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## Changes in Religious Values in the Czech Republic

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**Abstract:** The article provides a brief sociological description of the religious development in the regions of Bohemia and Moravia over the past centuries and a more detailed analysis of the recent trends based on the data of the European Values Study from 1991 and 1999. The main conclusions for the present situation of the country are: (a) The secularisation continues, but not as quickly as 30 or 40 years ago; (b) Religious ideas of average citizens differ more and more from the traditional Christian dogmatic or atheistic ideology – religious syncretism and Far East inspirations are widespread in the Czech Republic now; (c) The paradoxical character of current trends in the Czech Roman Catholic church is stressed – threats to and the chances of the main Czech religious society have been dramatically altered since the revolution in 1989.

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The term 'religion' encompasses a rather complex set of opinions, attitudes, values, usages, rituals, organisations and political or economic interests. It is not possible to understand the role of religion in a society by concentrating on only one of its aspects or functions. The main objective of this article is to evaluate the short-term trends in religious development in the Czech Republic as presented in the data of the European Values Study (EVS) of 1991 and 1999 (the number of respondents in each year was 2110 and 1908 respectively). Taking the above points into account, I regard it necessary to complete these survey data with some brief information on the historical and social context. With this background the changes in religious practices and value orientations can be interpreted in a more fruitful and inspiring manner than would be possible merely on the basis of data drawn from a quantitative survey.

Christianity, the traditional religion in the Czech Republic, has been declining since the 19th century. From a position of an almost monopolistic faith, broadly present throughout society, which at least formally it still occupied around the year 1900, Christianity has reached a situation where more than one-half (according to the EVS study in 1999, maybe two-thirds) of the population in this country are no longer church members, and only about 5% of citizens participate regularly in church life. In addition, the centre of gravity of the population of believers lies among the older age groups, and it can be expected that the secularisation process will probably continue as the people in these age groups die.

In addition to confirming and elaborating generally known facts, this article provides the following information on religiousness in the Czech Republic:

- A distinction is made between developments in particular churches ('popular' churches are differentiated from 'confessionary' ones – the latter are more immune to the process of secularisation), and there are also important transformational processes within the

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churches themselves. Overall, the data indicate that the secularisation process is already slowing down, continuing more through inertia, and decelerating or ceasing in some areas.

- The continuing decline of traditional Christianity and of the ideas it preaches does not also mean the disappearance of religious faith generally. On the contrary, in the last decade a more syncretic form of religiousness has started to appear, less fixed on the church, and containing ideas rather reminiscent of the religiousness of the Far East.
- These new religious directions address the current members of Christian churches as well as former atheists. The main difference between 'Christians' and 'non-Christians' has started to shift slowly away from the area of ideas and values toward the area of religious practice itself: people from these two groups are showing a convergence of religious beliefs and basic life values, but a difference remains in the matter of participation in church life, that is, whether they are socialised in the Christian religious tradition or not.

## 1. Historical Context

From the 16th until the beginning of the 20th century the current territory of the Czech Republic was a part of the Habsburg monarchy. A particular consequence of the rigorous re-catholicisation of the state in the 17th century was that the absolute majority of the population – formerly Utraquists and Protestants (Lutherans or Brethren) – joined the Roman Catholic Church. Outside of Roman Catholics, the only other religions on Czech territory were the remaining Protestants and a Jewish minority. These minorities gained certain rights again at the end of the 18th century. However, for complete equality they had to wait a further one hundred years. In 1918, when the Austrian monarchy disintegrated and independent Czechoslovakia emerged, the majority of residents in all regions of the new state professed at least formal affiliation with Catholicism. Nevertheless, the position of the Catholic Church had by that time, particularly in the spheres of the intelligentsia and the working class, already been considerably weakened. The identification of Catholicism with the unpopular Habsburg state, and the rapid industrialisation particularly in the northern and western parts of the region, led to a relatively quick decline in church loyalty. Soon after the revolution in 1918, this caused a decline in religious practice and the influence of the Catholic Church, its partial disintegration (the departure of a part of the clergy and about 10% of the members of the Catholic Church, and the rise of the competitive Czechoslovak Church) and the spread of anti-clerical and anti-Catholic moods. The Catholic Church came to find itself on the defensive, even though it still included more than three-quarters of the population,<sup>1/</sup> owned considerable property, and in the democratic circumstances of the years 1918-1938 was in a position where it could still have done something to counter this trend; and throughout the rest of the 20th century the decline in the number of its members and its power continued.

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<sup>1/</sup> According to the census in 1930 it was 78.5% of the population; in 1950 the share fell slightly to 76.4% of the population [see *Sčítání...* 1994: 71]. Indeed, the membership of many individuals was rather a formal, traditional matter, as is proved by the sharp decline in church religiousness during the second half of the 20th century, induced primarily by political pressure.

The totalitarian regimes ruling intermittently during the years 1939-1989 engaged in violent anti-religious politics: In 1939-1945, Nazism annihilated or expelled the majority of the Jewish population, while during the 1950s the communists fought with particular aggression primarily against Catholicism. However, other religious organisations were not spared either. Consequently, in 1991 under one-half of the citizens of Bohemia and Moravia, mainly senior citizens, belonged to any church (the census in 1991 reported about 44%).<sup>2</sup> Given the deeply eroded process of religious socialisation, new members of churches are now not being acquired in proportion to the mortality rate, and the share of members of traditional churches in the population will therefore probably continue to fall.

According to the theory of T. Luckmann [Luckmann 1991: 117], in the Czech Republic there were also attempts to establish an alternative institutionalised *Weltanschauung* or 'world-view', which would replace the waning Catholic Church in its role as the bearer of the primary sense of life. According to this theory, these attempts to unseat the Catholic Church as ideological monopolist were unsuccessful, but two such efforts were still of great significance:

1. The different political ideologies of the first Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1938), crystallising above all around the personality of the first president, the philosopher and sociologist T. G. Masaryk (1850-1937), were supported by political institutions as well as by organisations like the Czechoslovak Church (today called the Czechoslovak Hussite Church, which arose in the years 1920-1921 through the secession of a part of the Catholic clergy) and Sokol (a nationalistic sporting organisation). The mentioned organisations still exist today, but they evidently have their zenith behind them.
2. Communist ideology, officially ruling from 1948 to 1989, sustained heavy ideological and political losses, first in 1968 (the suppression of the 'Prague spring' through Soviet military intervention) and second in 1989 (the 'velvet revolution' which restored the democratic regime). It can therefore be considered as having been discredited among the majority of the Czech population. But even today, preferences for the Communist Party hover at around 15%. Although there are protest voices and peripheral groups behind them, the importance of communist ideology cannot be underestimated, even in the form of inclusive ideological residuals among individuals who have already rejected this ideology.

