

Working Papers Series

Katedra Sociologie
Fakulta filozofická Západočeské univerzity

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THE TACHOV REGION AND ITS RELIGIOUS MEMORY:
NEW SUDETENLAND OR A HOME OF FAILURE?

Working Paper No. 01 – 16

www.kss.zcu.cz

THE TACHOV REGION AND ITS RELIGIOUS MEMORY: NEW SUDETENLAND OR A HOME OF FAILURE?¹

By Jan Váně², Jiří Stočes

Abstract

This study focuses on the way the Catholic Church has been functioning in the Tachov micro-region. We tried to explore what is the perception of the Church itself and of its activities in the region by three groups of key actors: Catholic clergy, politicians and religious laymen. We also looked into how this perception is related to the way historic memory is perceived. The Tachov micro-region was selected because of the fact that the presence of the Catholic Church in the area had traditionally been very strong, which, however, changed dramatically after the expulsion of Germans after the World War II. Today, the region ranges among the less religious in the Czech Republic. The findings and conclusions drawn in this article are based on an ethnographic research carried out in the area between January 2014 and February 2015.

INTRODUCTION

In late modern societies, reality is pervaded by pluralism. The ultimate result of this is not only that no single set of beliefs is at hand that could be used to constitute a society as a whole but also that no single group (sharing a particular set of beliefs) may play the role of an all-embracing entity in relation to its members.³ This situation befalls on all social actors, including religious groups and Churches as institutions the very *raison d'être* of which it is to guide their members in this world. The plurality of approaches, views and value orientations is reflected also in the way religious tradition is being grasped, creating ruptures in both religious and cultural memory. Each religious group strives to maintain continuity of the orthodoxy of faith and religious practice. In pluralistic societies, however, it has been increasingly problematic to preserve and reproduce religion in its orthodox form.⁴ And the difficulties incurred as a result of this further grow in countries where religious values do not represent an integral part of the public discourse, which is the case of the Czech Republic, too.

¹ This study was written in frame of the “Continuity and Discontinuities of Religious Memory in the Czech Republic” project (and supported by the Czech Science Foundation as project No. 14-01948S).

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³ Peter L. Berger, *Vzdálená sláva /A far glory/* (Brno: Barrister & Principal, 1997), 75.

⁴ In this text, the term orthodoxy refers to strict adherence to the learning of the Church in the area of both religious theory and practice. We definitely do not use this term to refer to the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Our reasoning is based on the assumption that religion provides religious people with cognitive, normative and emotional clues and that, the historical role of religion taken into consideration, its relicts are contained in cultural memory even in distinctly secular countries, including the Czech Republic. In other words, religious memory is present, by the means of values and symbols, in both society and individuals, and these values and symbols are accepted as an integral part of the traditional values inherent to the society. The legitimacy of these norms and symbols is confirmed in the ethos of the particular country, which, however, is not necessarily justified rationally, relying rather on tradition.

Tradition is carried on by memory, which, in turn, may be defined as the ability of an individual/community to preserve certain types of information. The important thing is that tradition always draws on the past, which, in turn, is always grasped from the present.⁵ Results from this the conclusion that tradition does oblige, creates the feeling of belonging together and defines the strength of inter-group solidarity (which functions as social ties) but that the solidity of these ties is repeatedly tested and re-established. This means that when we think about the past as a source of memory and, at the same time, try to define its relationship to the present, we must come to the conclusion that “the past is being reconstructed with respect to the present and the present is explained through the past.”⁶

Paul Veyne even goes as far as to assert that the current turn towards the research of memory and tradition, or, if you like, history, as well as interest in narratives of the past and obsession with myths, represent a complex reaction to the disappearance of religiosity.⁷ This is one of the reasons that makes us study religious memory, the particular subject of the present study being the Catholic Church⁸ and its influence in the Tachov micro-region. We have focused on how the key actors – Catholic clergy, politicians and religious laymen – perceive the way the Church functions in the region and how they relate this functioning to (historical) memory. We have opted to study the Tachov region because this is where the Catholic Church had been very strong until the end of the World War II. Then the Sudetenland Germans were expelled from here, which entailed massive transformations as a result of which the region ranges today among the least religious in the entire Czech Republic. The hostile attitude of local population to religion may be illustrated by the fact that in the post-communist era (since 1989),

⁵ Jacques Le Goff, *Paměť a dějiny /History and Memory/* (Prague: Argo, 2007), 23.

⁶ Le Goff, *Paměť a dějiny /History and Memory/*, 36.

⁷ Nikolas Maslowski and Jiří Šubrt, *Kolektivní paměť. K teoretickým otázkám /Collective Memory/* (Prague: Karolinum, 2014), 8.

⁸ The term “Church” refers in our text to the Czech Catholic Church.

the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia has been regularly gaining an above-standard number of ballots when compared to the Party's national average (15%).⁹

This text does not aspire to establish a chronology describing what has happened in the region and, by doing this, assume that we understood why religiosity has been declining, why the efforts to renew it have not been met with success and why religion has been disappearing from the local population's collective memory. It does, however, aspire to define both living and non-living elements constituting relationship networks, the emergence of which may not be located in a particular moment. By saying this, we refer to Zygmunt Bauman's concept of palimpsests as relationship-constituting elements that are not firmly anchored in time but act as agents of a never-ending creation and re-creation.¹⁰

We are now going to outline the transformation of the ethos of the micro-region, taking into consideration the role played by the Catholic Church. We will also describe the methodology of our research and introduce findings that we established on the basis of ethnographic research.

THE TACHOV REGION AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

As mentioned above, the level of religiosity in the Tachov region ranges among the lowest in the Czech Republic. This makes us think that religion and religious memory are substantially devitalized in the region. Let us briefly outline some religion-related data concerning the Czech Republic, as established by the 2011 Population and Housing Census (hereinafter referred to as Census). According to statistics, a mere 21% of the population considers themselves as religious. Out of these 21%, only 14% adhere to a Church or some kind of a religious organization. Most religious people, declaring they adhere to some kind of a religious organization (14%), are members of the Roman-Catholic Church, or, in other words, 74% of the total of religious people declaring they adhere to some kind of religious organization are Roman Catholics (meanwhile, when the entire population is taken into consideration, the Roman Catholics represent just 10%). 34% of the population, onto the contrary, stated they were without confession (which, in absolute numbers, represents 3 612 804 persons out of a

⁹ During the last parliamentary election, the Communist Party got 23% of votes in the Tachov region. („Parliamentary election of October 25 and 26, 2013,“ last updates as of April 3, 2015, <http://www.volby.cz/pls/ps2013/ps311?xjazyk=CZ&xkraj=4&xnumnuts=3207>.)

