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# Being a Modern Christian and Worker in the Czechoslovak National State (1918–1938)<sup>1</sup>

## IZVLEČEK

### POLOŽAJ SODOBNEGA KRISTJANA IN DELAVCA V ČEŠKOSLOVAŠKI REPUBLIKI (1918–1938)

Oktobra 1918 je z razglasitvijo nove Češkoslovaške republike prišlo do revolucionarnih sprememb ne le na političnem, družbenem, gospodarskem in kulturnem področju, temveč tudi v verskem življenju v državi. Nova Češkoslovaška nacionalna cerkev, ki so jo ustanovili trinajst mesecev pozneje, je združevala narodno usmeritev, reformirano cerkveno gibanje, teološki modernizem, husitsko in reformacijsko tradicijo ter nasprotovanje Katoliški cerkvi, katere ugled je bil dokončno omajan v prvi svetovni vojni. Novoustanovljeno Češkoslovaško cerkev so podpirali različni organi, poleg tega pa je veljala kot ustrezna izbira za dobrega češkoslovaškega državljana, predvsem delavca. Obenem je sprožila udi nasilno gibanje za spreobrnitev (1921, 1930) in številne lokalne konflikte (v 20. letih prejšnjega stoletja). Članek se osredotoča na versko in narodno opredelitev delavcev ter na spremembe v današnji Ostravski regiji – industrijski regiji (središču češkoslovaške težke industrije), ki se razprostira po etnični meji in je talilni lonec številnih narodov (Čehov, Slovakov, Poljakov, Nemcev in Judov). V njem bomo analizirali interakcije med družbenimi razredi ter versko in narodno opredelitvijo delavcev. Poskušali bomo pojasniti proces spreobrnitve ter motivacijo zanj v različnih cerkvah. Posebno pozornost bomo posvetili spreobrnitvam med pripadniki delavskega razreda v 20. in 30. letih prejšnjega stoletja. Analiza bo temeljila na protokolih spreobrnitve, dokumentih o popisih prebivalstva iz leta 1921 in leta 1930 ter na cerkvenih listinah Rimskokatoliške in Češkoslovaške cerkve.

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1 This study was conducted as part of the project by the Grant Agency of the Czech Republic, reg.no. 16-04364S, entitled 'Religious Life of Workers in Industry in the Czech Lands (1918–1939): Institutions, Religiosity and the Social Issue', carried out at the Masaryk Institute and Archives of the Czech Academy of Sciences (2016–2018).

*Ključne besede: Delavci, Češkoslovaška cerkev, gibanje za spreobrnitev, Ostravska regija, 1918–1938*

## ABSTRACT

*The declaration of the new Czechoslovak national state in October 1918 brought revolutionary changes not only to the political, social, economic and cultural scene, but also to the religious life of the country. The new Czechoslovak national church created thirteen months later combined national orientation, the reformed clerical movement, theological modernism, the Hussite and reformation tradition and protest against the Catholic Church, definitively discredited in World War I. The newly established Czechoslovak Church received support from various authorities and was seen as the proper option for the good Czechoslovak citizen, primarily the worker. At the same time, it produced a violent conversion movement (1921, 1930) and many local conflicts (1920s). The paper will focus on the workers' religious and national identification and changes in today's Ostrava region – an industrial region (the centre of Czechoslovak heavy industry) situated on the ethnic borderline and in the melting pot of many nationalities (Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Germans and Jews). It will analyse the interactions between class and the religious and national identification of workers. It will try to clarify the process and the motivation to convert between different churches. Special attention will be given to conversions among the working class population in the 1920s and 1930s. This analysis will be based on conversion protocols, census documents from 1921 and 1930 and ecclesiastical files of the Roman Catholic and Czechoslovak church.*

*Keywords: Workers, Czechoslovak Church, Conversion Movement, Region of Ostrava, 1918–1938*

## I.

The process of constituting the Czechoslovak Republic at the end of October 1918 was to be, in the minds of its founders headed by the future President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850–1937, in office 1918–1935), an act of *national revolution*.<sup>2</sup> The national revolution was to be closely followed by a *social revolution*, emphasising the demands of land reform and the socialisation of large industrial enterprises. While the social revolution broke down as a half-hearted land reform to the detriment of great church

2 For the Czech sociologist and political philosopher T. G. Masaryk, by the end of the 1890's the religious issue (*Moderní člověk a náboženství* [*Modern Man and Religion*], 1896) and the social issue (*Otázka sociální* [*The Social Issue*], 1898) were already the most prominent contemporary tasks that needed to be addressed outside the confessional bounds of the traditional churches, as both Catholicism and Protestantism were, in his opinion, beyond reform, not to mention the Russian orthodoxy. For Masaryk, as the supporter of Palacký's concept of Czech history with its heyday during the time of the Czech Reformation in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Czech issue (*Česká otázka* [*The Czech Issue*], 1895) was then primarily a religious concern, which failed to be resolved due to the reformatory inconsistency of the Czech Protestant churches and the Catholic anti-modernism.

and noble landowners (1923–1926), and large enterprises were eventually socialised in a completely different political setting as late as in October 1945, the national revolution gave birth to a multi-national and multi-confessional Czechoslovak State. It was dominated by the Czechoslovak nation<sup>3</sup> with the prevailing denomination being Roman Catholic, and took the form established in 1918–1920 until March 1939.<sup>4</sup> An integral part of the national and social revolution after 1918 was to be a *religious revolution* under the slogans of the modernisation and democratisation of Czech Catholicism, its departure from Rome and Vienna and the accomplishment of the Czech reformation and anti-clerical tradition represented by Jan Hus (1369–1415), Petr Chelčický (1390–1460), Jan Amos Komenský (1592–1670), Karel Havlíček-Borovský (1821–1856) and Masaryk. This fact was omitted in Czech historiography until it was brought to light again by foreign researchers led by Martin Schulz Wessel (2011).<sup>5</sup> The key driving force behind the religious revolution were the Czech Roman Catholic clerics who had joined the Jednota katolického duchovenstva československého [Union of Czechoslovak Catholic Clergy] (1918) which followed up on the activities of the prohibited Jednota katolíckeho duchovenstva [Union of Catholic Clergy] (1902–1907). With the exception of bishops, the Union associated Czech Catholic clergy at all hierarchical levels, predominantly supporters of Czech nationalism, believers in Christian socialism and sympathisers of Marxist socialism.<sup>6</sup>

