EAST-WEST CHURCH REPORT

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Special Issue: Czech Catholic Approaches towards Secularized Society

Editor's note: "Today the Czech Republic is one of the most secular countries in Europe, with nearly three-quarters of adults (72%) describing their religion as atheist, agnostic or 'nothing in particular.'" This striking finding comes from a wide-ranging survey published by the Pew Research Center in 2017. Almost all remaining Czech adults—or 21 percent—identify as Catholic, yet this figure is down from 44 percent in 1991. [See "Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe," Pew Research Center, 10 May 2017, https://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-belief-and-national-belonging-in-central-and-eastern-europe/.]

Is Czech society really so secularized? Why has the number of self-identified Catholics halved in the absence of Communist restrictions? This issue of the East-West Church Report *features diverse interviews with three active Czech Catholics. All came of age after the Communist regime in then-Czechoslovakia was swept away by the Velvet Revolution of 1989 (when the eldest was a student and the youngest a toddler). All joined the Church in their teens and have close experience of Catholic education in their homeland.*

14th-century Imperial Chapel, Emmaus Monastery, Prague (G. FAGAN)

"There is hunger in this society for values, for the beauty of Christianity":

An Interview with Professor Fr. Tomáš Petráček

Professor Fr. Tomáš Petráček is a prominent Czech Catholic priest and scholar. In Prague, he teaches at the Catholic Theological Faculty of Charles University and is Canon of the Chapter of All Saints at Prague Castle, a position created by Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV in the 14th century. Fr. Tomáš also teaches at the University of Hradec Králové, approximately one hour east of Prague, where he ministers to a parish with many students at the Church of the Virgin Mary.

The editor of the East-West Church Report *met with Fr. Tomáš at Charles University's Catholic Theological Faculty in November 2019. The conversation took place in English.*

Did you have a Catholic upbringing or were you drawn to the Church as an adult?

Both are true to some extent. But if I had to choose, I would say I converted in my late teens, towards the end of the Communist period. It was linked with my search for truth and for some orientation in that Communist time. The Catholic Church was one of the few points of resistance within Czech society, so there was a certain attraction for me.

Did you come from a dissident background?

Politically, my whole family refused to accept the Communist regime. They were members of agrarian political parties, which were an important force

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Petráček Interview *(continued from page 1)*

on the center-right from the time of the First Czechoslovak Republic [1918-38]. My father was a farmer who did not want to give up his fields to the new collective agricultural units. He was imprisoned for this, for about two years in the early 1950s.

You were 17 at the time of the pro-democracy Velvet Revolution in late 1989. Did you take part?

Yes. I was in the final year of college, and we elder students were the leaders of what was called the Strike Committee. There were members in each class. In my home town of Hořice [approximately two hours' drive northeast of Prague] there is also a unique school for stonemasonry and sculpture, and the students and most teachers at this school were very well connected with the schools for art and sculpture in Prague. That meant that they had accurate information on what was happening here in Prague. The stonemasonry school and mine were consequently the first schools outside of Prague to strike and demonstrate in public.

The events of 17 November 1989 [a brutal attack by riot police on a peaceful demonstration in central Prague] took place on a Friday. We started to demonstrate on the following Tuesday and then traveled to Prague for the large demonstrations in Letná Park over the following weekend. There were at least half a million people there.

Professor Fr. Tomáš Petráček (G. FAGAN)

Were there any Catholic figures active in the Velvet Revolution who impressed you?

At that point I was already attending church. Everyone knew Fr. Václav Malý [today auxiliary bishop of Prague]. He was a spokesperson for the Charter 77 human-rights campaign. He was also a speaker at the two big demonstrations in Letná Park. He made a very important gesture then, when he invited the huge crowd to pray the "Our Father" with him. It was a very significant moment. [Footage of the prayer may be seen at "Druhá obří demonstrace na Letné (26.11.1989)," *YouTube*, 22 October 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxmthRAIrGM&t=2045s from approximately 28.00 to 35.00.]

Was there a turning point during those weeks when you expected the Velvet Revolution to succeed?

After about two weeks a new government was appointed in which only a small proportion of ministers were not Communist Party members. The euphoria weakened a little at that point. I remember thinking that it could become more complicated and that worse problems might lie ahead. But for most of us there was no question of hesitation or turning back.

Nowadays you teach at the Catholic Theological Faculty of Prague's Charles University, as well as at the University of Hradec Králové. What are your academic roles in these institutions?

Here in Prague I work in the Department for Ecclesiastical History and Literary History. This faculty's other four departments cover Pastoral Theology and Law Sciences; Biblical Sciences and Ancient Languages; Christian Art History; and Systematic Theology and Philosophy. In a typical year we receive 15 new students in theology, and at least 20 in art history. Many lay people study theology here, not just future priests.

At the University of Hradec Králové, I head the Department of Cultural and Religious Studies within the Faculty of Education. This department trains future school teachers of religion, who will go on to work in either public schools or parishes. There are also students who just wish to deepen their knowledge of Christianity. Most are Catholics.

The same department teaches cross-cultural communication, which spans cultural anthropology, philosophy, and ethics. Students there come from all corners of society and are mostly not affiliated to any particular faith. Instruction is in English, and we have some students from China and Vietnam.

According to recent polling by the Pew Research Center, only 29 percent of Czechs say they believe in God—the lowest proportion in Central and Eastern Europe. Is there something specific in Czech culture determining this?

I tried to describe the reasons in one of my [English-language] books, *In the Maelstrom of Secularization, Collaboration, and Persecution: Roman Catholicism in Modern Czech Society and the State* [Lublin: El-Press, 2014]. In brief, the Czech Republic is a territory that suffered from the first wave of secularization in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which took place in connection with modernizing liberal government and the rise of anticlericalism. State churches were also negatively associated with the *ancien régime*. Then came a second wave of secularization in the form of persecution organized by the Communist state. I think this is a reason why so many people abandoned the Church and their affiliation to organized religious institutions.

These people are not atheists—they are in a gray zone. There are many who are simply "religiously amusical": they do not understand the concept of religion. They do not know what use it would be or how it might help in their lives. These are not amoral people—they raise their children well and actively engage with society. Often, they believe that there must be "something," and they may be close to pantheism,

Catholic Theology Faculty, Charles University, Prague (G. FAGAN)

or trust in superstitions, such as chakras and horoscopes. In the Czech Republic there are actually fewer genuine scientific atheists than there are religious believers.

Is Czech society as socially conservative as states such as Poland and Hungary when it comes to issues such as homosexuality?

Well, civil partnerships are legal here. Czechs are quite liberal towards homosexuals. In recent years our president [Miloš Zeman, in office since March 2013] has tried to criticize them and encourage society to challenge their demands. But this is a surprising political trend, as Czechs are generally very liberal. For example, it does not cause a stir if a politician is divorced or is found to have lovers. Many Czechs have experience with pornography.

Alongside this liberal streak, it is very easy for Czechs to be manipulated and mobilized against minorities. We do not have a strong collective identity as a nation or as believers, or a civic identity as in Germany or the United States—a strong belief in the Constitution or similar values. Without this positive identity, Czechs can easily be manipulated by being presented with negative depictions of "enemies." These may be homosexuals or Muslims—as we saw in the recent European migrant crisis. Christian believers could also very easily become such "enemies"—especially Catholics. This much was clear during public debate over the restitution of church property that had been confiscated by the Communists. A large portion of society retains very strongly anti-clerical ideas and stereotypes.

What impact does that situation have on the Catholic Church in the Czech Republic?