¹⁰ Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

total of 10 562 214 inhabitants). A significant part of the population (45% or 4 774 323) refused to answer the question on confession.¹¹

These numbers show that the Roman Catholics are the largest religious minority in the country. This, at the first sight, makes the Catholic Church an influential institution backed by 10% of the population on which it should be able to rely in political and cultural conflicts with the majority society. The truth, however, as documented by various research projects, is that the influence of the Czech Catholic Church is not as strong as could be expected when the cultural significance of the Church in the history of the nation is taken into consideration.

Looking at the empirical data on the relationship between the Church and the society, we find out that the Czech people see the role played by the Church in quite an ambivalent way. The root cause of the distance and mistrust the majority society feels towards the Church definitely reaches behind the era of communism as is generally assumed.¹² It is interesting, though, that after the fall of the communist regime, the status of the Church changed and the Catholic Church had, in the beginning of the 1990's, the highest sympathy rate in the entire existence of Czechoslovakia (founded in 1918). These positive feelings (documented in a number of surveys¹³), however, started to evaporate and since the middle of the 1990's, they settled down to a stable value of 30% of the population trusting the Church, meanwhile over a half of the adult population of the country not trusting it. These findings were confirmed by the 1991, 1999 and 2008 European Values Surveys and by the 1999 and 2008 International Social Survey Program.¹⁴ Also, the Church is trusted less in the Czech Republic than in other countries.¹⁵

< Chart 1. The Tachov region about here >

¹¹ „Population and Religion. Census 2011,“ cited as of April 4, 2015, <https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/nabozenska-vira-obyvatele-podle-vysledku-scitani-lidu-2011-61wegp46fl>.

¹² See also Jiří Hanuš, *Tradice českého katolicismu ve 20. století /Czech Catholic Tradition in the 20th century/* (Brno: CDK, 2005) or David Václavík, *Náboženství a moderní česká společnost /Religion and Modern Czech Society/* (Prague: Grada, 2010).

¹³ For further information on the research of religion in the Czech Republic after 1989, see also Jan Váně, „Výzkumy věnující se podobám religiozity v České republice po roce 1989,“ /„Research in religiosity in the Czech Republic after 1989) in *Cesty k datům. Zdroje a management sociálněvědních dat v České republice /How to Find your Data/*, ed. Jindřich Krejčí et al. (Prague: Slon, 2013), 355–376.

¹⁴ „European Values Study,“ as of April 14, 2015, <http://www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu/evs/about-evs/>; „International Social Survey Programme,“ as of April 14, 2015, <http://www.issp.org/>.

¹⁵ See also Standard & Special Eurobarometr („Gesis,“ as of April 1, 2011, <http://zacat.gesis.org>.)

Chart 1. The Tachov region.



< Chart 2. The Tachov micro-region vicariatee about here >

Chart 2. The Tachov micro-region vicariatee.



Today, the level of religiosity significantly differs according to regions. The Tachov micro-region is a part of Western Bohemia, where the level of religiosity is quite low: repeatedly below 18%. To explain this, we need to bring the readers' attention the strong secularization processes going on in Western Bohemia since the 19th century but mainly the expulsion of the Sudetenland Germans after the World War II. The Sudetenland Germans were profoundly

religious and with their expulsion, large areas were left depopulated. Even seventy years after the end of the war, religiosity among the population in former Sudetenland is very low.¹⁶

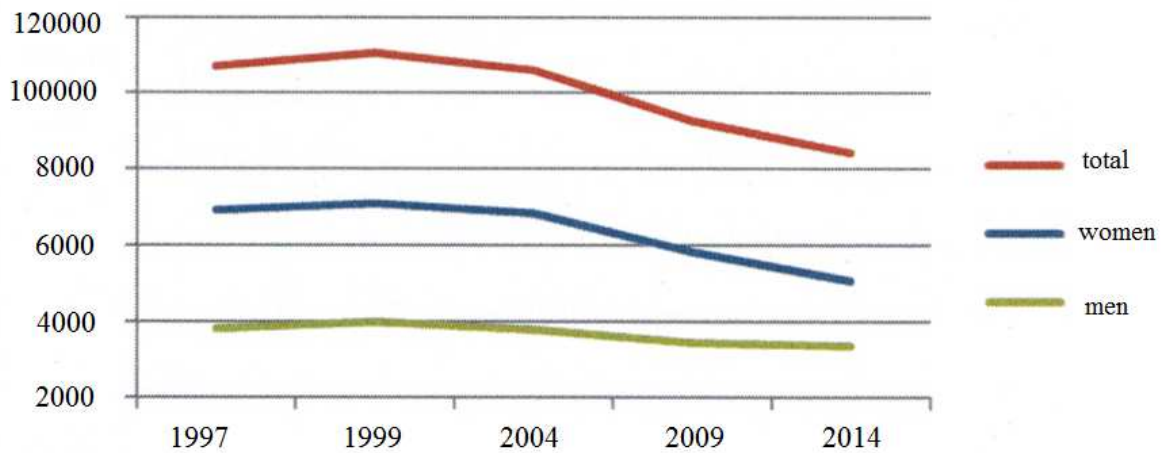
The Tachov micro-region is a part of Western Bohemia and as such, it falls under the jurisdiction of the Plzeň Bishop and is classified as the so called Tachov vicariatee.¹⁷ Let us now see some data collected in the last (2011) Census. Since the previous (2001) Census, virtually no demographic changes incurred in the Tachov micro-region. In 2001, it had 51 439 inhabitants, meanwhile in 2011 it was 51 917. From a broader perspective, this means that during this period, the population curve stopped to fall (as was the case of the 1990's). When it comes to comparing declared religiosity, however, there were certain changes. In 2001, a total of 10 016 inhabitants declared their affiliation to a particular confession, meanwhile in 2011, it was just 3 511 persons. This dramatical decline affected mainly the Catholic Church: in 2001, it had 8 022 members, meanwhile in 2011, it was just 2 111. The situation today is even more dramatic, which we can tell according to a survey carried out, in 2014, by the Church itself.

< Graph 1. Church services attendance. Plzeň bishopric 1997 – 2014 about here >

¹⁶ Sudetenland is the border area around the current Czech Republic. Until 1945, this region was inhabited prevalently by ethnic Germans who were expelled after the War. The Tachov micro-region is a part of the Sudetenland.