Besides the independent Czechoslovak State and the failing socialisation, the revolutionary events and ethos of October 1918 gave rise to another revolutionary

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- 3 The historical roots of the ahistorical concept of the Czechoslovak nation and language (referred to as Czechoslovakism) must be sought as early as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was not until World War One, however, that it became the ideology of the emerging Czechoslovak state, calling upon the assertions of the national revivalists František Palacký (1798–1876) and Ján Kollár (1793–1852) concerning the historical unity between the Czech and Slovak nation. With the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic, Czechoslovakism became the state doctrine incorporated into the Constitution (1920), which accelerated the emancipation of the Slovak nation but hindered its full national and political self-realisation. The key critic of Czechoslovakism in the interwar period was the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Even today, several tens of thousands of Czech exiles all over the world claim allegiance to the Czechoslovak nation and language. For details, see e.g. Jan Galandauer, “Čechoslovakismus v proměnách času: od národotvorné tendence k integrační ideologii,” [Czechoslovakism and Its Changes in the Course of Time: From a Nation-creating Trend to the Ideology of Integration] *Historie a vojenství: časopis Historického ústavu Armády České republiky* 47, No. 2 (1998): 33–52.
- 4 *Československá vlastivěda. Řada II: Národopis* [Czechoslovak History and Geography. Series II: Ethnography] (Praha: Sfinx, Bohumil Janda, 1936), 99: In 1930 Czechoslovakia had a population of 14 479 565, 9 668 770 of whom declared themselves Czechoslovak nationals (66.8 %), 3 231 688 German nationals (22.3 %), 691 923 Hungarian nationals (4.8 %), 549 169 Russian and Ruthenian nationals (3.8 %), 186 642 Jewish nationals (1.3 %), 81 737 Polish nationals (0.6 %) and 49 636 (0.3 %) other nationalities. The most popular was the Roman Catholic Church (74.8 % of the Czechoslovak population); Evangelic (Protestant) churches comprised 10 %, the Czechoslovak Church 5.1 %, the Greek Catholic Church 3.9 %, the Russian Orthodox Church 0.6 % and the Israelites 1.1 % of the population. 4.5 % of the Czechoslovak population followed no religion or belonged to marginal religious communities.
- 5 Martin Schulze Wessel, *Revolution und religiöser Dissens: Der römisch-katholische und der russisch-orthodoxe Klerus als Träger religiösen Wandels in den böhmischen Ländern und in Russland 1848–1922* [Revolution and Religious Dissent: The Roman Catholic Church and Russian Orthodox Clerics as Bearers of Religious Change in the Czech Lands and Russia 1848–1922] (München: Oldenbourg, 2011), 1–26.
- 6 On the social status and ideological profile of the Czech clergy prior to World War One, see biographies of pro-reform Catholic clerics, e.g. Jaroslav Hrdlička, *Život a dílo prof. Františka Kováře: příběh patriarchy a učence* [The Life and Work of Prof. František Kovář: The Story of a Patriarch and Scholar] (Brno: L. Marek, 2007). Oskar Malý, *Můj životopis: vzpomínky spoluzakladatele Církve československé (husitské)* [The Story of My Life: Memories of a Co-Founder of the Czechoslovak (Hussite) Church] (Brno: Brněnská diecéze Církve československé husitské, 2009), etc.

project – the national *Czechoslovak Church*. It was established, after thirteen months of agitation, conceptual inconsistencies and conflicts with the Roman Catholic hierarchy, at the beginning of January 1920. The new church, the establishment of which was initiated by several dozen lower-ranking Czech clerics, was primarily supposed to be the Czech national church, free of Roman Catholic paternalism. It was to be a democratic church as regards hierarchical structures (elected clerics, a combination of the episcopalian and presbyterian principles), tolerant in dogmatic matters (a symbiosis of the tradition of the eastern Slavic Christianity and western reformation) and modern in terms of its ritual practice and law (national liturgical language,<sup>7</sup> voluntary attendance at services, liberalisation of the celibate and divorce,<sup>8</sup> cremation). It should have been a platform from which to eliminate the decades of antagonism between Czech nationalism and the Danubian version of ultramontane Catholicism, sharply hierarchised in social and nationality terms. It must be mentioned, however, that the Czech clergy were not alone as regards similar pro-reform efforts among the former Austro-Hungarian nations – in March 1920, for instance, a petition organised by 83 Croatian priests called upon the Zagreb archbishop to democratise and nationalise the Roman Catholic church in Croatia.<sup>9</sup> In the minds of its founders,<sup>10</sup> the Czechoslovak Church had the potential to address most of Czech Christian society that did not want to break away from institutionalised Christianity and at the same time desired to leave Danubian Catholicism, discredited by the controversies between the aristocratized hierarchy connected with the House of Habsburg and ordinary clerics mostly from the rural areas, characterised by the prevailing Czech language and social instability. The 1910 and 1921 censuses showed that the Roman Catholic Church lost 1 388 000 worshippers in the Czech lands, of which 523 232 (or 37.7 %) found their institutional asylum in the newly constituted Czechoslovak Church in 1921. It must be noted, however, that more than 60 % of the inhabitants of the Czech lands who had left the Roman Catholic Church remained non-believers.<sup>11</sup>

While most historical works dedicated to topics relating to the Czechoslovak Church were based on the biographies of its representatives, the histories of specific communities or its constitutive phase (M. Schulze Wessel), topics relating to social history have so far been voiced only very rarely. This paper primarily explores the

7 Schulze Wessel, *Revolution und religiöser Dissens*, 158: Schulze linked the importance of national liturgical language in the Czech environment with Czech society's frustration over failing language regulations (1897–1898) by Prime Minister Kazimír Badeni.

8 Hugh McLeod, *Sekularizace v západní Evropě (1848–1914)* [*Secularisation in Western Europe, 1848–1914*] (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2008), 142–53: Also in the environment of Czech pro-reform Catholicism, as in the case of German Catholicism (Deutschkatholizismus) or Old Catholicism (Altkatholizismus), the call to liberalise the celibate was a fundamental part of the modernisation programme aiming to promote the middle estate model of liberal morals among the priesthood.

