

## WHITE PAPER

### RELIGIOUS SITUATION IN CONTEMPORARY CZECH SOCIETY

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#### 1. Introduction

In a number of international comparative surveys, the Czech Republic steadily occupies a position among countries with the lowest levels of religiosity (Lužný, Navrátilová 2001; Greeley 2003; Voas 2009; Smith 2012). Several sociological studies accentuate the fact that the secular profile of Czech Republic poses an exception even among post-Communist Central and Eastern European countries whose religious development has been strongly formed by an explicit anti-religious regime for almost half a century (Zrinščak 2004; Müller 2011). Moreover, when comparing populations of the Czech and Slovak Republics, countries that have for a significant part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century belonged to a common state, one finds a curiously dramatic difference between their religious profiles (Greeley 2003: 130-131; Froese 2005; srv. též Váně, Štípková 2013). In this context it suffice to note that the Czech Republic represents a 'special case', comparable to that of the Eastern Germany (former German Democratic Republic) or Estonia, which are commonly regarded as the most irreligious places in Europe (Pollack 2002; Froese, Pfaff 2005; Wohlrab-Sahr 2011; Remmel 2016).

However, several studies have been published in the last few years that questioned the widely held assumption about the Czech society as one of the most atheistic countries in present-day Europe (Hamplová, Nešpor 2009; Nešporová, Nešpor 2009; Nešpor 2010b; Václavík 2010; Hamplová 2013) They maintain that this assumption is based on a lack of understanding that the Czech religiosity is characterized by high levels of privatization and individualization, as well as strong distrust in traditional religious institutions, especially in the mainstream Christian churches. These studies rely on the data from empirical surveys and their authors

emphasize that the individualized and privatized spirituality is often mistakenly interpreted as atheism. Based on data from a national survey *Detradicionalization and Individualization of Religion (DIN 2006)*, Hamplová and Nešpor (2009: 594) showed that despite low levels of membership in religious institutions and a low participation in religious activities, Czechs are not indifferent toward religious and spiritual phenomena. A rather high level of 'religious illiteracy' is another important feature of the Czech religious landscape (comp. f.g. Protero 2008).

## **2. Historical indication/ examination**

To correctly understand the complicated and ambiguous attitudes of the Czech population toward religion, one needs to consider several political, social, and demographic developments in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Already in the period of so-called First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938), a specifically Czech attitude toward religion and religious institutions was visible. This period was characterized by a rising distrust towards religious institutions, a tendency for privatization of religions and a growing indifference towards religion. This religious transformation was dominated by the efforts to distance oneself from the dominant Catholic Church. The most dramatic changes took place in the first years of the existence of the independent Czechoslovak state, i.e. approximately until 1925 (comp. Paces 1999). The comparison of the data from the 1910 and the 1921 Census shows that the Roman Catholic Church has lost more than 1.2 million members in this period. This decline, however, affected different regions and ethnic groups to different extent. It decline was most profound in Bohemia (Western part of the country), less so in Moravia and Silesia. The 'renegades' were mostly of Czech nationality and the number of Czech (Sudeten) Germans who have left the Church was small.

After the World War II, the above-described tendencies were strengthened by two factors: deportation of German minority from the Czech borderlands in years 1945-1947 (approximately 2.6 million of individuals were affected) and the establishment of the communist rule in 1948. As a consequence of the deportations, the country lost a significant proportion of its Catholic population. However, the deportations profoundly influenced also other denominations (German Evangelical

Churches, New Apostles Church and Old Catholic Church). The demographic and socio-economical changes brought by the removal of German population were even more serious. The formerly German regions (the so-called Sudetenland) were essentially depopulated. The resettlement of these borderland areas was centrally organized<sup>1</sup> but the strategy was to send in individuals, not communities, as was the case of Silesia in Poland. The settlers were often recruited from the supporters of the political Left from, the lower social stratas and groups with poor education. In particular, 'politically reliable' sympathizers of the Communist Party were often selected for the task. As a consequence, there was a higher proportion of individuals 'without any religious affiliation' arriving to the borderlands.<sup>2</sup> This manner of resettlement of the areas previously inhabited by Germans produced discontinuity of family and community ties and contributed to the disintegration of local religious memory. However, we should mention that there were some exceptions, such as settlements by re-immigrants from Eastern Europe (e.g. communities of ethnic Czechs from Volhynia). They predominantly belonged to the Orthodox Church and greatly contributed to its transformation after the World War II.

After 1948, when the Communist regime was established in Czechoslovakia, the social, demographic and cultural transformation of the Czech society continued. This development involved also a rapid decline of participation in religious activities. Even though the downturn started in the late 1940s, the most profound transformation occurred only in the 1960s and again in the mid-1970s. However, it is necessary to emphasize that the Communist regime has not arrived with a distinctively new concept of attitude towards religion. It skillfully used the already existing tendencies (e.g. anticlericalism of intellectuals). Thus, in the Czech case, the classical Marxist interpretation of religion built on and drew its credibility from nationalistic anti-Catholicism of the pre-WWII period. However, the anti-religious

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<sup>1</sup> Historically speaking it would be appropriate to distinguish between a so-called wild resettlement and a 'spontaneous' inhabiting of the borderlands related to it, which happened in the first months after the war, and a later organized depopulation of the areas.