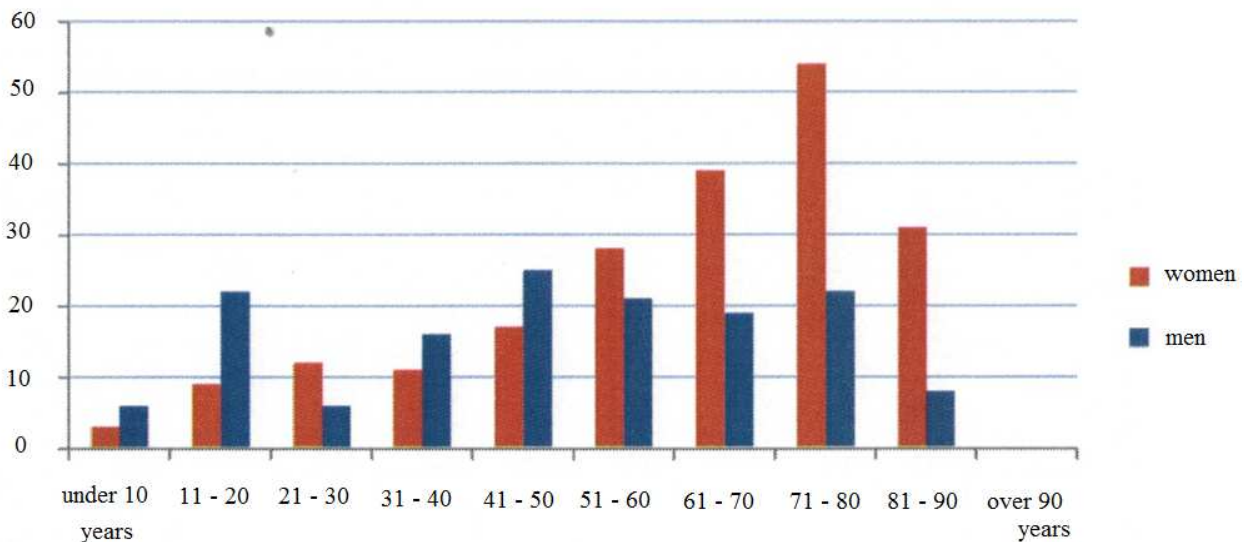
¹⁷ From the administrative point of view, the Church in the Czech Republic is divided into two provinces, the Czech and the Moravian. The Czech province comprises of 5 dioceses and the Moravian of 3. The Plzeň diocese covers almost entirely the State administrative units of the Plzeň and Karlovy Vary regions. The Plzeň diocese was founded in 1993. Plzeň, with its Saint Bartholomew cathedral, is the seat of the Plzeň Bishop. The diocese spreads out on 9 236 km², it has 795 000 inhabitants, out of which 142 000 are Roman Catholic. Catholics on the Plzeň diocese territory represent approximately 18% of the population, there are 101 priests. The most serious problem the Plzeň diocese has to cope with is the chronic lack of priests. This is why the Bishop decided to merge parishes and has repeatedly asked for help abroad, a call that was listened to mainly by Polish Church. Currently, ¼ of the Plzeň diocese priests are foreigners, most of them Poles.

Graph 1. Church services attendance. Plzeň bishopric 1997 - 2014



< Graph 2. Churchgoers according to age. The Tachov vicariate, 2014 about here >

Graph 2. Churchgoers according to age. The Tachov vicariate, 2014.



The Graph 1 shows the results of surveys repeatedly carried out by the Plzeň bishopric since 1997, more precisely the overall decline in the attendance of religious services. The decline is rather steep when it comes to women, in the case of men, it has been rather gradual. This decline

can be, in the case of both groups, explained by the dying off of the oldest generation which has been, in the long term, defined as the one with the highest declared religiosity.¹⁸ The Graph 2 also shows that the Tachov vicariate and its bishoprics (see Chart 2) displays an extremely low rate of those who actively participated in religious services at the time of the Census (November 2014). When we look at the age structure of the churchgoers, furthermore, we see that 2/3 of those who participate in religious services are men and women older than 61. This, in absolute numbers, means that at the time of the Census, 349 persons would regularly attend religious services, out of which 204 women (their average age was 58 years) and 145 men (average age 42 years). The average age of all who participate in religious services within the vicariate is 56.¹⁹ When we put these data in the context of the total number of inhabitants of the region in 2011, we see that actively participating Catholics represent slightly over 0.5% of the region's population.

There is a number of reasons that can be used to explain why religiosity in the Tachov region is so low even though 25 years have gone by since the fall of the communism. Let us now introduce the most important ones. Without much doubt, the root cause of the low religiosity in today's Tachov micro-region is the aforementioned expulsion of the German population after the World War II. Until 1945, the German population prevailed in the area, just in the East (around the town of Stříbro), there Czech population was stronger. Until 1945,

¹⁸ Jan Váně, Dušan Lužný and Martina Štípková, „Traditional and Alternative Religiosity in Contemporary Czech Republic: A Comparison of Age Groups” in *Altern in den Religionen/Ageing in Religion*, ed. Karl Baier and Franz Winter (Münster: LIT, 2013), 184–203.

¹⁹ It is possible (and meaningful) to compare current religiosity with religiosity before 1945 in relative numbers only because older data are related to differently defined administrative units. Borders of former districts do not correspond with today's situation. The only way to get comparable absolute numbers is to compare data for individual communes. But if we want to get a basic idea about the demographic structure of the population in relation to confession and ethnicity, it is sufficient to say that according to the Census of December 1st, 1930, there was a total of 41 159 inhabitants in the political district of Tachov (which included judicial districts of Tachov and Přimda but not Plánsko, Stříbrsko and Bezručicko, which are a part of the Tachov micro-region today – see Chart 1.). Out of these 41 159 inhabitants, 2.1% were ethnic Czechs and 97.8% ethnic Germans. Out of these people, 40 538 (98.5%) claimed there were Roman-Catholics, 128 (0.31%) evangelical Protestants, 63 (0.15%) the Czechoslovak Hussite Church, 310 (0.75%) Jews (the so called Izraelite religion) 15 people (0.04%) were of other or unknown confession and 105 (0.26%) declared themselves without confession. According to a Census carried out by the Nazi administration in the Reich's Sudetenland as of May 17th, 1939, the former district of Tachov (Landkreis Tachov) (which did not overlap with the former Czechoslovak Tachov district) had 56 490 inhabitants (with no ethnicity declared but of course, the population was mostly German). Out of these people, 55 888 (99.2%) declared themselves as Roman-Catholics. These data are taken from the following publications: *Statistický lexikon obcí v Republice Československé. Úřední seznam míst podle zákona ze dne 14. dubna 1920, čís. 266 Sb. Zák. a nař. vydán ministerstvem vnitra a Státním úřadem statistickým na základě výsledků sčítání lidu z 1. prosince 1930, I. Země česká (= Statistický lexikon obcí v zemi české) / Statistical Lexicon of Municipalities in the Czech Country/* (Prague: Orbis, 1934), XXII-XXIV. (percentages are calculated); *Die Gemeinden des Reichsgaues Sudetenland. Ausführliche amtliche Ergebnisse der Volks-, Berufs- und Betriebszählung vom 17. Mai 1939 für jeden einzelne Gemeinde. Nach dem Gebietstand vom 1. Juli 1941* (Warnsdorf: Verlag Ed. Strache, 1941), 40, 48 and 52.