9 Schulze Wessel, *Revolution und religiöser Dissens*, 142.

10 The most often mentioned founders include Karel Farský (1880–1927), the first patriarch of the Czechoslovak Church; Bohumil Zahradník-Brodský (1862–1939), the author of the questionnaire survey in December 1918; Ferdinand Stibor (1869–1956), a Silesian priest and later the bishop of the Silesian dioceses; and Matěj Pavlík (1879–1942) who eventually aligned with the Russian Orthodox church.

11 Milan Kučera, *Populace České republiky 1918–1991* [*Population of the Czech Republic*] (Praha: Česká demografická společnost, Sociologický ústav Akademie věd ČR, 1994), 12.

question of how the majority of the Czech (Czechoslovak) public, i.e. the working class,<sup>12</sup> responded to the establishment and activities of the Czechoslovak Church, especially in a region with such an extremely high concentration of heavy industry and the industrial working class.<sup>13</sup> To what extent, and in which respects, was the pro-reform church programme stemming from Czech nationalism and Catholic modernism attractive for workers and what mobilising potential did it have in the working class environment, which was rife with post-war national and social struggles? The crucial question posed by this paper is then the stability of the newly gained identity of a Czechoslovak Christian in the working-class environment, including its criticism from organisations with a rival world view and from experts (sociology of religion).

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## II.

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The Czechoslovak Church, which obtained state approval in September 1920, found most response in larger cities, industrial regions and several rural areas in Moravia, Eastern Silesia and in Central and Eastern Bohemia, most of which were linked to the activities of pro-reform chaplains and catechists. In mid-February 1921, 5.2 % of the population of the Czech lands claimed affiliation to the new national church community. Nine years later, in December 1930, 7.3 % (779 672 people)<sup>14</sup> declared themselves members of the Czechoslovak Church. This was when the Church went through its constitutive stage, during which it experienced a theological crisis resulting in the secession of a number of worshippers and the establishment of the Czech Orthodox Church under the jurisdiction of the Serbian Orthodox Church, headed by bishop Gorazd (Matěj Pavlík).<sup>15</sup> In the early 1920s, the Church also faced a series of legal conflicts with the Roman Catholic Church, whose churches and chapels it acquired – often with the tacit approval of the local authorities – in the boroughs with a prevalence of members of the Czechoslovak Church.<sup>16</sup> The hunger riots and

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12 Ibid., 14: As regards the social structure of the Czech population, the working class made up 54.5 % of the Czech population in 1921 and 60.4 % in 1930.

13 Jiřík et al., *Dějiny Ostravy [History of Ostrava]* (Ostrava: Sfinga, 1993), 312, 313: In 1930 the working class prevailed in the economically active part of population, with 64.9 % in the so-called Great Ostrava region and with 74.7 % in the Slezská Ostrava judicial district.

14 Kučera, *Populace České republiky*, 12.

15 Josef Tomeš et al., *Český biografický slovník XX. století, I. díl: A–J [Czech Biographical Dictionary of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century; Vol. I: A–J]* (Praha and Litomyšl: Petr Meissner and Paseka, 1999), 371. Matěj Pavlík / Bishop Gorazd (St. Gorazd II) is an emblematic figure in the Czech history of religion in the 1st half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: a Catholic priest, psychologist and chaplain of the psychiatric hospital in Kroměříž, he was ousted from the Roman Catholic church on 3 September 1920, following which he joined the Czechoslovak Church, from which he was ostracised on 21 June 1924 after being consecrated as a bishop in Beograd (25 September 1921) and after a mission among the North American Czechoslovaks. Gorazd's work, the Czech Orthodox Church under the Serbian and Constantinopolitan jurisdiction, was dissolved after the men behind the assassination attempt on Heydrich (27 May 1942) were found in the Orthodox cathedral in Prague. Bishop Gorazd was executed on 4 September 1942 and canonised by the Orthodox Church in September 1987.

16 Pavel Marek, "Zápas o vlastnictví kostelů po vzniku Československa," [Struggle for the Ownership of Churches af-



demonstrations of collective justice in the final months of World War One then found a response in outbreaks of local violence. The political stabilisation and increasing legal awareness of the young Czechoslovak State, which saw a moderate weakening of the anti-Catholic tendencies of the post-revolutionary period, led to the restitution of Catholic churches, rectories and churchyards in the mid-1920s. The Czechoslovak Church thus faced the need to build its own confessional infrastructure. Building churches was a constant financial burden, which gradually phased down the initial revolutionary ethos of the national church, especially as the church, in its opinion, failed to advocate an appropriate position as regards the state subsidy policy towards the church.<sup>17</sup> When the Czechoslovak Church was forced to change its name to the Czech-Moravian Church after the establishment of the Protectorate Böhmen und Mähren, it had more than 200 churches and up to a million worshippers amongst the workers and lower middle class, led by teachers and lower-ranking state officials for whom joining the national church during the early Protectorate was often a form of tacit resistance against the occupation regime.

The idea of national, social and religious revolution resonated particularly strongly in the region of Ostrava (also called Ostravsko), the centre of the Czechoslovak coal, iron, steel and heavy chemical industries. In the district of Slezská Ostrava, situated in the region, 26.6 % of the local population declared affiliation to the Czechoslovak Church in 1921.<sup>18</sup> This region, situated in a black coal basin near the Czechoslovak–German–Polish state border, was also on the Czech–German–Polish language border and on the border between areas that were traditionally Catholic and Lutheran but had a strong Jewish presence. From the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Ostravsko underwent a period of national and social turmoil,<sup>19</sup> exacerbated especially by the tense circumstances during World War One, when Ostrava's heavy industry was thoroughly militarised. The post-war establishment of the national Czechoslovak Church in Ostravsko came at a time when the people's referendum was being prepared in the boroughs between Ostrava and Těšín along the border river Olza (28 July 1920), together with the separation of the Czech-speaking enclave of Hlučín from Germany

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ter the Establishment of Czechoslovakia] *Moderní dějiny: časopis pro dějiny 19. a 20. století / Modern History: Journal for the History of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century* 23 (2015): 89–126.

