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Where is it heading?
Religion in late modernity in the Czech Republic

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Where is it heading? Religion in late modernity in the Czech Republic¹

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to demonstrate how religion—the set of traditions and the source of collective memory—is perceived in the Czech Republic by individuals with different levels of religiosity. The article concentrates on the way in which religion is perceived in an environment characterised by strong indifference to religious matters and a low level of declared religiosity. The paper asks whether religion in such an environment possesses the potential to stabilise (or to destabilise) society; it further compares whether the way religion is perceived by the community of traditionally religious people differs from the way it is perceived by people who practice alternative faiths.

An analysis of ISSP 2008 data shows that there are rather negative perceptions of religion in the Czech Republic, and this view is influenced by the level of religiosity. Thus the more religious (alternatively or traditionally) people are, the more positive perceptions about religion they will hold. This study finds that controlled sociodemographic characteristics such as sex, age and education do not have any statistically significant influence on perceptions of religion.

Keywords: religion, memory, secularisation, perception, alternative religiosity, traditional religiosity, Czech Republic

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Introduction

The situation of traditions is very paradoxical in the modern world. Traditions are necessary for society for social cohesion; it is the essence of traditions that holds society together. If there were no traditions, people would always begin at the same point, and progress would be impossible. Many theorists claim that traditions are slowly disappearing from society. This disintegration of traditions is caused by the process of modernisation, as well as parallel processes such as individualisation, globalisation, consumerism and urbanisation.² Furthermore, from the point of view of modernisation, traditions are not necessary for progress; on the contrary, they are barriers to it.

Religion is a good example of a questionable and discussed tradition in the 'modern' world. Religion itself was a 'great' tradition that structured the lives of people and stabilised society for many years. Religion used to have a positive meaning for society that it has lost today. This shift in the thinking about religion may be seen as an influence of modernisation, in particular secularisation. The functions that religion once had have been transferred to different areas. The theory of secularisation has been contested in its original sense, however, and researchers are now trying to show that religion cannot entirely disappear.³ This challenge of secularisation in the context of rising uncertainty nationwide (in this case in the Czech Republic) should result in a rediscovery of the functions of religion, rather than its extinction. In other words, people might look to religion for the certainty that is currently missing in their lives.⁴

The purpose of this article is to present how religion, as a set of traditions and a source of collective memory that provided social cohesion for a long time, is perceived in late modernity in the Czech Republic. The findings could contribute to answering the question of why and to what extent religion has or has not been re-discovered in the Czech Republic. Thus the theoretical part of the article focusses mainly on the meaning of religion and the relationship between religion and memory. The empirical part of the article presents the results of a regression analysis based on the data of ISSP 2008.

Theory

Religion: What did it once mean and what does it mean today?

² See for example: Jean-Francois Lyotard, *O postmodernismu* (Praha: Filozofický ústav AV ČR, 1993); Zygmunt Bauman, *Individualizovaná společnost* (Praha: Mladá fronta, 1999); Ulrich Beck, *Riziková společnost: na cestě k jiné moderně* (Praha: Slon, 2002).

³ See for example: Zdeněk Nešpor, *Jaká víra? Současná česká religiozita/spiritualita v pohledu kvalitativní sociologie náboženství* (Praha: Sociologický ústav AV ČR, 2004); Dana Hamplová, "Čemu Češi věří: dimenze soudobé české religiozity," *Sociologický časopis* 44 (2008): 703–723; Dana Hamplová and Blanka Řeháková, *Česká religiozita na počátku 3. tisíciletí* (Praha: Sociologický ústav AV ČR, 2009), Radek Tichý and David Vávra, *Náboženství z jiného úhlu* (Brno: CDK, 2012).

The position of religion as a tradition that structures peoples' lives has changed over time. In history we can find periods where people celebrated religion and periods where they criticised it. Although there is not room in this article to discuss each period from antiquity to the present, it is important to understand the context of modernity and post-modernity/late modernity, because these are principal periods connected with changing the meaning of religion in the present through debates about secularisation.

The importance of modernity is that modernity itself can be seen as a 'midwife of secularisation'.⁵ The tendency to a decrease of importance of religion that is well known from modernity began earlier, during the Enlightenment. This period of history was characterised by a belief in reason and progress; it replaced the belief in God with the belief in reason.⁶ Some early modern authors presupposed that religion would completely disappear from society, while others predicted that religion would be transformed. In other words, authors tried to describe what the role of religion would be in this new type of society. In this context, we can mention three key authors—Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx and Max Weber. Marx refused religion in the sense that it was an ideological instrument and the 'opium of mankind'⁷; this instrument would be unnecessary in a classless society. In his view, religion was an instrument of the elite for disciplining society.⁸ Weber connected religion with 'disenchantment' of the world when religion became only one type of social action.⁹ Durkheim presupposed the disappearance of religion, albeit only in its original form; still, he thought, it should be present in society in the form of rituals, which provide social cohesion. He also anticipated a rise of new activities and ceremonies that would replace the existing ones.¹⁰ The ideas of these authors later became an integral part of theories of secularisation.

The conception of secularisation is, however, quite problematic, because there are many theories of secularisation rather than one overarching theory. This is why the sociologist Roman Vido suggests using the term *secularisation paradigm*. The term *paradigm* is better for including a wide field of debates about secularisation, because it is collective (i.e. not individual), it stimulates scientific research and it does not need to have one overarching theory.¹¹ In its original sense, *secularisation* should mean the gradual disappearance of religion from society. In late modernity this conception has not been tenable, and authors have stopped claiming in their theories that religion will completely disappear from society. According to the sociologist James Beckford, we

⁴ Jan Váně, *Komunita jako nová naděje?* (Plzeň: Západočeská univerzita, 2012).