Particularly after the fall of communism (1989), which made way for a plurality of ideological and religious opinions, the behaviour of the population in these areas has come to increasingly resemble the situation in Western European countries, in the sense of the

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<sup>2/</sup> Today, church membership in the Czech Republic is officially indicated on the basis of self-declarations in census questionnaires. These data are in this way loaded with the subjective feelings of respondents and can depend upon immediate changes in the image of the church. 'Objective' data from church registers of baptisms would probably show a considerably higher share of Christians in the population, because in practice there is no mechanism (e.g. an obligatory church tax) motivating the non-practising members to formally secede from the church in the Czech Republic. However, the church registry is currently in a very poor state (often lacking records on the deaths of members, or their emigration or transfer to another church) and has not – as far as I know – been processed as a whole. Data from censuses in 1950 and earlier are of course based on 'objective' church membership and therefore are not fully comparable with data from the years 1991 and later.

growing religious diversity and the development of new forms of religiousness in addition to traditional church religions. Through the clear recovery of institutionalised religions and quasi-religions, the main, organised bearers of partial 'world-views' are institutions specialising in matters other than religion or ideology: media and pop-stars, marketing and institutionalised consumerism, political leaders and sports representatives. An individual is able to choose from the pluralistic selection and assemble post-modern ideological collages.

## **2. Churches in the Czech Republic**

In the 1991 census, most people (99.6%) who registered themselves with a denomination were members of a Christian church, predominantly the Roman Catholic Church (88.9% of believers). The Evangelical Church of Bohemian Brethren (4.5% believers) and the Czechoslovak Hussite Church (3.9%) were also numerically significant. Church members were on average older and less educated than the segment of the population without any denomination. Believers were geographically concentrated particularly in the south and the east of the Czech Republic (regions often characterised by delayed industrialisation or agrarian regions), while in large cities and in the north-west part of the country the level of religiousness was lower.<sup>3</sup> Also, there were far more female than male church members (in 1991 there was about 8% more women than men in the entire population, and about 22% more among church members).

Therefore, it is necessary to take this heterogeneous distribution of believers into account in the evaluation of the religiousness of the Czech population and its consequences. Our findings could be biased by age, class, region, gender, and educational differences between people not declaring any denomination and church followers.

In addition, we have to remember that, at present, institutions which are formally associated with only a small number of followers or which sometimes do not even call themselves churches at all have an undeniable influence on religion in the Czech Republic. These are in part small but active religious groups, and are often ideological extremists ('sects'). Jehovah's Witnesses are the best known among them in the Czech Republic. In addition, there are movements of various gurus and hermetic or mystic paths, which need not be founded on the membership principle, but act rather through the dissemination of particular literature and music, the profession of a specific life style, the organisation of lectures and meetings, and so on. They aim especially at the younger and educated urban population, where the established churches have comparatively little credit.

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<sup>3/</sup> According to a comparison of the results of the EVS studies in 1991 and 1999, it seems that this religious polarisation between the north-west and the south-east of the Czech Republic is still deepening: while in relatively religious parts of Moravia the progress of secularisation has seemingly slowed in the 1990s, on the contrary, the share of church members is henceforth quickly falling in north-west Bohemia and in Prague.

## **2.1 Qualitative Changes in the Czech Roman Catholic Church after 1989**

After the 'velvet revolution' in 1989, churches in the Czech Republic underwent deep changes. The most important are the metamorphoses of the Roman Catholic Church, because it is by far the largest Church and its internal changes were noticeably significant. From the qualitative viewpoint the following points in its decade-long evolution are particularly important:

- Renewed freedom of action: this brought about an immense expansion of activities into many areas (church order, editing religious literature, education, charity [Hrudníková, Krejčíř, Pala 1995]), the possibility to resume contacts abroad (Vatican, local Catholic Churches in neighbouring countries).<sup>4</sup>
- The possibility to obtain considerable influence in the life of local communities again, particularly in rural regions with a bigger share of Catholics: this is also linked with the recovery of parish life, the construction of new churches,<sup>5</sup> the emphatic role of KDU-ČSL (a traditional Christian party, supported above all by the Roman Catholic electorate) in local politics, and the possibility to act directly on school-age youth.<sup>6</sup>
- The consolidation, restructuring and increase of the power of the control structure in the church: new bishops<sup>7</sup> were nominated and the worst collaborators with the old regime<sup>8</sup> were purged from the church power structures, while merited, but inadaptable pre-revolutionary dissidents, inhibiting the establishment of the new status quo, were dismissed.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4/</sup> The political easing also made the life of other religious communities easier. But with the exception of those that were prohibited before 1989, the newly acquired freedom evidently did not cause any such radical changes in the life of any other large church.

<sup>5/</sup> With several exceptions, in 1989 the youngest Roman Catholic church buildings in the country dated from the 1930s. The great majority of these buildings however are over 200 years old (and often still in bad technical condition). During the past hundred years, the geographical distribution of the population changed dramatically, and therefore the accessibility of churches was quite unsatisfactory in many places in 1989.

<sup>6/</sup> Teaching religion was not formally prohibited in schools during communism, but the regime tied it to too many obstacles, so it was – especially in the 1970s and 1980s – mostly stopped or seriously reduced.

<sup>7/</sup> The communist regime inhibited rather successfully the nomination of new bishops to vacant places, or it was ready to accept 'reliable' candidates only. All the vacant episcopal seats were soon occupied after the revolution, and through the division of actual dioceses two new ones gradually came into existence, in Plzeň and Opava-Ostrava.