The Church is divided, as it is in Slovakia and Poland. Most—but not all—of the bishops wish to be allies of those politicians who build upon this negatively constructed identity of "enemies." They wish to condemn all modern trends and emancipation movements in society. The archbishop of Prague, Dominik Duka, in particular sees fighting these culture wars as a good way of mobilizing priests and laypeople. A current example is the Istanbul Convention on violence against women and domestic violence, which they reject as introducing gender ideology.

[Editor's note: First opened for signatures in Istanbul in 2011, the Council of Europe's *Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence* defines "gender" as "the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men." While this does not cover the biological distinction between men and women, some believe it is too broad. To date, the Czech Republic has signed but not ratified the Convention.]

There are also other clergy, such as Václav Malý, Tomáš Halík, Ladislav Heryán, and Marek Orko Vácha, who seek to communicate with Czech society not through condemnation, but discussion. They accept that we are only part of society and that we have to speak with others as equals, while respecting their positions. They try to offer some positively formulated ideas.

From your experience engaging with ordinary Czechs one-to-one, what attracts or repels them about the Catholic Church?

I do not have full experience with this, because I normally do not speak with people who really hate the Church—they will not speak with me. But I think there is hunger in this society for values, for the beauty of Christianity—they want to hear about that. When we are able to present Christian ideas in the way that Pope Francis does, they listen. They do not necessarily become Christians immediately, but they feel that it is something important and beautiful.

Many people in the most progressive milieu of Czech society who are trying to improve life for some minorities are angry with the Church because they think we are part of a campaign against NGOs [non-governmental organizations]—that we play a counter-revolutionary role in society, fighting all these new demands. I think that we are making exactly the same mistakes as in the 19th century—fighting against everything in society without critical discernment of what is going on; where something is absolutely correct, where something could be improved. We just say, "No, it's all bad, we don't want it, the direction of modern society is all wrong." It is always negatively formulated—against gay marriage, against the Istanbul Treaty. There is no indication of what we *do* want—a positive agenda.

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A student outside Charles University's Catholic Theology Faculty, Prague (G. FAGAN)

Petráček Interview *(continued from page 3)*

Would this alternative approach entail a radical change in the form of the Church or its traditions?

No. Our thinking is entirely on the same ground as Pope Francis—there is no really extreme wing here. It is not even close to the liberal Catholic movements in Germany or Switzerland.

How do you feel about the process of lustration [de-Communization, particularly disqualification of Communist officials from public office] in the Czech Republic after 1989? Has enough been done by the Catholic Church in this sphere?

It was important, but it is evident after 30 years that it was not enough. More should have been done to deal with the Communist regime. We still do not have any museum of Communist repression. There are now attempts to rewrite modern history and say that, while there were some excesses, it was generally quite okay.

Within the Catholic Church, some of the most compromised people just moved to less important parishes, while others went on to have illustrious church careers. There was nothing like a public confession: "I did this," "I'm sorry for this," "I shouldn't have done it," or even, "No, it never happened." There was only one priest who publicly admitted collaboration with the secret police.

Some clergy managed to obtain formal documentation that they had not collaborated. This was absolutely crazy because it relied upon a former Communist secret policeman saying that a priest had not passed on information. Everyone knew it was a game—if someone emerges as an informer for the secret police, then they must have delivered information. The most painful part of all this is that there were heroes of the *ecclesia silentil* or silent church—priests who refused to collaborate and suffered as a result. The secret police informers continued their church careers, while these people were not acknowledged. The informers are not in senior positions anymore because they are too old, but they used to be.

Plzeň [Pilsen] students in December 1989 trying to salvage secret police documents found burned in a quarry near Záluží. (Source: VLADISLAV VITEK/ PILSEN CITY ARCHIVE)

When it became known that clergy had collaborated, did they retain public support?

Some of them did, but we have a shortage of priests, so if they behave nicely and do the work, people are forgiving. It was like the elephant in the room. Everybody knew, but nobody spoke about it.

Wenceslas Square, Prague—site of major pro-democracy demonstrations during the 1989 Velvet Revolution (G. FAGAN)

Do you think this situation has negatively affected the course the Church has taken over the past 30 years?

Yes. Certainly there was some confusion in values. If the Church preaches passionately about transparency and penance and conversion, and has people in important positions who are not able to do any of this, it is very problematic. Probably we will discover later—now it is all only at the level of unverified oral tradition. But I think it will come out.

Are the relevant archives open?

The Czech archives are open, but many important documents disappeared immediately after the Velvet Revolution. Maybe they are somewhere, I do not know—but the materials on the most problematic bad guys are not in the Czech archives. They are somewhere in Moscow.

Has the Church ever organized any kind of investigatory commission?

No. There were some ideas, but they never came to anything.

You yourself have been active in efforts to honor the memory of one particular victim of the Czech Communist regime, Fr. Josef Toufar. He was tortured and killed by the secret police in February 1950 for refusing to denounce a miracle witnessed by his Catholic parishioners—a crucifix that began to move on the altar in his church in the village of Číhošť.

Yes. Fr. Josef did not see the crucifix move because it was behind his back. But there were around 25 eyewitnesses, some of whom are still alive. We have spoken to them and registered their testimony as part of the process towards Fr. Josef's beatification. [Beatification permits local veneration, but is a stage away from canonization as a saint of the Catholic Church.] There is a group of volunteers working on this. Formally, the process started in 2013, but it was taken

up by the *Promotor Iustitiae* only in 2018. [Meaning "Promoter of Justice" in Latin, the *Promotor Iustitiae* is a Catholic body responsible for examining evidence on behalf of a candidate for beatification or canonization]. As Hradec Králové is a small diocese, it took several years to find people willing and able to take this on. The volunteers are priests with their own parishes, and this was something they had to add to their normal workload.

We were also occupied by the exhumation of Fr. Josef's remains. His bones were complicated to find as they were in an anonymous mass grave in Ďáblice, a neighborhood of Prague [see T. Pexa, J. Krajsa, M. Šaňková, P. Velemínský, J. Havrda, T. Kotrlý, and J. Drábek, "Identification of the skeletal remains of the Czech communist regime crime victim, priest Josef Toufar," *Forensic Science International*, Volume 291 (October 2018), https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0379073818303803.]

Was Ladislav Mácha, the main secret police interrogator responsible for Fr. Josef Toufar's torture and murder, ever brought to justice?

There was a trial in which he was sentenced to several years in prison, but he served only about a year before being released due to his age and health issues. He had been the leader of a group of five or six secret police officers who tortured Fr. Josef in order to make him confess that he had staged the miracle with the crucifix. When Fr. Josef refused, they escalated the violence against him over several weeks and finally beat him to death.

[Editor's note: The day before he died, Fr. Josef was forced to appear in a short propaganda film aimed at debunking the miracle. See "Běda tomu, skrze něhož přichází pohoršení (1950)," *YouTube*, 5 March 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=msGdYUMZiNA.Particularly notable is the segment at 9.40 illustrating how the wiring alleged to be responsible for the crucifix miracle is ultimately being pulled from Wall Street, New York.]

(Left to right) Fr. Jan Bula (Source: www.czechchurch.org), Fr. Václav Drbola (Source: www.posledniadresa.cz), and Fr. Josef Toufar (Source: Miloš Doležal Archive).

Was Fr. Josef Toufar the only Czech Catholic priest killed by the Communists?

No, there were other priests sentenced to death and executed. Fr. Josef's is a special case because they did not even charge him with anything. They wanted him to blame bishops and Vatican officials for ordering him to orchestrate this miracle. He refused to do that because it was not true. It would have gone against his conscience.

If Fr. Josef were beatified, would this be the first instance in the now-Czech Republic in recent times?