⁵ Roman, Vido, *Konec velkého vyprávění? Sekularizace v sociologické perspektivě* (Brno: CDK, 2011), 34–35.

⁶ Jan Keller, *Dějiny klasické sociologie* (Praha: SLON, 2007), 36.

⁷ Karl Marx and Joseph J. O'Malley, *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'* (London: University of Cambridge, 1982), 138.

⁸ Marx and O'Malley, *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'*, 138.

⁹ Max Weber, *Sociologie náboženství* (Praha: Vyšehrad, 1998).

¹⁰ Émile Durkheim, *Elementární formy náboženského života: systém totemismu v Austrálii* (Praha: Oikoymenh, 2002).

¹¹ Vido, *Konec velkého vyprávění?*, 22–32.

can distinguish six different streams of secularisation thoughts that form secularisation theories. The first stream is built on the thoughts of Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer, and partly on those of Émile Durkheim. The main idea of this stream of thought is a structural differentiation. Structural differentiation means that religion has become just one of many subsystems; one with very low influence. The second stream continues the thoughts of David Hume and other members of the Scottish Enlightenment, as well as the French encyclopaedists. An emphasis on empiricism and scientism is in the background of this stream of thought; religion is justified only in the form of 'original religion' that is grounded in human reason. The third stream is based on the thoughts of Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsche; it accents the inner dynamics of religion and its transformation in the context of social and cultural changes. The fourth stream is connected with classic figures of liberalism such as John Stuart Mill and John Locke; it is based on the institutionalisation of religion and the problematisation of religious tolerance. The fifth stream is inspired by Marxism; this stream views religion as a part of an oppressive social system. The sixth and final stream refers to Sigmund Freud and his psychoanalytical theory, in which religion is viewed as a 'collective neurosis'.¹² The paradigm thus is useful to include this wide range of thoughts about secularisation.

Meanwhile, theorists of secularisation abandoned thinking of secularisation as the disappearance of religion from society altogether, and tried to find new explanations¹³ in the sense of some transformation of religion, which sometimes implies a theory of individualisation. We can summarise these theories that, in agreement with secularisation theories, religion does have some place in society, but it is nevertheless greatly limited. Although religion is often associated with the private sphere, we often witness its presence in the public sphere; we speak about desecularisation and deprivatisation.¹⁴ Researchers have also responded to this, showing that religion does have some place in the public sphere.¹⁵

This fragmentation of secularisation theory is a good example of trends in post-modernity, which is characterised by the rejection of clarity and a shift to plurality.¹⁶ A large number of different theories means that there are many opinions about the validity of secularisation in society. In other words, while some authors claim religion still has meaning (and thus there is no secularisation in the original sense), others still argue that society is still going through the process

¹² Vido, *Konec velkého vyprávění?*, 35–36.

¹³ See for example: Bryan R. Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969); Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion. The Problem of Religion in Modern Society* (London: Collier-Macmillan LTD., 1967); Peter L. Berger, *Posvátný baldachýn* (NY: Anchor Books, 1967), etc.

¹⁴ José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

¹⁵ See for example: Lucie Jarkovská a Kateřina Lišková, "Tradice, její rozpad a záchrana skrze sex: Diskurzivní strategie odpůrců sexuální výchovy," *Sociologický časopis* 2 (2013): 269–290; František Kalvas et al., "Rámcování a nastolování agendy: Dva paralelní proces v interakci," *Sociologický časopis* 48 (2012): 3–37; Lee Marsden and Heather Savigny, *Media, Religion and Conflict* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009); Johanna Sumiala-Seppänen and Knut Lundby, *Implications of the Sacred in (post) Modern Media* (Göteborg: Nordicom, 2006), etc.

¹⁶ Lyotard, *O postmodernismu*.

of secularisation. The authors Peter Berger and Steve Bruce are good examples. Berger withdrew his theory of secularisation under changing circumstances. He problematises secularisation through the increase of fundamental religious movements, and due to the fact that the United States as a modern superpower is still quite religious.¹⁷ According to Berger, ‘the assumption that we live in a secularised world is false. The world today ... is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever’.¹⁸ Bruce stands in opposition to Berger’s statements, finding them unsatisfactory; he justifies the theory of secularisation. Bruce sees a confirmation of secularisation in religious revival, not refusal; he also finds that alternative religiosity does not mean a denial of secularisation. As a result, people do not understand this alternative in the spiritual sense, nor are they very frequently in contact with it. In Bruce’s view, secularisation is a change in religion, which means a decrease of religion.¹⁹

In the Czech context, there has also been ongoing debate about secularisation and the position of religion in society. The main topic of debate is whether or not the Czech Republic is an atheistic nation. Researchers have tried to explain the causes of the low level of religiosity in the country with four main explanations. The first is successful but superficial re-Catholisation after the Battle of White Mountain. The second is an anti-Catholic focus of national revival. The third is the refusal of clericalism connected with the acceptance of civic liberalism thinking by political representation. The fourth is the valued pragmatism of the majority. According to the scholar of religion David Václavík, the only correct explanation is one that combines religious behaviour with considerations of the deep economic, social and political changes that Czech society has undergone since the nineteenth century.²⁰ The sociologist Petr Pabian also discusses the causes of the low level of religiosity; he connects it with communism, which had strong support in the Czech society and stood against only partly mobilised Catholicism. This led to an indifference to religious characteristics for Czech society.²¹ Although communism is a frequently used explanation, because the system attempted to do away with religion through strict repression, it is wrong to view the context of communism as a specific form of secularisation, because studies measuring religiosity have shown that the Czech Republic does not differ much from other countries in this regard. Ongoing processes affecting the nation are similar to processes happening in other European countries.²²

So far I have described the context that has influenced the perception of religion today. The

¹⁷ Peter L. Berger, *Vzdálená sláva. Hledání víry ve věku lehkověrnosti* (Brno: Barrister&Principal, 1997), 30–34.

