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## Czech Resistance to Organized Religion

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Senior Research Paper

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In Partial Fulfillment

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THE 499-Senior Paper

by

Donald L. Schwarz Jr.

November 2021

## INTRODUCTION

In 1996 my wife and I moved to the Czech Republic as missionaries participating in the second phase of a missions training program in our local church. We went intending to be there for only three to six months as part of the program. Little did we know at the time that we would end up living there for the next fifteen years until 2011. We continue to travel back to the Czech Republic several times a year to assist pastors and churches to this present day. Because of these experiences, we have an affinity and a sense of calling from the Lord for this nation and its people. We are moved by the words of Jesus in Matt 28:18-20<sup>1</sup>, where He commands us to “go...and make disciples.”

The Czech Republic is a secular,<sup>2</sup> post-communist, post-Christian nation that is almost 80% atheist/agnostic, according to statistics<sup>3</sup>, yet it boasts a vibrant spiritual heritage. I have lived there and seen the effects of both the positive and negative experiences of their rich and varied history. As a follower of Christ, I desire to obey Christ’s command to make disciples and to see Czech people experience the love of Jesus personally. Jesus changes everything! I am well acquainted with the challenges of sharing the Gospel in this environment and seek to learn how to make disciples for Christ in the Czech Republic.

I have organized and been involved with many evangelistic outreaches since 1996 that consist of a presentation of the Gospel of Christ and then an invitation for those listening to make a personal decision to follow Christ for themselves (John 3:3,16;14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom 10:9-10,

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*, Wide margin reference edition, Updated (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2014). “All Scriptures are quoted from the ESV unless otherwise noted.”

<sup>2</sup> Olaf Müller, “Secularization, Individualization, or (Re)Vitalization? The State and Development of Churchliness and Religiosity in Post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe,” *Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe* 4, no. 1 (December 29, 2011): 31.

<sup>3</sup> “CSU 2011 Czech Government Stats-Religion,” accessed October 27, 2021, <https://vdb.czso.cz/vdbvo2/faces/en/index.jsf?page=vystup-objekt&pvokc=&katalog=30719&pvo=ZVCR014&z=T>.

13). Often, we have people that will come and indicate a decision to follow Christ, even with strong emotions such as weeping and tears being exhibited. Then strangely, they refuse to give basic contact information such as an address or phone number in order to talk with them further. In addition, a large percentage of them will not visit a local church service any time after that experience.

The purpose of this research paper is to show a historical pattern of betrayal by foreign powers, totalitarian regimes, including the Catholic Church, that tried to oppress Czech people, affecting how they relate to Christianity and the church today. I will study the causes of why those professing faith in Christ in evangelistic outreaches in the Czech Republic often do not connect with a local church body. Also, I want to find out how to facilitate a more significant percentage of them connecting to a local church to fulfill Christ's command in Matt. 28:19-20 to make disciples. I will give a brief overview and history of the Czech Republic and its people, then examine the Biblical foundations of why this is an important issue. Afterward, I will discuss some of the reasons why Czech people have difficulty connecting with local Christian churches. In conclusion, I will give a spiritual perspective and introduce a few possible practical solutions that could help to remedy this situation.

### **Basic Country Facts**

The Czech Republic, or Czechia, is a small landlocked country nestled in the heart of Central Europe. It is surrounded by Germany and Poland on the north, Austria on the south, and Slovakia on the east. It is comprised of two primary regions, Bohemia in the west and Moravia in the east, with the capital city of Prague in central Bohemia.<sup>4</sup> When referring to the Czech

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<sup>4</sup> "Information about the Czech Republic | Consulate General of the Czech Republic in Chicago," accessed November 6, 2021, [https://www.mzv.cz/chicago/en/other\\_useful\\_information/information\\_about\\_the\\_czech\\_republic/index.html](https://www.mzv.cz/chicago/en/other_useful_information/information_about_the_czech_republic/index.html).

Republic in this paper, I will use the terms the Czech Republic and Czechia interchangeably as Czechia has only been adopted as the official name since 2016.<sup>5</sup> In addition, I will use Bohemia and Czech lands interchangeably to refer to this area in the historical past before it was an independent nation.

The Czech Republic is home to 10.7 million people who are predominantly Czech, Slovak, and some other minority people groups being represented, with the official language of Czech spoken by over 95% of the people.<sup>6</sup>

Czechia has been part of the European Union (EU) since 2004 and NATO and numerous other international organizations and has a free market economy.<sup>7</sup> Even though Czechia is part of the EU, they are not in the Euro economic zone and still have their own currency, the Czech Koruna.<sup>8</sup>

The Czech form of government has been a Parliamentary Republic since 1993 with a president, prime minister, and cabinet, and two chambers in the parliament, the senate, and the chamber of deputies.<sup>9</sup> In the past, the Czech Republic was joined together with Slovakia, which comprises Czechoslovakia, initially formed in 1918. They split from each other in 1993 in what has been called the “Velvet Divorce.”<sup>10</sup> Czechoslovakia was under a communist regime that took over in 1948. In 1989 the Czechs and Slovaks threw off the centralized state communist system without violence, causing the event to be called the “Velvet Revolution.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> “Czechia,” in *The World Factbook* (Central Intelligence Agency, October 26, 2021), <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/czechia/>.

<sup>6</sup> “Czechia.”

<sup>7</sup> “Information about the Czech Republic | Consulate General of the Czech Republic in Chicago.”

<sup>8</sup> “Information about the Czech Republic | Consulate General of the Czech Republic in Chicago.”

<sup>9</sup> “Czechia.”

<sup>10</sup> “Czechia.”

<sup>11</sup> “Information about the Czech Republic | Consulate General of the Czech Republic in Chicago.”

The Czech Republic is a predominantly atheist/agnostic nation, with 79% of Czechs professing no religious beliefs according to the March 2011 census. Roman Catholics make up the most significant percentage of those professing faith in God, followed by a much smaller percentage of Protestants.<sup>12</sup> There is debate about the interpretation of the religious statistics and the actual numbers, which we will briefly discuss later in this paper.

### **Brief History**

Czechoslovakia was initially founded in 1918 and became an independent nation when the Austro-Hungarian empire (or Hapsburg Dynasty) was being dismantled at the end of World War 1. It quickly became a prosperous democracy and was among some of the most developed countries in the world. This period is often referred to as the “First Republic.”<sup>13</sup> That period came to an end with Hitler’s annexation of the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia in September 1938 and the invasion of Czechoslovakia in March 1939.<sup>14</sup> After World War 2, the republic was under the “Soviet sphere of power with “limited” democracy”<sup>15</sup> until the communist takeover of 1948. At that time, all private property was confiscated, and people’s basic rights were severely curtailed. There was a movement early in 1968 that is often called “Prague Spring” when more democratic reforms were introduced, and people began to protest conditions and demanded normalization. This was crushed on August 21, 1968, when surrounding Warsaw Pact nations with the backing of Russian troops suddenly invaded Czechoslovakia and installed a new

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<sup>12</sup> “Information about the Czech Republic | Consulate General of the Czech Republic in Chicago.”

<sup>13</sup> “Czechoslovakia : A Country Study,” image, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540 USA, 31-32, accessed November 6, 2021, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/frdcstdy.czechoslovakiaco00gawd/?st=gallery>.

<sup>14</sup> “History | Embassy of the Czech Republic in Dublin,” accessed November 6, 2021, [https://www.mzv.cz/dublin/en/about\\_the\\_czech\\_republic/history/index.html](https://www.mzv.cz/dublin/en/about_the_czech_republic/history/index.html).

<sup>15</sup> “History | Embassy of the Czech Republic in Dublin.”

government.<sup>16</sup> This would be the situation until the “Velvet Revolution” in November 1989, when the communist regime was removed from power.

The Czech Republic is considered one of the most secular countries globally, along with Estonia and former East Germany.<sup>17</sup> This process did not happen overnight but had already begun before the communists came to power.<sup>18</sup> The communists simply took advantage of this process to aid in their takeover of Czechoslovakia. In the 1970s and 1980s, they presented an image to the outside world of religious freedom in which Christians were allowed to meet for worship and prayer together. This was very hollow freedom, though, because of the spies amid these Christian gatherings, ready to report any activity that could be perceived as a threat to the communist government.<sup>19</sup>

It is difficult to imagine today that the early Reformation sprang from this area of the world. Leaders like Jan Hus, who was martyred in 1415, sowed the seeds of reform that would come to greater fruition one hundred years later through Martin Luther in present-day Germany.<sup>20</sup> The Hussite movement sparked by Jan Hus would have a distinct impact on Czech culture and society that would be felt for centuries to come. The power of the Catholic Church was weakened, and a more distinct Czech culture began to emerge.<sup>21</sup>

Czech lands had first been introduced to Christianity through the influence of German Catholics in the 820s when the ruler of Great Moravia, Mojmir, was baptized. His successor,

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<sup>16</sup> Günter Bischof, ed., *The Prague Spring and the Warsaw Pact Invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968*, 1. paperback ed, Harvard Cold War Studies Book Series (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2011), 35-36.

<sup>17</sup> Atko Rimmel and Marko Uibu, “Outside Conventional Forms: Religion and Non-Religion in Estonia,” *Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe* 8, no. 1 (December 31, 2015): 5.