There are none so far, but some cases are already being considered by the Congregation for Beatification in Rome. There is Archbishop Josef Beran of Prague, for example. [Editor's note: Archbishop Beran was imprisoned by the Nazis in Dachau concentration camp as well as being placed under house arrest by the Communist regime in then-Czechoslovakia.] There are also two Czech priests, Fr. Jan Bula and Fr. Václav Drbola, who were hanged for the shooting of several Communist officials in the village of Babice, Moravia, in 1951. Both were wrongfully in prison at the time of the shooting, so they could not possibly have been responsible.

Hundreds more priests and laypeople were imprisoned for as long as 15 years. Many also died in prison because they were forced to work in uranium mines without any protective measures [see the *East-West Church Report*, vol. 26, no. 3 (2018), 5-8.]

Did Mácha ever express any remorse?

No, he never accepted his guilt. To him, Fr. Josef was an enemy of the new regime, and it was right to eliminate him. When he was asked if he felt some remorse, he said no—the only thing he regretted in life was that he had spent too much time in offices rather than outdoors in the fresh air.

What about the others in the group?

There were investigations in the 1960s [i.e. during the short Prague Spring period of political liberalization] and after the Velvet Revolution. The others involved were mostly dead by the time the case reached trial in the 1990s, and those who were still alive tried to blame Mácha. However, their testimony was important in his conviction.

Earlier, some of the group did show remorse and even stopped working for the secret police, because they did not want to be part of something like this. Only Mácha was so stubborn. He was a true Stalinist, angry at Communists he saw as too weak and soft. He died only very recently—in September 2018. ♦

"We must live our faith within a context":
An Interview with Fr. Štěpán Smolen

Fr. Štěpán Smolen was just six years old when the Iron Curtain fell. Originally from the town of Český Krumlov in far southern Bohemia, he is now one of two Catholic priests serving at the Assumption of Our Lady Church in the factory town of Mladá Boleslav, less than an hour's drive northeast of the Czech capital, Prague.

In November 2019 the editor of the East-West Church Report *met with Fr. Štěpán in his presbytery kitchen. Over tea, he shared his experience entering the Catholic Church as a young adult, and the challenges and joys of ministering to a provincial urban parish in the Czech Republic. The conversation took place in English.*

Did you have a Catholic upbringing?

My parents both had a Catholic upbringing, but during the years of Communism they lost their faith, so I was not raised as a Catholic. I was not raised as an atheist, either—no one thought about God. In our family I never heard anything religious until I was about 12 years old.

Fr. Štěpán Smolen (G. FAGAN)

What drew you to the Catholic Church?

I am an avid reader, so it was partly an intellectual quest. I also met several teachers and fellow students who had interesting personalities, but they had one "fault" (laughs)—that was their Christianity. I was very upset by the fact that someone could still believe those old myths about Christ. I wanted to discuss and show them how stupid this Christianity was, and so I started to read the New Testament and books about Christianity to prove that it was not true. (Laughs.) I began to attend Sunday Mass when I was around 17. From 2003-09 I studied religion and philosophy at Charles University in Prague. I also attended the Catholic Theological Faculty there as a seminarian from 2010-14. It was a persistent, slow attraction that drew me. I was ordained a priest in 2015.

The Catholic Theological Faculty at Prague's Charles University is not controlled by the Catholic Church. How was your experience there?

Theologically, it used to be quite a conservative institution, to some extent more conservative than similar institutions in the West. Following the reforms of Vatican II in the 1960s, the Catholic Church opened up to the outside world, but this seminary was of the traditionalist Tridentine type [following the Latin-language, formal style of Catholic worship ubiquitous prior to Vatican II]. It existed under close Communist surveillance. It was very difficult to enroll—some students tried five or even ten times. After the Communist collapse of 1989, the teachers continued to be mostly priests who wanted to educate future priests. Tension then arose in the early 2000s, when our then-archbishop, Cardinal Miloslav Vlk, grew unhappy with the faculty because he thought it was very behind the times. For example, certain subjects were only for men, and only for future priests, which was not possible within the rules of Charles University. Most of the old professors left, and a younger generation came in—now many of the teachers are young men and women who received their degrees abroad, particularly in Germany and Italy. This created another tension, because the faculty turned more to the liberal side. That is a generalization, of course—there are conservative professors there as well as liberal—but that is the tendency. I studied there during those rather liberal times.

The parish where you serve—Assumption of Our Lady—is the only Catholic church in Mladá Boleslav, a factory town dominated by Škoda, the automobile manufacturer. Is it a very active parish?

This is perhaps the liveliest parish in the diocese of Litoměřice. We have many people who have come here from Slovakia, Moravia [eastern Czech region neighboring Slovakia] or Poland, and also Roma people, of whom some are quite fervent Catholics. We also have quite many converts. In 2018, for example, we had 26 adult baptisms, which is quite a lot for the size of parish. On Sundays, 450-500 people attend Mass. This is about one percent of the population of Mladá Boleslav. There are similar-sized towns in the diocese, such as Chomutov near the border with the former East Germany, where not even 100 people come to Mass on Sunday.

The Czech Republic is reputed to be one of the most atheist countries in Europe. What is your experience of Czech society?

My perspective is that of a priest who meets daily with people who want to hear something about God and who convert, so from my perspective it is not so bad. Every year there are people who knock on the door and want to hear something about God and then start to lead a Christian life. So here in Mladá Boleslav it is quite a happy job to be a priest. I sense thirst for God. Perhaps because people know almost nothing, they are even more open to hearing the Gospel

here than in those traditional parts of the Czech Republic where they are used to "something religious"—a kind of popular, traditional religion. In the Moravian countryside, church is part of daily life. For some people it can be inner belief, but it is mostly part of the folklore.

Here in northern Bohemia, things are different. If you are a Catholic, you must choose to be a Catholic, because you will be the only one in your class or your workplace, and you must be prepared to be—not persecuted, but mocked.

What kinds of backgrounds do your parishioners have?

Everyone is different, that is what is interesting. Very typical for this parish, but not for the Czech Republic in general, is that there are more men than women, and mostly men between the ages of 20 and 50. This creates a certain kind of spirituality. Today after Mass a group of men, mostly fathers, met here to pray the Holy Office and the rosary, then they read the Gospel before going home to their families. This phenomenon of men coming to pray together is not something I knew in Prague or in my hometown. Also, in the five years I have been here, most of the converts I have known and who have remained here are young men.

Are they generally employees of Škoda?

Some are. Of the men that met this evening, one is a designer for the Škoda factory. Another is a worker there. One is a former drug dealer who converted and now has a family. Another is a former gambler, a Roma man, also now with a family. One is part Roma and has a well-paid IT job in Prague. Another is a manager. So all these men appear to have nothing in common, yet they come together. It is interesting how this one fact of belonging to the Church, of believing in Jesus Christ, the Holy Trinity, is something that brings people together. It is impossible to make statistics out of this. It is possible to say only that each one is an individual case, and that it is a tiny minority of the city's inhabitants.

Downtown Mladá Boleslav (G. FAGAN)

Statistically, Czech society appears largely atheist. Do you think Czechs are actually quite spiritual but do not wish to define themselves as such to pollsters?

The Czech Catholic theologian Tomáš Halík thinks so. However, the level of ignorance about the content of the Christian faith is immense. A few years ago a question in the high school graduation exam asked students to identify Judas. Most did not know who Judas was. There were complaints addressed to the Ministry of Education demanding why this question was asked, since this was not an exam in religious studies. "Oh my!" I thought. For me, familiarity with the character of Judas is basic general knowledge of anybody living in Europe.

Even some people who come wishing to baptize their children have no idea about Christianity—they know only that it is a tradition in their family. I once showed a crucifix to a couple and asked if they knew who was on it. They wondered whether it was a pope! Of course, that is an exceptional case—most people would say this was Jesus Christ. But even the fact of one such case means that something is amiss with people's general knowledge.

