno due to the fact that a 'too visible' minaret would offend Christians. Mention should also be made of the new legislation concerning churches and religious groups (since 2002), because it highly favours the established churches. On this issue see especially Štampach [2000].

⁶ The Czech president is elected by Parliament, though there is a strong popular movement which favours the direct vote by the people. If there were, the new president would probably be found among non-partisan 'moral' thinkers.

though less visible shifts in other public spheres. In the 1990s Czech society witnessed the (re)birth of the religiously governed services of medical care, social work, education, mass media and the service of priests in prisons and the army. While some of these changes led to discontent among the majority of the population and even criticism, centred especially on those institutions with the broadest social impact (schools, media), another possible result is that the majority believe that "the existence of churches ... [is] necessary or useful only for the care of old and sick people" [Lužný and Navrátilová 2001: 95]. Traditional churches are thus (at least) allowed to do what nobody wants to do; in this way even anti-clerical people grant them their 'existential rights' (though certainly not outside the range of activities indicated here), but there is a possibility that the scope of activities tolerated could expand in the future. If this happens – and it seems highly likely it will – then the Christian churches will slowly but surely re-institutionalise their presence in the social and cultural spheres. Consequently, they (or the organisations connected with them) will, through their work in such spheres, at least partially de-secularise society and impose new spiritual outlets, such as the hospice movement of our day. It is not clear, however, whether these shifts would lead to a move towards Christianity as such, or if they would strengthen some kind of 'amorphous' privatised religiosity, which seems more probable.

Other trends in the religious development of contemporary Czech society

Recent worldwide trends in religious development, which have been studied by scholars in religion, also include the upsurge of Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement, and other theological, and especially devotional changes to traditional, church-organised Christianity. Although the impact of these shifts is not yet of any great importance in the Czech Republic, it seems to have a certain influence, especially among the young population.

My analysis of this movement draws on the findings of P. Heelas regarding the modern religiosity that is oriented towards life, which includes both theistic movements, centred around the Holy Spirit, and privatised spiritualities focusing on the higher self [Heelas 2002: 370–372]. If we start with Catholic youth, we can see that their personal piety seems usually to be oriented towards quite 'modern' and less orthodox spiritual movements, such as private (Marian) revelations, viewing the pope as a 'cultural hero', and towards a celebration of 'exemplary persons', personal gurus, who are usually young, modern and charismatic priests or friars. These believers go through a deep inner struggle to reach their spiritual orientation, though much depends on their teachers, who are not always fully orthodox in their teachings, and yet in many cases they use the membership in a church only as a 'spiritual label'. They are much less concerned with the church's dogma than with the behavioural implications of the faith in politics and especially in private life, including the forbiddance of pre-marital sexual relationships or the use of contraceptive devices. In fact, many of them hold the unorthodox belief in reincarnation and simi-

lar phenomena, while their faith in a personal God as Saviour and especially in other 'old-fashioned' points, like Heaven and Hell, seems to be less important. Similarly, among the Protestants there is a relatively wide youth movement in Pentecostalism. It provides a personal connection with the Holy Spirit, while omitting Bible study and traditional church teachings (and authority). This quest for mysticism is also usually associated with charismatic leaders, who in some cases direct their followers away from the established churches [e.g. *Církev* 2002: 11, 258].

The turn to Pentecostalism and charismatic Christianity among young members of these churches can be interpreted as a 'mild' rebellion against parental, church or any and all kinds of authority and can be connected with the search for spirituality or 'shopping' in a world of new uncertainty. At the same time the faith of these young people is strengthened by the moral failure of the majority of other churches as a result of their formerly pro-communist behaviour. Although all these explanations appear to be true they are nonetheless insufficient. In addition, such 'protest movements' among young members of churches are closely connected with shopping for spirituality in general, which also includes other, new non-church spiritual outlets, like the NRMs, 'oriental' philosophies,⁷ therapeutic practices, literature and music, and many other examples. These form secondary (spiritual) institutions, offering 'home after home' as substitute structures, similar to those Heelas found in Western Europe [Heelas and Woodhead 2001: 59–68]. The leaders and members of such institutions are thus fighting on two fronts. On the one hand, they disagree with the 'traditional' social and political role of religion. This means they both resent and cry out against the old Moravian Catholic churchmen (for having re-established traditional society), who are usually associated with anti-enlightenment rhetoric, generally condemning the former Emperor Joseph II, and with the contemporary political de-privatisation of (Christian) religion. On the other hand, they are waging a battle against what could become the full privatisation of spirituality. This privatisation goes hand in hand with rising uncertainty in a changing world and can also be linked to the (more generally) prevailing processes of individualisation, materialisation and 'economisation' under way in Czech society after 1989. The neo-liberal policy and neo-classical paradigm in socio-economic relations backed by Václav Klaus, which only served to strengthen even further the communist-era individualistic and materialistic social maxim – 'he who does not steal, robs his family' – are, from this point of view, condemned for having led to exclusively private and material concerns, and consequently they are forsaken. The same applies to consumerism, mainly material consumerism, even though its critics do not realise that they themselves are also 'shoppers' – in quite a developed spiritual market.