<sup>18</sup> Petr Cincala, “A Missional Outreach Model in the Czech Republic, a Postchristian, Secular Culture,” *Great Commission Research Journal* 12, no. 1 (2020): 56.

<sup>19</sup> Cincala.

<sup>20</sup> S. Harrison Thomson, *Czechoslovakia in European History* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1965), 92.

<sup>21</sup> “History | Embassy of the Czech Republic in Dublin.”

Rastislav, feared German expansion and invited the Byzantine Christian missionaries, Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius, to Moravia to introduce Slavic liturgy there.<sup>22</sup> Despite his efforts, the influence of the Roman Catholic Church continued to grow and ultimately changed the course of the history of Bohemia and Moravia.<sup>23</sup> The dynasties of the following centuries were predominantly Catholic, with a few minor exceptions. At various times some of the rulers would enforce Catholic traditions and expel Protestants from their lands. One of those seasons of persecution resulted in Moravian Christians fleeing to lands owned by Count Nicholas Zinzendorf on the present-day border of Czech and Germany in a small town of Herrnhut. A prayer and missions movement was birthed during this time that sent missionaries to every inhabited continent of the earth and spawned a 24-hour prayer movement that lasted for 100 years.<sup>24</sup> Those early missionaries are credited with influencing Christian missions for centuries to come. The Czech Republic is truly a land with a rich spiritual heritage.

### **BIBLICAL FOUNDATION**

As stated earlier, the purpose of this research paper is to show a historical pattern of betrayal by foreign powers, totalitarian regimes, including the Catholic Church, that tried to oppress Czech people, affecting how they relate to Christianity and the church today. Many of those professing faith in Christ in evangelistic outreaches in the Czech Republic often do not connect with a local church body. To better understand this issue, I will examine the Bible for a scriptural perspective on what the church is, the church's mission, the importance of making disciples, and why this is important.

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<sup>22</sup> Derek Cooper, *Introduction to World Christian History* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2016), 110-111.

<sup>23</sup> "History | Embassy of the Czech Republic in Dublin."

<sup>24</sup> Ruth Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya: A Biographical History of Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1983), 69-74.



Often when people think of church, they think of a building where people gather to worship or a particular time of the week like Sunday when people gather to pray and hear preaching or teaching of the Bible. While this is undoubtedly part of the discussion surrounding the church, it is a tiny part and not the original meaning of the Scriptures, as we will discover.

The word church is used solely in the New Testament and never found in the Old Testament of the Bible. “The English word “church” is derived from the Greek word ‘*kuriakon*’ which means “belonging to the Lord” and is never applied to the Church in the New Testament period.”<sup>25</sup> It is only used as an adjective two times to describe the Lord’s Supper and the Lord’s Day (1 Cor 11:20; Rev 1:10). According to Duffield, Greeks used it to refer to a church building later in early church history.<sup>26</sup> The words to describe a church building in the New Testament are commonly temple and synagogue (Acts 5:42; Jas 2:2). The Hebrew words *qahal* and *edhah*, often translated as *ekklesia* in the Greek New Testament, meant ‘a gathering or assembly’, such as Judaism eventually had in the synagogue.<sup>27</sup>

In Scripture, the word church most often refers to a group of people, not a building or a service time in the week. The Greek word for church is *ekklesia* and is derived from the verb *ekkaleo*- “to call out”- and refers to those who are ‘called out and assembled together.’<sup>28</sup> It has a twofold meaning: a local assembly of believers and the redeemed of all ages who follow Jesus Christ. Matthew is the only Gospel to use the word.<sup>29</sup> It is used 115 times in the New Testament,

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<sup>25</sup> Guy P. Duffield and Nathaniel M. Van Cleave, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology*, Rev. ed. (Los Angeles, Calif: Foursquare Media, 1983), 419.

<sup>26</sup> Duffield and Van Cleave, 419.

<sup>27</sup> Norman Geisler and Norman Geisler, *Volume Four: Church, Last Things*, Systematic Theology (4 Vols.) / Norman Geisler, Vol.4 (Minneapolis, Minn: Bethany House Pub, 2005), 17.

<sup>28</sup> Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger, eds., *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Pub. House, 1994), 78-79.

<sup>29</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew: From Biblical Text-- to Contemporary Life*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2004), 564.

mainly in Acts and the Apostle Paul's writings. It most often refers to a local congregation.<sup>30</sup> In our western American mindset, we often think of people coming to a church building in a somewhat formal setting, but in the New Testament, the word "church" often referred to a small gathering of people in a home or private residence (Acts 2:26; 5:42; 8:3; 12:5, 12; Rom 16:3-5, 14-15; Phlm 1:2).

In this paper, I will refer to the church often but in several contexts. In other sections of this paper, I will refer to the institutional church or the Roman Catholic church as in history. In this section of the paper, I will primarily be referring to the "New Testament church founded by Jesus Christ; that is, an assembly of believers joined to Christ's spiritual body by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13) at the moment of regeneration (Titus 3:3-6), when they individually place their faith in the Lord Jesus as Savior (Acts 16:31)."<sup>31</sup> Those believers that are part of the visible church here on the earth should be part of a local community of believers that meets regularly (Heb 10:25) for edification (Eph 4:12), worship (John 4:24), and participating in the ordinances of the church.<sup>32</sup>

### **Ordinances of the Church**

The ordinances practiced and observed by Protestant Churches are Water Baptism and The Lord's Supper (or Communion). These are two ordinances that Christ clearly commanded. The Catholic Church and others have other ordinances that they hold to, but I will focus on these two ordinances for the purposes of this paper. The Church practiced these for nearly one thousand years before others were added and are the two generally mentioned by the Early

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<sup>30</sup> Ronald F. Youngblood et al., eds., *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, New and enhanced edition (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2014), 247.

<sup>31</sup> Geisler and Geisler, *Volume Four*, 17.

<sup>32</sup> Geisler and Geisler, 17.

Church Fathers.<sup>33</sup> An ordinance is “something commanded and enforced by the proper authority.”<sup>34</sup> Another word sometimes used instead of ordinance is the word “sacrament.” Duffield adds that one definition of an ordinance is “the outward sign of an inward work.”<sup>35</sup> There has been much debate about these ordinances throughout Church history, causing much strife and misunderstanding, which are outside the scope of this paper.

Jesus commanded the ordinance or sacrament of Water Baptism in Matt 28:19 in “The Great Commission,” where He commanded disciples to be baptized. Jesus also set an example by being baptized Himself in Matt 3:13-17 and told John, “Let it be so now,” when John told Christ that he needed to be baptized by Jesus, not the other way around. This signified the importance of this outward act for every follower of Christ. It was commanded by Peter (Acts 2:38, 41) and is referenced throughout NT Scripture (Acts 8:12; 8:36-38; 9:18; 10:47, 48; 16:15; 16:33; 18:8; 19:5,6; 22:16; Gal 3:27). This ordinance and act are an outward profession of an inward work testifying to the grace of God.<sup>36</sup> A person is immersed in the water, as Jesus was, and it is done “in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19).”

Christ instituted the ordinance or sacrament of The Lord’s Supper as He ate His last meal with the disciples in the upper room. Luke 22:14-20 gives the account of Jesus taking the bread and the wine, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” After sharing the bread, they each drank from the cup of wine, and Jesus said, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.” The Apostle Paul also taught the Lord’s Supper to the NT churches in 1 Cor 11:23-26. It is a memorial or remembrance of what Christ

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<sup>33</sup> Duffield and Van Cleave, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology*, 435.

<sup>34</sup> Duffield and Van Cleave, 435.

<sup>35</sup> Duffield and Van Cleave, 435.

<sup>36</sup> Duffield and Van Cleave, 436.

did for us and a proclamation of our faith (1 Cor 11:26). In this ordinance, the Scripture tells us that we are also proclaiming the return of Christ (1 Cor 11:26) and a statement of our oneness in the Body of Christ (1 Cor 10:17).<sup>37</sup>

Partaking of the Lord's Supper or Communion is an act that we must do soberly and circumspectly (1 Cor 11:27). We are to examine our hearts and judge ourselves concerning our relationships to others in the Body of Christ (1 Cor 11:28-32). It is a time to make sure we are in right relatedness to fellow believers and the Lord. If there is a sin or anything amiss, it is a time to put things in order with the Lord and others.

### **Universal Church**

It is important to note that the church is both universal and local. The Universal Church refers to the invisible body of all believers, while the local church refers to "a visible manifestation of the universal body of believers in a given locality."<sup>38</sup> Another distinction is that the invisible church is that part of the body of Christ already in heaven, while the visible church is that part of the Body still here on the earth.<sup>39</sup>

When Jesus first used the word "church" (*ekklesia*) to refer to the body of people that He would begin to gather (Matt 16:18), He was borrowing from and building upon this word *ekklesia* as used in the Greek Septuagint. In the Septuagint (OT Scriptures), the word *ekklesia* could refer to 1. the "congregation of Israel," or 2. an assembly of people whether they were organized or simply an unorganized mob. The common understanding would have been an "assembly."<sup>40</sup> According to Duffield, when Jesus said, "On this rock, I will build my church"

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<sup>37</sup> Duffield and Van Cleave, 437.

<sup>38</sup> Geisler and Geisler, 17-18.

<sup>39</sup> Geisler and Geisler, 18.

<sup>40</sup> Duffield and Van Cleave, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology*, 420.