<sup>2</sup> The strategy of the Communist Party was carefully 'phased'. In the years following the war, it relied on a form of cooperation with some religious groups, e.g. the Czechoslovak Church. The Communist Party then advocated a cooperation with Churches; recruitments for the Czechoslovak Hussite Church even took place in the borderlands (with respect to Church because of the property of German Evangelical Church in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia, with respect to the Party due to a proclaimed anti-clericalism). After 1948, however, this kind of 'cooperation' ceased to be of interest to the Communist Party.

ethos did not radically transformed Czechs' attitudes to religion. It only further deepened the distrust towards religious institutions, strengthened indifference towards religion, and successfully contributed to the 'religious illiteracy'. It did not produce conscious acceptance of atheism in the Czech society.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, gradually increasing indifference towards religion had rather ambiguous consequences. On the one hand, the role of religion in the everyday life weakened. On the other hand, religion was regarded as something 'clandestine', encompassing both protest and alternative. Yet, the newly gained attractiveness did not mean that religion started to exert more influence on the everyday life. This fact emerged fully in 1968 when the Communist rule lost its last bits of legitimacy in the eyes of absolute majority of population. In the 1970s and 1980s, the religious organizations, particularly the Catholic Church but in some respect the religion itself, have gradually become a symbol of dissent and hope. Yet, this protest and hope was political rather than an expression of spiritual search for a new life. The everyday life was more and more emerged in consumerism and individualized materialism.

### **3. Religious situation in Czech society after 1989 in the census data**

The first relevant information regarding Czech religiosity after the collapse of the Communist regime in November 1989 was provided by the 1991 Census. Yet, its results need to be interpreted with utmost caution since they reflect a specific situation of the early 1990s strongly echoing recent political developments.

Based on the 1991 Census, 44% of population declared a religious affiliation, whereas slightly fewer than 40% said they do not have any. The remaining 16% refused to answer the question. The Czech Statistical Office explains this relatively high figure by the fact that this information was not asked in previous years and even in 1991 Census the answer was voluntary.<sup>4</sup> The religious plurality typical for the

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<sup>3</sup> Given the available data the rate of the so-called analytical atheism (i.e. a conscious rejection of whatever kind of supernatural based on relatively clearly formulated reasons) in Czech society is spread as widely as in other countries of Western and Northern Europe.

<sup>4</sup> The respondents could for various reasons simply omit the question. Another possible reason could be the fact that even before the census there was an upsurge of disputes over whether to include the question on religious creed into the questionnaire. Annulment of a law prohibiting the inquiry gave rise to protests from some citizens, who could then refuse to answer the question. One also need to take into consideration the option that some

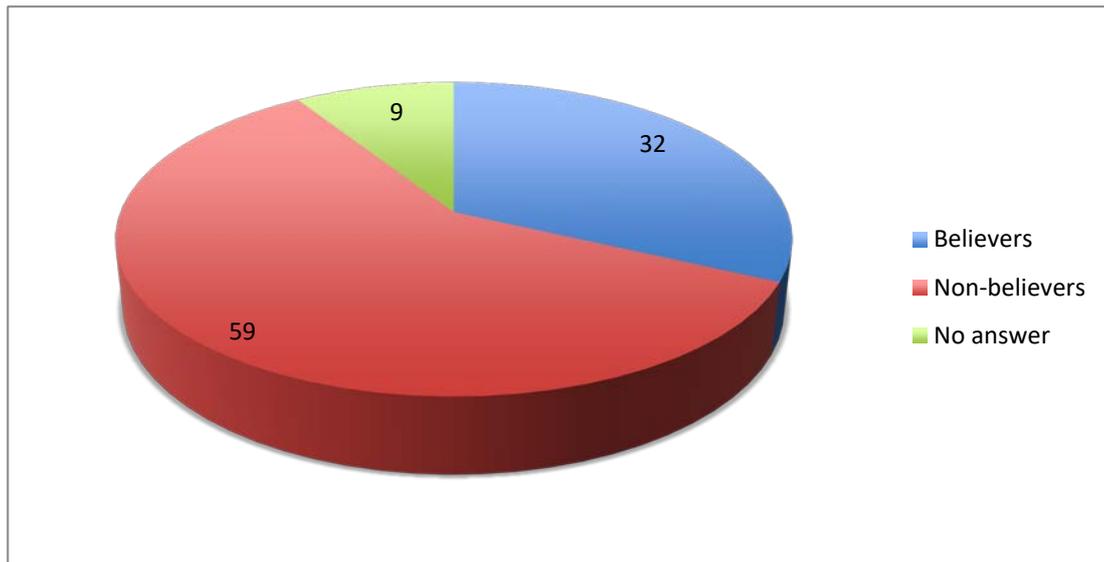
late 1990s was only emerging in the 1991 Census and the Roman Catholic Church was clearly the strongest religious institution, counting for 39% of the population. Some representatives of the Church interpreted this result as evidence of the Catholic 'character' of the Czech nation and as a promise for the future. Nevertheless, it was incorrect understanding of the data or more accurately it was a consequence of an inadequate expectation based on euphoria of the 'post-revolutionary society'. Nevertheless, despite its limitations, the first post-communist census highlighted some principal features of 'Czech religiosity'. In particular, it demonstrated important regional differences along two main axes: a) the 'traditional' axis of West – East (Bohemia and Moravia), which was noticeable already before 1948; and b) borderlands – inland axis, which is clearly a consequence of the sociodemographic changes after 1945. These regional differences – as many other surveys have shown – apply not only to the levels of traditional church religiosity, which is markedly lower in Czech borderlands. It applies also to non-traditional and alternative religious groups (comp. to e.g. Václavík 2010:135n).

Data from the 2001 census showed a completely different and more realistic picture of the Czech religious landscape. However, it needs to be emphasized that every census since 1991 used a different measure of religiosity. Thus, it is necessary to treat the results with some caution and confront them with data from specialized surveys.

Nevertheless, in the 2001 Census, the share of people belonging to any religion dropped by more than 10%, whereas the proportion of those 'without any religious affiliation' increased by 20%. Interestingly, the number of refusals also dropped by nearly a half. It is possible that at the beginning of the third millennium, the question of religion and its perception became a relevant part of life in the Czech society. Overall, the second post-communist census confirmed the trends that had been predicted by some surveys and demonstrated weakening position of the mainstream religious denominations.