¹⁸ Peter L. Berger, *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Washington: the Ethics and Public Policy Centre, 1999), 2.

¹⁹ Steve Bruce, *Secularization, In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 104–112.

²⁰ David Václavík, *Náboženství a moderní česká společnost* (Praha: Grada, 2010), 53–74.

²¹ Petr Pabian, “Alternativní příběh české sekularity,” *Sociální studia* 2 (2013): 85–105.

²² Petr Fiala, *Laboratoř sekularizace. Náboženství a politika v ne-náboženské společnosti: český případ* (Brno: ČDK, 2007), 9–12.

perception of religion is important because from history we know of cases when religion was reinvigorated if it could satisfy the needs of the people. Today, we live in a period characterised by a high level of uncertainty. We no longer blindly believe in the idea that progress is a guarantee of survival. In other words, we no longer believe in the idea that has systematically disturbed religious values and has caused us to move away from religion. The idea that modern societies would be able to ensure peoples' safety and welfare has not proven to be the case. These circumstances should open some space for religion. Experiencing existential uncertainty, a sense of danger or desire for human contact and solidarity, or answering the question of why we exist are still important factors for individuals, and should be a reason for seeking religion or other spiritual forms.²³ In other words, in late modernity, religion should become a renewed resource of certainty and stability in the sense of discovery of a 'lost paradise' in a religious community.²⁴ But this can only be possible if religion overcomes a few barriers connected with modernity and the process of secularisation.

The first challenge that needs to be resolved is disputes over the definition of religion. Bruce criticises post-modern approaches that argue that 'religion' is merely a modern construct as if there was contrasting category of naturally occurring nouns.²⁵

There are two main approaches to defining religion—functional and substantive. These perspectives are the key to determining the validity of secularisation. The functional definitions are very inclusive. According to these definitions, what religion does in society is important. In this sense, religion has several functions: for example, providing strategies to overcome problems that humans face in their daily lives (e.g. hopelessness, futility, despair and so on).²⁶ Religion provides solutions to otherwise unanswerable questions of being, or it can bind people together in forms of collective action. The problem with these kinds of definitions is that they are too broad; thus, it is difficult to draw precise boundaries about what religion is or is not.²⁷ That is why the sociologist and scholar of globalisation Roland Robertson claims that if we defined religion through a functional perspective, we could not speak about a decrease or weakening of religion, because this definition is so broad that it could include many phenomena such as nationalism, socialism and so on.²⁸ Bruce even claims that functional definitions are not definitions of religion, but rather assertions about the consequences of religion substantively defined.²⁹ He is an advocate for substantive definitions. In this approach, it is not important what religion *does* in society but rather what it *is*: what the 'essence' or the 'substance' is. The main feature of this definition is the

²³ Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular. Religion and Politics Worldwide* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 245–246.

²⁴ Váně, *Komunita jako nová naděje?*, 13.

²⁵ Steve Bruce, "Defining Religion: A Practical Response," *International Review of Sociology* 1 (2011): 108.

²⁶ Keith A. Robert and David Yamane, *Religion in Sociological Perspective* (London: SAGE, 2012), 6–7.

²⁷ Grace Davie, *The Sociology of Religion* (London: SAGE, 2007), 19–20.

²⁸ Vido, *Konec velkého vyprávění?*, 63–64.

²⁹ Bruce, "Defining Religion," 107.

distinction between the sacred and the profane. This kind of definition is also problematic, however, because it directs researchers' attention only to traditional forms of religion, whereas they overlook new forms of religiosity.³⁰ In the context of secularisation, substantive definitions do not permit a change in substance when religion is changed: the change means a sign of secularisation. Sometimes the pursuit of defining religion hides what Bruce correctly highlights: 'what is interesting about the strong-weak religion debate is that nothing hinged on the definition of religion'.³¹ The true importance of the approach to religion is operationalising, identifying and measuring the features of religion and of all the other social phenomena that we wish to deploy in our explanations.³² We have to bear in mind that 'definitions are not mirrors of reality to be judged as "true" or "false" but are tools that can be seen by those who use them as more or less useful (Berger, 1997)'.³³

Another challenge lies in something that can be called the *structural conditions* of society. By this I mean barriers that determine thinking about religion in a particular society. There could be restrictions when people cannot declare their religiosity, or negative perceptions of religion when people do not declare religiosity due to social control: because it is not good to believe. In the Czech Republic, there is an idea that the cause for the discontinuity of religion is the set of structural conditions: for example, communism. This does not fully explain why the revival of some religious beliefs is still not possible. In other words, why people no longer look to religion during uncertain times, or why religion is not successful in meeting people's needs. There have to be other reasons than political pressure; for example, a low level of trust in the Church when people prefer to remain without belief than re-accepting the teachings of the Church. 'Institutions can be changed instantly. But people must forget and re-learn ... In any case, people seem to change less quickly than institutions'.³⁴

Furthermore, the decline of believers could also be related to a negative perception of religion in our society: people connect religion with such negative factors as child abuse scandals, discrimination against homosexuals and terrorism.³⁵ It is possible that non-religious affiliation (or participation in different traditions, including seemingly 'distant' alternatives) could be caused by legislative regulations (typical of a communist regime) or by scandals such as those that have plagued the Catholic Church.³⁶ We need to know what the barriers are that cause weak religious

³⁰ Robert and Yamane, *Religion in Sociological Perspective*, 4–6.

³¹ Bruce, "Defining Religion," 116.

³² Bruce, "Defining Religion," 118.

³³ Robert and Yamane, *Religion in Sociological Perspective*, 4.

³⁴ Meulemann Heiner, "Enforced Secularization - Spontaneous Revival?: Religious Belief, Unbelief, Uncertainty and Indifference in East and West European Countries 1991-1998". *European Sociological Review*. 1 (2004): 60.