- 17 ZAO, Olomouc branch, Diecézní rada Církve československé Ostrava [Diocesan Council of the Czechoslovak Church in Ostrava] (1915)1922–1964 (DR CČS OV) collection, f. 8, inv. no. 184, 1930: In 1930, for instance, when 5.1 % of the Czechoslovak population were members of the Czechoslovak Church, the state subsidy to fund the operation of the church was 4 200 000 Kč (4.2 %) of the total allocated subsidy of 101 000 000 Kč (the Roman Catholic church received 70.4 % of the total state subsidy with a 74.8 % representation in the Czechoslovak population). The Czechoslovak Church officials considered the state subsidy to be wholly inconsistent with the cultural and, especially, national importance of the church community.
- 18 Martin Jemelka, "Sociálnědemokratické bezvěrecké hnutí na meziválečném Ostravsku," [Social Democratic Movement of Non-Believers in the Interwar Ostrava Region] *Ostrava: sborník k dějinám Ostravy a Ostravska* 26 (2012): 163.
- 19 Karel Jiřík, "Vítkovice – nejvíce germanizovaná obec v Předlitavsku," [Vítkovice – the Most Germanised Village in Cisleithania] *Ostrava: příspěvky k dějinám a současnosti Ostravy a Ostravska* 21 (2003): 162–96: The drastic Germanisation of the local Slavic workers was infamous in Vítkovice (today Ostrava-Vítkovice), a company town controlled by Vítkovické Iron Works, one of the most important Cisleithanian weapons industry enterprises during World War One, together with the Škoda arms factory in Pilsen. In no other village did the German population grow so quickly to the detriment of the original Slavic population as in Vítkovice.

and its accession to the Czechoslovak State (4 February 1920). It was also a time of rising social tension caused by the post-war crisis in the coal and heavy machinery industry and the requirement to socialise Ostrava's heavy industry, accompanied by the forced departure of many Poles to the neighbouring and newly emerging Polish state.<sup>20</sup> For instance, in the mining village of Michálkovice, a suburb of Ostrava, where supporters of the Czechoslovak Church made up 60.5 % of the local population in 1921,<sup>21</sup> the post-war anger of the frustrated workers broke out with the same intensity in street riots against the expelled Catholic priest who allegedly showed favouritism to Poles, and also against German and Polish mine engineers.<sup>22</sup>

Radvanice ve Slezsku, a neighbouring suburban miners' borough which now lies within the city of Ostrava, almost 40 % of whose inhabitants lived in three worker colonies in 1921, became the cradle of the Czechoslovak Church in Northern Moravia and Czech Silesia.<sup>23</sup> The very first community of the Czechoslovak Church in Radvanice ve Slezsku was established in January 1920, just one week after the founding synod in Prague held on 8 January 1920,<sup>24</sup> during the culmination of the border conflict around Těšín and at a time of unceasing pressure from the left-wing Social Democrats to socialise the enterprises. The national and social tension, which tended to result in a violent response to the strife, also had an impact on the confessional conflicts which affected many boroughs in the region in the weeks following the establishment of the local community of the Czechoslovak Church in Radvanice ve Slezsku. The violent seizure of several Roman Catholic churches and accusations that several clerics had shown favouritism to Poles led to violence and bloodshed, especially in the villages of Michálkovice, Heřmanice and Radvanice, mostly inhabited by the working class.<sup>25</sup> "Not even the Austrian Army was able to break away from the enemy during World War One as quickly as the crusaders of Radvanice retreated from the cathedral door when faced with the Czechoslovak miners. The bravest ones could even be seen jumping across the ditches and ploughed fields and seeking salvation in their escape", wrote the church magazine entitled *Palcát* [*Mace*] on the Catholics' unsuccessful attempt to reclaim the Roman Catholic church in Radvanice ve Slezsku on 5 January 1921, which had been illegally seized by worshippers of the Czechoslovak church. They had laboriously collected the funds to build it, at the time still as Roman Catholics.<sup>26</sup>

20 Václav Sekera, "Náboženské přesuny na Ostravsku," [Religious Conversions in the Ostrava Region] *Sociální problémy: revue pro sociální teorii a praxi* 2, No. 1 (1932): 8.

21 Jemelka, "Sociálnědemokratické bezvěrecké hnutí," 163.

22 Ludmila Turecká, "Kronika," [The Chronicle] in: *Lidé z kolonií vyprávějí své dějiny* [People from the Colonies Tell Their History], ed. Martin Jemelka (Ostrava: Repronis, 2009), 118–22.

23 Martin Jemelka, "Resumé," [Summary] in: *Ostravské dělnické kolonie II: závodní kolonie kamenouhelných dolů a koksoven ve slezské části Ostravy* [Ostrava's Worker Colonies II: Factory Colonies of Coal Mines and Coke Plants in the Silesian Part of Ostrava], ed. Martin Jemelka (Ostrava: Ostravská univerzita v Ostravě, 2012), 723.

24 Antonín Barcuch, "Počátky československé církve (husitské) v Radvanicích," [Origins of the Czechoslovak (Husite) Church in Radvanice] *Těšínsko: vlastivědný časopis Český Těšín* 48, No. 3 (2005): 23.

25 Marek, "Zápas o vlastnictví," 124.

26 *Palcát: Týdeník národní církve československé diecéze ostravské* [Mace: The Weekly of the National Czechoslovak Church, Ostrava Dioceses] 8, No. 39, September 29, 1929.