(Matt 16:18), His emphasis was on “My,” not on the word “church.” It seems that Jesus wanted to draw attention to the fact that this would be a group of people that belonged exclusively to Him and would make up His Body.<sup>41</sup> He was differentiating this Body from the “Congregation of Israel.”

### **The Mission of the Church**

When we look in the Scriptures, the church had some specific roles or missions that they performed, especially as seen in the Book of Acts and Pauline epistles. Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He gave the apostles what is commonly called the “Great Commission.” This command can be found in all four of the Gospels and the Book of Acts (Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-20; Luke 24:47-49; John 20:21-23; Acts 1:8). The church was commanded to preach and teach the good news of Christ that would result in supernatural signs following. In addition, the church is to make disciples, or disciplined followers, that go and teach others what they have learned.

Discipleship is a word that has been used in many ways, especially in modern church history. It is part of the central mission that Christ gave to His church in Matt 28:18-20. Jesus said to go and make disciples. He did not say make converts or simply get people to pray a simple prayer of belief in Christ that had no change in their character and actions. The word disciple comes from the Greek word *mathetes*, meaning “a learner or a follower.”<sup>42</sup> It also means “someone who follows another person or another way of life and who submits himself to the discipline (teaching) of that leader or way.”<sup>43</sup> This word is found almost exclusively in the Gospels and the Book of Acts, except for several references in Isaiah. The Apostle Paul picks up

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<sup>41</sup> Duffield and Van Cleave, 420.

<sup>42</sup> Merrill Frederick Unger et al., *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, Rev. and updated ed (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 305.

<sup>43</sup> Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, eds., *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale Reference Library (Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 384.

on this same idea in His letters when he encourages believers to “imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ,” (1 Cor 11:1) and “the things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do” (Phil 4:9). Ultimately, we are following the example that Jesus left us (1 Pet 2:21).

Hull brings out three dimensions of making disciples from Matt 28:19 that are important to note. First is evangelism or sharing the good news of Christ and doing as Christ said, “baptize them.” As Hull points out, church discipleship has often mistakenly focused only on those who are already believers. But Christ’s command includes the definite thought of going and proclaiming the gospel to those who have not heard. The second is the importance of development or growth, which provides for developing character. Jesus said, “teaching them to obey.” The third is deploying or sending them, which is seen in the command “go.” Christ wants His disciples to go on mission into the places where they live, work, and play and be His witnesses.<sup>44</sup>

Another essential part of the church’s mission is that of sustaining a fellowship of believers. As Acts 2:42 says of the early church, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship.” The word fellowship in Greek is the word *koinonia*, which means “that which is had in common, or shared,” “communion.”<sup>45</sup> It is more than just meeting together to visit and have coffee, which certainly can be part of fellowship, but it goes much deeper than that when seen in Scripture. It is based on a relationship with God the Father and His Son, Jesus (1 John 1:3, 6, 7), and our relationship to other brothers and sisters in Christ. It implies a unity by the Holy Spirit in bonds of love, unity, and singleness of purpose (2 Cor 8:4b; Gal 2:9; Eph 3:9a; Phil 1:5a; 2:1b).<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 34.

<sup>45</sup> Duffield and Van Cleave, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology*, 432.

<sup>46</sup> Duffield and Van Cleave, 432.

Worship is another crucial part of the mission of the church. Jesus said that the Father is seeking people to worship Him in John 4:23. 1 Pet 2:9 says, “But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” Notice that part of our mission as the church on the earth is to proclaim His praises. When we give God glory and praise together as a Body, God works in our lives corporately and individually. Worship is not only music and singing but the way we live our lives, speak to our neighbors and family. It is an all-encompassing word that has the thought of bowing our lives in submission, reverence, and obedience to God. Rom 12:1 (NASB) says, “Therefore I urge you, brothers *and sisters*, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship.”<sup>47</sup>

Besides worship and fellowship, another part of the church’s mission is missions and evangelism. All through the New Testament, there is an underlying theme of mission that compels the believer individually and corporately to be involved in taking the gospel to the “end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Jesus said that He was “the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Jesus commissioned us in Matt 28:18-20 to “go...and make disciples of all nations.” It is not a suggestion or an option but a command to be obeyed by the church.

Besides missions and evangelism, the church’s mission includes caring and nurturing those who believe in Christ and are baptized into His Body. The Bible compares a new believer to a newborn infant that requires milk (1 Pet 2:2). Just like a baby needs natural parents, God plans that those in the Body of Christ care for and nurture the new believer. In Eph 4:11-16, the

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<sup>47</sup> Kenneth L. Barker, Donald W. Burdick, and Kenneth Boa, eds., *Zondervan NASB Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Pub. House, 1999).

Apostle Paul speaks to the Church at Ephesus and reminds them that God has set ministry gifts in the Body, such as the pastor and teacher, “to equip the saints,” “for building up the body of Christ,” so that we grow to “mature manhood,” or a complete and mature man. He goes on in v. 14 to say, “that we may no longer be children.” The idea is that God wants believers to grow and mature. We can see this in 1 Cor 3:1-4 as well. The Apostle Paul shows how he spoke to the Corinthians as “infants in Christ” and “fed you with milk” to facilitate spiritual growth. The teaching of God’s Word and pastoral care help believers to grow and become disciples that are then going and making other disciples as Christ commanded.

The church’s mission is not only to minister to spiritual needs but also to practical needs. We can see this in Acts 6:1-7, where the early church had a ministry to the widows in the church to assist them with food and basic needs. The Apostle Paul refers to collecting funds to help the church in Jerusalem during a famine in Acts 11:27-30. Jesus spoke of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, taking in the homeless, visiting those who are sick and in prison (Matt 25:31-46). These references give insight into the church’s mission or the Body of Christ here on the earth.

### **Individual Members in the Church**

One last perspective on the importance of the church is that of the role of the individual believer and their support to the corporate body of Christ. Some people think they are fine and do not need others, but that directly opposes the Scriptures. God’s commands are not without reason. Just like a coal in a fire, when it is pulled away from the main blaze, it will get cold and slowly begin to go out over time. There is a natural analogy that can be seen in the spiritual health of the individual as they relate to the community of other believers.



The Apostle Paul uses another metaphor when he describes the individual members of the body of Christ in comparison to the physical body (1 Cor 12:12-27). Just like the physical body has many parts, and all the parts are essential, so it is with the Body of Christ. Paul writes:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body (1 Cor 12:12-15).

The thought expressed here is that we need each other as the Body of Christ. There are gifts and talents that God has placed in each of us that benefit the whole Body. When someone pulls away, or we push someone out of our fellowship, we are not wise. We may ultimately be hurting ourselves both individually and corporately.

In Heb 10:25, the author of Hebrews is exhorting believers to come together, saying, “not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” The thought and instruction here are that there is a danger when we neglect meeting together. As mentioned earlier, we can begin to grow cold in our passion and fire for the Lord. So, the believer is to be diligent in regularly entering into communion and fellowship with others in the community of faith. There is something to be received from one another and something that each believer has to give. “Encouragement cannot take place in isolation,” but only when believers meet together regularly.<sup>48</sup>

Acts 2:42-47 brings this same important principle out as well:

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<sup>48</sup> George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 345.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

They shared their lives in the community day-to-day, both in the temple and from house to house.

The church has a responsibility to preach the Gospel, make disciples, nurture new believers, equip the saints, and observe the ordinances that Christ commanded. The individual believer is responsible for following Christ, being a witness for Him, and serving others in His Body. While men have organized and structured the church from a natural and material perspective, it has always been rooted in a personal relationship to Christ first and foremost and then to love others (Mark 12:29-31).

### **REASONS CZECHS RESIST CHURCH AND RELIGION**

This section will explore some of the causes and reasons Czech people have resisted the Church and religion in general and highlight some ideas and beliefs that have hindered newborn Czech Christians from integrating into local Christian communities in more significant percentages. One factor that I will also address briefly is that of the actual atheistic mindset of the Czech people. Surveys and census statistics have indicated a growing percentage of atheists

in the Czech Republic since the fall of communism in 1989. While there is undoubtedly a measure of truth in those statistics and data, there is also strong evidence that the issue is not as much the atheistic mindset of Czechs, but a growing skepticism of the institutional church and religion, not a lack of belief in God.<sup>49</sup> I will come back to this issue later in this section.

First, it is essential to recognize that the Czech Republic is a secular nation. As Van de Poll points out, “the terms secular and secularization can have several meanings. Here I will use them in the sociological sense: the decline of the social and political influence of the church and Christian institutions and the public sphere becoming secular, i.e., neutral, a-religious.”<sup>50</sup> Paas says that “Christianity is no longer the moral and spiritual conscience of European societies; increasingly, it has become their repressed memory.”<sup>51</sup>

While Czech culture is solidly secular, it is also post-Christian, meaning that Christianity is no longer the dominant religion and there is a separation of church and state, compared to earlier centuries when the Church and State worked in tandem under the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Yet, there are signs of their strong Christian heritage everywhere in culture. Often this rich heritage is viewed with a more sentimental and fond perspective than a devout religious perspective, which can be confusing to those looking from the outside. For example, it is not uncommon to see a nativity scene in the center of a town square with Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus accompanied by the three wise men and accompanying animals. The local city council even funds these seasonal decorations. But to emphasize, these are seen as sentimental memories of Czech history and culture for most Czechs.