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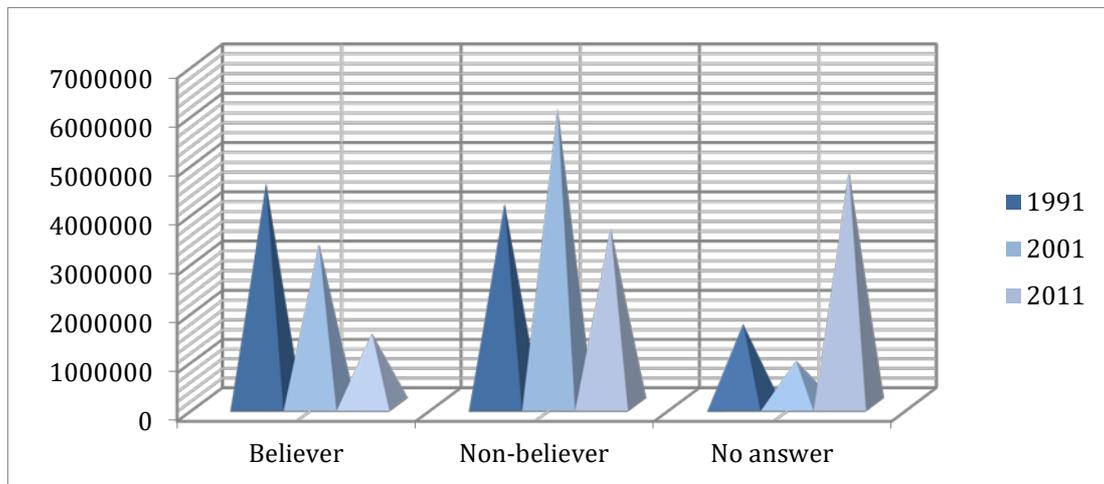
respondents refused to align one's creed with a specific traditional church or religious group, and hence opted for this answer.

**Figure 1:** *Religious affiliation according to census in 2001 (in %)*

During the 1990s, mainstream churches lost significant proportion of their memberships for are several reasons. First, they were affected by demographic changes, particularly aging and mortality. Moreover, they were not able to address potential converts effectively. Some of them were also closely connected to specific cultural, regional, or historical circumstances related to their emergence or activities, which were abstruse for contemporary believers, or else internal discrepancies leading to separation.

This development was the most striking in case of the Silesian Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession that dropped between 1991 and 2001 to only 42% of its former membership. Furthermore, Czechoslovak Hussite Church lost 44% of its members, Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren dropped by 43%, as well as the Roman Catholic Church, which experienced a decline of 32%.<sup>5</sup> Such decline did not, however, affect all religious groups. On the contrary, a number of them experienced an expansion. This was true especially for small evangelical denominations, particularly those influenced by the Pentecostal and charismatic movement. This shift reflects similar developments in many West European counties (comp. McGrath 2002).

<sup>5</sup> In terms of absolute numbers, however, the greatest loss affected the Catholic Church (1 280 605 members) and Evangelical Church of Czech Brethen (86 784 members).

**Figure 2:** Religious affiliation in the Czech society according censuses in 1991, 2001 a 2011

The 2001 Census showed that the regional differences have become even deeper than before. However, the decline of membership in the traditional Christian denominations, especially Roman Catholics, was proportional and did not selectively touch only specific regions. A comparatively highest number of Catholics still remained in southern Moravia, while their numbers were the lowest in northern and north-western Bohemia, as was the case in the early 1990s.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the relatively weak position of the traditional religious institutions in the regions previously populated by Germans does not mean that these places are a 'spiritual desert'. For small and alternative groups, Christian and non-Christian alike, these regions constitute a relatively promising area. In contrast to the traditional religious groups that have suffered a considerable loss of its members, the small and alternative groups have been relatively successfully taking roots here.<sup>7</sup>

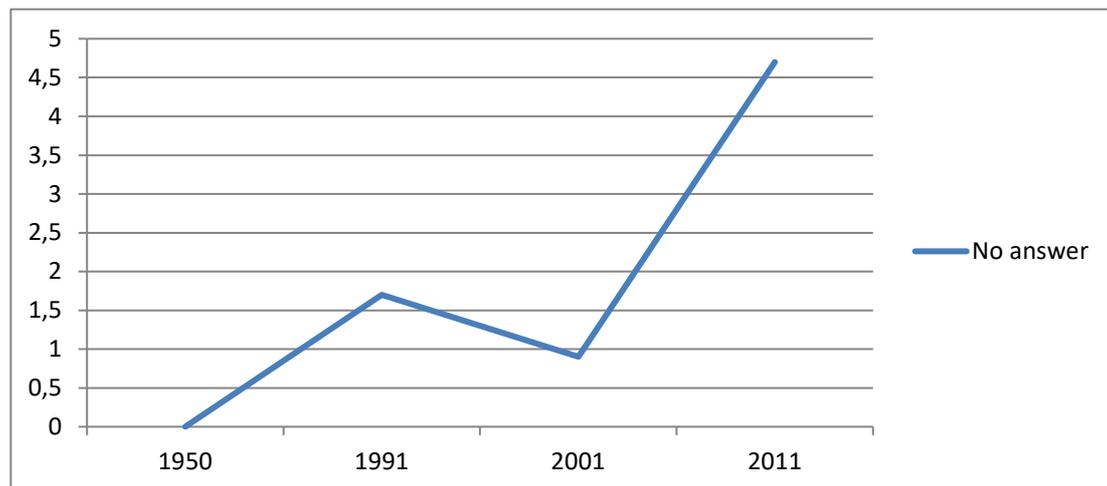
The last census from 2011 demonstrated another radical shift away from traditional religious groups, growing indifference towards religion or even

<sup>6</sup> It is nonetheless interesting that while in 1991 Roman Catholics accounted for the majority of the entire populace in 22 counties, in 2001 this was true only for three of them (Uherské Hradiště, Opava and Hodonín).