Is there any religious education in Czech public schools?

At that level there is a law allowing priests or other religious


Assumption of Our Lady Church, Mladá Boleslav (G. FAGAN)

educators to enter public schools to teach. If there are at least six or seven pupils of the relevant faith in the school, the principal must allocate a classroom, and you can teach there. In my diocese, however, most religious classes take place in the parishes, because we do not have that many students. In our town of around 50,000 inhabitants, for example, we have perhaps 100 students.

How is the Catholic Church generally perceived by the public?

Most people know very little about the Church, and their information comes from the media. Some negative material is partly true—one topic is pedophilia, and there was a terrible case last week involving a priest and a disabled teenage boy. People hear about such cases, and then they form their opinion.

From a public relations perspective, the restitution of church property confiscated by the Communists turned out to be a disaster. In the end, the Church got back most of its property, but we lost credibility. Even though the law was on our side, people do not see it that way—the Church is perceived as an institution awash in money. It is a great paradox that people think we are so rich. I have no reason to complain, but I know fellow young priests—friends who

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Smolen Interview *(continued from page 7)*

live in parishes around here—who can afford to heat their houses to a maximum of only 14 Celsius [57 Fahrenheit] in winter.

What has caused this problem?

When church property was returned by the state, parishes received some buildings and fields, for example, and dioceses received money as compensation for church buildings that could not be returned, such as when a historical church building now houses a hospital. This money was invested, but at a time when the investment climate was not favorable, so now there is less and less money for priests' salaries.

Spiritually, it is good that the state does not pay priests—when you are not dependent upon the state, you are freer to speak the truth. But many priests are now preoccupied with what they should do with their fields, forest, or buildings. For some priests, it is the only thing they can do, because they have just a handful of parishioners yet are obliged to maintain these buildings and fields.

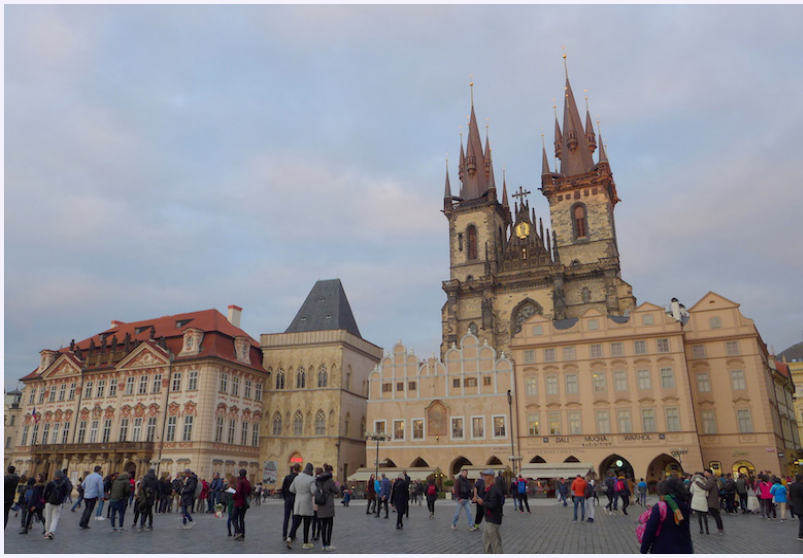
Do you think Czechs' lack of engagement with the Church is largely a legacy of Communism?

Well, Poland and Slovakia had the same experience, but they are more devout. I think it lies somewhere deeper. For Poles, Catholicism is part of national identity: "We have to be Catholic, because of those Orthodox Russians and Protestant Prussians; we must keep our faith and national identity." Slovakia is largely rural with a different culture, and their national uprising or renewal was also connected with Catholicism. Here, on the other hand, we have the notion that being incorporated into the Austro-Hungarian Empire forced us to be Catholic.

When the new Czechoslovak Republic was founded in 1918, a statue of the Virgin Mary on the Old Town Square in Prague was torn down as a symbol of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Just now there is controversy over what to put there. Some people say it cannot be reinstated, others say that it is time to rebuild it, and a replica of the original Marian Column has already been prepared. For different Czechs, this Column has different meanings. For some, it is a symbol of religious oppression and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. For others, it is a symbol of the Virgin Mary who prays for our nation, and so a symbol of God's protection. We cannot find a satisfactory solution.

[Editor's note: In January 2020 the Prague city authorities announced that the Marian Column would be reinstated. A portion was re-erected in June 2020 and was subject to an arson attack the same month. See Filip Noubel, "In the Czech Republic, controversy over a newly re-erected Catholic monument ends in flames," *Global Voices*, 30 June 2020, https://globalvoices.org/2020/06/30/in-the-czech-republic-controversy-over-a-newly-re-erected-catholic-monument-ends-in-flames.]

Has Communist-era collaboration between some Catholic clergy and the authorities had a long-lasting negative impact, in your experience?



Old Town Square, Prague (G. FAGAN)

A Slovak colleague told me that in Slovakia, all parish priests who held significant offices had to resign after the 1989 Velvet Revolution, and there was a process of vetting before they could be re-appointed. But here in the Czech Republic it was not like that. Of course, not all priests were open about what they did during those years of Communism. But I do not experience this as something that would deform church life now.

When I was a fervent young convert, I thought that many problems we have in church life in the Czech Republic were caused by the fact that it had not been possible to put into practice the reforms of Vatican II as had happened in the West. Then I spent a year in Belgium, and I saw the emptiness of Belgian churches and the secularization of life there. What to do with this experience? It felt like cognitive dissonance in my heart. So to some extent—this is a dangerous sentence, but—to some extent Communism did less harm to the Church than consumerism. Some characters were bent by the persecution, some were crushed, but many people found their faith in persecution. I am not arguing for Communism, I have only seen that the Czech seminaries were full then, which is very different from today. In the Czech Republic, also Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary, values have remained more conservative. On the other hand, Catholics in Germany have opinions that are very similar to the secular population. So the Iron Curtain did provide this protection from major changes, of which many are questionable to me as a Catholic.

Do you think the Czech experience of the Communist era has anything to teach people in the West?

There is a notion that it can be a good inspiration for Western Christians—who are to some extent, and in a very different way, being persecuted by secular society—to look at how Christians in Central and Eastern Europe managed to live through the years of Communism. This might be the case, but I think there are also many differences, and it is a big temptation to make easy comparisons.

The Communist authorities suppressed all monastic orders in then-Czechoslovakia in 1950 [see the *East-West Church Report*, vol. 26, no. 3 (2018), 5-8.] Has there been a revival of monastic life in the Czech Republic in recent years?

Emmaus Monastery, Prague (G. FAGAN). An abbot of this Benedictine foundation, Arnošt Vykoukal (left), died in the Nazi concentration camp of Dachau in 1942.

This has been a big problem, because a whole generation was lost. There were some secret religious orders, but monks and nuns could not live as communities in religious houses. It was very difficult to keep a vocation in a normal, everyday occupation. There was a big revival in monastic life after 1989, but most of those vocations did not last. It was very difficult for fervent young Catholics who knew nothing about religious life to connect with the old religious who had lived through persecution. They had spent most of their lives in civil occupations and were trying to live in community again, now in their 60s or 70s. It was very difficult for them as well.

Former Franciscan monastery complex in downtown Brno (G. FAGAN)

In the Czech Republic today, it is much easier to be part of a monastic community that is totally new, even if its way of life is traditional, such as the Trappists. We have a vibrant Trappist monastery in Nový Dvůr [two hours west of Prague] where the men are mostly in their 20s, 30s, or 40s. [A short documentary on the monastery may be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FT8tZzmEDVo.]