<sup>8/</sup> These priests were generally deprived of higher church offices and were displaced to positions of administrators of less important parishes. But almost no one was ever completely excluded from the clergy or severely punished in another comparable manner. This was probably owing to the 'velvety' spirit of the whole change in regime and the critical lack of priests.

<sup>9/</sup> This refers especially to some priests secretly ordained during the period of communism. For instance, theologians such as Tomáš Halík, Jan Konzal and Ivan O. Štampach worked in the Roman Catholic Divinity Faculty of Charles University in Prague soon after the revolution. However, later co-operation with them was withdrawn and they were replaced by people admittedly less charismatic but more conforming. As far as is known, this primarily resulted not from their theological departures from official church teaching, but rather from the personnel politics of the authorities. In this case we can obviously see an exhibition of the victory of conservatism over reform in the gov-

- The transition from the post-revolution state of ecstasy and relative openness toward the church to the long political conflict over the place of the church in the political life of the nation and over the restitution of property secularised after the communist take-over in 1948.
- The weakening of the monopoly over religious issues. The communist regime certainly persecuted the Catholic Church, but it also strenuously obstructed the appearance of any alternatives in the area of religion. Thus Christianity and particularly Catholicism essentially occupied a monopolistic position in the field of religious interpretations of the world. Only the newly installed democracy allowed missionary campaigns of non-Catholic and sometimes also non-Christian movements into Czech territory. In many Czech bookshops today, the shelf-space taken up by esoteric and alternative religious literature far exceeds the space devoted to Christian literature.
- The origin of an embryonic 'public opinion' on the Roman Catholic Church and the initiation of a discussion process in the church. It also brought about the formation of separate opinion streams and/or the surfacing of ideological conflicts. We can distinguish at least three main opinion groups inside the active core of the church now: (1) Moderate conservative, connected with the official power structures of the church. It seems that its main problem is the absence of a good conception and an attractive vision. (2) Radical conservative, refusing any compromises with today's world and with different religions. Its advantage is the connection to traditional devotion and its striking simplicity; its main problem is obscurantism, sectarian thinking and the tendency to produce conflicts. (3) Moderate progressives, struggling for reform and the convergence of the church and the world, gravitating toward a liberal approach and open ecumenicity. The latter group has the least church influence of the mentioned streams, and also lacks a powerful vision. Thanks to its personalities, however, it is able to come across better in the media and among the public than the moderate or even radical conservatives do.<sup>10</sup> A 'radical progressive' stream, similar to the group in Germany centred around people

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erning body of the Czech Roman Catholic Church. Paradoxically, it seems that the removal of former dissidents was often more harsh than the punishment of former pro-communist traitors. This can be explained in the fact that opportunistic collaborators, aware of their total defeat, mostly fell in line quickly and without resistance and tried to incorporate themselves, for which they obtained understanding and pardon, while many dissidents were active in asserting various alternative visions of the church, which could be felt as a threat by church leaders. [See Corley 1993, Putna 1994, Hanuš 1997, Konzal 1998, and Fiala and Hanuš 1999.]

<sup>10/</sup> Because the inducted streams are not institutionalised in the form of factions, there are no clear demarcation lines between them. For instance, we can find a whole scale of positions from extra conservative to rather open-minded in the Catholic charismatic movement. In my opinion the best criterion for the identification of the opinion directions in the Czech Catholic Church is currently perhaps their stance toward Vatican Council II. For the moderate conservatives the Council is a basic guideline, which they aim to introduce into practice, and they are receptive to the Council's conservative propositions. The radical conservatives criticise the Council from the right or ignore it - their spirituality and practice are oriented toward the pre-Council period (emphasis on the cult of revelations and wonders, assertion of the Latin liturgy and so on). Conversely, the moderate progressives accentuate first of all the liberal and renewal parts of Council resolutions, and demand a continuation further in this direction, that is, to go even beyond the Council (they are discussing e.g. the problems of compulsory priest celibacy, the admission of women to church functions, the radical advance

like Eugen Drewermann, is still not present in the Czech church, except for individual rebellions. One of a number of explanations may lie in the fact that fifty years of oppression served to strengthen the allegiance of church members.

At present, the state of the Czech Roman Catholic Church seems to have been 'conserved' but not stabilised. The church suffers from a shortage of clergy<sup>11</sup> and is unable to stop the gradual decline in its importance. However, they take hope from the large number of religious, charitable and cultural initiatives arising mainly from the church base, and from believers and the lower clergy.

## *2.2 Development of Church Membership and of Ecclesiastical Practice*

The empirical analyses in the following text are based on the two surveys of the European Values Study of 1991 and 1999 (EVS 1991, EVS 1999). The use of the same methodology and the same core questions in the surveys enables a comparison between the two time points. All of the following tables and graphs are based on these two surveys.

From a comparison of the surveys of the EVS in 1991 and 1999 (see table 1) it is evident that the share of church members in the population is continuing to decline. Since the bearers of ecclesiastical religiousness are primarily senior citizens in the Czech Republic, this development, caused by the natural mortality rate, is not surprising. More interesting is the juxtaposition of both years of surveys by cohorts.

In the course of the continuing decline in church membership among the older part of the population (which is surprising because on average men die younger than women, who are the main bearers of religiousness<sup>12</sup>) we can see a certain revival of 'churchmanship' among people who were born in the years 1960 to 1972. The process of secularisation continues in the sense that the percentage of church members falls with the decrease in age in the entire surveyed population, but this decline is more moderate among the younger citizens of the Czech Republic.

An analysis of the data of the EVS study shows that the decline in church membership applies above all to the Roman Catholic Church and to the Czechoslovak Hussite Church, thus to the traditional folk churches, whilst the share of evangelical members and the members of small denominations is clearly not falling or is even growing. The EVS data of course do not allow for an assessment of any small denomination individually – the statement is related to the total sum of the membership of small religious groups.

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in ecumenism, and so on). The fundamental difference between the stated streams is not in the interpretation of the Council, but is equally cognitive (through a distinctness in the conception of religion and society), sociological (through the position in society and in the church, through the link to different social groups) and psychological (the type of personal religiousness). [See Halík 1995.]