The “red” priest Ferdinand Stibor (1869–1956), formerly a Catholic (1894) and later a Czechoslovak priest (1920), bishop (1922–1950) and eventually vice-patriarch of the Czech-Moravian Church (1942–1945), one of the four signatories of the founding deed of the Czechoslovak Church,<sup>27</sup> became the charismatic leader of the dramatic establishment of communities of the Czechoslovak Church in Ostravsko. Stibor’s personality as a Czech nationalist and provincial cleric with a considerable degree of social empathy raised awareness of the national, social and religious conflicts in the early 1920s as the most important social issue of the largest industrial region in the Czechoslovak State. When Stibor became the first priest of the workers’ vicarage in Radvanice ve Slezsku, part of the Těšín General Vicarage of the Wroclaw dioceses, in 1908, he was the only priest in the Czech part of the Wroclaw Archbishopric who conducted the parish agenda, including birth, marriage and death records, in Czech. Ostrava’s workers never forgot that he was the only cleric to reject the forced contribution from his wage to wartime loans during World War One. And he gained even more sympathy among the working class through his marriage with the parish cook Žofie (1919), with whom he had a legitimised son Ferdinand Rudolf (1910) and Břetislav (1920).<sup>28</sup> Stibor also helped the Jednota katolického duchovenstva československého, from which the Czechoslovak Church stemmed, gain considerable support among Ostrava’s workers. Its stately structure may have easily reminded them of a trade union, and its struggle for the social emancipation of the Czech workers’ class struggle.<sup>29</sup>

It was to Stibor’s credit that as early as in the first post-war census, 63.7 % of the inhabitants of Radvanice ve Slezsku declared their affiliation to the Czechoslovak Church, and in the three neighbouring Silesian villages, Heřmanice, Kunčičky and Michálkovice, it was more than 30 %. It took a further nine years before the Czechoslovak Church also established itself in the more urbanised Moravian villages in an area which now forms part of Ostrava. Its members made up more than 20 % of the population in seven Moravian villages, today also part of Ostrava.<sup>30</sup> While in 1921–1930 the number of worshippers of the Czechoslovak Church radially grew towards Radvanice ve Slezsku in geographical terms, the actual quantities varied a lot during the 1920s. The primary factor was the national and social composition of population, where the percentage of worshippers of the Czechoslovak Church fell as national and social heterogeneity increased. Another key role in this process was

27 František Maria Hník, *Za lepší církví: Duševpytná studie o příčinách přestupů do Církve československé* [For a Better Church: A Soul Research Study on the Causes of Conversions to the Czechoslovak Church] (Praha: Ústřední rada Československé církve v Praze, 1930), 231–33; *The Provolání, kterým byla 11. ledna 1920 prohlášena v denním tisku a s kazatelnou chrámu sv. Mikuláše v Praze samostatná československá církev* [The Manifest which declared the independent Czechoslovak Church in the daily press and from the pulpit of St. Nicholas church in Prague on 11 January 1920] was signed by B. Zahradník-Brodský, priest in Ouběnice and trade union councillor at the Ministry of Education and National Awareness, ThDr. K. Farský, secondary school teacher of religion in Pilsen, G. Procházka, priest in Jenišovice, near Turnov, and F. Stibor, priest in Radvanice ve Slezsku.

28 *Masarykův slovník naučný: lidová encyklopedie všeobecných znalostí, VI. díl* [Masaryk’s Encyclopedia: People’s Encyclopedia of General Knowledge. Vol. VI] (Praha: Československý kompas, 1932), 967.

29 Schulze Wessel, *Revolution und religiöser Dissens*, 126: The author was probably the first to notice these substantial connotations.

30 Jemelka, “Sociálnědemokratické bezvěrecké hnutí,” 163.



the new church's ability to fulfil the pastoral needs of the worshippers – this is the only explanation for why in Radvanice alone, the Czechoslovak Church lost 20 % of its worshippers, who joined the Roman Catholic community after the renewal of the Roman Catholic vicarage in 1925 or, more importantly, became ceased to be affiliated to any church.<sup>31</sup> The observation made by Czechoslovak sociologists of that period, that post-war conversions to the Czechoslovak Church were for many of its worshippers only a short stopover on the way to agnosticism, was far from irrelevant.<sup>32</sup>

It was not only in Ostravsko, where 22.8 % inhabitants of the Moravská Ostrava district and up to one third of the population of the Slezská Ostrava district changed their denomination in 1921–1930,<sup>33</sup> that the Czechoslovak Church was especially attractive to the Czech lower classes, primarily the working class and so-called iron farmers (villagers working in industry). It offered them an opportunity to settle the national and confessional rivalry of the preceding decades with the challenges of modern industrial society.<sup>34</sup> According to a declaration on the rally to mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the Czechoslovak Church, held at Masarykovo Sq. in Moravská Ostrava on 5 July 1930, workers comprised up to 80 % of all the 60 000 worshippers in the Silesian dioceses.<sup>35</sup> The question of how the Czechoslovak working class's affinity with the Czechoslovak Church originated was also answered by a questionnaire survey at the end of 1929 before the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Church (1930) carried out among the readers of *Český zápas* [*Czech Struggle*], its official periodical. The questionnaires were filled in by 625 worshippers answering a variety of questions about the reasons why they had joined the Czechoslovak Church and how they felt about its development so far.<sup>36</sup> There were only 12 responses from Ostravsko (in contrast to the far greater response from the Kladno region, another mining region in Central Bohemia), which was probably linked with the competition between *Český zápas* as the periodical for Czech worshippers and *Palcát* as the periodical for those from the Ostrava (or Moravian-Silesian) dioceses. However, a long letter was attached – and published at the end of the survey – from Hulváky, a working quarter of Ostrava shadowed by the Vítkovice iron works, whose author provided an intimate insight into the broad range of reasons for joining the Czechoslovak Church.<sup>37</sup>

31 AMO, ŘK FÚ v Radvanicích collection, inv. no. 1–2, Kniha přijatých do církve a odpadlých 1908–1933, 1923–1933.

32 Sekera, "Náboženské přesuny," 6, 7, 16, 25.

33 Jemelka, "Sociálnědemokratické bezvěrecké hnutí," 162, 163. Sekera, "Náboženské přesuny," 10.

34 Martin Jemelka, "Religious Life in an Industrial Town: The Example of Ostrava, 1850–1950," *The Hungarian Historical Review: Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae – New Series* 3 (2014): 883–85.

35 ZAO, Olomouc branch, DR ČČS OV collection, f. 8, inv. no. 184, 5. 7. 1930: The rally held on 5 July 1930, to mark the anniversary of the martyr death of Jan Hus († 5 July 1415), with a ceremonial oath of allegiance to the Czechoslovak Republic and the progressive national Czechoslovak Church, was perhaps the most important interwar demonstration of the Czechoslovak Church's worshippers in the Ostravsko region. The Declaration proclaimed at the manifestation called for lay schools, the separation of church from the state and the abolition of the patronage right over churches. Its main purpose, however, was to proclaim the Church's solidarity with the Czechoslovak state and its hard-achieved independence.