Roman Catholics who were the most numerous religious group, followed by quite an insignificant number of German speaking evangelical Protestants. Let us mention also Jewish population, inhabiting, in an untypical way, smaller towns and a number of (Jewish) villages, the number of which, however, was diminishing during the two wars and that perished completely during the Holocaust.²⁰

The expulsion represents the cornerstone of a discontinuity which has ever been felt since. The re-settlement process was relatively successful in larger towns only (there are just three of them: Tachov, Stříbro and Planá): in rural areas, several more or less successful waves of re-settlement took place.²¹ This means that many villages have never been, since the WWII, permanently inhabited: a very few families raised children in their new homes, the settlers often staying just a couple of years. The “normalization” (1969 – 1987) was, in fact, the first period after the World War II that brought, with the week-end dwellers from larger cities, some kind of a stabilization to the region. These week-end dwellers constitute today, in a number of smaller villages, the core of the population. In many cases retired now, many of them have virtually turned their week-end houses into their permanent domicile, without, however, declaring them as such.²²

It was very difficult for the new settlers to create emotional ties with their new, or, in many cases, temporary homes. Many of those who have stayed until today have never identified with the place and, with rare exceptions, do not feel the slightest need to establish any relationship with the former German culture or take care of its vestiges, including churches and

²⁰ Jiří Fiedler and Václav Fred Chvátal, *Židovské památky Tachovska, Plánska a Stříbrska / Jüdische Denkmäler im Tachover, Planer und Mieser Land / Jewish monuments in the Tachov, Plánsko and Stříbrsko regions/* (Domažlice: Nakladatelství Českého lesa, 2008), 5–12.

²¹ For the general information on re-settlement please see Lubomír Slezák, *Zemědělské osídlování pohraničí českých zemí po druhé světové válce / Agricultural Re-settlement of Borderland after the World War II/* (Brno: Blok, 1978); František Čapka, Lubomír Slezák and Jaroslav Vaculík, *Nové osídlení pohraničí českých zemí po druhé světové válce / New Settlement of the Czech Border Land after the World War II/* (Brno: Akademické nakladatelství CERM, 2005); Andreas Wiedemann, „*Kommt mit uns das Gernzland aufbauen!*“. *Ansiedlung und neue Strukturen in den ehemaligen Sudetengebieten 1945–1952* (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2007). The Tachov region is covered mainly in Jiří Topinka's „Zapomenutý kraj. České pohraničí 1948–1960 a takzvaná akce dosídlení,“ /*Forgotten region. Czech Borderland 1948 – 1960/ Soudobé dějiny* 3–4 (2005): 534–585; Jiří Topinka, „*Dosídlování pohraničí Plzeňska 1954–1960,*“ /*Re-settlement of the Plzeň region/ Minulostí západočeského kraje* 43 (2008): 115–162.

²² Antikomplex et al., *Zmizelé Sudety /Lost Sudetenland/ // Das Verschwundene Sudetenland* (Domažlice: Nakladatelství Českého lesa, 2006), 5, upravené a rozšířené vydání, 49; Petra Schindler-Wisten, „*Společenské aspekty chalupářské subkultury při studiu každodennosti v období tzv. normalizace,*“ /*Social aspects of week-end subculture/ Acta Fakulty filozofické Západočeské univerzity v Plzni* 3 (2007): 148. According to the data of the 2011 Census, there was a total of 11 157 houses in the Tachov region, out of which 9 616 were family houses. 1 538 houses were not inhabited and 553 (5.75%) of them was used for recreation. When we take out the three cities mentioned above (Tachov, Stříbro and Planá), the ratio raises to 7.91 % (503 inhabited houses for recreation compared to a total of 6 361 family houses). Source: „*The 2011 Census,*“ as of April 11, 2015, <https://vdb.czso.cz/sldvo>.

other sacral monuments.²³ In fact, the opposite is true: the new settlers have largely identified with the communist ideology and tradition, which was systematically built on the notion of the Iron Curtain. The collectivization of farms was carried out without complications and the irrational fear, shared by the majority of the population, of the comeback of Germans, along with the heroic myth of the Border Guard (which was, during the communism, one of the biggest employers in the region), have become the cement of the local society.²⁴

Another important aspect of this historical analysis is the longterm economic recession that came after the 1989 revolution, which has not been sufficiently compensated, as in other border regions, by the rise of tourism. Furthermore, there is a lack of transport services in the region and young (mainly educated) people keep moving off to large cities, mainly to Plzeň (this outflow had been, during the communist era, compensated by the system of “job placement orders”, which was designed to boost the resettlement of the now uninhabited regions).²⁵

The above taken into consideration, it is possible to conclude that traditional Christianity has been quite successfully eradicated in the Tachov micro-region. Christians currently living and practicing faith in the researched area had come from outside of it. Let us now briefly look at Christian groups living in the region today and at their origin.

Some of today's Christians in the region are descendants of religious families who came to the area from inland as new settlers right after the World War II. Some other came later to seek work or were assigned to the region through the “job placement orders”. These people are generally members of the most numerous Czech Churches, i.e. mostly the Roman Catholic Church, with some members of the Czechoslovak Hussite Church and, occasionally, of the evangelical Protestant Church.

Another specific religious group is represented by the so called “re-emigrants”,²⁶ i.e. people the families of whom had left the territory of the former Czechoslovakia to settle abroad,

²³ See, for example, Zdeněk Vyšohlíd and Zdeněk Procházka, *Čím ožívá krajina. Osudy 129 kostelů na Domažlicku a Tachovsku 1990-2000 / Was die Landschaft mit Leben Erfüllt. Schicksale der 129 Kirchen in der Region um Domažlice und Tachov 1990-2000/What makes the countryside live again/* (Domažlice: Nakladatelství Českého lesa, 2001).

²⁴ Václav Houžvička and Lukáš Novotný, *Otisky historie v regionálních identitách obyvatel pohraničí. Sebeidentifikace a vzájemné vnímání Čechů a Němců v přímém sousedství / Imprints of history in regional identities of the borderland population* (Prague: Sociologický ústav AV ČR, 2007), 74–84, 95–115.

²⁵ The “job placement order” was a document assigning the first job to high school and university graduates according to the needs of the then economic plan. The graduate was bound to take the job for a minimum of three years while the Company was to provide them with work and accommodation and compensate their costs of relocation. This regulation came into force in 1952 and in 1959 it was replaced by a milder version: the job was not assigned to graduates but recommended. The “job placement orders” of course, served also as a tool to repress both alleged and real “enemies of the popular-democratic regime”.