⁷ As in the other countries, this 'orientalism' is in fact implicitly connected with many Western, a priori mental habits and prejudices. At the same time, it is deeply affected by *neovedanta's* interpretation of Indian heritage.

Conclusion: Czech religiosity moving into the European Union

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 out-of-church movements and even anti-clericalism, de-traditionalisation and the rise of new spiritual outlets that are connected either with 'New Age' spirituality, or, to a lesser degree, with the new Charismatic or Pentecostal movement. The distinctive trends involve a certain de-privatisation of religion in the case of some faiths mainly affiliated though not directly connected with traditional Christian churches, while these in turn are returning to politics and to the public sphere after their overly secularised suppression under the communist regime. The Czech spiritual scene is thus transforming to an even higher degree than society as a whole is, but with uncertain and barely visible outlets and goals. The continued privatisation and pluralisation of beliefs is combined with the de-privatisation of traditional religions, and at the same time with the rise of de-traditionalised secondary spiritual institutions. Obviously, only the future can tell who the winners and winning strategies will be with regard to both religious organisations and the men and women looking for a spiritual dimension in their lives.

Whilst the description of different and, in many cases, counteractive developmental trends in the sphere of Czech religiosity and spirituality may be sufficient for understanding the contemporary situation, it will definitely not suffice for understanding the near future. This is owing to the fact that Czech religiosity (and anti-religiosity) has been massively influenced by foreign sources, at least over the past fifteen years, and therefore it will probably be even more affected by these influences as a member of the EU. The most visible changes will occur in relations among political entities and in political rhetoric. The Christian party and its politics will certainly co-operate with its Western colleagues and with those from the Visegrad countries. While the orientation of the Czech policy towards the West has been in fact present for a longer time, the second orientation mentioned has not. The reason for this no happening is certainly not a matter of any animosity between Czech and Polish (or other Eastern European) Christian policy makers. Rather, it is due to the fact that the Czech population feels itself somehow to be 'better' and 'more Western' than the other Visegrad countries. That is why the co-operation it has maintained with the East has up until now been insufficient and marginal. It seems that this will soon change, now that the Visegrad countries have entered the EU. However, there are also anti-religionists inclining toward the 'modernised' and 'most developed' West. They argue that the enterprises of Western societies and economies are connected with secularisation and privatisation, if not even with the abandonment of religion. European integration and policy making in the enlarged European Union (and in other related social, economic and cultural practices, though probably to a lesser degree) will thus lead to a sharpening of existing religious cleavages in the Czech political and public scene. While unlike in Poland [see Casanova 2003] there has been no Czech 'Europhobic' movement connected with

Christian attitudes (fearful of the loss of Christian identity in a secular, materialistic and hedonistic Europe), or with the direct opposite attitudes (fearful of the size of some Christian political parties in the EU), the importance of these issues will probably emerge now that the Czech Republic is a member state.⁸

No matter how visible the political side of the religious influence on the public becomes, it will by no means be the only effect on the field of religion resulting from the Czech Republic's integration into the EU. It may also be expected that there will be a much greater reciprocal support among the secondary spiritual institutions, their 'Europeanisation' and much closer connection with similar Western institutions. The supply of commercialised forms of 'sacrum' and marketable spiritualities will increase greatly, too, as will the new spiritualities of life, reinforced by the Western patterns they grew out of and/or their 'founding fathers'. Whether this will lead to diminishing Czech individualism, materialism and other negative aspects of contemporary 'wild capitalism',⁹ which reduces the role of men and women to that of passive elements living in economic or economic-like playgrounds, to the advantage of some churches or secondary institutions (including economic ones; see Heelas and Woodhead [2001: 59–62]), or even in favour of a more collectivistic 'civic religion', remains an unsolvable question. The opposite seems equally possible.

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⁸ Regardless of the wider and more important processes of 'Europeanisation' one can expect that the above-mentioned issue of the legalisation of the so-called new religious movements, both sects and cults, will be widely affected by convergent European rules, regulations and even popular opinions. It seems highly probable it will be massively discussed among the policy makers and in the mass media, as it has been in some EU countries (notably in Austria, France and Germany; see Introvigne [2000] and Richardson and Introvigne [2001]), while public attitudes and restrictive regulations against them will probably harden.

⁹ However, this materialism and individualism can be seen not only as the result of the general neo-classical course and some mistakes of the Czech transformation after 1989. It is also connected, at least to some degree, and strengthened by the contemporary 'corrosion of character' in the developed countries [Sennett 1998].

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