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<sup>49</sup> Petr Činčala, “Church Revitalization after the Velvet Revolution in the Czech Republic,” *FACULTY PUBLICATIONS* 16 (January 2005): 169-170.

<sup>50</sup> E W van de (Evert W) Poll, “Evangelism and the Paradox of Europe and Christianity,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 42, no. 4 (October 2018): 293.

<sup>51</sup> Stefan Paas, *Church Planting in the Secular West: Learning from the European Experience*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 187.

Second, to understand the present day, it is helpful to go back in history and learn how Czechs have arrived at this current moment in history. It is important to look back into the history of the Czech lands and peoples to understand their strong anti-religious feelings better. There is a rich spiritual heritage in the Czech regions. As pointed out earlier, pre-Reformation movements were already at work in Bohemia and Moravia long before Martin Luther's famed 95 Theses were nailed to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany, in 1517.<sup>52</sup> We will look at several key people and events that have influenced Czech's views of church and religion in current times.

### **Cyril & Methodius**

Czech lands had first been introduced to Christianity through the influence of German Catholics in the 820s when the ruler of Great Moravia, Mojmir, was baptized. His successor, Rastislav, feared German expansion and invited the Byzantine Christian missionaries, Constantin (Cyril) and Methodius, to Moravia to introduce Slavic liturgy there.<sup>53</sup> Despite his efforts, the influence of the Roman Catholic Church continued to grow and ultimately changed the course of the history of Bohemia and Moravia.<sup>54</sup> The dynasties of the following centuries were predominantly Catholic, with a few minor exceptions. At various times some of the rulers would enforce Catholic traditions and expel Protestants from their lands.

Cyril & Methodius were called the first "Apostles of the Western Slavs"<sup>55</sup>. They were instrumental in creating a new Slavonic script based upon Greek but adapted to certain unique features of the Slav's languages. They used this to bring a Slavic liturgy so the local people could

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<sup>52</sup> Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, Updated 4th edition (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 240.

<sup>53</sup> Cooper, *Introduction to World Christian History*, 110-111.

<sup>54</sup> "History | Embassy of the Czech Republic in Dublin."

<sup>55</sup> R.W. Seton-Watson, *A History of the Czechs and Slovaks* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1965), 13.

understand the church services and teachings from Scripture in their own language. Not to mention, they translated the Scriptures and other Christian literature into the Slavonic tongue.<sup>56</sup> As one author writes, they “were able to convert the heathen Czechs by the sanctity of their lives and their ability to address them in the mother tongue.”<sup>57</sup> Modern Russian, Bulgarian, and Serbian languages find their origins in this Slavonic script that eventually became the Cyrillic alphabet. This script and the languages that emerged from it have a “profound influence over all Slavs” even today.<sup>58</sup> Due to Cyril & Methodius’s ninth-century mission work in these regions, they left an indelible mark on the religious, political, and national levels that have affected these regions to this day.

Sadly, Rastislav’s successor realigned his kingdom with the Germanic kingdoms to the west and invited the Catholics back in. They began to work to undermine the missionary work of Cyril and Methodius. Paganism continued to be a strong influence in the Bohemian lands. But in the early tenth century, the Duke of Bohemia, “Good King Wenceslas” (910-929), of which the famous Christmas carol is named, began to rule. He was an avid supporter of Christianity in his “half-pagan realm.”<sup>59</sup> Unfortunately, he was assassinated due to political conflict. Nonetheless, he did live a life of piety, humility, and charity that eventually resulted in him being named the patron saint of Bohemia and Czech lands.<sup>60</sup>

These early events where the Germans influenced traditional Czech lands and peoples coupled with the role of the Roman Catholic church did not go unnoticed by modern Czechs.

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<sup>56</sup> James R Jr Payton, “Bypassing the History of Eastern Europe: A Failure of Twentieth Century Christian Scholarship,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 29, no. 4 (2000): 723.

<sup>57</sup> Edgar Legare Pennington, “The Soul of Czechoslovakia,” *Anglican Theological Review* 23, no. 4 (October 1941): 341.

<sup>58</sup> Seton-Watson, 13.

<sup>59</sup> Everett Ferguson, John D. Woodbridge, and Frank A. James, *Church History* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2005), 385.

<sup>60</sup> Ferguson, Woodbridge, and James, 385-386.

Events like these still touch the Czech people very deeply, causing them to have a deep-seated mistrust in the Catholic Church and, to a great degree, organized churches and religions in general, as well as outside foreign powers.

### **John Hus and Reformation**

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, certain reformers began to arise criticizing abuses in the church and clergy, specifically. One of these reformers was John Hus, originally from a small village in the south of Bohemia. He came from humble beginnings but soon became a formidable force, being influenced by the writings of John Wycliffe in England. Bohemia had become linked to England through the marriage in 1383 of Anne of Bohemia to King Richard II of England. Therefore, students began to travel back and forth between the universities at Oxford and Prague.<sup>61</sup>

Incidentally, Prague had the first university in Central Europe.<sup>62</sup> Hus became a student at Prague University at this time and eventually became a professor.<sup>63</sup>

Hus was influenced by Wycliffe's views on Christ as the head of the church and not the pope and the importance of putting the Scriptures into the people's language. Hus was noted for fiery sermons in the new Bethlehem Chapel in Prague that criticized the Pope and the sale of indulgences, among other things.<sup>64</sup>

Interestingly, the gift of Bethlehem Chapel by two wealthy burghers set the stage for the events that were to come. The purpose of this building was so that ordinary people could hear the preaching of the Scriptures in their language. Hus was known as a "powerful preacher" in both

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<sup>61</sup> Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 230-231.

<sup>62</sup> Seton-Watson, *A History of the Czechs and Slovaks*, 27.

<sup>63</sup> Thomson, *Czechoslovakia in European History*, 77.

<sup>64</sup> Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 230-231.

Latin and Czech, the common language.<sup>65</sup> He was named pastor of the church in 1402, and it was from this place that “the voice of the Czech reform” was to be heard.<sup>66</sup>

I should also note that at this time, difficult local economic and political events took place under King Wenceslas IV (1378-1419), successor to the more famous Charles IV, who had been Holy Roman Emperor. Adding to these events were the Great Schism and widespread criticism of the Church that was taking place in greater Europe.<sup>67</sup> So, all these things contributed to the atmosphere that church reformer John Hus entered in Prague and Bohemia lands.

Hus had been one of the outspoken reformers that had appealed to a council for changes in the church and papacy. Eventually, Hus was summoned to Constance by Sigismund, the Holy Roman Emperor, where he stood trial over an eight-month period. He was invited there on the guarantee of safe conduct by Sigismund, even though some of his closest friends had discouraged him from going, as they did not trust the Holy Roman Emperor. Unfortunately, Hus was “imprisoned, questioned, badgered, ridiculed, pled with, and threatened.”<sup>68</sup> They tried to entrap him and twist his words through deceit. He was only allowed to speak a few times, and even then, he was often interrupted. According to preserved records, what he said in his defense was effective, probably why they did not allow him to speak very much. When his friends tried to point out the blatant lies and twisted facts, they were ridiculed and treated with cries of derision themselves.<sup>69</sup> Hus was finally condemned as a heretic, which he adamantly denied. He

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<sup>65</sup> Thomson, *Czechoslovakia in European History*, 76-77.

<sup>66</sup> Thomson, 77.

<sup>67</sup> “History | Embassy of the Czech Republic in Dublin.”

<sup>68</sup> Thomson, *Czechoslovakia in European History*, 82.

<sup>69</sup> Thomson, 82.

was eventually burned at the stake on July 6, 1415, for refusing to recant his beliefs in the Scriptures.<sup>70</sup>

This singular event catalyzed what has come to be called the Protestant Hussite movement and the wars that followed for the next 20 years. It is events like these that still touch the modern Czech people very deeply, causing them to have a deep-seated mistrust in the Catholic Church and, to a great degree, organized churches, and religions in general, as well as outside foreign powers, like Sigismund, who had invited Hus to Constance with a guarantee of safe conduct.

During the time after Hus's martyrdom, the Czech language and nationality had risen in importance. German leadership and influence had waned significantly.<sup>71</sup> This was planting and watering the seeds of deep-seated Czech pride and nationalism that would spring to the surface in the centuries to come, especially under the heavy-handed dominance of various kings and empires.

Činčala points out that this critical spirit of John Hus that dared to challenge the church is still prevalent among Czechs today. The difference today is that Czechs refuse to have anything to do with the church and are skeptical about organized religion, whereas Hus tried to reform it from within. According to Činčala, a common statement of Czechs is, "I have nothing against the church, but I do not want to have anything in common with it."<sup>72</sup> This mentality, coupled with a history of being under the dominion of foreign powers, has cultivated a mindset in Czechs that is often resistant to authority but in a subtle way. People hesitate to join any kind of group that could define them or possibly coerce them into a particular course of action. They often avoid

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<sup>70</sup> Thomson, 82.

<sup>71</sup> Thomson, 89.