<sup>11/</sup> Which they try to solve through a mass import of priests from Poland; the disadvantages of the different mentality and different language of the Poles, and also the uncertain future of this help, are however quite manifest. [See Fitych 1995.]

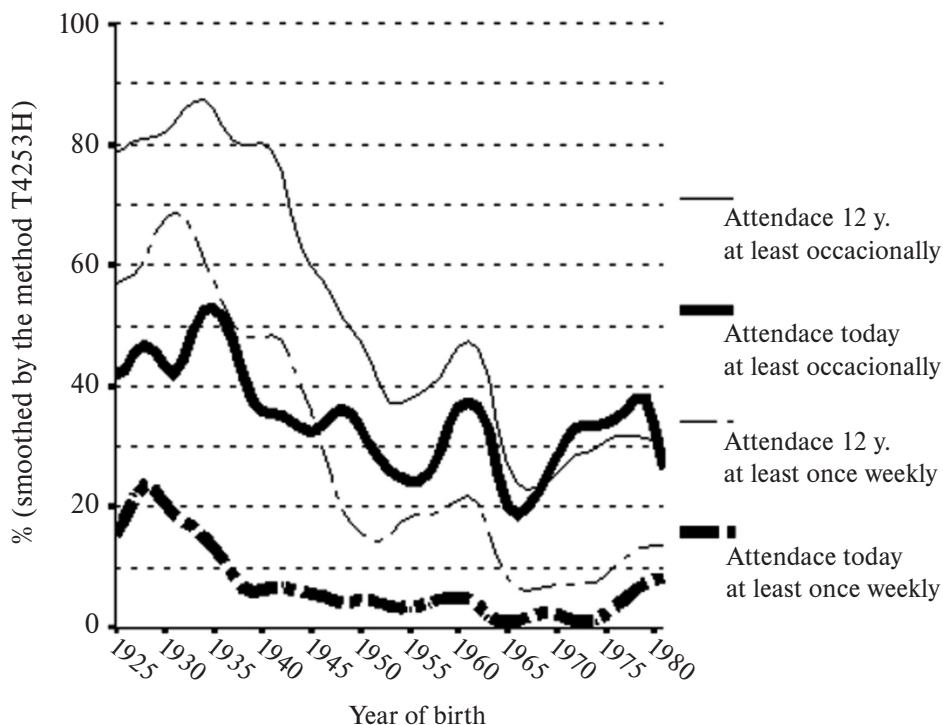
<sup>12/</sup> One possible explanation is that older people still displayed greater openness toward the church in 1991, motivated by the last echoes of the revolutionary mood from the year 1989, whilst in 1999, when the image of the church was rather poor in the media, many respondents no longer wished to report their church membership.

**Table 1: Belonging to a religious denomination by age cohort**

Question: 'Do you belong to a religious denomination?'  
 (% of positive responses)

|                     | 1991 | 1999 | Difference |
|---------------------|------|------|------------|
| born 1973 and later | -    | 18.4 |            |
| born 1960-1972      | 15.5 | 23.1 | +7.6       |
| born 1948-1959      | 25.9 | 24.7 | -1.2       |
| born 1936-1947      | 49.7 | 46.0 | -3.7       |
| born 1924-1935      | 64.0 | 55.4 | -8.5       |
| born 1923+          | 71.9 | -    |            |
| Total population    | 40.4 | 33.2 | -7.2       |

**Figure 1: Attendance at religious services now and at age 12, by age cohort**





Another important indicator is attendance at church ceremonies. In the EVS 1999 survey (see figure 1) a question was posed concerning the frequency of attendance at religious services (except weddings, funerals and christenings) at present and at the time when the respondent was 12 years old. The share of individual groups, according to the year of birth<sup>13</sup> of respondents, was smoothed with the use of the T4253H method<sup>14</sup> and standardised to the sum of 100%. The results are presented in Figure 1. The category 'at least occasionally' covers everyone who attends services at least once a year but not as frequently as once a week.

The largest percentage decline in religious practice in comparison with childhood is recorded among respondents who were born before the year 1945. Of the war generation, today roughly only one-tenth of respondents are attending church services at least once a week out of those who did so in the time of their childhood. On the lowest absolute level is the periodic attendance at religious services by persons today 25 to 40 years old, who however did not usually attend services even as children. In the youngest cohort, the attendance figures captured by the survey are higher again. However, there is the question of how attendance at services will evolve further among this not yet fully mature generation.

The maximum attendance at religious services is found among people who lived a part of their childhood during the war, i.e. the generation of the 1930s. The data indicate<sup>15</sup> that there might be a temporary intensification of religious practice, induced possibly by the political situation. Conversely, a decline of publicly practised religiousness in the period of childhood can be recorded among the people who were born in the years 1940-1953, and once again among those born in the period of 1960-1968. The former reached 12 years of age in the period between 1952 (the peak of the Stalinist oppression) and 1965 (the political thaw before the Prague spring), and the latter between 1972 (the successful completion of 'normalisation' and the entry of the domestic communist reaction supported by the Soviets) and 1980 (the time when the internal weakness of the regime had been slowly uncovered and a hidden religious recovery was observed). Conversely, the end of the 1960s brought with it a religious resurgence, which proved able to temporarily restore the church with part of its lost position. Although it cannot be declared with complete certainty, owing to the fogginess of temporal identification in reminiscences from childhood,

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<sup>13/</sup> Answers have been recoded for the purposes of data processing into three categories: weekly and more often; less than weekly, but at least once a year; less than once a year or never. For processing data aggregated by the year of birth, SPSS software was used.

<sup>14/</sup> The T4253H smoother that was used "starts with a running median of 4, which is centered by a running median of 2. It then resmooths these values by applying a running median of 5, a running median of 3, and hanning (running weighted averages). Residuals are computed by subtracting the smoothed series from the original series. This whole process is then repeated on the computed residuals. Finally, the smoothed residuals are computed by subtracting the smoothed values obtained the first time through the process." (Explanation cited from the SPSS Help.)