²⁶ For more information on re-emigration in general, see, for example Jaroslav Vaculík, *Poválečná reemigrace a usídlování zahraničních krajanů /After-War Migration and Settlement of Compatriots Coming from Abroad/*

creating Czech enclaves (for example in the region of Banat in current Romania). These people were coming back to the “land of their fathers”, bringing along their original or new faith, which they have always considered (and to a large extent still consider) as an important element of their identity. Having inhabited the entire villages (and having had, especially in the beginning, nowhere else to go), these re-emigrants have created communities rather isolated from the outside influences but, at the same time, relatively stable and enduring. Their religiosity is often of a specific character, it might be close to pietism or various charismatic protestant movements (evangelical Protestants, Baptists),²⁷ or else are close to Eastern liturgy (Orthodox or Greek Catholic Church).²⁸

The last group of Christians living today in the area are members of new lay Roman-Catholic religious communities, which have been founded, in most of the cases, in the town of Plzeň. These communities were created with the idea of relaunching Christian and cultural life in rural and borderland areas. They frequently participate in various local activities and, to a large extent, initiate and organize these themselves. They aspire to reconstruct destroyed historical monuments, they are trying to re-establish contacts with the original German population, revive the ante-war traditions, organize concerts and other cultural events or else undertake to start small farms run in the environmentally-friendly regime. These activities of theirs are often met with resentment not only from the side of the “native” population (the week-end dwellers being in many cases the only ones who regard these activities with sympathy) but also from the side of the Church representatives who see the communities as too independent.²⁹

From the statistical point of view, members of the above Christian communities represent a very little percentage of the Tachov micro-region population. But communities are

(Brno: Masarykova univerzita v Brně, 2002); for the re-settlement of the Tachov region, see Ivana Kotrbatá, „Ještě je 400 míst volných v tachovském okrese!“ Příspěvek k „malým dějinám“ reemigrace a dosídlení Tachovska v narativních interview na začátku 21. století,“ /”There are 400 places in the Tachov region!”/ *Etnologický časopis – Český lid* 3 (2010): 265–280; Gabriela Fatková et al., *Tachovsko: krajina v paměti / paměť v krajině. Katalog k výstavě* (Plzeň: Západočeská univerzita v Plzni, 2014), 54–60.

²⁷ Edita Štěpíková, *Země otců. Z historie a ze vzpomínek k 50. výročí reemigrace potomků českých exulantů /The country of our fathers/* (Prague: Spolek exulantů, 1995), 336–343 (2. rozšířené vydání z roku 2005 nebylo autorům v době přípravy studie k dispozici); Zdeňka Hovorková, „Repatriace českých pobělohorských exulantů z Polska na Bezručicko po druhé světové válce,“ /Re-patriation of the Czech after-Bílá hora exile from Poland to the Bezručice region after the World War II/ in *Scamna super Misam 2. Sborník prací studentů a absolventů katedry historie FPE ZČU*, ed. Jiří Stočes and Eva Mušková (Plzeň: Západočeská univerzita v Plzni, 2010), 89–100.

²⁸ Júlia Bakošová, „Tachovský děkanát,“ *Hlas pravoslavy /The voice of orthodoxy/* 12 (2014): 15–18; Karel Sládek et al., *Řeckokatolická církev v českých zemích. Dějiny, identita, dialog /Greek Catholic Church in the Bohemian Lands/* (Červený Kostelec: Pavel Mervart, 2013), 35.

²⁹ See also Jan Váně, *Komunita jako nová naděje? Náboženské neinstitutionalizované komunity optikou sociologie náboženství /Community as a New Hope?/* (Plzeň: Západočeská univerzita, 2012).

quite active and, thus, visible. Despite of this, the question (concerning mainly the new lay religious communities) remains: are these groups stable enough to be able to exercise some influence in the region for more than one generation?

RESEARCH FIELD AND METHODOLOGY

In the previous chapter, we have outlined historical circumstances influencing the transformations of religiosity in the researched region and events that brought about the rupture in continuity of religious memory. Let us now describe the theoretical background on which we have based our thinking about the memory and the way it influences religiosity. We used Jan Assmann's theoretical concept³⁰ of two types of inter-subjectively shared memory. On the one hand, there is the *communicative memory* constituted by everyday interactions and rarely transgressing the form of talk or narrative. This type of memory is rather fragile: it is not protected from forgetting by being fixed through some kind of a material objectivization, such as texts or paintings, which would institutionalize it through cultivating and providing it with a means to be transferred and codified.³¹ Communicative memory can be seen as a landmark according to which individuals are able to orientate in the world and, at the same time, it works as a medium of interactions among individuals and, parallel to this, it is nourished by these interactions.

On the other hand, there is the *cultural memory*, transgressing the memory shared by individuals with their contemporaries. It is, in fact, the communicative memory consciously transformed, through recording and interpretation, into an objectivized form, i.e. the cultural memory. In other words, there are two poles of memory: the communicative memory, which is of an episodic character and is linked to our experience, and the cultural memory, which relies on the semantic memory which, in turn, is linked to everything that we have learned and remembered.³² Talking about memory, we need to mention socialization, a process closely related to the constitution of memory. Socialization helps us remember but, at the same time, our memory helps us become socialized. Socialization is not a mere foundation of the memory, it is also a function or, as we might call it, the “cement of memory”.³³ Life in the society (the

³⁰ Comp. Jan Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory* (California: Stanford University Press, 2006), Jan Assmann, *Kultura a paměť: písmo, vzpomínka a politická identita v rozvinutých kulturách starověku / Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination/* (Prague: Prostor, 2001).

³¹ See also Csaba Szaló, „Od kolektivní paměti k paměti města,“ /From collective memory to the memory of cities/ *Sociální studia* 2 (2013): 7–11.

³² Comp. Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory*.

³³ Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory*, 4.

social context) is the place where norms and values originate. These norms and values represent a key element when it comes to defining what is important and what is the significance of rules, values, facts, etc. Doing this, we structure our private experience to the deepest level: the private and the shared intertwine and that is why it is very difficult to make the difference between the memory of an individual and memory of the society.

Let us now move onto another specific concept of memory, *religious memory*, connected, in Jan Assmann's work, mainly with religious rites that he sees as a medium of thinking.³⁴ Religious memory is considered a part of the collective memory³⁵, which is not just a sediment of settled experiences and interpretations but is socially constructed. This (see also Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann 1999)³⁶ means that involved in its creation are not only competing discourses and power structures – as it is fashionable to say today – but that it is a product of socially shared symbolic universes and that the key role in this process is played by the objectivization of experience through the language as a tool used to reproduce the shared objectivized cultural (religious) symbols, such as texts, rites, paintings or sculptures.

Religious memory, just like the cultural memory, has the ability to constitute space that is shared on the basis of a common experience, thanks to which it is filled up with shared or, onto the contrary, antagonistic expectations influencing actors' behavior. In order to understand these expectations, we would recommend to use the hermeneutic method, concentrating on the role played by “understanding” under the condition that we approach important events as a text. Hermeneutics, thus, along with the cultural memory theory, serves as a tool to explore conditions that help constitute and recognize a text (events) as binding.

The data (attitudes and opinions of key actors /politicians, laymen, clergymen/ concerning the nature of religious memory and the role played in the process of its constitution by the Catholic Church as a regional “hegemon”) were collected in an ethnographic research, a suitable tool allowing the researcher to explore the actors' perspectives (the actors being regarded as key figures in our analysis of the present and of the weakening of religious memory).