The origin of this monastery is interesting. In the 1990s, young men wanting to enter a monastery looked around, but did not find what they were looking for in the Czech Republic, so they went to Sept-Fons in France, where there is a large Trappist monastery. Over time, perhaps 10 Czechs went there, and so the Trappists started a new foundation here in the Czech Republic. Almost the same thing happened with a community of Trappist nuns. Some young women started their vocation in Vitorchiano in Italy, and after some time there were quite a few, so they founded an abbey south of Prague—Klášter Naší Paní nad Vltavou.

These communities are more stable, I think. Monastic life is not just about reading books—you must pass on the knowledge and experience that is lived within a community. That was possible in France and Italy, but it was not possible here during the Communist years. Even though the old monks were heroes, it was very difficult for them to renew the religious life afterwards.

Alongside your parish work you run a Catholic publishing house, Hesperion [https://www.hesperion.cz/]. What does it do?

Hesperion is a small publishing house—we are five friends who started publishing books in 2013. We wish to help people get to the roots of their Catholic Christian spirituality with the help of various texts on the importance of silent prayer, adoration of the Eucharist, and liturgical beauty, for example. Our books appeal mostly to conservative and traditionalist Catholic readers. We do address difficult subjects, including by publishing books in translation, such as Philip Lawler's book on the sex-abuse scandal in the Catholic Church [*The Faithful Departed: The Collapse of Boston's Catholic Culture*, originally published in 2008]. We wanted to speak out about the reasons for this scandal and not just have the secular media speak about it. We were quite unhappy about the defensive way in which some church members discuss the issue. That is not a good way of dealing with the problem, because it helps it to happen again.

We have also published a Czech translation of Rod Dreher's *The Benedict Option* [subtitled *A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* and originally published in 2017] because to some extent we think it can be an inspiration for Catholics here. Of course, the context is totally different. However, we are also small groups of Christians living in a secular society, and it is very important not only to have strong mission and evangelization, but also to build communities where faith is actually practiced. We must live our faith within a context. ♦

"Theologically, we have no other experience of God but human experience":

An Interview with Martin Koči

Martin Koči was born in 1987, not long before the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia was peacefully swept away by the Velvet Revolution of 1989. Raised in Karlovy Vary, a spa town in the western Czech Republic, he went on to complete a doctorate in theology at the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium.

Martin was one of four contributing authors in a stimulating English-language essay collection, A Czech Perspective on Faith in a Secular Age *(Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2015.) Another was Monsignor Professor Tomáš Halík, the Czech Catholic Church's most prominent intellectual. (For an interview with Monsignor Professor Halík, see the* East-West Church Report, *vol. 28, no. 2 (2020), 1-6.)*

Martin Koči is currently a researcher at the University of Vienna, Austria, where he lives with his wife—a Protestant theologian—and young family. The editor of the East-West Church Report *met with Martin in the heart of the Czech Republic's second largest city, Brno, in November 2019. The conversation took place in English.*

Did you have a Catholic upbringing?

Actually, I was not even baptized as a child. I converted in 2002, aged 15, through my engagement with a Catholic youth group in Slovakia. During my high school years I attended a parish there because the parish priest is one of my father's best friends. Basically through this experience, my family returned to the Church. I was baptized, my sister was also baptized, and my father returned to the Church. After that, I became very active in Catholic youth work in Karlovy Vary, a spa town in the west of the Czech Republic, as well as in the diocese of Plzeň [Pilsen] generally. I decided to study theology because I wanted to work with people. Then, after two weeks of theology, I realized that academia was a world in which I felt very comfortable and for which I had certain talents that I wanted to unfold further. So I switched from fieldwork, so to speak, to academic work.

Martin Koči (G. FAGAN)

What are you doing at present?

By training I am a theologian, but since January 2019 I have been working as a post-doctoral researcher in the philosophy department at the University of Vienna. The topic I am engaged in is the so-called "return of religion" from both philosophical and political perspectives—because almost all political concepts are secularized theological concepts. [Editor's note: In the late 20th century, scholars who had predicted that modernization would result in an increasingly secular world were surprised to observe a global resurgence in religion.] I am reading particular philosophers, mostly French, because France has this experience of *laïcité* or secularization of Catholic culture followed by a return to religious questions on a societal level, including in academia. The project I am involved in is entitled, "Revenge of the Sacred: Phenomenology and the Ends of Christianity in Europe."

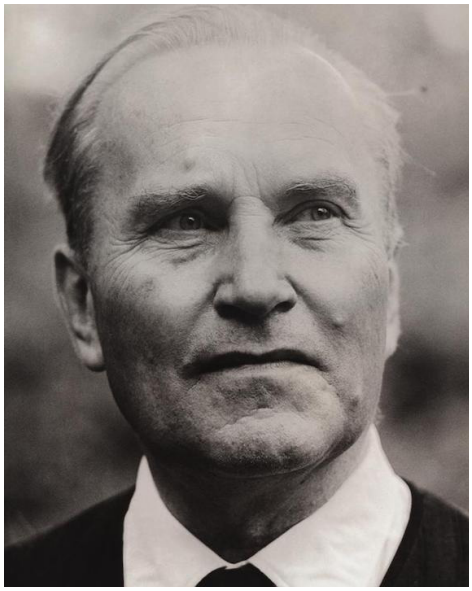
What is phenomenology?

Phenomenology is a particular philosophical school founded by Edmund Husserl at the beginning of the 20th century. It basically started as an inquiry into human experience. What do we really experience when we observe ordinary things, such as this coffee cup, this laptop? How do we obtain knowledge about the things that we see? The point was to explain the world, not from the perspective of some other, metaphysical sphere, but from our lived experience.

The philosopher who introduced phenomenology to then-Czechoslovakia was one of Husserl's pupils, Jan Patočka (1907-77), the most important Czech philosopher of the 20th century. He is very important to me as a source of influence, inspiration, and encouragement.

He is perhaps better known internationally as one of the most prominent activists in the Charter 77 human-rights movement in Communist Czechoslovakia.

Patočka was a classical philosopher interested in questions of early philosophy, but because of his democratic, humanist orientation he was not allowed to teach at university under the Communist regime. He therefore became active in the so-called "Underground University" [unsanctioned academic seminars, typically held in private homes], and some students gathered around him. Professor Tomáš Halík was



Jan Patočka
(Source: Jindřich Přibík/Archív Jana Patočky)

one of them. Patočka became publicly visible in the 1970s when he accepted the invitation of certain dissidents to become one of three spokespersons for Charter 77. At that time, he wrote some of his more accessible, shorter texts on political and human-rights issues. As a consequence of this public engagement in Charter 77 and his negotiations with several Western politicians, he was interrogated by the secret police in March 1977. He was not tortured, but about a week after this lengthy interrogation he died. He was already elderly and in poor health at the time, and he suffered a brain hemorrhage as a consequence of the interrogation.

Interestingly, while Patočka was not a practicing Christian—though a baptized Catholic—I believe his work was very close to some lines of theological inquiry, and to Christian questions in general.

Did Patočka consciously involve Christian principles in his thinking?

He never aspired to be useful to theologians. I think this is partly because in his time it was still very important for philosophers to be philosophers and not to exceed their competence—not to cross a boundary and appear to be theologians. But Patočka had many friends who were Protestant theologians, with whom he debated and corresponded. He read the major theological works of his day. He was personally engaged with the question of religion throughout his life. His first publication, in 1929, was an essay entitled, "Theology and Philosophy," and his last, in 1977, was "On Masaryk's Philosophy of Religion," Tomáš G. Masaryk being the first Czech president [1918-35].