<sup>15/</sup> The answer to the question of attendance at religious services at age 12 can be read also as a record of the development of church attendance in the past, in the time of childhood of the respondents. Different reasons make it impossible to reconstruct the attendance history from the responses exactly, but the main trend is recognisable. We can trace a maximum decline in churchgoing occurring in the decade around 1960, and again in the 1970s, and conversely, a certain renaissance in attendance during the war (1938-1945), around the year 1968 and then after 1989. The least church attendance perhaps in all of Czech modern history falls into the decade of 1977-1987.

the data create the impression that after the regime began its fight against religion, the level of the religiousness practised remained at least at times approximately on the original level for several years, and the retreat was then stopped by the mere foretaste of the ensuing political warming.

The share of periodic attendance at religious services did not decline in as explosive a manner as regular attendance did.<sup>16</sup> In the younger generation, people who had discovered occasional churchgoing, though they did not have this tradition in their families, even approximately balanced those who had grown up in the tradition of church attendance, but abandoned it.

From the perspective of current church attendance, the population can be divided into four rather homogeneous groups according to age and based on the mentioned results:

1. The First Republic or pensioner generation, which was born up until the year 1938: Church services are regularly attended by about 15% of this generation, and sporadically by every second person, and 80% of this generation have some church education.
2. The senior middle generation, which was born in the years 1939-1962: About 5% of this generation regularly go to church, and 30% go sporadically. About half of this generation, rather the senior part of it, have experience with the church.
3. The junior middle generation, which was born in 1963-1977: Roughly 2% of this generation regularly attends church, though again about 30% only sporadically. About the same ratio have experience with church services from childhood.
4. The younger generation, which was born after 1978 (people who celebrated their twelfth birthday after the 'velvet revolution' in 1989): About 8% of them attend church regularly, and about 35% sporadically. About 30% have church experience from childhood. With respect to attendance at religious services they are the second most active group after their grandparents in the oldest generation.<sup>17</sup>

A closer look at the behaviour of these four groups from the viewpoint of church attendance can be obtained through the juxtaposition of the behaviour of respondents at age 12 and now. The following table differentiates between five patterns of behaviour:

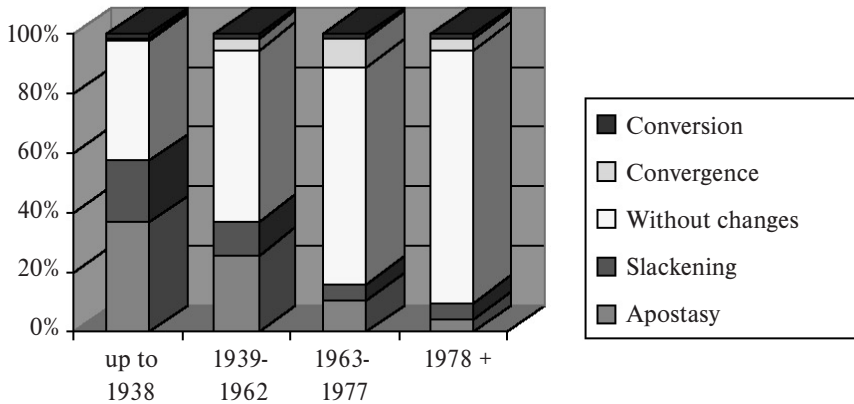
- Apostasy: respondents attended church at least occasionally at age 12, but they never attend church today;
- Slackening: respondents attended church at least once a week at age 12, but attend it only sometimes today;
- Without changes: respondents' behaviour in this area today is roughly the same as at age 12;
- Convergence: at age 12 respondents almost did not attend church at all, but today sometimes attend church;
- Conversion: respondents go to church at least weekly today, although at age 12 they went less often or not at all.

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<sup>16/</sup> The Roman Catholic Church requires its members attend mass at a minimum of once a week. This limit divides the active members from the members on the margin, who do not follow this instruction. The EVS data from 1999 indicate that it may be easier to root out regular 'ostentatious' religious rituals than a vague sense of church membership demonstrated by episodic church attendance.

<sup>17/</sup> Of course, we cannot extrapolate far-reaching conclusions about the start of a return to traditional religion from this finding. We can rather anticipate that church attendance will somewhat decrease in this generation, as soon as people lodge families and are exposed to heavy workloads.

Figure 2.: Changes in church attendance by age cohort



In general we can talk about a gradual stabilisation of religious habits in the Czech Republic. The share of people who have not changed their behaviour since age 12 is increasing constantly. The share of apostasies is definitely decreasing. The rate of conversions (defined as described above) is constantly very low. Among the weekly church visitors in the generation that was born in the years 1963-1977, however, the share of converts is by no means negligible.<sup>18</sup> There is an implication that Christianity in the Czech Republic is increasingly losing the character of a popular, traditional religion, and is becoming a personal option among those who have accepted it.

### 3. Religious Values among the Czech Population

Although the share of Church members fell by roughly 7 percentage points (from 40% to 33%) between the years 1991 and 1999, according to the EVS data, the share of respondents who declared themselves as believers remained unchanged at the level of 43%. This means that the share of believers without a church background has grown considerably.

#### 3.1 Concept of God

This point also corresponds with the quick dissemination of religious conceptions without a church background. At first we will concentrate on the changing concept of God, which we may regard as a good indicator of religious sentiments and at the same time as the fundamental element of an individual's religious value system. Table 2 shows that the idea of an impersonal power or spirit is currently obtaining adherents at the expense of traditional Christian theory (supported so far by only a small minority) and religious agnosticism.

<sup>18/</sup> In the Czech sample of EVS 1999, five out of a total of twelve periodic church visitors from this generation did not attend church at age 12. The other seven attended church at least weekly at age 12 as well as at the time of the survey.

**Table 2: Changes in the belief in God**

Question: *'Which of these statements comes closest to your beliefs?'*  
(percentage of population)

|  | 1991 | 1999 | Difference |
|--|------|------|------------|
| There is a personal God <sup>19/</sup>                                 | 12.2 | 6.5  | -5.7       |
| There is some sort of spirit or life force                             | 37.7 | 50.2 | +12.5      |
| I don't really know what to think                                      | 26.8 | 21.0 | -5.8       |
| I don't really think there is any sort of spirit,<br>God or life force | 23.3 | 22.3 | -1.0       |

These changes are related very strongly to age, as table 3 proves. The data testify to the progressive weakening of the traditional institutionalised types of belief in God (that is, either belief in a personal God, promoted by the Christian church, or no belief in any spiritual principle, propagated especially by the former communist regime). Conversely, new convictions are becoming widespread that do not overlap with any of the traditional options, and their content lies roughly between the two.