The data were collected in the period between January 2014 and February 2015. During this time, we carried out a total of 20 interviews with key respondents and approximately 270 hours of observation. We have contacted priests who had lived and worked in the region during

³⁴ Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory*, 139–154.

³⁵ Assmann, *Kultura a paměť /Culture and Memory/*.

³⁶ Peter L. Berger a Thomas Luckmann, *Sociální konstrukce reality: pojednání o sociologii vědění /Social Construction of Reality/* (Brno: CDK, 1999).

the communist regime and, eventually, after its fall, as well as priest who are living and working in the region today. We have done the same with politicians, contacting individuals with political influence who have the power to affect relations of the town of Tachov political representation and the Catholic Church. When looking for relevant lay informants, we searched for individuals who are active in the public space. In other words, we used three lines of contacts, to which we added new informants through the snowball sampling technique.

The average length of the interview was around 90 minutes and all interviews were semi-structured.³⁷ All interviews were recorded and transcribed. We have received informed consent from all participants and we committed to keep confidentiality. It has soon become evident that in such a small region, it is, in some cases, practically impossible to keep the anonymity of the source, mainly in the case of Church representatives and politicians. This means that, in order to protect our informants, we were not able to use all information we gathered. A part of the problem was solved by only listing categories (a) priest, (b) politician, (c) religious lay person.

Politicians

The Catholic Church is considered as the principal bearer of religious memory in the region and we would now like to outline the way regional politicians see its role in maintaining or restoring religious memory. They assign the most important role to priests active in the region today or in the past. The history of the region and the current situation of the Church in the region taken into consideration, priests represent a very small group of actors. It has soon become evident that politicians believe that priests (with the exception of one who lived and worked in the region in the turn of the millennium) as well as the entire Catholic community are very passive. According to politicians, Church has not been particularly engaged in the public space during the last 25 years. A part of the political representation is thus quite reserved when it comes to the Church and its assumed influence in the Tachov micro-region.

„These Catholics, they don't make any effort at all (...) what bothers me with these Catholics, it's that they are persuaded that they are something more than the others. So when there were new people coming to the region, who were not so much religious, didn't practice so much, they looked down to them. (...)

³⁷ Questions as we asked them in the semi-structured interview were specific according to which group of informants we interviewed. But all three groups had one identical set of questions: (1) Who, according to you, is the bearer/interrupter of the religious memory in the region? (2) Where or what are, according to you, the key religion-related places in the region? (3) How is religious memory maintained/interrupted in the region? (4) Why do you think religious memory in the region is maintained/interrupted?

They have not taken advantage of the only opportunity to attract people they had after the fall of the communism (...) there is no longing to advocate ethical life, no longing to come up with something that would put people together, (...) it's hardcore passivity." (politician)

*"I'd imagine they would be more active but they probably feel as if someone would say that they are annoying. (...) Father *** is great, I do not want to say that he has resigned completely but despite of this I am afraid that he is not quite sure whether it would serve a good purpose if the Church was more present."* (politician)

The fundamental accusation is that of passivity. Let us now elaborate. Some of the "invisibility" of Church representatives is, understandably, due to physical constraints. 7 priests are currently assigned to the Tachov vicariate but 3 of them are over 70 years old. If it's the priests who are supposed to be the key actors responsible for the reproduction and maintenance of religious memory, then – their number and age structure taken into consideration - it is quite understandable that they are in a state not far from burnout: they are overloaded with work and they have to carry out activities that have nothing to do with their evangelistic mission, such as fund raising, taking care of various reconstruction projects, looking after a number of parishes with great distances between, etc. When we take this into consideration, then it is quite understandable that the overall impression is that the Church is passive and "invisible". In other words, priests, as the assumed main actors, are not able to even slowdown the process of breakdown of parishes as the main agents of collective memory, Catholic identity and common history shared by individuals that had started after the World War II and was accelerated by the communist regime.³⁸

On the other hand, politicians repeatedly stated that even though manifestations and events that would maintain religious memory are not numerous and that for the society (*„Church remains somewhere in the margins and it does not want to be friends"*), Church is important for of the micro-region's marketing.

„The fire brigade has a new flag and they had it sanctified." (politician)

*„That's what happens here, Father *** has to go all the places. I have invited him many times to my events to give blessings."* (politician)

Priests are often invited to participate in various (cultural) events organized by both municipalities and communities (where they usually sanctify various objects, such as flags or

³⁸ It seems that this is not due only to the communist regime but that it is a trend that can be seen even in Western countries. See, for example Hervieu-Léger, who describes the decomposition of parishes as the main guarantors of the collective religious memory in France in the 1950's. (Daniele Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), 130–140).

Christmas trees). And it is generally expected that they would participate in important social events, such as funfairs (traditionally connected to pilgrimages), organized by the municipalities. Religious zeal of people who participate in these events should not be overestimated and we definitely not see this practice as a manifestation of deprivatization as defined by José Casanova: the presence of Church representatives does not comply with the basic parameters of deprivatization as José Casanova defined them.³⁹ This practice, according to us, represents rather a practice in which religious symbols are used for marketing and aesthetic purposes despite the fact that one of the politicians linked the presence of priests in public events to the need of something that would transgress the everyday reality: „*People want to have it brushed by some kind of a higher principle or so, (...) they feel as if it was more serious, more dignified, more trustworthy.*” On the other hand, politicians also complained that a priest did not want to sanctify certain buildings or objects even though they asked him for it and that the act would be related with an important cultural and political event. „*In ***, we did three crosses, one positive and one negative. He blessed them. But what he did not want was the little green man, which is, in fact, something from the Middle Age, they often put it on cathedrals but no one really knows what it is.*” (politician)

The above illustrates that the Church and its representatives are expected to play some kind of a service role. Such approach, according to us, could be theoretically explained through the conceptualization of religion as developed by Grace Davie. She pointed out that individuals (in particular stages of life) or institutions tend to use services the Church offers as its representative function. Rites of passage, such as baptisms, weddings or funerals represent the typical events that would be concerned by the above but the Church is solicited also at the occasion of various political and cultural events that we have described earlier in the text.⁴⁰ This means that the Church, even in a strongly irreligious environment, plays a representative role

³⁹ Casanova tried to demonstrate that religion leaves the place it used to be assigned to it in the private sphere and that it enters a non-differentiated public sphere of the civil society where it participates in conflicts on the redrawing of social borders as they existed until now. Results from this a situation when religious groups see themselves no more as integrating social elements of individual nations but transgress to a new trans-national level, acquiring a global identity that enables them to be confronted with the nation state and the current social order. In such a situation, deprivatization has three forms: (a) religion as a tool of mobilization and defense of traditional forms of life against the state and economic expansionism, (b) religion as a defense against the “wild” capitalism, (c) religion as a barrier against individualism (José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago – London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 225–230).