<sup>7</sup> This growing religious plurality is further emphasized by the fact that according to the 2001 census, the county of Liberec was home of 27 800 worshippers and 4 650 (16%) of these were sympathizers of small and in our environment non-traditional religious groups whose majority we can define as the so-called new religious movements. A similar occurrence can be observed in other counties in northern Bohemia: in the county of Jablonec nad Nisou it was 16,6%, in Ústí nad Labem county 16% and in Most county 15,2%. By contrast, in counties with a strong position of traditional religious groups, which are the Moravian counties in particular, the proportions of non-traditional religious groups did not reach 10 per cent: in Zlín county 6% registered as supporters of small and non-traditional religious groups, in Hodonín county their numbers reached 4,2% and in Žďár nad Sázavou county 4,5%.

apatheism. Yet, similarly to previous censuses, one needs to consider the data with some caution. In contrast to the previous data collection, the question about religious affiliation was explicitly marked as voluntary. Partly as a consequence, only 14% of Czech adhered to a specific religious group or denomination, while 7% said they were believers without belonging to any denomination or a religious group. Another 34% proclaimed themselves as non-religious. In total, 45% of population refused to answer the question. Thus, in comparison with 2001, a decline affected not only those who explicitly declaring a religious affiliation (dropping from 32% to less than 21%) but also those who said they were not religious (dropping from 59% to 35%). Moreover, the number of individuals refusing to answer rose dramatically (from 9% to 45%).

**Figure 3:** Growth in “category” no answer between 1950 and 2011<sup>8</sup>



It is clear that these changes cannot be interpreted using the census data. A more detailed survey would be necessary to see whether this development indicates increasing religious indifference. It is also possible that the question about religious/non-religious identity lost its meaning.<sup>9</sup> Yet, there are other potential explanations. Some religious groups might have refused to answer the question for dogmatic reasons. For example, the leadership of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints that recommends its member not to fill in the answer adopted such

<sup>8</sup> To answer on religious affiliation was obligatory in census in 1950 and even in 1991 (but during this census wasn't strictly required). It is facultative since 2001.

<sup>9</sup> In 2011, persons not stating their relationship to faith (not marking they were either religious or without creed) but by written entry proclaimed themselves to be atheists, were not included in the basic structure of populace. The number of such persons was 1 058, 698 men and 360 women. This number, however, only accounts for those who remembered and noted it down; such possibility was not offered in the manual.

strategy. Similar reasons can be surmised in regard to some members of established churches.

Additional data related to regional differences or sociodemographic indicators confirm the already known trends. The last census demonstrated further weakening of traditional religious groups on one hand, and strengthening of ‘small’, Christian evangelical groups (e.g. Brethren Church, Apostle Church), alternative religious communities and other non-traditional groups (e.g. individuals declaring themselves as Buddhist<sup>10</sup>). In contrast to the previous censuses, respondents were offered an option “believer without religious affiliation”. If we expand this group also by those who declare themselves as Catholic or Christian but did not specify any church or Christian denomination, the size is by no means negligible. It includes nearly 800 thousands individuals.

**Table 1:** Changes in membership in chosen religious groups between 1991 and 2011

	1991	2001	2011
Catholic Church	4 021 385	2 740 780	1 083 899
Czech Brethren Evangelic Church	203 996	117 212	51 936
Czechoslovak Hussite Church	178 036	99 103	39 276
Jehovah’s Witnesses	14 575	23 162	13 097
Orthodox Church in Czech Lands	19 354	22 968	20 628
Silesian Evangelic Church of Augsburg Confession	33 130	14 020	8 162
Brethren Church	2 759	9 931	10 872
Seventh Day Adventists	7 674	9 757	7 394
Greek Catholic Church	7 030	7 675	9 927

<sup>10</sup> The strongest group was *Diamond Way Buddhism – Karma Kagyu Lineage* claiming 3 484 followers in the census.

Christian bodies	3 017	6 927	3 458
Apostolic Church	1 485	4 565	4 934
Brethren Unity of Baptists	2 544	3 622	3 208
Methodist Evangelic Church	2 855	2 694	1 952
Old-Catholic Church	2 725	1 515	1 736
Federation of the Jewish Communities in the Czech Rep.	1 292	1 515	1 132
Neo-Apostolic Church	427	449	98

The census data do not provide any information about the trust in religious institutions or churches. Yet, it is an important issue if we want to understand the public role of religion in modern Czech society. Degree of trust in religious institutions is regularly asked together with degree of trust in other key social institutions (political bodies, courts, army, education system etc.). Based on accessible data it becomes clear that after a few years in the early 1990s, when religious institutions enjoyed a rather satisfying amount of trust of their followers (extending 50%), latest in the late 1990s this declined significantly and today, religious organizations account for one of the least trustworthy public institutions in the Czech society.

The Czechs are keen to negatively perceive any kind of occurrence that can be interpreted as an attempt on the part of churches or religious organizations to influence public affairs. Then it becomes irrelevant if these occurrences relate to potential political declarations or a possibility to influence economical developments. The lowest rate of trust, however, has certainly been affected by disputes over restitutions of church property.

#### **4. Trends and Transformation of the “Czech Religiosity” as seen from Quantitative Surveys from the Start of the New Millennium**

As repeatedly stated above, the census data should be treated very carefully. It is better to view them as “illustrative” only, or as signals of certain trends, e.g. decrease of the number of members of traditional religious institutions involving a certain de-institutionalisation of the Czech religiosity. However, to adequately analyse these trends we should use data from more specific surveys. Vast majority of these took place before 2011 and cannot therefore help much to clarify questions raised by the last population census.