³⁵ Ulrich Beck, *A God of one's own: religion's capacity for peace and potential violence* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), 125.

³⁶ Daniel M. Hungerman, "Substitution and Stigma: Evidence on Religious Competition from the Catholic Sex-Abuse

transmission. Why do all mothers not religiously socialise their children, and why are all children not believers when they reach adulthood? We need to determine why the new generation sees more de-conversion than conversion, and why there are ever-lower numbers of religious parents, and thus a decline in the numbers of believers.³⁷

One example of distancing from an idea of religion in the Czech context is the debate about sex education that took place in Czech schools in 2010. After the Ministry of Education published a brochure about sex education, there was a great public outcry against sex education in schools. These initiatives were likely successful because the religious discourse was replaced by a cultural discourse. The conservative cultural discourse was easier to accept than the religious discourse because of the lukewarm religious climate in the Czech Republic. The Christian right finds the most success in topics where it uses secular discourse: pseudoscientific arguments about physical and mental health, as well as therapeutic discourses on self-acceptance and self-improvement.³⁸ Thus, people relate to religion when it is replaced by another discourse.

I would like to deal with these challenges to some extent. First, for my analysis it is not important what the function or substance of religion is. I will use the survey's data for analysis, operating with the assumption of an individual's pre-understanding of the term *religion*. The important thing is the collective memory of the respondents, rather than precisely defining the term *religion*. The next chapter, as a result, is dedicated to the concept of memory in relation to religion. Second, in the analysis that follows I will try to determine if there are barriers in the perception of religion in the Czech Republic that impede its revitalisation, and whether or not these barriers are specific to a particular sector of society.

Memory and Religion

The concept of memory is gaining more and more attention in social science today.³⁹ The historian François Hartog even takes the view that memory is a new paradigm in social science.⁴⁰ An

Scandal“ *NBER Working Paper*, No. 17589 (2011): 23.

³⁷Antonín Paleček and Roman Vido, “Náboženské vyznání v České republice z perspektivy inter- a intragenerační transmise”. *Naše společnost* 2 (2014): 24–35.

³⁸Jarkovská and Lišková, “Tradice, její rozpad a záchrana skrze sex,” 287.

³⁹ See for example: Petra L. Burzová, Ilona Dvořáková, and Ondřej Hejnal, “Paměť a prostor: Reprezenační strategie společenstva vzpomínání v postindustriálním městě,” *Sociální studia* 4 (2013): 107–126; Andreas Huyssen, “Berlínské proluky,” *Sociální studia* 4 (2013): 15–34; Gergely Kunt, Dóri Szegő, and Júlia Vajda, “Politická komunikace v příbězích zneuctěných památníků,” *Sociální studia* 4 (2013): 35–56; Blanka Marková, and Ondřej Slach, “Governance kulturou tažené urbánní regenerace: Případová studie Černá louka v Ostravě,” *Sociální studia* 4 (2013): 127–143; Ivana Rapošová, Apolónia Sejková, and Csaba Szaló, “Zabúda Brno na Zbrojovku? Praktiky formovania urbánnej pamäti prostredníctvom individuálnej angažovanosti aktérov,” *Sociální studia* 4 (2013): 79–105; Kateřina Sidiropolu Janků, “Krajina vzpomínek. Kdo kreslí mapu brněnského Bronxu?” *Sociální studia* 4 (2013): 57–78; Jiří Šubrt, and Jiří Vinopal et al., *Historické vědomí obyvatel České republiky perspektivou sociologického výzkumu* (Praha: Karolinum, 2013); Dušan Lužný, “Kulturní paměť jako koncept sociálních věd,” *Studia Philosophica* 61 (2014): 3–18; Nicolas Maslowski and Jiří Šubrt, *Kolektivní paměť. K teoretickým otázkám* (Praha: Karolinum, 2014), etc.

⁴⁰ Maslowski and Šubrt, *Kolektivní paměť*, 31.

increasing interest in this topic was characteristic of the 1970s; this increasing interest in memory was connected with the awareness of the extinction of vivid memories. This is because the generations that witnessed first-hand the crimes and catastrophes of the twentieth century are dying, taking these vivid memories with them.⁴¹ This situation implies that memory is bound to people. Memory is tied together with forgetting, which explains why collective memory is more reliable than individual memory. There have even been discussions of whether or not there is such a thing as individual memory. As the early twentieth-century sociologist and philosopher Maurice Halbwachs claimed, our memories rest collectively and are reminded to us by others, even if these memories are connected with events or things we have experienced or have seen alone. This is because we have never really been alone. In our lives we converse with others (for example, with architects, writers, artists and so on) to obtain different perspectives about something.⁴² Furthermore, the Egyptologist Jan Assmann claims that it is difficult to distinguish 'individual' and 'social' memory because the individual is always social to a high degree.⁴³ This means that memory is rooted in society but is still in the process of transformation. Thus, to some extent memory is dependent upon context because we interpret memories that happened a long time ago differently under new circumstances due to our new experiences. Our appraisal of the past is relative, and thus so is memory; memory is also threatened by forgetting, as was mentioned earlier. Halbwachs explained forgetting as a process whereby an individual, as the owner of a particular memory, forgets something that does not have a concrete grounding in the present. In other words, when we cease to be a member of a group, memories that we shared together fade because they lack external impulses. The specific frame that held the memory has changed or disappeared.⁴⁴

There are a few strategies that may moderate the process of forgetting. The first is holding memory within a group. A collective has a better chance of reconstructing memories than an individual does, because each individual in a group can remember something, and together they can describe their memories in more detail.⁴⁵ In addition, people need bonds in order to develop memory, and memory is needed to form those bonds;⁴⁶ this dialectic relation helps to hold collective memory. The second strategy is connecting memory to material objects when the main role of these material objects is to stop time and to preserve things as they were. Such places of memory would not exist if there were not the possibility to change and update their meanings. What we remember are not places of memory themselves, although they work as a place where memory

⁴¹ Maslowski and Šubrt, *Kolektivní paměť*, 8.