⁴⁰ Representative religion (Church), as defined by Grace Davie, describes a situation in which the religious minority acts in the name of a broader group of people who understand and approve. Such situations may occur, for example, during significant Church holidays (Christmas, Easter or State holidays), a *Te Deum* at the occasion of the presidential inauguration or baptism of a child of non-practicing parents upon a wish of a relative (Grace Davie, *The Sociology of Religion* (Los Angeles – London: Sage Publications, 2007), 127).

in the eyes of the broad public. This, in turn, means that the Church (religion), as remembered by the population, represents an entity to which it is possible to turn one's attention and use it in particular situations. In other words, even though an overwhelming majority of the Tachov region population does not participate in religious life, the people occasionally use the Church for specific purposes.

Using the representative function of the Church (religion) within the region is also related to its marketing value, well appreciated by politicians who, otherwise, are cautious when it comes to interacting with Church. Which, in turn, entails dissatisfaction from the side of opposition politicians.

„Well, it depends on which of the municipal councils we talk about but when you really strike and ask them why they give all the time everything to the fire squad and nothing to the Church even though you need to repair banks [in the Church], they say that they don't have money now. They are blocked, religion tells them nothing, and all has become worse with the Church property restitutions now,⁴¹ that is a problem. According to them, they [the Church] is loaded. (politician)

The refusal to assign resources to Church-related activities may be explained by political affiliation (those who refused are members of the Communist or Social Democratic party). We have already pointed out that political life in the Tachov micro-region has been dominated, in the long term, by left-wing parties, i.e. the Czech Social Democratic Party and the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia. Communist and social democratic politicians see the Church in general, activities it carries out and its role as a bearer of cultural (and religious) memory as a relict of the past, conserved until today through material vestiges, such as churches, chapels or crosses in the countryside. Despite this attitude, they often deemed it appropriate to co-fund reconstructions of Church monuments from municipal budgets. By doing this, they wanted to demonstrate their positive approach not only to the Church but also to the cultural memory of the region. Yet even though they have been doing this, it has always been apparent that this effort to protect Church monuments is related mainly to the aesthetic aspect of the issue: the parish church, for example, is the town's dominating feature pictured in all brochures, representing the key object of the town's and region's marketing strategy. Members of the opposition in individual towns or communities have confirmed this interpretation.

⁴¹ The Church property restitution quarrel has been going on in the Czech Republic the early 1990's. It is about returning the Church property stolen by the communist regime. The Restitution Act was passed by the Czech Parliament in 2012. For more information on the problem of restitutions, see for example Jan Váně and František Kalvas, „Agenda-Setting Effect of Focusing Events: Case Study of Church Restitutions Issue,“ *Sociologia* 3 (2013): 290–315.

„They did not care for the Church, they were just persuaded that it would be good for Tachov.”
(politician)

„I wrote an entire study of why it is necessary to repair the organ in the church. Some politicians are a-priori against it. And when they got a demand from some parish, they think that it is not at all appropriate [for the Church to ask for the money]. But times have been changing. During the last six, seven years, the town's representatives have started to understand that it is here, that some help is needed and that it is not a problem for the town to support it.” (politician)

The Church is often seen as passive but religious memory is activated and used by politicians mainly during various cultural events with strong aesthetic background. All the above taken into consideration, it is possible to draw the following conclusion: when compared to the communist era (that strived to eradicate any possible kind of religious memory), current politician' attitude to religion is either reserved or indifferent. This, however, does not prevent them from using religion-related events and symbols not only as a service provided to the mainstream society but also as a marketing event promoting the particular locality.

Laymen

We have established that tradition is the source of memory. At the same time, looking back at history and statistics, we can clearly see that there is just a handful of active lay people affiliated to the Catholic Church in the region. According to what politicians have said, there is a demand from the majority society when it comes to the utilization of the Church as a service organization. In other words, it is generally expected that there is an active religious minority, understanding and able to carry out religious acts that are used, in particular moments of life, by all the others. This, yet in other words, means that there are active bearers of religious tradition, which represents a reservoir of meanings able to activate (not only) religious memory. The problem, however, lies in the fact that active religious people are so small in number that they do not even represent 1% of the population of the researched region.

When we asked religious lay people about the causes of the situation, we usually got one identical explanation. Religiosity could not take root in the region because after the Germans were expelled, a motley assortment of people both from inland and abroad came to the region without ever constituting a firm core of religious people around which further activities and generations could have clustered and that would be able to strengthen and transfer religious tradition.

Another very often cited argument for the lack of bearers of religious memory is the fact that it is hardly possible to find, on the territory of the micro-region, more than one entire

Catholic family, let's not even mention a second or third generation religious family. This is why lay people are persuaded that religious memory is born primarily by priests.

„Poor priests, terribly high demands are placed on them. When they finally succeed to gather ten people in the church, these people have no children. There is a lack of families, we'd need at least three families so the Mums can meet, to make it good for something. (...) one Mum is over here, the other over there, it is no strength. You need a group of children. I had the chance to experience that, we used for example to go on vacation with the Plzeň folk, that is a very intensive thing, it's completely different. Ten women of my age, one tells me something, the other other thing, it inspires you. And in the church here, I know no people of this sort here. (...) You don't find something like that in Tachov or in Bor, families with children are simply missing here.” (religious lay person)

The longterm trend of not only the lack of religious people but of families living in the region for some decades is approved also by priests who has lived and worked in the region since the 1990's. For forty years, the situation has remained the same: the lack of priests as bearers of religious memory cannot thus be compensated by the number or abilities of religious people in the region. This entails the feelings of skepticism and resignation in both priests and religious people, and, among certain laymen, provokes attempts to explain this situation by other than socio-demographic or cultural and political explanations. Communist oppression and, predictably, the expulsion of Germans are seen not only as the root cause of weakened religiosity in the region and disappearing of religious memory, but, in the case of the expulsion, as a punishment.

„Those who were expelled from here, they definitely wished no good to this region. I'm just saying one thing. I've been to various places but what you find here, it is really weird. It's like bewitched here. (...) When you walk through these villages from which the people were chased away, the only thing you see is a pond and reeds and trees with a cross and when you walk through such a place, it's like if you spotlighted Auschwitz or something like that. It just weighs on you.” (religious lay person)

„I had big plans, many times, I had plenty of energy, I succeeded in many things, I organized concerts, community was growing, many people would participate and all of a sudden, they just disappeared and everything was different and we had to start over. And it was the same thing again and again. I don't know how to explain it, people came and disappeared. Every time something starts to blossom here, something starts to grow - I conducted a church choir - and all of a sudden, they are gone. It's like these waves, like when the oeuvre does not grow but is tried again and again. And you must start over and over. And gather forces and courage to restart constructing something.” (religious lay person)

Both religious people and priests are persuaded that the region used to be significantly religious and that it has lost its religiosity and tradition along with losing contact with the German ethnic. And then, next to the well rooted narrative of the loss of religiosity resulting the expulsion of religiously active Germans, there is the other aspect of the issue: frustration of having to start over and over again. Let us enumerate the causes of repeated collapses when it comes to

activities carried out by religious people. The first one is a rather strong fluctuation of the population: people come (usually seeking work) and go. The second reason are the priests themselves, let us explain: in the turn of the millennium, there was a significant shift in the way things were done: a very active but quite unorthodox priest came to the Tachov region. His ways, on the one hand, seduced mainly young people and people who were searching for spirituality. On the other hand, his unorthodox methods kept provoking other priests and some lay Catholics, as a result of which he was forced to retire and disharmony among religious people was seeded.