Still, their results bring numerous valuable pieces of information. We can use them to explain some trends in the Czech religiosity at the turn of the millennium. The changing position of the institutionalized religiosity is of these trends. Almost all relevant surveys conducted in the 1990s, just as the few realized after 2000 have unequivocally demonstrated that this kind of religiosity underwent a relatively important decline in the 1990s. Of course, the question is how to interpret such decline. One possibility is to see it as the consequence of the long-term Czech distrust towards religious institutions, which may be tracked as far as to the end of the 19th century. In line with this explanation, the majority of Czechs seems to identify the Roman Catholic Church and religion in general. This means that the attitudes towards the Church reflect overall stance to religious institutions. Relatively high trust of churches in the early 1990s, just as a relatively high percentage of population declaring support for a specific religious group, were clearly consequences of the exceptional situation given by specific circumstances of the transforming post-communist society.

From as early as 1993, there were some signs of the de-institutionalization of the religious life. This may have been seen as a returning secularization of the Czech society - if we understand secularization as progressive marginalization of traditional religious institutions accompanied by an increase of religious plurality. However, it would be more precise to say that after mid-1990s the Czech society started to experience demonopolization and deinstitutionalization of the religious life. As a consequence, a spiritual marketplace has developed (cf. Roof 2001), where the

concept of *believing without belonging* developed by the British sociologist of religion Grace Davie is increasingly relevant (Davie 1990).

In this respect, information on practices linked to traditional forms of the institutionalized religiosity is of key importance. Past surveys dealt mainly with participation in regular religious rites and key life rituals (e.g. baptism, weddings, funerals). As far as taking part in regular religious practices (at least once a month) is concerned, all available survey data show it is rather low even if compared to most ex-Soviet bloc countries, reaching some 7%. If compared to the situation of early 1990s and first years of the new millennium, the decline is clear, yet not dramatic. However, if we consider the longer-term trends the situation seems to be relatively stable. Other religious practices (e.g. baptism) are also relatively insignificant. According to the surveys, only 1/3 of respondents considered baptism to be important. Yet, this does not mean that religious acts, like baptism or religious wedding, may not be interesting or even popular for a subgroup of the population. The fact of being “interesting”, however, means that some individuals consider them to be an alternative to ordinary secular ceremonies. They are view as something that brings a kind of “invigoration”. Another explanation could be found in Grace Davie’s concept of vicarious religion and its functions.

Aside from information about the changing role of religious institutions, respondent’s personal attitudes towards religion are important. According to the *AUFBRUCH 2007* survey, only 23% of respondents claimed being religious, while 65% declared themselves as not religious. Another 11% considered themselves as neither religious nor irreligious. These results may be interpreted as another piece of evidence about deepening secularization of the Czech society. However, this interpretation is put into doubt if we compare the *AUFBRUCH 2007* survey with data from the *DIN 2006* survey. The latter survey provides a somewhat differentiated view of this issue as more than 50% of respondents claimed to be spiritual and more than 20% could not state whether they were spiritual or not.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Respondents were to comment on four specific characteristics of their own religiosity: (1.) I am spiritual and live according to religious teachings. (2.) I am spiritual in a certain way. (3.) I cannot say if I am spiritual or not. (4.) I am not spiritual and I am not interested in these things.

Weakening of the traditional institutionalized religiosity or a self-reflexion of one's own religiosity are not the only important issues. We need also to consider the role and transformation of religious as well as the acceptance of certain spiritual and religious practices. Two key surveys conducted in the first decade of the new millennium, such as the *DIN 2006* survey, the *AUFBRUCH 2007* focusing on the religiosity in the Central and Eastern European countries, or the large comparative surveys (*ISSP* and *EVS*), showed that a large proportion of the Czech population (from 40 to 50%) believes in a certain form of transcendence. At the same time, the surveys showed that the religious views have become greatly differentiated. Only a relatively small part of respondents (around 10%) identified themselves with a traditional Christian idea of a personal God. Respondents were much more inclined to believe that God is a supernatural force, a form of spirit or life energy. Even a significant portion of those who declare to be Christians adopted these ideas.<sup>12</sup>

**Table 2:** *Belief in God and stability of belief (in %), ISSP 2008*

<b>Belief in God</b>	<b>%</b>
I don't believe in God	40,3
I don't know if God exists and I don't believe if it is possible to find out	14,8
I don't believe in personal God, but believe in some Higher Power	16,3
Sometimes I believe, sometimes not	6,9
Although I doubt about His existence, I believe in God	10,5
God really exists and I don't doubt about it	11,3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100,0</b>
<b>Stability of belief in God</b>	<b>%</b>
I don't believe in God and I have never believed in God	60,4
I don't believe in God, but I believed in God earlier	11,4
I believe in God, but I didn't believe earlier	4,9
I believe in God and I have always believed in God	23,3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Thus, these data demonstrate the plasticity and multifaceted character of the Czech religiosity at the beginning of the new millennium. The "religious belief" – if we use a simplified term – is more and more going in the direction of what the British sociologist Paul Heelas calls spirituality (cf. Heelas 2005). This term refers to

<sup>12</sup> Specific results were somewhat different, which resulted from different perception of possibilities the respondents were allowed to choose from. While, e.g. the *AUFBR 2007* survey offered only the option *I do not believe in God as a person but I do believe in a higher power* (16%), the *DIN 2006* survey used two variants: (1.) *There is some form of spirit or life power* and (2.) *There is a supernatural power*. More than 40% of respondents chose one of these variants.

the deinstitutionalized form of religiosity characterized by a strong tendency to syncretize and detraditionalize religious views. Its goal individual development and consumption, the religion is not a goal but rather an instrument. It is not surprising that in the given context, the transcendence acquires the form of something, which is more “in accordance” with other discourses and narrations in the pluralistic late-modern identity.