If you examine Patočka's unpublished manuscripts, which are just drafts of certain ideas, the theological input or inspiration is in fact much more apparent than in his published material. He encourages us, "Not only to live faith, but also to think it." I am now trying to see how his philosophical ideas on solidarity in community, which he termed enigmatically "the solidarity of the shaken," and the way in which relationships function may be applied to Christian practice—whether there might even be something fruitful in his thinking for our ecclesiological models.

You have written a book on this subject.

Yes, *Thinking Faith after Christianity: A Theological Reading of Jan Patočka's Phenomenological Philosophy* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 2020].

One of the main pursuits of phenomenology is to study how modernity has changed our experience of the ordinary world. During the course of the 20th century, society in the West—and here [in the Czech Republic] we are in Western culture—experienced several paradigm shifts due to modern development: the industrialization and technicalization of society, secularization and a rapid drop in religiosity. Christianity is no longer the framework through which we interpret the world. It is not something to which we refer when we want to explain how our society is structured, or how our personal relationships are set up, for example. It is no longer the major point of reference. Yet Patočka was still interested in Christianity despite its public decline. He described Christianity as "thus far the greatest, unsurpassed but also un-thought-through élan that enabled humans to struggle against decadence." And I argue together with him that Christianity is still at work; this heritage is still with us.

I am further interested in how Patočka foresees the transformation of Christianity itself in the age after Christendom. We are not in Christendom any more, but Christianity is still here with us. It is of course with those who claim to be Christians, but it is also with those who have no idea what Christianity is. It is simply present in Western civilization, in our culture, and Patočka developed a profound sense of this presence. In *Thinking Faith After Christianity,* I try to use some of his ideas to think about Christian faith in the age after Christendom, in which conditions are not in favor of accepting Christianity as a common reference point or framework.

Patočka's life straddled the pre-Communist and Communist periods in then-Czechoslovakia. Did his experience of Communism affect his understanding of the role of Christianity?

That was actually my initial idea: to see how his thoughts on Christianity were inspired by his intellectual resistance to totalitarianism

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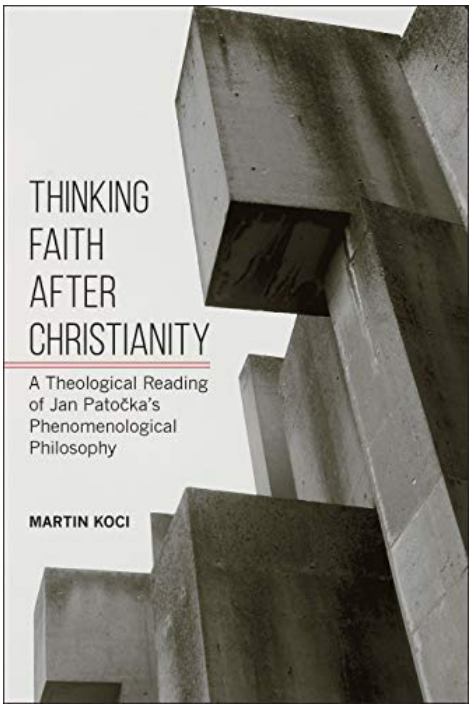


and dogmatism. But this is difficult to determine. Patočka was a very open-minded thinker who was well aware of certain dangers inherent in any big modern narrative, not just Communism.

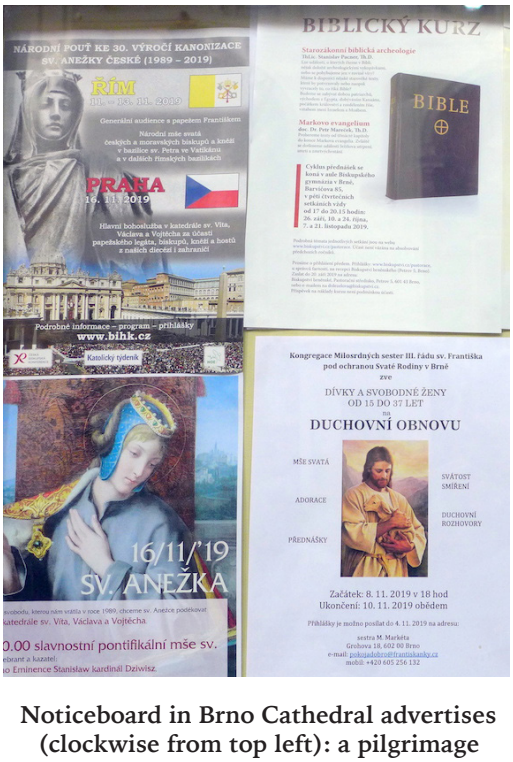
Your own formative years were in the post-Communist Czech Republic, when the Catholic Church was no longer constrained by atheist government policy. Have you seen positive change in popular attitudes towards the Catholic Church here during your lifetime?

Not much, to be honest. Most people are just not interested. There is no real hostility, except if a politician makes use of the Church, or in connection with Church finances. The Church continues to function as a ritual aspect of society, as when Václav Havel [first post-Communist president of Czechoslovakia, 1993-2003] had a Church funeral because he was a baptized Catholic. But in general, there is not much interest in what the Church is doing or not doing, and the number of practicing Catholics continues to decline.

How has the Church responded to this decline, and where do you see the problem?

The response of the Church has been to try to build up its structures as if our society were still a Christian society. I see very little thinking about possible ways of experimenting with our particular situation. If you go from the Czech Republic in almost any direction, you find far more Christian societies, with the possible exception of the former East Germany. To the west and south, you have Bavaria and Austria—where the Catholicism is more cultural, but nevertheless prevalent. To the north and east, in Poland and Slovakia, there is a very strong Catholic presence. So I think the Catholic Church is missing its chance, not just of reaching intellectuals, but ordinary workers. Unlike British society, Czech society is very egalitarian—we do not really have social classes—and I think the Church is unable to work creatively across this social stratum. Of course, there are positive examples—if you go to Professor Halík's church in Prague, you will see an island of "positive deviation." But that is not a typical picture.

For me, the example of theological education is telling. Our Catholic theological faculty at Charles University in Prague provides education not only to future priests and religious brothers and sisters, but also to would-be teachers of religion and people who are simply active in the Church—people who will do a completely different job, or who are already working in some other job and who are just interested in theology. This faculty is in a unique position, because it is located within a secular university and funded by the state. So it has the opportunity to be a melting pot of ideas at the crossroads between the Church and society, but instead the faculty focuses almost exclusively on training clergy for the Church. It is so eager to do this work for the Church that it forgets about its work for culture and society. And who else but theologians, or people who are at this crossroads of ideas, should think about the question you asked me—where is the problem? How come our numbers are still declining?



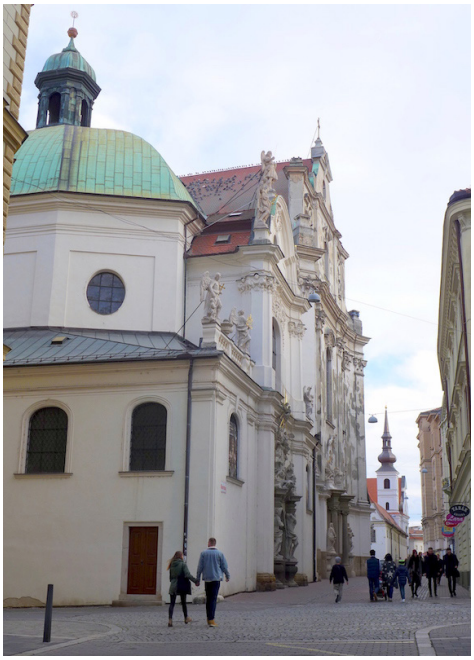
Noticeboard in Brno Cathedral advertises (clockwise from top left): a pilgrimage to Rome, Bible courses in Old Testament archaeology and on Mark's Gospel, a two-day spiritual renewal event for young women led by Franciscan nuns, and a special Mass in Prague to commemorate 30 years since the canonization of St. Agnes of Prague in November 1989. (G. FAGAN)

Of course, the easiest way of dealing with this question is to point outside: "It is not us, it is society—they are the problem." Perhaps the Church is not much interested in having well-educated priests, because it is much more difficult to work with people who can think for themselves. (Laughs.) But it is a symptom of something larger—there is still a reluctance to reflect upon the situation and to take it seriously.