36 Hník, *Za lepší církev*, 49–54.

37 *Ibid.*, 235–37.

The key motivation for this 69-year-old female respondent to convert in April 1925 was the use of Czech liturgical language and the emotional impact that liturgy had in the national language: “During the service I could hear the cleric [Author’s note: this was Bishop F. Stibor] praying nicely in Czech, I could understand everything. [...] When he started his spiritual address, I went forward right up to the altar as I did not want to miss a word of what he said [...] I told my husband how much I liked a service held in Czech so that everyone can join the cleric in prayer all the way through the holy mass.”<sup>38</sup> For 68 other working-class respondents in industry and farming across the Czech lands, the prevailing reasons for leaving the Roman Catholic Church, besides the national liturgical language, related to the wrong it had done to the Czech nation, Germanisation, the legitimisation of the Hapsburg State and the war atrocities.<sup>39</sup> They also mentioned the lack of confessional tolerance, the Church’s dogmatic and authoritative approach, fees charged for liturgical acts, the practice of confession,<sup>40</sup> superstition and general inconsistency between the doctrine promoted by the Church and its practices. Other reasons that made the Czechoslovak Church so attractive, besides the language aspect, included its reformism, modernism, sympathy with the converted Catholic clerics, Catholic agitation and, most importantly, the freedom of conscience, which was based primarily on a non-dogmatic approach to the Christian message. The survey, for instance, showed that most of the respondents were opposed to the traditional teaching of the Holy Trinity. The worker respondents claimed that it was easier to be a conscious Czech, a modern Christian and proletarian in the community of the Czechoslovak Church than it was in the Roman Catholic Church. “I also convinced my daughters to convert even with my grandchildren, and the whole family of 14 people converted to the Czechoslovak Church,” stated the female respondent from Hulváky, a working class village.<sup>41</sup>

The dynamism of the confessional mobility in the Czech lands in the 1920s and 1930s, and the fluctuation in the number of followers of the Czechoslovak Church, are evidenced in many resources, primarily in the census statistics<sup>42</sup> and Roman Catholic books on changes in denomination (*liber conversiones / mutationis religionis / apostatarum*). In Radvanice ve Slezsku alone, more people returned to the Roman Catholic Church in the mid-1920s than left the Church for whatever reason.<sup>43</sup>

38 Ibid., 236, 237.

39 On the schizophrenic dual role of army clerics during World War One, acting both as spiritual pastors and military ideologists, see e.g. a convincing paper by Matthias Rettenwander, *Der Krieg als Seelsorge: Katholische Kirche und Volksfrömmigkeit in Tirol im Ersten Weltkrieg* [War as Care for the Soul: The Catholic Church and Folk Devotion in Tirol during World War One] (Innsbruck: Universitätsverlag Wagner, 2005), 159.

40 On the traditional antipathy of male worshippers to the practice of confession, see e.g. McLeod, *Sekularizace*, 142–53.

41 Hník, *Za lepší církví*, 237.

42 Sekera, “Náboženské přesuny,” 1–5.

43 AMO, ŘK FÚ v Radvanicích collection, inv. no. 1–2, *Kniha přijatých do církve a odpadlých 1908–1933, 1923–1933*. Barcuch, “Počátky československé církve,” 23. While Radvanice ve Slezsku had 7095 inhabitants in 1921, 1455 of whom declared affinity to the Roman Catholic Church (20.5 %) and 4516 to the Czechoslovak Church (63.6 %); in 1930 this proportion in the population of 8136 was 2899 (35.6 %) to 3727 (45.8 %). Compared with 1921, Roman Catholic numbers increased by 15.1% while the worshippers of the Czechoslovak Church dropped by 17.8 %.

And the years 1921 and 1930, when the numbers of those leaving the Catholic Church not only in Radvanice ve Slezsku were the highest, were also census years in the Czechoslovak Republic and the culmination of the anti-Catholic campaign which was also proactively exacerbated by the non-believer organisations of the Social Democrats<sup>44</sup> and Communists, in addition to the Czechoslovak Church. If the Czechoslovak Church benefited from the post-war revolutionary ethos of the national reckoning with Danubian Catholicism, it profited only briefly during the constitutive years of the Czechoslovak Republic. And while it offered its worshippers teaching which was tolerant in dogmatic matters and included many modernist impulses, such as voluntary attendance at services and confession, liberalisation of marital issues and cremation, in the industrial working class environment it met with nothing more than limited interest in theological topics.

Although Ostrava's workers sympathised with the resignation from priesthood privileges such as confessional secrecy, celibacy and clerical vestments and uniforms, and were enthusiastic about the use of Czech language in liturgical matters, they remained indifferent as regards the theological disputes between the Protestant sympathisers and Orthodox traditionalists during the constitutive years. As the hierarchs of the Czechoslovak Church soon protested, the appointment of workers as members of the councils of elders, on the contrary, brought forth the tension of political party strife and class rivalry into the life of the local communities – conflicts between the worshippers and councils of elders on one side, and the clerics or religious teachers on the other side, became a constant phenomenon faced by the new church community in Ostrava region.<sup>45</sup> Neither did workers abstain from the obligatory criticism of the attitude shown to property in the new church, whose clerics eventually strove for the same thing as their Roman Catholic predecessors – a reputable social status and the financial stability of a cleric paid by the state.<sup>46</sup> Full identification with the message of the Czechoslovak Church was hampered by many practical obstacles, whether related to Christian ministry (attendance at services) or social status and consensual family tradition, all the more so when joining a new church community was not the result of an inner conversion but generally a mere administrative act of switching allegiance from the Roman Catholic Church to the Czechoslovak Church.

44 Martin Jemelka, "The Social Democratic Atheist Movement in Interwar Ostravsko," in: *Secularization and the Working Class: The Czech Lands and Central Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, eds. Lukáš Fasora, Jiří Hanuš and Jiří Malíř (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, Pickwick Publications, 2011), 174–92.