This trend is confirmed by other data concerning individual religious beliefs. A relatively small importance is given to the traditional religious ideas linked to the institutionalized religiosity, e.g. belief in heaven, hell or resurrection. Less than 30% of respondents identified with these in these surveys (*DIN 2006, AUFBRUCH 2007, ISSP 2009*). On the other hand, such facts as healing powers of amulets, ability to foresee future or reliability of horoscopes are acceptable for more than 40% of respondents. In some cases (e.g. ability to foresee future) the positive answers exceeded 50%. Once again it is true that ideas corresponding to subjective spirituality of a late-modern consumer get more and more attention. It is irrelevant, whether this “believer” will claim to be a Christian, Buddhist or Neo-pagan. Obviously, this does not mean that this is the only “viable” form of religiosity in the Czech society. Next to this one, there are other, relatively influential options. For example, these may include evangelical groups in Christian churches and denominations, which seem to be more successful and attractive than traditional Christianity even in the Czech context.

**Table 3:** Acceptance of religious ideas (in %), *DIN 2006*

	Yes		No		Total
	definitely	probably	probably	definitely	
<b>Afterlife</b>	11,9	24,2	26,4	37,5	100,0
<b>Heaven</b>	10,2	16,0	49,3	24,5	100,0
<b>Hell</b>	8,3	13,2	24,8	53,7	100,0
<b>Miracles</b>	8,4	18,6	26,1	46,8	100,0
<b>Amulets</b>	5,6	37,0	27,0	30,3	100,0
<b>Stars</b>	9,6	36,5	26,3	27,6	100,0
<b>Fortunetellers</b>	10,8	42,2	24,0	23,0	100,0
<b>Healers</b>	9,3	31,8	25,3	33,6	100,0

It is clear that many representatives of traditional religious groups as well as supporters of the “non-religious” approach will interpret this development as

something that jeopardizes or degrades religion. Nevertheless, from the point of view of viability of religion in following years, this tendency will probably be only marginal. The principal role is likely to be played by religious experience and the ability of individual religious groups and currents to offer an acceptable and sufficiently attractive alternative to the increasingly chaotic and less comprehensible and thus more dangerous, technically depersonalized (post)modern society.

In this context, one must interpret the traditional “Czech Atheism”. There is not a space for deeper analysis but let say the following. The group of those who can be called analytic atheists is small and its size is close to the average of West-European countries. Yet, except for this group, the idea of “Czech atheists” usually helps to “hide” other phenomena such as religious apatheism or individualized religiosity that is very common in the Czech society.

## 5. Conclusions

Surveys from the last two decades allow us to formulate conclusions concerning the relationship of the Czech society to religion. They are crucial for understanding the Czech religiosity:

(1) *Czech atheism is not atheism.* Most of the relevant survey data show that truly atheistic attitudes are held only by a small minority of people. The “Czech atheism” tends to be confused with other religious phenomena, such as deinstitutionalized religiosity and apathy towards religion (religious apatheism).

(2) *Low level of institutionalization of the religious life.* The attitudes of the Czech public towards religious institutions, particularly traditional churches, tend to be negative or indifferent at the very best. Yet, even those who are willing to explicitly declare affiliation to a specific religious group often do not participate in its “religious life”. Such tendency seems to be more obvious in case of the Roman Catholic Church and mainstream non-Catholic denominations (Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, Czechoslovak Hussite Church).

(3) *Deep individualization of religion.* These tendencies of the Czech religiosity are in line with its significant individualization. It is reflected in both the ambivalent attitude to religious institutions and the high levels of religious syncretism.

(4) *Low level of commitment.* One of the most obvious aspects of the high level of individualization of religion is its relatively ambivalent position in the daily life. The commitment to religious practices is low and the religious ideas and values exert only a small influence on other attitudes and behaviours.

## 6. Blank Spaces

Religion-related surveys provide us with relatively large datasets that may be used to analyse the form and tendencies of the current Czech religiosity. Yet, we are still confronted with several gaps in the current scholarship when trying to compile a sufficiently representative “map of the current Czech religion”. The following five clusters of issues are considered to be of greatest importance and we believe deserve appropriate attention.

- (1) *Study of religious communities.* Available data provide a certain picture of the macro-level of the religious life. These are often used to formulate unfounded generalizations. Aside from this, the bits of information concerning this very layer do not allow us to adequately study the dynamics of activities of specific religious groups.
- (2) *Study of compactness, differentiation and distribution of power of individual religious groups.* Ideas of compact operation of individual churches and religious movements or even traditions tend to provide gross misinterpretation of available data. It shows that partial surveys focused on specific churches and movements will have to significantly deal with the internal dynamics and differentiation thereof.
- (3) *Commitment to the religious activity.* Most surveys claim that one of the key problems of the “Czech religiosity” is the low level of commitment. Yet, no survey deals with this phenomenon to a sufficient level and this is why the analyses and interpretations thereof lack depth and relevance.
- (4) *Study of key strategies of religious groups.* Vast majority of surveys ignore the fact that religious groups have their own strategies which determine their activities. Study of such strategies would not only allow to better understanding motives of behaviour of specific groups, but also discrepancies among expectations of their members or surrounding society in the daily reality.
- (5) *Study of the Czech atheism.* Even though the cliché of a high amount of atheism in the Czech society appears in almost all depictions of the

relationship of Czechs to religion, this phenomenon appears to lack deeper examination. Most available studies tends to acquire historic or theoretical works and does not reflect the current expert debate focusing on the topics of unbelief and non-religion, just as they use empirical data to a minimum extent.

## **7. Appendix: Studies of religion in the Czech Republic (Czechoslovakia) after 1989**

While the communist government decree of 27 July 1954 following after the freedom of confession declared in the Constitution banned the state bodies from establishing religious faith of the population and from maintaining relevant registers, this does not imply no sociologic and other religiosity-related survey took place under the communist regime. The design, methodology and results were generally influenced by the prominent anti-religious ideology and acquired data or the interpretations thereof were not available to public (Nešpor 2008). Ideologically unbiased surveys started to appear only after 1989, while at the same time academic and public discussion focused on the results was open; as for most of these, all in fact, financed from public sources, primary data are available at the same time (cf. Váně 2012). The elementary overview may be divided to (a) representative quantitative studies, (b) qualitative studies and (c) historical-sociological studies.