<sup>72</sup> Činčala, "Church Revitalization after the Velvet Revolution in the Czech Republic," 170-171.



joining any kind of political or religious groups, thus the low percentages of participation in civic organizations, churches, political organizations, etc.<sup>73</sup>

### **Thirty Years War**

After John Hus was martyred, it catalyzed the Bohemian rebellion for the next twenty years. Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund would try to defeat this rebellion by leading five crusades into the Czech lands in 1420-1431, all to no avail. The Hussites became feared as ruthless warriors that fought using new tactics never before encountered. The Hussites broke into two factions, the moderates, and the radicals. The infighting set the stage for an eventual agreement between Catholic Europe and Hussite Bohemia. The Compact of Basel in 1436 (*Compacta*)<sup>74</sup> confirmed the Hussite denomination and brought a measure of peace back to Czech lands,<sup>75</sup> although the Catholic church never officially would accept the *Compacta*.<sup>76</sup> These events laid the foundation for the thirty-year war in the year 1618-1648.<sup>77</sup>

The Hussite movement had a significant impact on society and culture, bringing religious dualism to Europe.<sup>78</sup> The influence and power of the Church began to decline, and the Czech nobles and towns were able to prosper. In conjunction with this came a surge in Czech nationalism and Czech culture in social life.<sup>79</sup>

The Reformation under Martin Luther in 1517 had an impact on the Czech lands where Protestantism had already taken root under John Hus and his reforms. Luther and his reforms would eventually set the stage for the Peace of Augsburg in 1555. It allowed rulers to choose

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<sup>73</sup> Činčala, 170-171.

<sup>74</sup> Thomson, *Czechoslovakia in European History*, 88.

<sup>75</sup> "History | Embassy of the Czech Republic in Dublin."

<sup>76</sup> Thomson, *Czechoslovakia in European History*, 88-89.

<sup>77</sup> Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 303.

<sup>78</sup> "History | Embassy of the Czech Republic in Dublin."

<sup>79</sup> "History | Embassy of the Czech Republic in Dublin."

either Lutheranism or Roman Catholicism. Unfortunately, it set the stage for conflict in the 17<sup>th</sup> century because there was no provision for Calvinists. The growing tensions were ignited on fire by Ferdinand II of the Hapsburg Dynasty, a zealous supporter of the Counter-Reformation under the Catholic Church. He was named king of Bohemia and then later Holy Roman Emperor.<sup>80</sup> He acted on the “legal principle “*Cuius regio, eius religio*” (i.e., the religion of the ruler would dictate the religion of the land) and brought changes to the region.”<sup>81</sup> The predominantly Protestant Bohemian nobles rose in rebellion and aligned themselves with Frederick V, an ardent Calvinist ruler in the German territories.<sup>82</sup> This set off the Thirty Years War.

One of the first battles was the Battle of White Mountain near Prague in 1620. The Catholic forces won the battle and forced Catholicization upon the Czech lands. Ferdinand II confiscated most of the estates of the Protestant Bohemian nobles and expelled many Protestants from Bohemia. Scattered throughout Bohemia to this day are memorials reminding Czechs of that period of history. On the Old Town Square in Prague, in front of the famed Astronomical clock, are twenty-seven white crosses commemorating the execution of twenty-seven Protestant leaders, including three nobles, seven knights, and seventeen burghers.<sup>83</sup> <sup>84</sup>These events would have long-lasting consequences.

Interestingly, other lands under the Hapsburgs monarchy did not experience these events the same way as the Czech lands. Poland and Germany had kept their religion based on their rulers at the time, whether Lutheranism or Catholicism. Slovakia and Austria, who also were a

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<sup>80</sup> Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 303.

<sup>81</sup> Jana Furstova et al., “Czech Out the Atheists: A Representative Study of Religiosity in the Czech Republic,” *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 31, no. 4 (October 2, 2021): 289, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10508619.2020.1844967>.

<sup>82</sup> Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 303.

<sup>83</sup> Thomson, *Czechoslovakia in European History*, 111.

<sup>84</sup> Seton-Watson, *A History of the Czechs and Slovaks*, 112-113.

part of the Hapsburg kingdom, were already predominantly Roman Catholic. Therefore, forced re-Catholicization was not as much of an issue in those lands as it was in the lands of Bohemia.<sup>85</sup> These events still touch Czechs very deeply, causing many of them to have a deep-seated mistrust in the Catholic Church and, to a great degree, organized churches and religions in general, as well as any perceived outside foreign influence.

### **Under Foreign Domination**

Czech Nationalism was already growing in the 15<sup>th</sup> century before the martyrdom of John Hus. Czechs were growing resentful of Germanic influence and control over their lands and the church's influence, specifically the corruption and simony among those in church leadership. Other reformers had already been speaking out about the abuses before John Hus arose.<sup>86</sup> Hus' death was only the spark that ignited nationalistic tendencies that were already present. The Bohemian rebellion or Hussite movement that followed Hus's martyrdom ushered in a period of Czech cultural and national pride in social life.<sup>87</sup> The *Compacta* or Compacts of Basel, signed in 1436, gave the Hussites the rights and freedoms that caused Protestant views to take even deeper root in Czech lands for the next two hundred years.

Beginning with the Council of Trent in 1545-1563, the Catholic Church initiated its Counter-Reformation in response to the Protestant Reformation in the early part of that century.<sup>88</sup> One of the Hapsburg rulers, Ferdinand II, was greatly influenced by the Counter-Reformation, having been Jesuit-educated. When he was named king of Bohemia, he imposed Catholicism on the Czech lands in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century and began expelling Protestants and executing

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<sup>85</sup> Furstova et al., "Czech Out the Atheists," 289.

<sup>86</sup> Thomson, *Czechoslovakia in European History*, 76.

<sup>87</sup> "History | Embassy of the Czech Republic in Dublin."

<sup>88</sup> Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 274, 277-279.

Protestant officials. It only reinforced deep-seated nationalistic feelings in the Czech people.<sup>89</sup> This was followed by re-Catholicization again in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, too. As Furstova points out, “Unlike neighboring Poland or Russia, where nationalism has always been connected to their church (Roman Catholic in Poland, Orthodox in the Russian Federation), Czech nationalism was never primarily religious. On the contrary, the nationalist rejection of the Habsburg monarchy at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century also included rejection of the Catholic Church.”<sup>90</sup>

It should also be noted that part of the oppression was that German was the official language during this period. The Czech language was forbidden and not allowed in government communications or the church liturgy. The common people or peasants were effectively cut off from higher society and relegated to lower-class citizenship.<sup>91</sup> This situation fueled the nationalistic tendencies in the Czech lands, which grew even stronger in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Czech nationalism was not anti-religious, but against the Hapsburg monarchy, which in the Czech mindset included the Catholic Church. The repression from that period is still remembered today. Czech intellectuals have referred to their historical lands as “the great medieval nation having almost disappeared by the early modern period.”<sup>92</sup> Czech people see the Catholic church as part of the foreign invading force that tried to oppress them.

Another facet to this issue is that of a geopolitical nature. Central and Eastern Europe regions have often been referred to as the “Lands in Between.”<sup>93</sup> This can be seen from the perspective of this region in between the dominant historical nations of Germany and Russia, the

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<sup>89</sup> Shelley, 303.

<sup>90</sup> Furstova et al., “Czech Out the Atheists,” 289.

<sup>91</sup> Thomson, *Czechoslovakia in European History*, 108-116.

<sup>92</sup> Olga Nešporová and Zdeněk R. Nešpor, “Religion: An Unsolved Problem for the Modern Czech Nation,” *Czech Sociological Review* 45, no. 6 (December 1, 2009): 1216, <https://doi.org/10.13060/00380288.2009.45.6.03>.

<sup>93</sup> David Otto Rossbach, “Cleavages, Social Engagement and Trust in Post -Communist Europe” (Ph.D., United States -- Texas, Texas A&M University), 28, accessed October 29, 2021, <https://www.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/304337596/abstract/89EE10C5E2B4470APQ/36>.

continents of Europe and Asia, and even in between the East and the West. Often, these lands were considered colonies of the more powerful colonial empires and not ruling empires themselves. As Rossbach points out, “Rule over these lands, and therefore the dominant culture during this period, was a culture imported from the heart of the great empire, be it Prussian, Russian, Austrian and to a lesser degree Ottoman. The battle between dominant cultures, then, was one of foreign occupier and native occupied.”<sup>94</sup> This aspect of history still weighs on the present-day Czech Republic, a small nation of 10 million people in the European Union, sometimes torn between the East and the West due to their unique cultural mix from historical influences.

### **Hussite Church Established**

When Czechoslovakia was formed in 1918 at the end of World War 1 Czechs gained their independence from the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Hapsburg Dynasty) and Catholicism as the religion of the State. Not long after Czech independence was declared, a Protestant church was formed called the Czechoslovak Hussite Church harkening back to the Protestant heritage of the Czech people. Many Czechs left the Roman Catholic Church during this time and joined this new national church. Some referred to this as a “new Czech Reformation,”<sup>95</sup> while it was really an “out-of-the-church movement connected with Czech nationalism, liberalism, and a general self-awareness.”<sup>96</sup> In the following years, though, many began to leave the established churches in general. It was a period when religious skepticism and anticlericalism could be expressed more freely without fear of reprisal, so Czechs took the opportunity to express their views. This

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<sup>94</sup> Rossbach, 28.

<sup>95</sup> Nešporová and Nešpor, “Religion,” 1216.