⁴² Maurice Halbwachs, *Kolektivní paměť* (Praha: SLON, 2009), 51.

⁴³ Jan Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 3.

⁴⁴ Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994 (1925)), 279 cited Maslowski and Šubrt, *Kolektivní paměť*, 19.

⁴⁵ Halbwachs, *Kolektivní paměť*, 50–92.

⁴⁶ Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory*, 5.

starts to put images of the past together into a story.⁴⁷ And stories are always better for remembering than isolated memories are.

Religious rituals are one of the oldest and most fundamental media for bonding memory.⁴⁸ For that reason, religion itself is one source or type of connective/collective memory. This idea helps to overcome the problem of defining religion, because religion is a specific mode of believing where a 'chain' and collective memory have a crucial role. The chain makes the individual believer a member of a community that incorporates past, present and future members. A collective memory then becomes the basis of that community's existence. This explains why, when people are losing their memory, they are also losing traditional religion.⁴⁹ We could remember some fragments of memories, however, and it does not matter if they refer to the substance or to the function of religion: we still use them and integrate them into other symbolic systems.⁵⁰ This means that traditional religion is going through changes.

In the Czech context, the collective memory of a sense of history is quite problematic. History does not seem to be important for many Czechs; very few people are actively interested in history.⁵¹ The problem is that people with a low level of historic knowledge could be more easily manipulated into believing historical misinterpretation (for example, misinterpretation of religious issues) which could lead to a decrease of the number of believers. The low level of religiosity in the Czech Republic could therefore be connected with a lack of interest in history. This is why memory is a good tool for analysing the transformation of religion (i.e. its continuity and discontinuities) or in something we can call *religious memory*.⁵² Continuity in religious memory can be interrupted by many effects that are more or less linked to each other: for example, hostile political regimes, such as communism; the failure of religious socialisation; and negative news about religion, such as religious scandals and religion-inspired terrorism. The discontinuity could also be due to an erosion of plausibility structures as a result of religious pluralism. When individuals feel cognitive dissonance because the truth they believe in is confronted with other truths—with the result that there is no longer one absolute truth—many truths can make individuals have doubts about their beliefs.⁵³

In such an environment, there is a need to preserve the continuity of memory (in particular, religious memory) in resources besides human resources. Religion can be kept, for example, in churches, books or electronic media, or it can be kept inherently in something that originally had

⁴⁷ Maslowski and Šubrt, *Kolektivní paměť*, 35–36.

⁴⁸ Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory*, 11.

⁴⁹ Daniele Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), ix.

⁵⁰ Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, 158.

⁵¹ Šubrt and Vinopal et al., *Historické vědomí obyvatel České republiky perspektivou sociologického výzkumu*, 207–208.

⁵² Lužný, "Kulturní paměť jako koncept sociálních věd", 4.

⁵³ Berger, *Vzdálená sláva*, 11–22.

religious meaning and now has been replaced by another meaning, as some rituals, events or values. Although these media of religious memory are the elements that possess the potential to mobilise religion (by providing continuity in society), there must be an impulse—some activity—for mobilisation itself. There could be the problem of the vicious circle. There are some causes that weaken religion, and thus reduce the number of believers; the low number of believers then lacks the power to mobilise their religion, which then reinforces the causes that led to the decrease in believers in the first place. This is why I will analyse the perception of religion in the Czech Republic: it could reveal both the cause for the decrease in numbers of believers and the potential to mobilise religion. The findings should reveal which group or groups could be a carrier for this potential for mobilisation, and which barriers or other factors disturb the continuity of religious memory.

Methods

Data

Data were collected from the Czech Sociological Data Archive. For the analysis, the data of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) 2008 were used. A survey was created by stratified multistage random sampling. The sample size was 1,512 respondents who were at least 18 years old, permanently residing in the Czech Republic. Using data from this kind of survey does have some limitations; for example, respondents' different understandings of the same question, answering according to expectations connected with the majority opinion in the country, biased memories of respondents and so on. Although there is no best solution for solving these limitations, there are approaches that reflect the limitations of the interpretations.⁵⁴

Another problem could be a forced reduction of the data sample because of data preparation. For example, in this analysis, a sample of 895 respondents was used. Almost 40 percent of the decrease of the respondents was due to deleting omitted observations in the variables that were used and data re-coding; nevertheless, the sample was still large enough to be analysed.⁵⁵

I formed a few composite variables for the analysis. The creation of variables can also be seen as problematic because the researcher can combine certain variables and not others, depending on, for example, the scale's degree. Putting certain variables together meaningfully can raise some interesting and important findings, if it is possible to do so. The dependent variable, then, is *religion perceived as a stabiliser [or destabiliser]*,⁵⁶ and the composite independent variables are *alternative*

⁵⁴ Martin Vávra, "Jak zjišťovat návštěvnost bohoslužeb? Problém s měřením náboženského fenoménu," *Naše společnost* 7 (2009): 32–39.

⁵⁵ I also worked with a sample of 1,096 respondents, where I did not use the one key variable that caused this large decrease in data; the results were similar, so this decrease was justifiable. Including this variable thus refines the findings, but does not bias them.