In addition to age, other demographic variables also play a considerable role, above all education and gender. People who believe in a personal God very often have only elementary education. Conversely, this idea is rarely encountered among people with a vocational and secondary school education. Among those with post-secondary education, this belief is represented to a slightly higher degree, but it cannot be statistically differentiated from that of the average population. Almost two-thirds of those who believed in a personal God a decade ago were women, but today the gender ratio of theists is far more balanced. The decrease among women who hold this belief is occurring faster than the decrease among men.

The existence of a spiritual or life force is the idea frequently indicated by the most educated part of the population – people with secondary school and post-secondary education. Conversely, people with lower education do not indicate this belief as often, although even in this category it is the most frequent opinion on transcendental matters out of all four choices. A decade ago, it was rather men who believed in this idea, but today women are outbalancing them in this category. This means that they are the ones who have primarily attached themselves to this viewpoint during the past decade.

The view 'I don't really know what to think' is distributed in another way among the population – if is often the answer of people without a university education. Among university graduates only few people think this way. Thus it is not a matter of true philosophical agnosticism, but rather of the religious disorientation of this part of the Czech population. The above-mentioned fall in the share of respondents in this category can then

<sup>19/</sup> In 1999, the wording of the first offered response to this question was slightly altered: instead of 'There is a personal God' (as in 1991), the version 'There is a God as a person' was used. The reason was that the phrase 'personal God', traditionally used in teaching catechism, was by some people understood as 'my god, owned by nobody else'. In contemporary Czech, the adjective 'personal' is used mainly for an appropriation of the subject by the speaker, not in the philosophical sense 'to be like a person'. The change of wording could have caused a drift in the distribution of responses between the first and second possible responses. However, the fact of the growing superiority of the 'impersonal' concept of God over the orthodox Christian one cannot be denied.

**Table 3: Belief in God and age cohort (in %)**

|                                    | 1991 | 1999 | Difference |
|------------------------------------|------|------|------------|
| <i>Personal God</i>                |      |      |            |
| born 1973 and later                |      | 4.7  |            |
| born 1960-1972                     | 6.9  | 4.2  | -2.7       |
| born 1948-1959                     | 6.2  | 5.2  | -1.0       |
| born 1936-1947 <sup>20</sup>       | 13.6 | 4.8  | -8.9       |
| born 1924-1935                     | 16.2 | 15.3 | -0.9       |
| born 1923 and earlier              | 27.7 |      |            |
| Total population                   | 12.2 | 6.6  | -5.7       |
| <i>Spirit or life force</i>        |      |      |            |
| born 1973 and later                |      | 51.5 |            |
| born 1960-1972                     | 36.6 | 50.5 | +13.8      |
| born 1948-1959                     | 38.6 | 52.5 | +13.9      |
| born 1936-1947                     | 40.0 | 49.0 | +9.0       |
| born 1924-1935                     | 35.9 | 47.8 | +11.9      |
| born 1923 and earlier              | 36.6 |      |            |
| Total population                   | 37.7 | 50.2 | +12.5      |
| <i>There is no spiritual power</i> |      |      |            |
| born 1973 and later                |      | 20.7 |            |
| born 1960-1972                     | 29.0 | 25.2 | -3.8       |
| born 1948-1959                     | 29.2 | 23.4 | -5.8       |
| born 1936-1947                     | 21.5 | 21.0 | -0.5       |
| born 1924-1935                     | 15.6 | 18.6 | +3.0       |
| born 1923 and earlier              | 13.8 |      |            |
| Total population                   | 23.2 | 22.3 | -1.0       |

be explained by the higher ideological disorientation of people during the unstable period after the 'velvet revolution' in 1989.

Finally, true atheism today is above all the domain of people with vocational education – they formed one-half of the advocates of this view in 1999. In comparison with 1991, the number of people with secondary-school education who shared this opinion declined. In 1991 they made up 33% of the atheists, but in 1999 only 25%. These former atheists have probably transferred mainly to the group 'I don't know what to think'. This is a prediction of the distinct weakening of the social support for atheism in these circles. The decline is especially evident among women (the share of women among Czech atheists has declined by about 7.5% over eight years).

<sup>20/</sup> The eminently large difference in this cohort, still educated in large part by church teaching, can perhaps be explained partly by the change of wording in the question. But it illustrates the poor quality of religious socialisation of this generation.

**Table 4: Religious ideas**

Question: *'Which, if any, of the following do you believe in?'*

(percentage of positive responses, sorted by the difference between 1991 and 1999)

|                  | 1991 | 1999 | Difference   |
|------------------|------|------|--------------|
| Life after death | 22.7 | 35.8 | <b>+13.1</b> |
| Reincarnation    | 11.1 | 23.1 | <b>+12.0</b> |
| Sin              | 55.9 | 58.7 | +2.8         |
| God              | 36.7 | 38.9 | +2.2         |
| Hell             | 11.6 | 13.1 | +1.4         |
| Heaven           | 23.5 | 20.6 | <b>-2.9</b>  |
| Telepathy        |      | 73.0 |              |

### 3.2 Other Religious Ideas

In addition to the concept of God, views on other religious ideas were also surveyed. The considerable growth of heterodox religious views is confirmed in table 4. The differences in bold print are statistically significant at a 95% significance level. The opinion on telepathy was not a part of the questionnaire in 1991.

There has been an explosive development of convictions about the after-life fate of man: fewer people believe in heaven, but there are quickly spreading beliefs in life after death and in reincarnation. This 'life after death' of course cannot be pressed into the traditional concept of heaven and hell. Instead, people obviously help themselves with religious ideas borrowed from Indian civilisation.