<sup>96</sup> Nešporová and Nešpor, 1216.

anticlericalism continued to increase and was fueled even more when the nation came under the Soviets influence after World War 2.<sup>97</sup>

### **Hitler and Munich Agreement**

A discussion of the causes of why those professing faith in Christ in evangelistic outreaches in the Czech Republic often do not connect with a local church body must also focus attention on the events of the last seventy years, specifically the period under communism from 1948-1989. The influence of atheistic communism and the events of World War 2 have had a very distinct effect on all of Europe and especially the citizens of former Czechoslovakia.

As mentioned earlier, the Czechs and Germans have had tense relations off and on for centuries. On September 30, 1938, Czechoslovakians were shocked and horrified when Germany, Italy, England, and France met and signed an appeasement document with Hitler ceding the Sudetenland region (western Czechoslovakia borderlands with Germany) to Nazi Germany and the Third Reich. The western nations hailed this as a remarkable feat of diplomacy, especially by Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain of the United Kingdom. They felt that they had avoided a potential war, of which Europe was still recovering and did not want to experience again. Unbeknownst to them, they had simply helped facilitate another step in the march towards World War 2. This singular event in modern history set in motion a series of events that would reverberate through history over the next fifty years.<sup>98</sup> In addition, it added another layer of distrust and animosity towards foreign powers that make up part of the modern Czech psyche. These underlying feelings and attitudes touch on the area that we are discussing in this paper of why Czechs are hesitant to join a local church community.

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<sup>97</sup> Furstova et al., "Czech Out the Atheists," 289.

<sup>98</sup> Seton-Watson, *A History of the Czechs and Slovaks*, 367-373.

## Communist Persecution

The Soviet Red Army liberated Czechoslovakia. However, United States Army General George Patton's Third Army had advanced to the outskirts of Prague from the West before the Soviets. Still, it withdrew to the line that had been agreed upon near Plzen, Czechoslovakia. This decision was made by Roosevelt (USA), Churchill (UK), and Stalin (USSR) at the Yalta conference already in 1943.<sup>99</sup> In the following months after Nazi Germany surrendered, the Soviets took over the administration of Czechoslovakia as the nation began to recover from the war in a period of "limited democracy."<sup>100</sup> During this time, the Czech Communist party, with the support of the Russians, began to exercise greater and greater influence. In 1948, the communist party won control of the Czechoslovak Republic in a vote in the Czechoslovak Parliament. This change of events would affect the next forty years of the nation's future until they were ousted in November 1989.

Under communism, people were seen as a collective entity instead of individual human beings with personal dignity and free will. Their fate and that of the nation were subjected to "true scientific values."<sup>101</sup> "All private property was confiscated; all political and human rights were suppressed."<sup>102</sup> The communist regime sought to strip away any form of personal individuality and mold the Czech nation into what it perceived the country and people should look like. Through "brainwashing and other "re-educational" techniques, the totalitarian regime compelled people to repudiate what they held "most sacred," first and foremost God (if they were believers) then their family, friends."<sup>103</sup> "Indoctrination was enforced at all levels, even in

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<sup>99</sup> Thomson, *Czechoslovakia in European History*, 427-433.

<sup>100</sup> "History | Embassy of the Czech Republic in Dublin."

<sup>101</sup> Margarita T Todorova, "The Effect of Communism on the Protestant Churches in Bulgaria," *Methodist History* 51, no. 1-2 (October 2012): 113.

<sup>102</sup> "History | Embassy of the Czech Republic in Dublin."

<sup>103</sup> Todorova, "The Effect of Communism on the Protestant Churches in Bulgaria," 113.

art and culture. Film directors and writers were expected to affirm the great achievements of the socialist reality and way of life and not depict the negative side of present-day life. A failure to do so was seen as defection due to foreign influence, mainly Western.”<sup>104</sup> Living in this sort of environment of constant conformity affects individuals and society over the years.<sup>105</sup>

For many Czechs that had already abandoned traditional religion after World War 1, this was not as much of a problem as it related to the church. The communist condemnation of religion and churches as the “opium of the masses” was easily accepted by most.<sup>106</sup> As Činčala points out, “the Communists were well aware of the advanced secularization within Czechoslovakia; they took full advantage of it, waiting to victoriously celebrate the burial of the Church.”<sup>107</sup> The communists helped the process along by taking control of all church properties and putting the clergy on the state payroll, further undermining any trust that someone might have in the Church. In many ways, Marxist communism is more than an economic or social theory; it is a worldview that borders on being a religion.<sup>108</sup> In addition, “the pressure for uniformity and the “no religion” policy impacted peoples’ self-worth; the government’s efforts to discourage individuality and to create a culture where all members were equal undermined people’s sense of uniqueness and value. Freedom of thought was limited, particularly in religious matters, and the fear of what others might think kept people away from the church.”<sup>109</sup> Czech people tend to be quite critical of one another, having a shame-based culture, which coupled together with the communist’s strategies “led many to doubt the value of religious

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<sup>104</sup> Todorova, 113.

<sup>105</sup> Justin Clardie, “Communist Legacies and Opposition Churches: Religious Behavior in Post-Communist Europe,” *Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe* 9, no. 1 (2016): 20-21.

<sup>106</sup> Nešporová and Nešpor, “Religion,” 1217.

<sup>107</sup> Činčala, “A Missional Outreach Model in the Czech Republic, a Postchristian, Secular Culture,” 56.

<sup>108</sup> Pavel Hanes, “Residual Marxism or the Need for Demarxification in Eastern Europe,” *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 8, no. 3 (May 2008): 22.

<sup>109</sup> Činčala, 57.



institutions.”<sup>110</sup> It is important to mention that many sociologists now recognize that it did not mean the Czechs had lost their religious or spiritual needs.<sup>111</sup>

Czechs have a desire to belong, but they are also proud. Činčala says that “Czechs are critical and intolerant of others. Although naturally friendly and sensitive, they often “armor” themselves as rough and suspicious. It is common for Czechs in the public sphere to be two-faced.”<sup>112</sup> He says that these are simply defense mechanisms that they have developed to protect themselves from being hurt. They do not want to be criticized and are concerned about what others might think or say about them. These attitudes and perspectives control the daily life of most Czechs.

This mindset causes Czechs to live in a dualistic world divided into their private and public spheres of life. It is as though Czechs live a double life. Who they are in private is not the same as who they are in public. According to Činčala, “It is impossible to truly know a Czech person in the public sphere. The private sphere is protected because that is where people treasure their dearest values-happiness, love, friendship, and relationships. The public arena, on the other hand, is like a jungle where people hide to catch their prey.”<sup>113</sup> People go to work to make a living and take care of their practical needs. There is a distinct difference for them between these two worlds. Rossbach concurs, saying, “post-communist individuals are noted for their cold public demeanor, and yet this is balanced by their steadfast loyalty as friends.”<sup>114</sup> Unfortunately, the church has been relegated to this public world of mistrust and aversion.

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<sup>110</sup> Činčala, 57.

<sup>111</sup> Nešporová and Nešpor, “Religion,” 1217.

<sup>112</sup> Činčala, “Church Revitalization after the Velvet Revolution in the Czech Republic,” 170-171.

<sup>113</sup> Činčala, 171.

<sup>114</sup> Rossbach, “Cleavages, Social Engagement and Trust in Post -Communist Europe,” 46.

Throughout history, the Czechs have been subjected to outside foreign powers coming in and forcibly taking control, oppressing the public, just as the communists did. The communists sought to totally transform society and change life at its foundations.<sup>115</sup> Činčala highlights an interesting aspect, “the communists were not satisfied with controlling the public sphere; they tried to gain access to people's private worlds as well. Yet, through this tyranny, the walls protecting the private part of people's lives grew thicker. The password into the private sphere of those who have been threatened is credibility and trust.”<sup>116</sup> Czechs simply became more suspicious and distrustful, which can be seen today.

“Communism, like all authoritarian governing systems, thrives best when exercised in an environment of great distrust. The institutional mechanisms of distrust abound in communist countries,” according to Rossbach.<sup>117</sup> It is interesting to look at the historical evidence from countries that were part of the Communist Bloc during Soviet times. As one researcher points out, there was a phenomenon called “blat.” “Blat is defined by Ledeneva as “the use of personal networks and informal contacts to obtain goods and services in short supply and to find a way around formal procedures.”<sup>118</sup> This informal system was built on trust. People did not trust the normal bureaucratic channels but found it was easier to rely on your personal friends and acquaintances that you could trust. The governments considered this as corruption and bribery because it was outside their control. The point is that for those under communism and even in post-communist countries like the Czech Republic, “trusting social networks continue to remain vital for the economic welfare of the citizens...and the poor in particular.”<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Miklós Tomka, “Religiosity in Central and Eastern Europe: Facts and Interpretations,” *Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe* 3, no. 1 (2010): 2.

<sup>116</sup> Činčala, “Church Revitalization after the Velvet Revolution in the Czech Republic,” 172.

<sup>117</sup> Rossbach, “Cleavages, Social Engagement and Trust in Post -Communist Europe,” 15.

<sup>118</sup> Rossbach, 28-29.

<sup>119</sup> Rossbach, 28-29.