Professor Halík has called upon the Church not to limit ministry to what he terms "dwellers"—those who already identify as practicing members—but to engage with apparent non-believers in wider society, whom he terms "Zacchaeuses" or "seekers." What do you think of this?

I now think that this binary division may be misleading us. In all of us there are multiple identities, which sometimes coincide with our religious allegiance and are sometimes in tension with it. We have our professional work, our private life, our hobbies, and these are no longer determined by our allegiance to a particular church. It is no longer simply the case that you are born into a Catholic family, receive First Communion, get married, are buried, and along the way you go to Catholic schools and are a member of Catholic societies. The world is simply not structured so that we can live our whole lives within a single narrative. And so we are not just either "believers" or "non-believers," "dwellers" or "seekers."

And if you talk about "seekers" when addressing people who are outside the Church—even inside the Church—it sounds wonderful, right? But then who wants



Franciscan Church of St. John, Brno (G. FAGAN)

to be a "dweller"? Is the point to turn "seekers" into "dwellers"? I don't think so. If we understand Christianity as "the Way," as something constantly evolving in the individual life of a person, then we are all "seekers," in a way.

So there is no such thing as "dwellers."

Yes. That is not just the case in academic-leaning parishes in Prague, or here in Brno. In some little village church 20 kilometers from here, there are people who have their own questions and struggles, and I am not sure whether we can simply label them as "dwellers." So when we talk about approaching "seekers," we are not only talking about people who are at the margins of the Church, or even outside it. I think we are talking about ourselves. Maybe this is a partial answer to your question about what went wrong with the Church in Czech society, why numbers have fallen and people are not viewing the Church positively. It is because we simply forgot that we are "seekers" ourselves. We do not really think about how to approach ourselves as "seekers," and we simply repeat this self-referential story of self-affirmation, which does not help us to grow. When our children hear that, why would they be interested in the Church?

I think we need to address people's real questions. For instance, has one ever heard a church representative in the Czech Republic say anything about the rise in housing prices? For young families it is getting very difficult to afford housing, while in Church you hear, "You need to have more children, otherwise we will die out." Our connection with Christian values comes from our experience in the world. Theologically, we have no other experience of God but human experience. All we have is processed through us. It does not work just to point above or beyond something without reaching for what appears to us, to what really appears to be a problem, question, or struggle.

We cannot skip that, and we cannot just bombard people with some supernatural stuff without relating to general human experience. It is human experience that allows us to say that there is a certain limit to our purely human experience, and that is where faith begins.

So this means thinking differently about ourselves and our faith, not assuming that we have a cut-and-dried catechism that is settled, or believing that we just need to find a better way of presenting it to young people?

Absolutely. For example, if we add rock music to the Mass or make a YouTube video to explain the basics of Christianity, it doesn't serve the cause. It is just marketing. It might work, of course. But will it be authentic? Will it be what we are really looking for? Influences such as technology engage with us even without our knowing it, and the point is to see what they are doing to our experience of the world. For example, we need to understand that to a 15-year-old, going to Brno and posting a photo on Instagram there is not a report, it is part of the experience. So the issue is not about finding a more entertaining language or more appealing music for the liturgy. It is about facing people's real concerns.

How is this currently playing out among Czech Catholics?

There are people who identify as more liberal or conservative, and dialogue between them is nonexistent. It is the same as in the general public sphere nowadays—that we are divided. Unfortunately, debate is very polarized in Czech society, and there is not much will to see that we can have different opinions but still be united on very important things. I think this is a specter haunting the post-Communist mindset. My parents understood the distortion of the Communist regime and never identified with it, but it still influenced them, in the same way that we are now talking about technology influencing us. So we still have this mindset of who is with us, and who is against us.

In the present-day culture, I think that we need to take each other seriously, to see why someone thinks in a particular way, and also whether disagreement must end up in conflict, or just disagreement—whether we can think differently while still remaining together.

The Church also has to face up to the reality that the questions people have cannot be answered using the catechism. They may be existential, very human questions, but as Christians we believe that God became incarnate. God takes part in our humanity in all respects except for sin, and so we should take these human concerns very seriously.

(continued on page 14)

Interior, Franciscan Church of St. John, Brno (G. FAGAN)

Koči Interview *(continued from page 13)*

Does this approach necessarily mean being more liberal?

No. The example of the current papacy of Pope Francis shows that this is precisely the case—that to be more sensitive to certain questions does not mean that we buy this or that solution. You can be sensitive to the questions, needs, and struggles of the current young generation without undermining anything that the Church holds to be true. To recognize that there is someone else who thinks differently does not mean that you have to give up your own beliefs or confessional allegiance.

I do not think we have started to reflect upon this yet in the Czech Republic. Our experience during the Communist period was that having debates was useless, because you could debate whatever you wanted, but somebody else would still decide. You could even think what you wanted, just not say it aloud, pretend to conform, and everything would be fine. This mindset is still somehow present. In order to defeat it, we just need to start to talk. ♦

Downtown Brno (G. FAGAN)

BOOK REVIEW

Orthodox Christian Renewal Movements in Eastern Europe

edited by Aleksandra Djurić Milovanović and Radmila Radić
Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017
354 pp., $105 (hardback), ISBN 978-3-319-63353-4

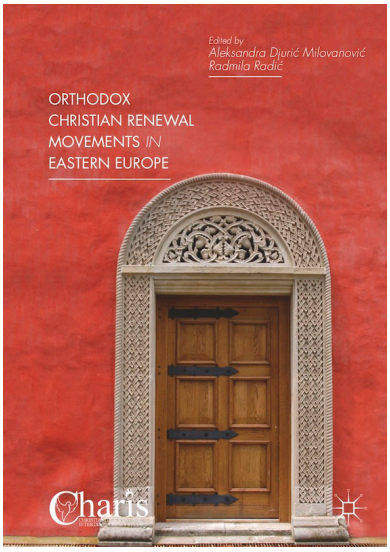
ROLAND CLARK

Eastern Orthodox Christianity prides itself on following Tradition, on preserving the authentic faith of the Apostles, but that does not mean that nothing has changed in the past two thousand years. What it does mean is that change was frequently contested. Tradition does and must adapt to the times, but it is interpreted by the Church as a whole; no one person has the authority to innovate on their own initiative. During the late 19th and 20th centuries this paradox—that Tradition must adapt yet no one may adapt it—caused repeated tensions within the Orthodox churches of Eastern Europe. This volume explores 10 different renewal movements that emerged across the region during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Individual chapters focus on specific movements, with five chapters dedicated to the God Worshippers (Serbian: *Bogomoljci*) in Serbia and two to the Lord's Army (Romanian: *Oastea Domnului*) in Romania and Serbia. Two chapters discuss the phenomenon as a whole. The first, by Meic Pearse, provides the historical context of modernization and nation-building in which these movements appeared, and argues that they were a result of Orthodoxy's encounter with modernity. The second, an Introduction written by Aleksandra Djurić Milovanović and Radmila Radić, notes the remarkable paucity of research on renewal within Orthodoxy. It argues that—in addition to helping us understand religion better—elucidating these movements contextualizes "the social role of Church institutions, social welfare, experiences of modernity and patterns of social developments." (17) Unfortunately, neither of these chapters offers much in terms of general analysis of causes, character, or consequences. Individual chapters do engage with some of these questions, but most are more descriptive than analytical, spending little time on historiographical debates. While discussing some of these movements for the first time in scholarly literature, the volume as a whole therefore throws up more questions than answers.