### 3.3 A Typology of Religious Value Systems

According to the attitude towards religious issues and religious practices outside the church (well-being from religion, prayer/meditation), the Czech population can be divided into four basic types:<sup>21</sup>

1. The traditional believer – practises a religion and believes above all in ideas based on the Christian spiritual tradition. The strong influence of Eastern spiritual ways (reincarnation, no belief in a personal God) can also be found in this group, but the character of the spiritual world of this religious type is rather occidental and Christian.
2. The atheistic type – marked by an almost pure lack of belief in religious content and by a very low level of practising meditation or having pleasant feelings from religion.
3. Life after life – is a religious type defined through a belief in some spiritual world and reincarnation theory, without accepting the belief in a personal God, but as a rule believing in some spiritual force. Therefore the idea of the 'beyond' does not usually contain the features of the Christian heaven or hell. At the same time, belief in life after life is the central and main motive of the person's religiousness.

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<sup>21/</sup> For the segmentation the K-means procedure of the SPSS statistical packet was used.

**Table 5: Religious types – percentages of positive answers**

|   | Traditional believers |             | Life after life |             |
|---|-----------------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|
|   |                       | Atheists    | life            | Meditative  |
| Personal God                            | <b>39.7</b>           | 1.4         | 0.6             | 5.4         |
| Some sort of spirit or life force       | 40.0                  | 16.6        | <b>87.8</b>     | <b>80.5</b> |
| There is no spiritual force             | 2.6                   | <b>40.8</b> | 2.1             | 2.1         |
| God exists                              | <b>96.7</b>           | 8.6         | 35.7            | <b>70.0</b> |
| Life after life                         | <b>85.3</b>           | 6.3         | <b>69.8</b>     | 25.7        |
| Hell                                    | <b>67.9</b>           | 3.1         | 14.2            | 8.0         |
| Heaven                                  | <b>89.6</b>           | 6.2         | 23.6            | 19.1        |
| Sin                                     | <b>95.4</b>           | 33.5        | 63.1            | 76.9        |
| Reincarnation                           | <b>42.3</b>           | 6.0         | <b>67.9</b>     | 17.9        |
| Gets comfort and strength from religion | <b>90.7</b>           | 3.0         | 6.1             | <b>53.0</b> |
| Practising prayer/meditation            | <b>88.1</b>           | 4.6         | 22.3            | <b>80.5</b> |

Notes: Figures in the table indicate what percentage of members of the religious type believe or practise in the way indicated in the line heading. In bold are the values particularly specific for the type.

4. The meditative type – is a type that practises religion, but who, outside of belief in a higher being and a moral imperative, does not accept most traditional theology. He or she thinks little about life after life; his/her ‘profit’ from religion is rather earthly and often lies in spiritual well-being. It also corresponds with the frequent practice of meditation or prayers.

People with basic education, older people and women (although their predominance is gradually lessening) tend more often to be traditional believers. People of this type naturally belong very often to some Christian denomination. Members of this group are mostly found in Moravia and in small communities. Men and people with only vocational education make up the majority of atheists. In 1991, young people especially were atheists, while now it is mostly middle-aged citizens who are. Atheists typically live in Bohemia, outside Prague, and in smaller towns. In 1991 it was usually men who belonged to the type ‘life after life’, but today there are more women in this category. Overall, they more frequently have secondary education, and in 1999 also tertiary education. Paradoxically, there are very often young people in this group. They are usually not members of a church, and they are found most often in Bohemia, outside Prague.

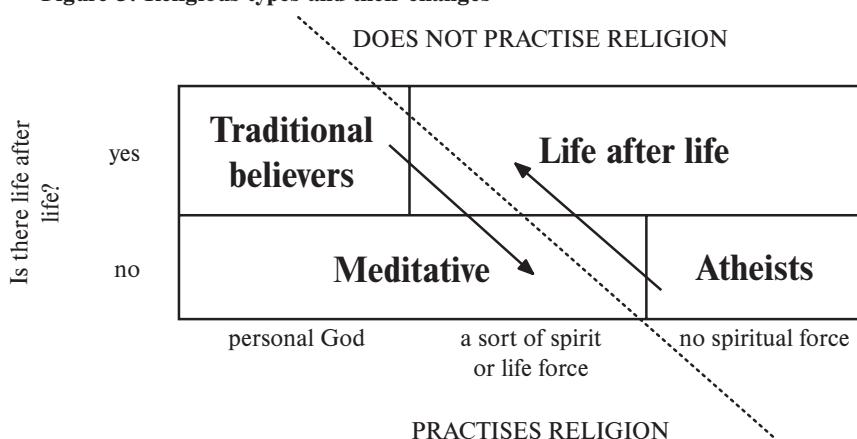
Women often belong to the meditative type. In 1991 there were primarily university graduates in this group, but today the type is no longer so crystallised along the lines of education. However, somewhat frequently, people with secondary education are found in this group now. The majority of people in this type are older, and its members usually also belong to some Christian denomination. Their typical place of residence is in Prague.

As table 6 shows, the share of some of the mentioned types in the population is now distinctly changing. The differences in the first and in the last type are small and statistically not significant. However, during the last eight years a very large transfer from the category of ‘atheists’ to ‘life after life’ was recorded. This points to one of the main forces be-

**Table 6: Share of religious types in the population (in %)**

|                       | 1991  | 1999  | Difference |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|------------|
| Traditional believers | 19.2  | 17.4  | -1.8       |
| Atheists              | 55.5  | 45.1  | -10.4      |
| Life after life       | 8.1   | 18.2  | +10.1      |
| Meditative            | 17.2  | 19.3  | +2.1       |
| Total                 | 100.0 | 100.0 |            |

**Figure 3: Religious types and their changes**



hind the present religious changes. Radical atheism offers its backers a cheerless perspective on their individual destinies, and it probably sank in appeal at a time when the attraction of utopias for a better collective fate dried up. Books like the one after which the type ‘life after life’<sup>22</sup> is named offer people a more optimistic view of their fate after death, without requiring that they bind themselves to the hard to accept tradition of current Western religious systems. It is enough to accept the idea of the existence of some higher force – perhaps the law of karma – or to draw on medical research about dying.