## Fall of Communism

In November 1989, communism came crashing down in Czechoslovakia. That period is often referred to as the “Velvet Revolution” because it was a peaceful and bloodless transition of power compared to some of the other surrounding communist nations that also saw regime changes in that season of time. There was a newfound sense of freedom in the air, and many Czechs swarmed to churches and evangelistic meetings. Sadly, this sense of hunger began to wane after a few years, and the mainstream churches that had seen their congregations swell lost as much as 30% to 50% of their members.<sup>120</sup> Many thought that “the breakdown of communism would automatically lead to a revival of churches, no such thing happened.”<sup>121</sup>

According to Cincala, a Czech researcher, he determined that Czechs were not irreligious in his early research, as the government census indicated. In fact, of “the 60% of Czechs claiming no formal profession of faith, 99% of those Czechs who were studied, it was found that they did believe in a higher power and were not opposed to a spiritual faith.”<sup>122</sup> His observation about Czech’s beliefs was that “People doubt the importance of the church, not faith,” or “For the majority of atheists, God is not an alien concept; however, the way in which the church presents him has left them angry.”<sup>123</sup>

This widening gap between the church and society after the Velvet Revolution can be explained in several ways. The traditional churches, including the Catholic Church, missed their opportunity to explain longstanding questions that Czechs had with their practices throughout the centuries. Czechs had legitimate questions about the condemnation and burning of John Hus, the

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<sup>120</sup> Cincala, “A Missional Outreach Model in the Czech Republic, a Postchristian, Secular Culture,” 56.

<sup>121</sup> Petr Sláma, “Notes from the Coasts of Bohemia or in Search of Alternative Polis,” *Communio Viatorum* 61, no. 2 (2019): 117.

<sup>122</sup> Cincala, 57.

<sup>123</sup> Cincala, 57.

Counter-Reformation, the church's role in the domination by foreign rulers and wars, as well as their claims for restitution, and vying for power and control.<sup>124</sup> This contributed to growing disillusionment with organized Christianity among Czech people who viewed faith more as a private matter. These things combined to put the organized church into the sphere of a public institution, which could no longer be trusted. "For an increasing number of nonbelievers, the church had stopped mattering."<sup>125</sup>

### **Fear of "Cults"**

Another factor that is important to consider in this dilemma of newborn Czech Christians hesitating to join a local church community is the fear of "cults" or being swept up into some sort of extremism. This is understandable on one level when you consider an average Czech's perspective of a newborn Christian friend who suddenly goes from being irreligious to being very religious. As pointed out earlier, Czechs are very critical of one another and do not want to be seen to be "out of step" with what is considered "normal." Besides, the Church is generally associated with "loss of freedom, loss of happiness, loss of friends, loss of self, loss of comfort, and perhaps even loss of peace. People's reserve toward the church is nurtured by various fears."<sup>126</sup> As Cincala points out, quite simply, people are "afraid that church would invade and spoil their most valuable domain-their private (and safe) world."<sup>127</sup>

### **Secularization**

When communism fell in 1989, there was a new openness and excitement about Christianity and religion in general. As Furstova points out, "there was a short wave of

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<sup>124</sup> Cincala, 58.

<sup>125</sup> Cincala, 58.

<sup>126</sup> Činčala, "Church Revitalization after the Velvet Revolution in the Czech Republic," 171.

<sup>127</sup> Činčala, 171.

enthusiasm for religion, connected with the positive role of the church during the turbulent times, the newly acquired freedoms, and a desire to make a political statement against the communist regime.”<sup>128</sup> Petr Činčala recounts the same thing in his research into revitalizing the churches after the fall of communism in 1989. He says, “Despite the newfound freedom and possibilities, people are drifting away from the churches more than ever before. Among the church leaders, there is a growing realization that people are not interested in the church. Although in the few years following the Velvet Revolution, hundreds of people were baptized, now the church is sidelined and not growing any longer.”<sup>129</sup> He points out that many churches have lost as much as 30-50 percent of their members.

In the 1991 census, there was a question on religious affiliation, the first time since the 1950 census.<sup>130</sup> In the 1991 census, 43.9% indicated they were believers (in God), with the majority saying they were Catholic. These numbers began to wane statistically over the coming years, eventually arriving at the current statistics that indicate 79% of Czechs do not believe in God.<sup>131</sup>

There are several hypotheses about why this happened. One camp endorses the idea that Czechs have become increasingly atheistic with the further secularization of their culture, besides other factors such as the death of older adults who were more religious and a lessening interest in the church among the younger generations. Others argue that it is more an issue of Czechs becoming disillusioned with the Catholic Church due to media attention on the Church’s efforts for restitution of property confiscated under the Nazi and Communist regimes in previous

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<sup>128</sup> Furstova et al., “Czech Out the Atheists,” 289.

<sup>129</sup> Činčala, “Church Revitalization after the Velvet Revolution in the Czech Republic,” 165-166.

<sup>130</sup> Furstova et al., “Czech Out the Atheists,” 289.

<sup>131</sup> “CSU 2011 Czech Government Stats-Religion.”

decades coupled with scandals among the clergy. However, that has been minimal in Czechia.<sup>132</sup> Those arguing this last point says this is evidence that this is more “Czech anticlericalism” rather than atheism and should be viewed as simply “religious skepticism.”<sup>133</sup> Still, others point out that institutional religion has failed to connect with people's felt needs, leading to an exodus to other forms of spirituality to find and experience life-giving faith.<sup>134</sup>

In Furstova’s research and others, there is strong evidence that Czechs are deeply spiritual people but reject the boxes society and government creates for them.<sup>135</sup> Many Czechs simply refuse to answer the questions on the censuses because they do not want to divulge something that is very personal to them.<sup>136</sup> For Czechs, “their search for spirituality can be referred to as “believing without belonging,” very often even accompanied by strong anti-church feelings.”<sup>137</sup>

Činčala concurs, saying, “my survey on religiosity indicated that 99 percent of all Czechs seem to believe in something and are not opposed to faith.”<sup>138</sup> He goes on to say that the deeper issue for many Czechs is a “deep aversion toward organized religion and the church in particular.”<sup>139</sup> As Činčala says, many people are spiritually hungry, but they are tired of traditional religion. In a survey of Czech atheists, he found people made statements like: "People doubt church, not Christianity;" or "For the majority of atheists, God is not an alien notion, only

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<sup>132</sup> Furstova et al, 289..

<sup>133</sup> Furstova et al, 290.

<sup>134</sup> Roderick R Hewitt, “The Changing Landscape of Christianity and the Challenging Context of Secularism,” *The Ecumenical Review* 67, no. 4 (December 2015): 549, <https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12188>.

<sup>135</sup> Furstova et al, 290.

<sup>136</sup> Nešporová and Nešpor, “Religion,” 1220.

<sup>137</sup> Furstova et al., “Czech Out the Atheists,” 290.

<sup>138</sup> Činčala, “Church Revitalization after the Velvet Revolution in the Czech Republic,” 169.

<sup>139</sup> Činčala, 170.

the way faith in Him is presented by the present conception of religion.”<sup>140</sup> While these views are certainly not those of everyone, they do give a glimpse into the thinking of many Czech people. We will look more deeply into some of the possible reasons for these views further in this section.

The atheistic communist system that held sway in Czechoslovakia from 1948 to 1989 sought to control every part of Czech culture and society. As mentioned earlier, they tried to control both the public and private spheres of people’s lives. To satisfy Czech citizens’ spiritual longings, they endeavored to replace religion with more rational and natural things, such as beer at the local Pub, sports, nature, and horoscopes. As pointed out by Nesporova, Czechs are spiritual people.<sup>141</sup> They often seek to fulfill those deep urges through naturalistic outlets but separate them from traditional religious connections.

The Czech Republic is one of the highest beer drinking per capita nations globally to this day.<sup>142</sup> Beer is deeply interwoven with their culture, and the local Pub is a place that people go to socialize. In some respects, the local Pub mirrors some of the same characteristics that should be in a local church. In addition, horoscopes and alternate spiritual pathways abound, seeking to assuage the hunger for spiritual answers. Cincala says, “Czechs replace socio-spiritual activities, church, and institutionalized religion with the pub, nature, sports, and horoscopes. There is also a growing group of spiritually hungry people who search for plausible religious forms and are often attracted to nontraditional spiritual movements (cults, sects, or secret religious circles).

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<sup>140</sup> Činčala, 170.

<sup>141</sup> Nešporová and Nešpor, “Religion,” 1233-1234.

<sup>142</sup> C. Castiglione et al., “The Demand for Beer in Presence of Past Consumption and Advertising in the Czech Republic,” *Agricultural Economics (Zemědělská Ekonomika)* 57, no. No. 12 (n.d.): 589–99.

Such groups attract Czechs today who are looking for fellowship to satisfy their felt needs, regardless of whether or not it is biblically grounded.”<sup>143</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I have shown a historical pattern of betrayal by foreign powers, totalitarian regimes, including the Catholic Church, that tried to oppress Czech people, affecting how they relate to Christianity and the church today. I have studied some of the causes of why those professing faith in Christ in evangelistic outreaches in the Czech Republic often do not connect with a local church body and other hindrances to becoming disciples of Christ according to Matt. 28:19-20. This section will summarize the research that I have looked at and then present some potential solutions. Some of the solutions are outside the scope of this paper, so they will only be briefly introduced and explained to offer how they could be a part of the overall solution.

I believe that God is at work in this nation and the lives of each person. He is reaching out to them, desiring for them to hear and understand the Good News of Jesus, repent, and believe in Christ, then become active participants in His Body, the local, visible church where they live in order to reach others around them with the same Life transforming message.