Many of the groups discussed here had a decisively Evangelical flavor. Milovanović and Radić tell us that they "were all characterized with intensity of personal religious experience, holiness, discipline, communion, Scriptural authority, use of vernacular languages in liturgical practice, hymn chanting, prayer." (12) Yet in some cases, renewal movements seem to have emerged completely independently of Western influences. In late Imperial Russia, for example, Ioann Verkhovsky developed a new form of Old Belief by blending nationalism, Slavophilism, and democratic forms

of church governance. Other groups in Russia—such as the Renovationists—used a passing acquaintance with Western liberalism to formulate focused critiques of the bureacratization of the Russian Orthodox Church and its subservient relationship to the state. Not a Western import, their religious reforms nonetheless reflected certain Western Protestant discourses and values that were circulating in some educated circles in St. Petersburg and Moscow. Count Lev Tolstoy explicitly founded his sect in conversation with both Western Christianity and Orthodoxy, while Evangelical peasant groups such as the Stundists and the Molokans were influenced by Protestant German settlers. These groups developed within an Orthodox milieu, however, and reacted to local pressures. During the 1890s Tolstoyans attempted to influence the Evangelicals, hoping to extend Tolstoyism out of elite circles and to add the support of educated society to these predominantly peasant Christianites.



Tolstoy and his followers had a degree of success with the Doukhobors in southern Caucasia, who refused to bear arms or swear an oath to the tsar. The government responded by exiling over a thousand people to Siberia, many of whom died on the way. In Kiev province, Kondraty Malevanny led a reform movement within Stundo-Baptism characterized by ecstatic prayer, singing, and dancing, as well as a belief that Malevanny was the Son of God returned to herald the Last Judgement. All of these movements were hostile to the Russian state and the official Church, though some were more willing to work with it than others. Those that explicitly rejected state authority, like the Doukhobors, were quickly suppressed with lethal force. In Russia it was only Verkhovsky's followers and the Renovationists who even tried to renew Orthodoxy—all the others preferred absolute separation from the rest of the Church. The Russian case studies also reflect clear differences between educated and popular religion. Whereas Verkhovsky, Tolstoy, and the Renovationists articulated their beliefs first and foremost through letters and pamphlets, the Doukhobors and the Malevantsy relied upon face-to-face gatherings and local preachers, reflecting a more Evangelical approach to spirituality and organization.

Practices usually associated with Protestant Evangelicalism arrived in the rest of Eastern Europe through a variety of avenues. The Nazarenes, for example, spread out from Switzerland during the 1830s, making converts in Hungary and the Serbian Banat region. Serbian Orthodox leaders became increasingly concerned that Nazarenes were converting Orthodox believers in the 1870s, and Boris Aleksov here argues that Orthodox reforms such as regular preaching were a response to Nazarene influence. In particular, he claims that the God Worshippers, a grassroots movement emphasizing individual piety and holiness, learned to read the Bible from the Nazarenes, making devotional Bible reading a core element of God Worshipping. Radić and Milovanović repeat this assertion, noting that the God Worshipper movement emerged out of a disparate collection of small devotional groups influenced by different Protestant sects, most notably the Nazarenes.

Dragan Ašković's study of God Worshipper hymnbooks and singing, however, reminds us that they also drew deeply on folk traditions and lyric forms in their gatherings. The movement became more institutionalized after the First World War, responding to state pressure for an organizational structure that bureaucrats could understand and interact with. The need for devotional tracts exposed the God Worshippers to Evangelical Protestant influences during the interwar period, but many of them also entered Orthodox monasteries, thereby invigorating Serbian monasticism rather than encouraging religious irredentism. Similarly, Ksenija Končarević maintains that the Serbian Orthodox Church modernized its liturgical language as a direct response to the popularity of the devotional practices encouraged by the God Worshippers.

Theoretical debates over religious influences are mostly absent from this volume. The authors assume that contemporaneity is enough to demonstrate influence. They also downplay the impact of Roman Catholic practices and spreading literacy in order to focus on more colorful groups, such as the Nazarenes and the God Worshippers. In most cases, these chapters are convincing when they say that Orthodox leaders were deeply concerned with the implications grassroots renewal movements had for the future of their Church. Whether they imitated them, however, is a different question. Dragana Radisavljević-Ćiparizović's much more theoretically-informed chapter on 21st-century renewal movements in Serbian Orthodox communities makes one wonder how conscious and coordinated religious change was. She concludes that much more local factors are at work today than historians assume gave birth to earlier movements such as the God Worshippers. This claim should also give pause to our confidence about religious change in the early 20th century.

The two chapters on the Lord's Army movement in Romania make another interesting contrast. Corneliu Constantineanu argues that this renewal movement emerged from "the 'rediscovery' of Scripture at the beginning of the twentieth century" (231). He locates this "rediscovery" in Dumitru Cornilescu's translation of the Bible, published in stages between 1921 and 1924; in Teodor Popescu's

(continued on page 16)

Djurić Milovanović and Radić Review *(continued from page 15)*

preaching in Bucharest; and in Iosif Trifa's newspaper in Sibiu, first published in 1922. The Lord's Army took root among Trifa's readers in Transylvania, and although Trifa was aware of what Cornilescu and Popescu were preaching in Bucharest, his was a completely independent renewal project. The Romanian Orthodox Church functions as a monolithic actor in Constantineanu's account, opposing the renewal efforts of Cornilescu, Popescu, and Trifa, and refusing even to dialogue with them. Mircea Măran's chapter, on the other hand, situates the emergence of the Lord's Army within "the wish to strengthen Orthodox elite influence in the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional society of Transylvania and to attempt to suppress the neo-Protestant movements which were seriously threatening to convert a large number of Romanian Orthodox believers." (266) He focuses predominantly on the Serbian Banat region, and is able to show how the Lord's Army functioned to strengthen ethnic and religious identities at the same time as it promoted a specific type of spirituality. Rather than emphasizing the differences between the Lord's Army and the official Orthodox Church, Măran shows how and why the Church worked together with the Lord's Army in specific times and places.

Although it only receives one chapter, the Zoe Brotherhood in Greece is probably the best known of the renewal movements discussed in this volume. A number of commentators have accused Zoe of being too "Protestant"—most notably the theologian Hristos Yannaras, who spent several years in the movement as a young man. Amaryllis Logotheti here argues that Zoe was "a reorganisation of the sovereign discourse of the Church as the preferential ally of the state within the borrowed version of the Protestant example." (290) Logotheti's nuanced approach to Zoe's goals suggests a useful way of understanding many of the Orthodox renewal movements discussed in this volume.

Reading the Bible during Molokan worship, Moscow (G. FAGAN)

While not Protestant, neither were they completely Orthodox in their ecclesiology and practice. The influence of Western Protestantism on these movements is undeniable, but it often arrived in oblique ways and was instrumentalized by local religious actors for their own purposes.

Galina Goncharova's chapter on the White Cross stavropegial monastic fraternity in Bulgaria shows how renewal movements functioned when they succeeded in negotiating church politics and aligning them with ecclesiastic and national goals. There was no talk of Protestantism here, although the discourse and values of the fraternity were remarkably similar to those of other renewal movements. It is possible that Orthodox renewal only became "Protestant" when its enemies had something to gain from the label. The same global religious currents and broad social trends intersected to produce all of the movements discussed in this volume, but how their stories played out depended on local conditions and—often—petty politics. ♦

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