45 ZAO, Olomouc branch, DR CČS OV collection, f. 8, inv. no. 184, 6. 9. 1935, 1938: As an example, the village of Michálkovic, neighbouring Radvanice ve Slezsku, can be mentioned as a place where none of the four clerics of the Czechoslovak Church prior to 1939 left under ordinary circumstances. The forced departure in 1938 of the problematic and probably also immature priest Auer, who was favoured mostly by the female worshippers, was not, symptomatically, ascribed to his moral deficiency, but to the German nationality ("the rebellious German nature"). He was not helped even by his successful campaign to build the organ in the cathedral. The fact that it was delivered by the German company Rieger, although cheaper than their Czech competitors, was probably fatal for Auer on the eve of the Munich Agreement.

46 ZAO, Olomouc branch, DR CČS OV collection, f. 5, inv. no. 82, Uchazeči o duchovní a učitelskou službu v CČS (1926–1937).

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### III.

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While the ideologists of the Czechoslovak Church praised its numbers of followers, however far this was from the original assumption of the entire Czech (Czechoslovak) nation converting to a new national church, soon after 1930 the Czech sociology of religion inquired into the reasons why the newly acquired identity was so fragile and the confessional mobility of the worshippers of the Czechoslovak Church had increased, a fact which the hierarchs of the Czechoslovak Church really did not like to admit.<sup>47</sup> The lack of inner conversion and the administrative nature of the conversion, the political rise of national, and the superficiality of anti-clerical, topics and theological flexibility which opened the door for members of other denominations to teach religion, agreeable to the spiritists<sup>48</sup> as well as non-believers, and primarily the prevalence of nationalism, liberalism and Marxism over its own religious issues, rendered, according to sociologists, the Czechoslovak Church unable to offer its worshippers the enduring identity of national Christianity.<sup>49</sup> Even that supporter of North American unitarism, T. G. Masaryk, to whom the Czechoslovak Church constantly referred, was sceptical enough to mention, in its early days, that denominations do not emerge through a decision made by several hundred clerics to abolish celibacy.<sup>50</sup> Those whose approach to the Czechoslovak Church was critical included not only the Roman Catholic Church<sup>51</sup> but also the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren and non-believer organisations: while for the Czech Evangelical Church, the Czechoslovak Church was only a half-baked pro-reform mutation of Catholicism, the non-believer Social Democrats openly referred to it as “*an old business under a new name*”.<sup>52</sup> Many critical prognoses turned out to be visionary – the Czechoslovak Church had over a million worshippers in 1950, but since the 1950s has outstripped all the others as the church community that is dying out the

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47 ZAO, Olomouc branch, DR ČČS OV collection, f. 8, inv. no. 184: As early as in 1935, the priest Bražina wrote a letter to Stibor the bishop, a fellow converted Roman Catholic priest, in which he complained about “the Church’s move to the defensive”. “The flame of enthusiasm in the Church has died away”, reported Bražina who ascribed the restoration of Catholic devotion in Michálkovice to the underappreciation of the ministry by the emerging generation of Czechoslovak priests.

48 On the symbiosis between spiritism and Czechoslovakism, see Martin Jemelka, “Brüderliche Treffen zum Lesen des Evangeliums: die erste Generation des schlesischen Spiritismus (1897–1919),” [Fraternal Meeting for the Reading of the Gospel: the First Generation of Silesian Spiritism] *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 69, No. 4 (2017).

49 Sekera, “Náboženské přesuny,” 6–16.

50 Antonín Klimek, *Boj o hrad I.: Hrad a pětka 1918–1926* [The Struggle for the Castle I.: The Castle and the Five] (Praha: Panevropa 1996), 30, 31.

51 Hník, *Za lepší církev*, 9–25: The establishment of the Czechoslovak Church was sharply criticised by the important Czech historian and probably Masaryk’s most influential ideological opponent, Josef Pekař (1870–1937), according to whom the constitution of a new national church in the vicinity of what were mostly Catholic Hungarians, Poles and Austrians seriously tarnished the international prestige of the young Czechoslovak state. Pekař’s argument was quite unique in the Czech environment, given its European perspective.

52 Jemelka, “The Social Democratic,” 177.

quickest,<sup>53</sup> not to mention the mass affinity of the Czechoslovak clerics with state socialism, which went beyond the borders of collaborationism.<sup>54</sup>

Compared with the Roman Catholic Church, the Czechoslovak Church lagged behind also in the programmatic development of social topics and social ministry, as it paid more attention developing its own organisation. Building up the Church provided new employment opportunities at all levels, including organ players and teachers of religion, especially because in the exchange of generations around the year 1930 the new clerics often recruited from among pauperised teachers or state employees seeking an opportunity for a quick career growth, stable income and social status in the young church. As regards the struggle against the economic crisis, the Czechoslovak Church confined itself to traditional charity methods, as it began to build a network of community charities as late as in the middle of 1928.<sup>55</sup> In the struggle against unemployment, unlike the Roman Catholic Church, it could not rely on a permanent alliance with any political party or a trade union organisation. In the greater Ostrava region with 60 000 believers, of which 80 % were working class and voters of Social Democracy or National Socialists, it was an especially painful handicap, of which the heads of the Silesian dioceses were well aware.<sup>56</sup> In the face of the actual economic crisis, identification with the Czechoslovak Church was a much more fragile process for the Czech working class than it was for Roman Catholic workers. There are cases from early 1930s from the industrialised region of Ostrava that are evidence of exclusion of Czechoslovak worshippers among the unemployed affected by the economic crisis, or of patients in state hospitals with obligatorily monastic staff.<sup>57</sup>

What also turned out as problematic in the long-term perspective was the resignation from apostolate among other than Czechoslovak nationalities. In 1930 when the Czechoslovak Church had 779 762 members in the Czech lands, only 1284 of its worshippers (0.2 %) were not members of the Czechoslovak nation.<sup>58</sup> Even a mission among its own members of the Czechoslovak nation, the Slovaks, was no very successful, as their reserved attitude to the project of a national church reflected many Czecho-Slovak resentments, mainly the animosity of the traditional part of the Slovak public towards the perception of modernism and reform of Catholicism by Czech nationalists. Only 11 495 Slovaks (0.35 % of the Slovak population) declared affinity to the Czechoslovak Church in 1930.<sup>59</sup>

53 Erika Kadlecová, "Z výsledků výzkumu religiozity dospělých v Severomoravském kraji," [From the Results of Research on Religiosity of Adults in the North Moravian Region] *Sociologický časopis* 1 (1965): 146.