⁵⁶ See Appendix, Table 2.

religiosity and *traditional religiosity*.⁵⁷ There could be a question of which variables should be involved in alternative and traditional religiosity, but these independent variables are not new in research studies; their creation is inspired by previous research.⁵⁸ The dependent variable was considered through the possibility of a survey (i.e. the questions that were asked) and theory. I chose variables that symbolise conflict as well as togetherness for several reasons. As was mentioned above, people need bonds in order to develop memory, and memory is needed to form those bonds.⁵⁹ The variables *practicing a religion helps people to make friends* and *practicing a religion helps people to meet the right kind of people* are involved for this reason. Making friends and meeting the right kind of people relate to social cohesion: to forming the necessary bonds. The variables *looking around the world, religions bring more conflict than peace* and *people with very strong religious beliefs are often too intolerant of others* were also involved in the scale because these variables symbolise problems that could cause discontinuities in religious memory. The first pair of variables thus refer to the perception of religion as a stabilising factor, and the second pair as a destabilising factor. I obtained a scale that could at least partially indicate the possibility in keeping continuity, but also highlight discontinuity. The reduction to these four variables was due to the fact that I was limited by the resources of the data (ISSP 2008). I determined the Cronbach alpha to justify this selection of variables and found that it was reliable. The recommended value for the Cronbach alpha in the literature is 0.7, but this is connected with the number of items used in the scale. In other words, 0.7 is good for a five-point scale, but not for a scale with thirty items.⁶⁰ The Cronbach alpha value of my composite variables was 0.72 for a four-point scale, which is good. If I included more variables, the value would have been higher, but it would not have been better.

Therefore, the other independent variables are *frequency of church attendance* and if *respondent declared some religiosity*. These two variables were involved in the models because they helped to distinguish between active believers and passive believers, which might also affect the perception of religion in society. A few sociodemographic control variables were also used, such as *age*, *sex* and *education*; this is because previous research studies have shown positive results in including these variables.

Analysis

The perception of a subject has always been the domain of qualitative research studies, which is why a quantitative approach might seem odd in the context of the current study. I will demonstrate

⁵⁷ See Appendix, Table 2.

⁵⁸ For example: Martin Vávra, "Náboženství a kvalita života. Psycho-sociální předpoklady," *Naše společnost* 2 (2010): 8; Hamplová, and Řeháková, *Česká religiozita na počátku 3. tisíciletí*, 64–75; Hamplová, "Čemu Češi věří?," 712; etc.

⁵⁹ Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory*, 5.

⁶⁰ Petr Soukup, "Čím větší, tím lepší (aneb mýty o reliabilitě)," *Socioweb*, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.socioweb.cz/index.php?disp=teorie&shw=242&lst=115>.

that quantitative research can also bring interesting insights into this problem; it can also be an inspiration for future research.

I used linear regression to test which variables influence the perception of religion as a stabiliser or destabiliser. I was also interested in the difference between ‘absolutely traditional believer [or non-believer]’ and ‘absolutely alternative believer [or non-believer]’. These categories approach the ideal types representing a person, who agree or disagree with all items on a scale measuring the independent variables of traditional or alternative religiosity.

I tested several regressive models. The first one included only control variables—*sex*, *education* and *age*—to check if they have a meaning to be involved in the models. Because each variable has at least some statistical significance, they were all included. I also tested models for alternative and traditional religiosity, as well as models that verify the influence of declared religiosity and the frequency of church attendance. I created models separately for alternative and traditional religiosity, as well as a model that tested their influence together.

Thus, I gradually involved independent variables to obtain one final model that included all variables combined for traditional religiosity, one for alternative religiosity, and one for both. I also examined models with various interactions, but there was no improvement; thus the interactions were not statistically significant. Statistical tests therefore determined that the best model was the model for both alternative and traditional religiosity together, and without the variable of declared religiosity. In addition, the best models for separated traditional and alternative religiosity were models without declared religiosity. The best models are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Relationship between variables. Traditional and alternative religiosity and attendance at religious services, related to whether the religion was seen as an element that stabilises or destabilises society. Coefficients of ordinary least-squares (OLS) regression (standard error). (N = 895)

Perception of religion (0: destabilisation—16: stabilisation)	<i>T_model</i>	<i>A_model</i>	<i>AT_model</i>
Traditional religiosity (0: non-believer–12: believer)	0.40*** (0.04)		0.30*** (0.04)
Alternative religiosity (0: non-believer–12: believer)		0.30*** (0.03)	0.23*** (0.03)
<i>Frequency of church attendance (contrasted with: less than 1 a year)</i>			
Now and then	0.61* (0.30)	1.50*** (0.26)	0.47n.s. (0.29)
Several times a month	2.11*** (0.42)	4.38*** (0.31)	2.27*** (0.41)
Sex (0=male, 1=female)	0.14n.s. (0.19)	0.11n.s. (0.19)	-0.00n.s. (0.18)
<i>Education (contrasted with: elementary)</i>			
Middle school	- 0.03n.s. (0.20)	- 0.05n.s. (0.20)	0.07n.s. (0.19)
University	0.25n.s. (0.32)	0.30n.s. (0.32)	0.34n.s. (0.31)
<i>Age (contrasted with: 18-29)</i>			
30-44	- 0.12n.s. (0.29)	0.00n.s. (0.29)	-0.07n.s. (0.28)
45-59	- 0.41n.s. (0.29)	- 0.21n.s. (0.29)	-0.23n.s. (0.28)
60+	- 0.02n.s. (0.29)	0.09n.s. (0.32)	0.03n.s. (0.28)
Constant	5.55*** (0.29)	4.75*** (0.31)	4.68*** (0.30)
R ²	36.02 %	35.01 %	39.64%
F	55.35	54.51	58.05
(df1:df2)	(9; 885)	(9; 885)	(10;884)
BIC	4374.54	4379.41	4329.15
(df)	10	10	11