Other than that, it is vital to mention census data (1991, 2001 and 2011), including religious belief declared by the population; this question is voluntary in the census, while at the last one, 45% people did not answer. Another problem is the changing census method, different reading/answering this only question focusing on religiosity and unavailability (incomplete availability) of primary data caused by the personal data protection imposed by law. Yet, it is vital to note that the 2011 census allowed the respondents, aside from declaring membership in a church or explicit refusal thereof, to declare themselves as a believer without any church membership, this was the option more than 700 thousand of Czechs (7% of the population) chose.

### **7.1. Representative quantitative surveys**

Questions concerning population religiosity, especially the declared religious belief and proportion of participation in religious services, are present in majority of representative sociological surveys and public opinion polls after 1989; deeper surveys focusing on this very area are much less numerous. First surveys were conducted under the sponsorship of church bodies, especially the Roman Catholic Church (*AUFBRUCH* ad.), and the Czech participation in international religiosity

surveys (*ISSP*, *EVS*) followed soon, and in 2006 the only independent Czech sociological survey focusing on religion (*DIN*) was conducted.

The very first quantitative survey concerning religion of 1991 sponsored by the Czech Bible Society, conducted in Czechoslovakia and other post-communist countries after 1989 monitored the relationship of the population to (the Christian) religion and the Bible. The survey took the form of a quota sampling on a two thousand specimen and the acquired data are available as in the case of standard sociological surveys through the Czech Social Sciences Data Archive at the Institute of Sociology ASCR. Unfortunately, this does not apply to further church-related surveys. This concerns especially the large international survey *God after the Communism (AUFBRUCH)*, conducted by the Roman Catholic sociologist Paul Zulehner, the first portion of which took place in 1997 and the other one in 2007. While table outputs of the first portion got published (Tomka – Zulehner 2008), primary data are not available to public and the survey method is unclear as well. Results of such surveys are usually processed and used only by their direct participants (Prudký 2005, 2009), who comment on long-term decline of the traditional religiosity, increase of kinds of value self-orientation and fatalism.

Such limitations apply also to recent surveys ordered by the Catholic Church, focusing on religiosity of youth (2011) or social perception of Church (2014), just as to the case of a (selective) presentation of statistic data concerning religious life of individual church corporations (cf. Tichý 2008). Whether other churches active in the Czech Republic maintain such statistics, such data are not public in most cases and thus they are unavailable for further sociological analyses (cf. Nešpor – Vojtíšek 2015).

In 1990s, Czech Republic accessed international sociological survey programs, some of which deal with religion from a detailed perspective: this means especially the Religion module within the *International Social Survey Programme (ISSP)*, conducted in 1998 (collection of Czech data took place in 1999) and in 2008, and the *European Values Study (EVS)*, which took place in 1990 (data collection in 1991), 1999 and 2008. In both cases, these are random sample surveys, representative for the whole adult population (18+).

*The ISSP survey* is realized in the Czech Republic by the Institute of Sociology ASCR (Dana Hamplová), the data were collected in June and July 1999 by the SC&C agency (N=1224, return 39%), in September 2008 by the Factum Invenio agency (N=1512, return 44%). Relevant survey module involves personal, political and religious positions of respondents, with the religious area specializing on personal religious ideas and practices, religiosity of close people, social impacts of religiosity and religious extremism in later surveys; the questionnaire includes a large socio-demographical part. Main notions were published by Hamplová (2000, 2013) and Hamplová and Řeháková (2009).

*The EVS survey* is conducted in the Czech Republic (or Czechoslovakia in 1991) by the Faculty of Social Studies of Masaryk University in Brno (Ladislav Rabušic). Data were collected in August to October 1991 by the survey department of the Czechoslovak Radio (N=2109), in March to May 1999 by SC&C (N=1908) and in May to November 2008 again by SC&C (N=1821). These surveys are not focused exclusively on the field of religion, while this is significant portion of studied topics, but also to life values, goals and preferences, leisure time, work and family life. Overall results summarizing all three portions were published by Rabušic and Hamanová (2009).

The only independent Czech religiosity survey *Detraditionalization and individualization of religion in the Czech Republic* (DIN) was conducted in September and October 2006 by the Institute of Sociology ASCR (Zdeněk R. Nešpor), the survey was a part of a larger study, which will be mentioned later. Data were collected by SC&C (N=1200, return 53%), and this survey used random sample, too, and is representative for the whole adult population. For the purpose of data comparability reflected topics dealt with in the ISSP "surveys – Religion, but it included more questions focusing on religious ideas (including nonconformist ones) and practice, relationships among different types of non/belief and perception of death. Main results were published by Hamplová (2008) and Lužný and Nešpor (2008). Currently, there is a new attempt to resume the *DIN* survey (Dušan Lužný) at the Palacký University in Olomouc, the results are not closed nor known yet.

## **7.2. Qualitative sociological and socio-anthropological surveys**

Deeper understanding of different dimensions of the current Czech non/religiosity, consequent social acting and the subjectively felt importance thereof come from qualitative surveys, the informative value is often restricted by small survey samples within regional, community or topical limits. Many minor surveys were and are conducted within qualifying university theses, systematically assigned mainly at the Faculty of Arts of Masaryk University in Brno (Dušan Lužný, David Václavík), Hussite Theological Faculty of the Charles University (Zdeněk Vojtíšek) and the Faculty of Humanities of the Charles University (Zdeněk R. Nešpor). Diploma and doctoral theses of students usually suffer from failings linked to such types of surveys and only a small portion of these got to be published. Wider, academically funded qualitative sociological and socio-anthropological surveys are much less numerous; in the last twenty years principally three community type surveys took place (Filipov, *Český Kendal* (Czech Kendal), *Bůh ví proč* (God knows why), alternative religiosity surveys take place (Zdeněk Vojtíšek) and surveys concerning dying and death (Olga Nešporová).