54 Jaroslav Hrdlička, *Patriarcha Dr. Miroslav Novák: život mezi svastikou a rudou hvězdou* [Patriarch Dr. Miroslav Novák: Life between the Swastika and Red Star] (Brno: L. Marek, 2010), 75 ff. Hrdlička, *Život a dílo*, 313 ff.

55 ZAO, branch Olomouc, DR ČČS OV collection, f. 8, inv. no. 184, 18. 6. 1928.

56 ZAO, branch Olomouc, DR ČČS OV collection, f. 8, inv. no. 184, 17. 1. 1930, 5. 7. 1930.

57 ZAO, branch Olomouc, DR ČČS OV collection, f. 8, inv. no. 184.

58 Albrecht, *Statistik der deutschen Katholiken*, 44, 53: In the Moravian-Silesian land with a population of 3 565 010 and 160 968 members of the Czechoslovak Church, only 189 Germans, 137 Poles, 56 Hungarians and 17 other people were not of Czechoslovak nationality.

59 Vladimír Srb, *Obyvatelstvo Slovenska* [Slovak Population] (Bratislava: Infostat – Inštitút informatiky a štatistiky, Výt-



It seems that besides the *social revolution* agenda, it was also the project of *religious revolution* that broke down in interwar Czechoslovakia, unless we consider this to have been fulfilled by Czech Protestant churches merging to form the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren,<sup>60</sup> or by the increase in the number of non-believers, from 718 000 in 1921 (7.2 %) to 834 000 in 1930 (7.8 %) in the Czech lands.<sup>61</sup> The reason for the short-lived success and early ideological depletion of the Czechoslovak Church actually lies in its slavish symbiosis with Czech nationalism, distant with members of nations other than the artificially established Czechoslovak nation and ignoring the universal ambitions of western Christianity. It was also one reason why only few members of nations other than Czechoslovak found their refuge in the Czechoslovak Church. In the end, the Czechoslovak Church was a religious project of Czech nationalism and a religious chapter in the national state programme, rather than an attempt at rehabilitating Christianity and implementing a reform programme stemming from the efforts of several dozen Roman Catholic clerics. With the involvement of many Czechoslovak clerics in the structures of the Czechoslovak State under state socialism (1948–1989) and with the Roman Catholic reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), this project was definitely doomed. The response to the Second Vatican Council and the rising ecumenical movement of the 1960s led to a definite dogmatic inclination towards western Protestantism, and the response to the state-socialism-based alternative to modernism was a lasting obedient attitude to the regime, comparable with the corruption of Soviet Orthodoxy. The ambition of appealing to the working echelons of the Czechoslovak society with a modern interpretation of the Christian message was forgotten after the coup in February 1948.

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kumné demografické centrum, 2002), 11.

60 *Ustavující generální sněm československé církve evangelické konaný v Praze 17. a 18. prosince 1918* [Founding General Synod of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, Held in Prague on 17 and 18 December 1918] (Praha: Synodní výbor Československé církve evangelické, 1919), 1–59: The Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, today the most numerous Protestant denomination in the Czech Republic with 51 936 members in 2011, was established in a merger of Evangelical communities of the Augsburg and Helvetican confession which were Czech in nationality at the General Synod in December 1918. The union of approx. 250 thousand Czech Evangelical worshippers was not joined by the Augsburg and Helvetican communities which were of German or Polish nationality and smaller Evangelical churches claiming the tradition of the Unity of the Brethren or stemming from the activities of the originally North American missionaries from the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century.

61 Kučera, *Populace České republiky*, 12.

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Martin Jemelka

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## **POLOŽAJ SODOBNEGA KRISTJANA IN DELAVCA V ČEŠKOSLOVAŠKI REPUBLIKI (1918–1938)**

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### POVZETEK

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Državna revolucija, ki je privedla do neodvisne Češkoslovaške republike (1918), ter socialna revolucija, s katero se je češko ozemlje dokončno preobrazilo v industrijsko in podeželsko regijo, sta vključevali tudi versko revolucijo, ki so jo vodili nekateri češki katoliški duhovniki. Njihove zahteve po demokratizaciji, liberalizaciji in nacionalizaciji češkega katolištva so se utesile v obliki Češkoslovaške cerkve (1920), doživele pa močan odziv, zlasti v industrializiranih predelih na Češkem, predvsem v Ostravski regiji, ki leži na češko-nemško-poljski jezikovni, etnični in verski meji. Kljub mnogim ideološkim in osebnim krizam se je leta 1930, po desetletju obstoja Češkoslovaške cerkve, zanjene pripadnike opredelilo 7,8 % češkoslovaških prebivalcev, predvsem iz srednjega in delavskega razreda, ki sta jih pritegnili dogmatska strpnost in teološka prilagodljivost. Čeprav se je Češkoslovaška cerkev predstavljala kot eden od stebrov češkoslovaške narodne identitete in je bila ponosna na vse več vernikov, katerih število je doseglo vrhunec leta 1950, ko jih je bilo približno milijon, je med prvo generacijo njenih pripadnikov prišlo do dinamične spremembe, zaradi česar so se verniki oddaljili od izvirnega koncepta, po katerem naj bi se celoten češkoslovaški narod spreobrnil in pridružil novi »državni in progresivni cerkvi«. Sociologi tistega časa so napovedali, da bo protikatolištvo živelo le kratek čas. Pomanjkanje dobro pripravljene socialnega programa se je za delavce izkazalo kot problematično, težava pa je bila tudi ta, da cerkev ni imela stabilnega političnega partnerja in ni bila sposobna nasloviti pripadnikov drugih narodov v Češkoslovaški republiki razen Čehov. Skupaj z neuspehom programa socialne revolucije, ki so ga komunisti prevzeli sicer šele leta 1948, je čez čas razpadel tudi projekt Češkoslovaške cerkve. Slednja je s tem postala verska skupnost, ki je v Češkoslovaški republiki v obdobju po 50. letih prejšnjega stoletja najhitreje izginila.