Source: ČSDA, ISSP 2008; author's calculations

Note: †p < 0.1; * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001

Results

Description

Table 1 represents three models; the best is the model that includes traditional and alternative religiosity together (the *AT_model*). We first consider an effect of the variables *traditional* and *alternative religiosity*. These variables have a statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) positive effect on the dependent variable *perception of religion*, which means the more people believe (traditional or alternative), the more positive meaning religion has for them. Then, the *traditional religiosity* (0.40) has a somewhat higher effect than *alternative religiosity* (0.30). What is interesting is that after putting together the variables *traditional* and *alternative religiosity* into one model (the *AT_model*), the effect of each variable decreases by almost 0.1, but the interaction of alternative and traditional religiosity has no effect; thus the model is not included in the table. We know the statistical significance, but the factual significance is more important. This means an ‘absolutely traditional believer’ differs from an ‘absolutely traditional non-believer’ by 4.80 points (*T_model*) and 3.60 points (*AT_model*) on the 16-point scale. I consider this as factually significant for traditional religiosity, because more than half of the sample is concentrated at the end of the scale (values 0 and 1).⁶¹ The effect of alternative religiosity is weaker: 3.60 points (*A_model*) and 2.76 points (*AT_model*). The factual significance is also weaker, because ‘absolutely alternative believers’ and ‘absolutely alternative non-believers’ have lower representation in this sample.⁶²

Furthermore, in Table 1 we can see the effect of the variable *frequency of church attendance*. This variable is highly statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) only in the category *several times a month*; and, in the context of alternative religiosity (*A_model*), also in the category *now and then*. In this model (*A_model*) the coefficients of the variable are the highest. In the third model (*AT_model*), an effect of the category *now and then* completely disappears ($p > 0.1$), but the effect of the category *several times a month* remains. Again, the tested interactions have no influence, so there is a specific relation in the data that I cannot control. The effect of 4.38 points in the category *several times a month* (*A_model*) is also factually significant, but we can also expect that people who tend to observe alternative religions do not often attend church. In addition, the effect 2.27 (*AT_model*) can be considered as being factually significant, but only slightly. This means a person who attends church several times a month values religion more positively (by 2.27 points on the 16-point scale perception of religion) than a person who attends church less than once a year.

Some important results are connected with the sociodemographic characteristics. We can see that in these models, which statistical tests have found to be the best ones, the variables *sex*, *education* and *age* have no statistically significant effect on the perception of religion. In other words, after including the dependent variables *traditional religiosity*, *alternative religiosity* and

⁶¹ See Appendix Table 3.

church attendance, the effects of the sociodemographic characteristics disappear ($p > 0.1$), and we might not expect it in reality. This is why I have also tested a model with various interactions, but none were statistically significant. This could mean that the negative perception of religion is not connected with a specific sector of the population, but rather is shared throughout society.

In conclusion, traditional and alternative religiosity are highly statistically (and factually) significant, as is church attendance several times a month. Other effects are not statistically significant, which means we cannot expect the hinted-at effects of *church attendance now and then*, *age*, *education* and *sex* in reality. We can also summarise that R^2 indicates that the perception of religion is influenced by other effects/variables that were not controlled for in these models, and that there is room for further analysis.

Reflection on the results

In the previous section I described the results from the linear regression. In this section I would like to go beyond the description to some extent and to delve more deeply into these findings, or at least to provide some ideas about the results. I would like to avoid the mistake made by many research studies, which is to only describe the results.⁶³

At first, I would like to focus on what could tell us similar effects of traditional and alternative religiosity. As was discussed above, the effect of traditional religiosity was higher than the effect of alternative religiosity, but in both cases the effect was that the more people believe, the more positive meaning religion has for them. It is not surprising that traditional believers give more positive meaning to religion, but what I consider to be important is the similarity between alternative and traditional religiosity. That is why there are some criticisms and doubts about using alternative religiosity as an indicator of religiosity in society, because people do not value particular items of alternative religiosity as being spiritual. The similar effect on the perception of religion, however, could indicate that the function of alternative religiosity is similar to that of traditional religiosity, and thus it could be used as such an indicator. In other words, the consistency of items for measuring alternative religiosity is reliable according to the Cronbach's alpha, and the effect of the compound variable is similar to the effect of traditional religiosity. The statement about the usefulness of alternative religiosity as an indicator would need further, detailed enquiry, however. For example, more studies comparing the effects of both types of religiosity on other topics that were not covered in this study are necessary.

The main finding is that there is a rather negative perception of religion in the Czech Republic. There could be many reasons for this. One of the causes can be, for example, a restrictive

⁶² See Appendix Table 4.

political regime such as communism, as was mentioned earlier. Another cause could be connected with the media. A first example is the case of restitution of the Church's assets lost during the communist era, which people feel strongly about.⁶⁴ In this case the Church did not accurately estimate the social mood regarding restitutions, and people came to view this topic rather negatively. The common view of the Church as a source for moral authority shifted to that of an authoritative and greedy power.⁶⁵ In other words, an attempt to retrieve all of the property of the Church became a negative symbol for religion itself. Many people, even believers, claimed that the Church should not get its property back.⁶⁶ A second example is the negative perceptions of religion connected with the news about terrorism and similar topics. The media form negative images of various religions, sometimes using terms that are misinterpreted,⁶⁷ and the negativity results in a decrease of trust in the Church; it is also projected onto the perception of religion itself.

The problem is that the negative perception of religion does not change even in a society that is permeated by uncertainty. Religion has not yet offered satisfying functions for society. There could be several reasons for this. The first reason is that the Church does not have effective strategies to change this atmosphere of negativity. The Church would like to shift people's attention to certain topics, but it fails in putting these topics into the public agenda.⁶⁸ Thus, there are still the same negative topics about religion in the public agenda, and new, positive, topics are not being created. The second reason is the aforementioned vicious circle, by which I mean the dialectic relation between the number of believers and the image of the religion—the higher the number of believers, the more positive the religion's image. The negative perception of religion thus could be one of the barriers that causes a low level of religiosity in Czech society, and the low number of believers is the cause of the negative perception. In other words, there is no capacity that could shift such a perception of religion today. The group that should be a carrier of religion—the group that should have the potential to change the perception of religion—is small. There are no such large numbers of alternatively religious or traditionally religious believers with such power in Czech society. Even such conditions could explain the failure of religious socialisation. People do not bring their children up to be religious because it has been mostly seen as a problem in society.