One important detail that I found in my research that surfaced often was that Czech people are not as atheistic as some may believe when looking at the basic statistics. I should point out that the raw data from Czech government censuses could be interpreted in several ways. The questions that were on the census have been debated as to their effectiveness. It seems that they have been left intentionally vague. But in a deeply secular nation such as the Czech Republic, there is not a strong motivation by the government to reinforce the traditional

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<sup>143</sup> Činčala, “Church Revitalization after the Velvet Revolution in the Czech Republic,” 172.



institutionalized churches. They want to keep the institutionalized church out of the halls of power and influence.

The deeper issue for many Czechs is a “deep aversion toward organized religion and the church in particular.”<sup>144</sup> As I looked at history, I found that the Catholic Church was often the cause or at least complicit in some of the historical actions taken against the ancestors of modern Czechs. There has evolved a deep mistrust and suspicion of the organized church and religion in the Czech corporate psyche.

According to Cincala, a Czech researcher, he determined that Czechs were not irreligious, but disillusioned with institutionalized religion. His observation about Czech’s beliefs was that “People doubt the importance of the church, not faith,” or “For the majority of atheists, God is not an alien concept; however, the way in which the church presents him has left them angry. Many Czechs simply refuse to answer the questions on the government censuses because they do not want to divulge something that is very personal to them.”<sup>145</sup> Thomason points out that the Slavs in general, but the Czechs specifically are individualists.<sup>146</sup> They do not like to be put in a box. For Czechs, “their search for spirituality can be referred to as “believing without belonging,” very often even accompanied by strong anti-church feelings.”<sup>147</sup>

In addition, Czechs have been subjected to foreign domination and betrayal frequently throughout history. Their culture and language were suppressed and even forbidden at times. This added another layer to their fierce pride and identification of what it means to be a Czech. Lastly, the secularization of their nation beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and then facilitated by the

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<sup>144</sup> Činčala, 170.

<sup>145</sup> Furstova et al., “Czech Out the Atheists,” 290.

<sup>146</sup> Thomson, *Czechoslovakia in European History*, 9.

<sup>147</sup> Furstova et al., “Czech Out the Atheists,” 290.

atheistic communists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century helped create further obstacles to individuals connecting to a local body of believers.

I found that these various experiences in their history have created a deep-seated sense of distrust in Czech culture, especially of public institutions and anything that seeks to control them from outside. As one researcher said, Czechs have a very dualistic world: their public life and private life. Trust is reserved for those in their private world to whom they give their allegiances.<sup>148</sup> Unfortunately, as pointed out, the church has been relegated to this public world of mistrust and aversion.

### **A Movement of "Cell" or "House" Churches**

In the research and through personal experience, I can see that Czech people still have a deep spiritual hunger. I believe that there is still hope, and God is at work in this nation, regardless of what government censuses may indicate. While Czechs may not identify with institutional religion or forms of faith, many are still seeking. Cincala says it well: “They seek in secret because they fear ostracism and hurt. Rationally they know there is something (somebody) above; however, their religious feelings are blocked by their personal fears. God's arms are open for them. God is waiting to be accepted. God desires to answer their questions, and God wants to share His love with them in meaningful ways.”<sup>149</sup>

Czechs are looking for authentic relationships where they can trust others. This will not be done through any institutionalized methods. Cincala points out, “when unchurched come to church, they often face a lack of acceptance and a pressure to conform. In the eyes of unchurched people, the values of the public sphere-uniformity, manipulation, and control-also have

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<sup>148</sup> Činčala, “Church Revitalization after the Velvet Revolution in the Czech Republic,” 170-171.

<sup>149</sup> Činčala, 177.

permeated organized religion.”<sup>150</sup> On the contrary, the unchurched are looking for people that genuinely care about them and are willing to share God’s love with them. People that will not criticize them for doubt, skepticism, or any hidden issues of their heart. “Unchurched people are looking for how one's faith in God connects with and applies to daily life. They are looking for a religion that is practical and relevant and addresses their felt needs.”<sup>151</sup> They are like the sheep that Jesus spoke of without a shepherd (Matt 9:35-38).

I believe the Lord wants to use small groups or house churches as a possible avenue for change. There are many varieties of these methods being used around the world today, all based on Scripture. I am not necessarily advocating for any specific method, but I do see their importance in Scripture. The Scripture says in Acts 2:46 that the early church met in “the temple...and from house to house.” That says that we need to explore this more intimate and personal method of ministry in the Czech Republic, where people tend to have an aversion to anything that looks institutionalized. It needs to be an environment that fosters personal relationships and builds trust. I should note that Czechs are very hesitant to open their homes to others.

Petr Cinčala, a Czech, highlights his experiences along this line in a church planting effort and outreaches that he conducted in his hometown of Liberec, Czech Republic, beginning in the late 1990s. He highlights some of his research in the Great Commission Research Journal 2020, Vol. 12. One of the things that he and his team found helpful was building relationships with fellow Czechs through music and the arts. They organized a local community center from which they hosted a pre-school, gave art lessons, started a musical choir group eventually hosting

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<sup>150</sup> Činčala, 172-173.

<sup>151</sup> Činčala, 172-173.

“Christian concerts, festivals, rehearsals, and art sessions.”<sup>152</sup> The interesting thing is that many of those initially involved were not believers or followers of Christ. But these activities allowed them to build personal relationships with people in the community. Through the years, they were eventually able to lead some of these people to Christ. My point in sharing this is the importance of building trusting relationships that become a bridge to share Christ. As he says, “once relationships were built and cherished, people were more open to God.”<sup>153</sup>

Cincala concludes by saying that, “This missional outreach model has fostered spiritual healing of the wounds in the Czech psyche...(and) demonstrates a culturally relevant and indigenous expression of Christianity in one of the most secular contexts one can presently encounter.”<sup>154</sup> While this particular model will probably not work for everyone, I think it illustrates that the ministry of making disciples will only move effectively at the pace of holistic and trusting relationships. As Stefan Paas, a Dutch church planter and missiologist, says, “the strategy for the future must be the creation of countercultural communities, living out an alternative lifestyle based on gospel values amidst an essentially pagan culture.”<sup>155</sup>

### **Spiritual Warfare**

An important area of discussion is that of spiritual warfare. Almost everything discussed in this paper has approached all the issues from a natural perspective or a cause and effect of natural, historical events. The Bible is clear that there is an invisible realm and a visible realm to this world that we live in. Scripture says that Christ created all things that are in heaven and on the earth, “visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities.” (Col

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<sup>152</sup> Cincala, “A Missional Outreach Model in the Czech Republic, a Postchristian, Secular Culture,” 10.

<sup>153</sup> Cincala, 10.

<sup>154</sup> Cincala, 11.

<sup>155</sup> Stefan Paas, *Church Planting in the Secular West: Learning from the European Experience*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 187.

1:16) Throughout the Bible, we see references to this invisible realm where there are both angels and demons, forces of God's Kingdom and the Kingdom of Darkness. Jesus makes specific references to Satan, or Lucifer, the ruler of the forces of darkness. (Matt 4:1-11; John 8:44) The Apostle Paul also refers to this enemy in Eph 2:2 saying, "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience." Again, in Eph 6:12, he highlights this spiritual battle saying, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."

It is critical to recognize that there is a natural and spiritual aspect to the work of God's Kingdom. It is also crucial that we not forget 1 Pet 5:8, which says, "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." We have an adversary against us, but he is also against anyone that might potentially believe in Jesus and the good news about Him. 2 Cor 4:3-4 says, "if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case, the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

Satan and his forces do not want people to know about Christ or follow Him and be His disciples. We need to be aware of this dimension as we go about the work of sharing the Gospel and making disciples as Christ commanded us. I believe that part of the issue facing the Church in the Czech Republic is this dimension of spiritual warfare. There is an enemy that seeks to bring fear, doubt, distrust, fear of betrayal, etc., and keep people from being connected to other Christians. I believe that Satan desires to "sift you (all of us) like wheat" (Lk 22:31) and destroy our lives, keeping people from fulfilling their God-ordained destiny. Jesus said this was the

*'modus operandi'* of the thief, or the devil, in John 10:10, “to steal and kill and destroy.” We are told in Scripture to resist the devil and his works and not to give him any place or opportunity. (Jas 4:7; Eph 4:27) This infers that we have a role and even a responsibility to pray and stand against his plots and schemes that would try to deter the work of making disciples of Jesus.

### **Final Thoughts**

In this paper, I have highlighted some of the reasons that hinder Czech people from connecting to a local church. I believe that having an awareness of these issues can help Christians be more strategic and sensitive in making disciples for Christ. I have also looked at some of the potentials in small groups or house churches to bridge these gaps. Finally, I discussed the spiritual dimension of recognizing the importance of spiritual warfare and realizing that this work is not only a natural work but also a spiritual work utilizing spiritual resources.

I believe that the Czech Republic is a strategic place in the plans of God and His kingdom. Just as it sits at the center and heart of Europe in the physical and geographical sense, I also believe it sits at a strategic intersection in the spiritual sense. Otto von Bismarck, the famed German Chancellor who united Germany in 1871, said, “he who is master of Bohemia is master of Europe.”<sup>156</sup> My prayer is that Jesus would be discovered once again in truth and honesty by the Czech people and made master of their lives and ultimately of all of Europe.

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<sup>156</sup> Thomson, *Czechoslovakia in European History*, 4.

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