The first anthropological survey to topicalize religion in the scope of a community survey of a smaller town of Moravia, was conducted in 1997-99 by the Faculty of Social Studies of the Charles University in the so-called *Filipov* (Jiří Kabele, Dan Ryšavý). This combined field stationary survey involving interviews and analysis of source materials, aside from religiosity it focused on the area of (local) politics, family and social life, work, entrepreneurial activities and overall post-revolutionary transformation of the society. Local specificity was the existence of a relatively strong evangelical minority, the congregational life and modifications of which were the focus of the survey. The main results were published by Ryšavý (1999) and Kabele (2004).

Community-related was also the *Český Kendal* survey realized within the aforementioned *Detraditionalization and individualization of religion in the Czech Republic* during 2006-08 as a counterweight and completion of the representative quantitative survey. The survey took place in two mid-scale towns, in Mikulov in South Moravia (Dušan Lužný) and in Česká Lípa in Northern Bohemia (Zdeněk R. Nešpor), linked to the religiosity survey methodology used in Kendal, Great Britain

(cf. Heelas – Woodhead 2005). This involved the survey focusing mainly on the field of religion, dealing with religious and social practices of traditional and alternative believers and their social representation or perception. Given the selection of survey localities, social processes in border regions repopulated after the WWII or even later were dealt with. Principal results of the survey including the comparison of religious lives in both localities were published by Lužný and Nešpor (2008).

The last larger-scale socio-anthropological survey *God Knows Why* was conducted in the Northern Bohemian border region in 2003-2008. The author, Barbora Spalová focused on functioning of several confessionally defined local communities, their internal power regimes and memory constructions (this involved two Roman Catholic parishes, a Baptist Union congregation and a Unity of the Brethren congregation). In this survey, the widest spread elements were those of reflective anthropology, in went furthest towards understanding inner meanings of individual (different) actors, which, however, renders it less usable for generalization; in summary they were published by Spalová (2012).

Aside from these surveys, it is necessary to mention long-term *monitoring* of so-called religious movements and other *alternative forms of religiosity* including non-church and non-organized ones done by the scholar of religion Zdeněk Vojtíšek. While previous Vojtíšek's works were influenced by ideological perspective of an anti-cult approach, the author progressively freed himself from this approach providing objective elementary overview of all religious organizations active in the Czech Republic (Vojtíšek 2004). His perspective is primarily academic, thus he concentrates only on monitoring institutions on the "supply side" of the religious marketplace. Such approach is similar the project focusing on studying and monitoring of all protestant congregations (Nešpor 2009a) and community of 27 smaller Christian churches (Nešpor – Vojtíšek 2009), while this includes social, socio-geographical and historic dimensions of activities of individual religious institutions; other segments of the organized Czech religiosity (Roman Catholic Church, Czechoslovak Hussite Church, non-Christian churches and centres of non-church spirituality) have not been treated yet.

Long-term survey of positions (of various segments) of the Czech society relating to dying and death including realization of relevant transitional rites and

ideas of a life after death has been conducted by Olga Nešporová since the start of the millennium. The survey combines quantitative and qualitative sociological and socio-anthropological approaches, paying special attention to changing requirements, needs and habits of the dying persons as well as survivors. The principal results were published by Nešporová (2013).

### **7.3. Historical-sociological surveys**

A number of authors believe that the specific form of the Czech non/religiosity has roots at least in the development of attitudes of the Czech society towards religion and churches during the 20th century, if not even farther. Thus, in the last decades, a historical and historical-sociological monitoring of a given area, however here, only those studies, which combine analyses of historic material with the current religiosity status of the Czech society, will be mentioned.

Nešpor (2010 a, b) and Václavík (2010) published overview works indicating a progressive deviation of a large part of the society from the traditional church-related religiousness and search for various religious alternatives; the communist era strengthened the former and hid, while did not eliminate the latter. Significantly beneficial was the collection of studies dealing with past and current religiosity from the point of view of (changes of) religious cultures (Havelka 2012), or the similar work focusing on older roots of the Czech anti-clericalism (Balík et al. 2015). Surveys, which all these works were based on, document the aforementioned notion of continuity (not invariability) of long-term processes of the religious evolution within the Czech society and the relation of the current state not only to the communist regime era but also to older institutions and tendencies.

Level of elaboration of institutional history of individual church communities after 1950s and in line with their acting in the free society after the fall of the communist regime is unbalanced. While some studied, socio-culturally created history of the Czech Roman Catholic Church (Balík – Hanuš 2007) and some smaller church communities (Seventh-day Adventist Church – Piškula 2009) are available, this is a minority of cases – this does not apply to any other socially established and politically, socially or culturally influential Czech churches (Czechoslovak Hussite

Church and Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren), and even less to nonconformist and/or non-church or other socially unorganized spiritual communities.

#### **7.4. Foreign overviews**

Data from publicly available quantitative surveys of the Czech religiosity are available for the international research community via the Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences (GESIS) data archive or by the means of the Czech Social Sciences Data Archive at the Institute of Sociology ASCR. Almost all aforementioned studies analysing and interpreting sociological or historical data concerning the Czech religiosity, were published only in Czech, thus being not directly available for foreign researchers. This does not mean that there are no overview or even some analytical studies published in internationally comprehensible languages.

The most accessible manual of modern Czech church history compiled according to the development in particular churches was published by Schulze Wessel and Zückert (2009), an overview of data concerning religious confession based on population census and sociological surveys for the whole of the 20th century was published by Nešpor (2009b). Sociological analyses of *DIN* and *ISSP* surveys – Religion were published by Hamplová and Nešpor (2009) and by Vido, Václavík and Paleček (2016). Some outputs of surveys concerning dying and death (Nešporová 2007) or socio-geographical surveys of traditional and emerging holy places in the landscape (Havlíček – Hupková 2013; Nešporová 2011) are also available.

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