To summarise, religion is not the key to overcoming uncertainty in Czech society due to certain barriers; one of these barriers is its negative perception. This does not mean that religion

⁶³ See more in: Jan Váně and Veronika Hásová, "Jak se v České republice vlastně měří náboženství?" *Acta Filozofické fakulty Západočeské univerzity v Plzni* 3 (2014): 139–170.

⁶⁴ Kalvas et al., "Rámcování a nastolování agendy".

⁶⁵ Fiala, *Laboratoř sekularizace*, 61–67.

⁶⁶ Dušan Lužný, "Náboženská situace v České republice po roce 1989," *Religio: Revue pro religionistiku* 2 (1998): 16.

⁶⁷ See for example: Veronika Hásová and Jan Váně, "Pojetí džihádu v Lidových novinách a Právu v letech 2001–2011," *Acta Fakulty filozofické Západočeské univerzity v Plzni* 3 (2013): 127–149; Marsden and Heather (eds.), *Media, Religion and Conflict.*; Sumiala-Seppänen and Knut (eds.), *Implications of the sacred in (post) modern media.*

⁶⁸ Váně, *Komunita jako nová naděje?*

does not have a function in society. Research studies have shown that religion is still important for society. In addition, people have not had problems with religious features that have been replaced by different discourses; this means that religion resonates in the memory of Czechs in the sense of *inherent religiosity*. By this I mean a set of beliefs, rituals or values that originally came from religion, but no longer have a religious sense. It is hard to identify such features: for example, the debate about sex education at Czech schools or the popularity of visiting famous religious buildings for non-religious reasons. Therefore, there is religious memory in Czech society, but it is weakened by the negative perception of religion and other causes. People rather cover (perhaps unconsciously) the religious meaning of various features. Still, there is the possibility of a renewal of religion because various media still hold the continuity of religious memory.

Conclusion and discussion

We can conclude that the position of religion is quite problematic in the Czech Republic. The analysis undertaken for this study proves that a prevailing negative perception of religion is shared throughout Czech society regardless of sex, age or education. The negative perception could be seen as one of the causes of the discontinuity of religious memory. While some continuity of religious memory should be seen in the groups of traditional and alternative believers, these groups are not robust enough to change the negative opinions of the majority towards religion. The problem here is that there is a lack of willingness to raise children in a religious manner in a society where there is such a negative perception of religion. We have to bear in mind, of course, that this lack of religiosity has many causes.

Negative perception of religion could be one of the barriers that impede religion from becoming a source of certainty in a society that is permeated by uncertainty. People are instead seeking other resources. For example, non-religious communities can function as one such resource. Various communities can satisfy people's needs today better than religious communities can. This is because the idea of community has a more positive meaning than religion for many people.⁶⁹ Community is not a reflexive term that society uses for itself, however.⁷⁰

Therefore, although there is a low level of religiosity found in the Czech Republic today, still it seems that people need religion in some form or another. The findings of other research studies indicate that secularisation only affects some layers of memory, while other layers of memory remain. This article opens the way for further research, which could determine the sources of negative perceptions of religion, and what layers resist secularisation and why they do so. Further studies could also examine in detail the usefulness of alternative religiosity as an indicator of

⁶⁹ Tony Blackshaw, *Key Concepts in Community Studies* (London: SAGE Publications, 2010), 19.

⁷⁰ Váně, *Komunita jako nová naděje?*, 13.

religiosity. In addition, this article shows that questions that are most often examined by qualitative research can be analysed by quantitative methods to some extent; these quantitative methods can produce important findings and can highlight interesting topics for further research.

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Appendix

- Table 2. The construction of variables
- Table 3 and 4. The characteristics of dependent variables

The construction of variables

Table 2. The construction of variables – religion perceived as a traditional (de)stabilizer, traditional religiosity and alternative religiosity.

Name of constructed variable	Name of original variable
Religion perceived as a (de)stabilizer (CA = 0.72)	Looking around the world, religions bring more conflict than peace
	People with very strong religious beliefs are often too intolerant of others
	Practicing a religion helps people to make friends (reverse scale)
	Practicing a religion helps people to meet the right kind of people (reverse scale)
Traditional religiosity (CA = 0.93)	Do you believe in heaven?
	Do you believe in hell?
	Do you believe in religious miracles? There is a God who concerns himself with every human being personally
Alternative religiosity (CA = 0.87)	Good luck charms sometimes do bring good luck
	Some fortune tellers really can foresee the future
	Some faith healers do have God-given healing powers A person's star sign at birth, or horoscope, can affect the course of their future

The characteristics of independent variables – traditional and alternative religiosity

Table 3. The characteristics of variable - traditional religiosity.

Traditional religiosity	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency
0	284	31.73 %
1	186	20.78
2	78	8.72
3	51	5.70
4	73	8.16
5	26	2.91
6	29	3.24
7	25	2.79
8	43	4.80
9	20	2.23
10	14	1.56
11	25	2.79
12	41	4.58
Total	895	100%

Table 4. The characteristics of variable - alternative religiosity.

Alternative religiosity	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency
0	115	12.85 %
1	57	6.37
2	63	7.04
3	70	7.82
4	124	13.85
5	68	7.60
6	99	11.06
7	88	9.83
8	91	10.17
9	45	5.03
10	24	2.68
11	22	2.46
12	29	3.24
Total	895	100 %