Among the above-mentioned types there are two ‘original’ or ‘pure’ ones – traditional worshippers and atheists. They are original in the sense that they were formerly large and widespread, in the sense of their institutional support, and in the sense of the formal education of the Czech population in one of these two positions. The remaining two types can be described as ‘hybrids’: worshippers who do not want or cannot accept maximalistic church teachings about life after death, but retain some elements of religious practice, transfer into the meditative type. Conversely, atheists, unsatisfied with the minimalistic atheistic view on the same matter, gradually move toward the type ‘life after life’.

<sup>22/</sup> Works like Moody’s *Life after Life* began to spread and received a great deal of attention after 1989, and became very popular in some circles. Such books had been more or less inaccessible to a wider audience before.



Figure 3 depicts the situation graphically. It is obvious that at present the main borderline (see the dotted line in the graph) between the two worlds of ‘believers’ and ‘non-believers’ is not the belief in God itself or the belief in life after life, but the tradition of religious practice. The current most important changes in religious values run parallel to this line – it is seemingly easier for people today to change views on God and the eternal life than to change their personal life style firmly formed by the Christian or atheist tradition.

### 3.4 Religious and Life Values

Another question is how strongly the religious values presented here are connected with other components of the value system of individuals. The EVS above all established how important work, family, friends and acquaintances, leisure time, politics, and religion are for respondents (answers on a four-point scale).

From the exploratory analysis it follows that except for the item ‘religion’ the fundamentals of the value systems of the four religious types are quite similar. Possible differences given by the religious make up of respondents are furthermore often eclipsed by differences given by their socio-demographic dissimilitude. The foundation of the secular part of the value system of the Czech population is basically shared regardless of religious attitudes. However, sub-populations defined by religion can vary in partial questions, e.g. of an ethical character.

In the course of further analyses of the relationship of data on life values and the types of religious value systems, the influence of gender, age, education, the size of the town, the region (Bohemia/Moravia) and the year of the survey has been removed using multidimensional regression. An analysis of the regression residuals was also made, the result of which is that the importance of work, family and leisure time does not relate significantly to the type of religious value system. The mean of residuals for the remaining three items is indicated in table 7. The dramatic difference in attitudes towards religion is not surprising because the respondents were classified into four groups according to their religious attributes. In the remaining two items the differences are not too large ( $\eta^2$  is 0.3% for the item ‘friends and acquaintances’ and 0.5% for the item ‘politics’, whilst for the item ‘religion’ the value is 41%). In both cases, atheists separate themselves as a group, for which the item *ceteris paribus* is least important. Thus it seems that atheism would lead to a distance not only from religious values, but (although to a far smaller extent) also from other values that are fundamental for human society on the whole. After the exclusion of atheists, the opinions of the remaining religious types in the rest of the investigated data

**Table 7: The mean residuals after controlling the influence of socio-demographic variables**

|                       | Religion | Friends | Politics |
|-----------------------|----------|---------|----------|
| Atheists              | -46.3    | -3.0    | -5.7     |
| Life after life       | -6.3     | +7.8    | +3.3     |
| Meditative            | +24.3    | -0.5    | +8.4     |
| Traditional believers | +107.6   | +3.2    | +5.0     |

Note: Figures in the table are multiplied by 100 for the sake of legibility.

set are homogeneous for  $\alpha = 0.05$  with the item 'politics', and also with the item 'friends and acquaintances'. This suggests the applicability of Durkheim's theory of anomie to Czech society.

#### 4. Trends in Religious Development

The history of Czech religion and the church in the 20th century has brought long-term changes to these areas, among the deepest and most dramatic in the entire history of the country. Although the last decade of the century brought about some reduction in the rate of secularisation and even a foretaste of a religious renaissance in some areas, the retreat of traditional church religion has continued. We can see this in two areas:

1. Membership in traditional churches (and the Christian population as a whole) has continued to decline owing to the *mortality rate of the oldest believers*, who constitute the greatest portion of traditional church membership. This is combined with the problematic religious socialisation of youth. Although there are indications of some improvement, churches have been unsuccessful at removing this problem and it remains one of the key problems related to the future function of churches in Czech society.
2. The tendency to abandon church teachings persists primarily among people of upper middle age. These people, often only weakly linked to church traditions, somewhat withdrew from the church during the last decade of the 20th century. It is of course possible that, after reaching retirement age and experiencing the related changes in life style, many of them will move closer to the church again. (Local religious communities of the Czech Christian churches often work as a sort of club for pensioners, offering social support and help in solving difficult problems related to old age and approaching death.) It is possible that the above-mentioned increased distance from churches is also linked to the political and ownership conflicts in which the Roman Catholic Church was entangled in the 1990s. Nevertheless, this tendency is not too strong and seems to be a secondary problem.

On the other hand, the start of new forms of religiousness that have been foreign to local tradition up until now can be seen. From the EVS it is possible to discern a spreading belief in some higher power over human life. Belief in this power or in God is linked either with an openness toward ideas of reincarnation and belief in a life after life, and/or with a religious stance in everyday life, finding expression in meditation, attendance at religious ceremonies, and a sense of an ethical imperative etc. In any case, these models of religiousness are undermining the position of 'pure' atheism, which is clearly becoming slowly marginalised.

The above-mentioned phenomena do not exhaust the whole area of basic life values. In contemporary society, things which are deeply defining and maintain a human being in his or her individual and social existence, which establish basic norms and life goals and confirm the identity of the social actors, do not always have the face of religion in the common sense of the word. However, the examination of these phenomena – although important even in the context of the sociology of religion – exceeds the framework of this article. Nevertheless, it is necessary to mention that there was rapid development in these areas also after 1989. A new position and new possibilities in politics, personal careers, consumption and marketing, leisure time, culture and sports, the decline of Marxism, and con-

versely, the explicit preaching of utmost sexual satisfaction and/or the accumulation of property and enjoyment as definitive targets of human life: altogether these are far more relevant changes in the life values of the Czech population than a moderate advance in the ecumenical movement or the foundation of a local branch of the Church of Scientology. And we can assume that these changes have and will continue to have a far-reaching influence even on religion in the normal sense of the word.

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