Another aspect of rivalry between the priests and the lay religious communities⁴² is the fact that members of the communities have, in most of the cases, been coming to the region from larger cities such as Plzeň. The lay religious communities are, in fact, groups of lay people founded and coming to the micro-region with the ambition to put into practice radical Christianity and live an authentic life, the goal of which it is to stand up to radical forms of individualism that started affecting, in the 1990's, also the Czech Republic. Their activism and dynamics have unhinged stereotyped perception of the Church among the broad public. It has soon become evident that members of these communities are able to actively enter into the public space within a particular location and set its agenda, or, eventually, frame this agenda according to their needs and ideas. The problem, however, is that members of these loose communities have rather reserved feelings towards the local Church hierarchy or that they do not respect all priests equally. It is also possible to say that the way they approach the Church is structured according to personal biographies of particular actors, not the (not always intelligible) Church policies.

Another element influencing the attitudes of communities to the Church and world in general is the emphasis put on the authenticity of personal faith, i.e. emphasizing the need to fulfill the very essence of Christianity, not its formal standards. This, of course, provokes a certain resentment in priests who work in the proximity of these communities. Even “ordinary” religious people have noticed that there is a tension between the lay communities and local priests.

⁴² We refer to non institutionalized lay religious communities originated in frame of the Church and reacting, in their specific way, to current processes. What they have in common is that they have been founded as communities of people striving to live the feeling of togetherness and authentic Christianity and that they want to leave urban life behind. The lay communities we have studied have been settling in empty parish houses that would otherwise become a great economic burden for the Church. The Plzeň Bishop decided thus to solve this issue by selling these buildings. Comp. Váně, *Komunita jako nová naděje? /Community as the New Hope?/*.

„Some people react to them in quite a stupid way, really. I think that [community] has no support from the closest [vicar] under the jurisdiction of whom they fall.” (religious lay person)

„And when, for instance [the priest] invited [the unofficial leader of the lay community], he instructed him that everyone must participate in the Loretto celebration and that this celebration must be really huge and pompous. And you know [the unofficial leader of the lay community], that's really not his thing. So he tried it once and that was it, it is not his thing to scream religious Marian songs into the microphone. He [the priest] does everything somehow violently, with no sensibility, he just pushes hard. And what is the result? The result is stupid: [the unofficial leader of the lay community] does not support these events so [the priest] does not support the lay community.” (religious lay person)

This testimony shows clearly that there is a conceptual conflict about how to fulfill and, above all, present religiosity to the outside world. Other interviews indicated that there is a strong communication barrier between average lay Catholics and the Church structure, present on all levels, with varying intensity and due to mutual mistrust. If such a barrier really does exist, we can hardly expect that the numbers of people affiliated to Church will stop dropping. The existence of the barrier may be demonstrated by the tension between active members of communities and priests. This may lead for example to a situation in which one of the communities we have explored has been gradually resigning to define itself as a religious community existing in frame of the Catholic Church and started defining itself as a non-religious community since it does not need Church in order to exist. This state of affairs does not constitute a very optimistic prospect for further development of the Church in the Czech Republic in general and is even less appealing for the idea of preserving religious memory in the region. Members and sympathizers of lay religious communities strive to address the problem of the weakening of religious memory by making it up to date, by trying to create a new tradition: these groups are coming to the micro-region from the outside and as such, they lack the traditional connection with the region, i.e. the constituting element enabling individuals, groups and organizations to build up their identity (which is a very important aspect in the Catholic environment: properly settled tradition is the basis for knowledge that forms individuals, that provides them with a basis on which they can learn to understand themselves and on which can support them when they have doubts).

That is why lay communities trying to settle in the region define their own rituals, come up with their interpretations of events, with a specific way to (re)produce a tradition based on a series of repeated events that become, in the eyes of outsiders, a kind of a trademark of the communities. The missing tradition, i.e. the intelligible picture anchored in memory, is created during particular events but also *ad hoc*. We are now going to point out the most important aspect of the work of one of the researched lay communities, which will serve us as an example

of the way cultural memory is treated and will explain how come the relationship between priests and lay members of religious communities has become so complicated.

The expulsion of Sudetenland German and, along with them, a great number of priests, is the decisive moment defining the region's memory. The researched community has thus entered into a region which, many generations ago, had lost its original social structure and cultural memory without a new one being created. As a result of this, all religiosity has gone from the region, along with all cultural and social activities. The lay communities have perceived this region as space that needs to be revitalized with respect to its (original) Catholic religiosity. In this point, they agree with both priests and religious people in the region. Except for this point, however, they emphasize the need to understand and acknowledge that the region is closely bound to the German element. In other words, when these communities are trying to constitute their own tradition and take roots in the region, they consciously use the notion of Sudetenland as an attention-drawing symbol. Talking to the members of communities, we could see that this symbolism is mentioned quite often: not rare are jokes about Sudetenland as the “end of the world” with respect to jobs, miserable state of the countryside or broken social ties. And then there is the other, complementary symbol: community as a cultural and spiritual oasis in an otherwise arid country, cultural and religious (Catholic) a long time ago, to which it is necessary to return its meaning.

*„It is related to the fact that it is advantageous to support these people somehow because, simply, we have nothing else. It is a Sudetenland desert here. So *** has *** and all these activities that she has been carrying out there. (...) And what counts for us is the affinity, spiritual affinity, affinity with places, we want to breathe in their spirit again by bringing people together (...) those who lived here and those who are living here now. Because without tradition, you need to link your new thing to something, otherwise it's impossible.” (member of the community)*

The act of linking the symbolism of Sudetenland to the idea of the oasis (community) serves to a specific purpose: defining the center and the periphery. The effort to revive and endow the place with its lost cultural, religious and landscape-forming sense represents a tool that helps the community legitimize some of its activities (demands for development grants, etc.) as well as to set agenda within the public space (re-establishing contacts or organizing meetings of former and current inhabitants of particular municipalities or villages).

The process of re-framing the symbolism of Sudetenland (managed by the particular community) represents an interesting shift in the perception of this phenomenon in the Czech Republic. Older generations link the notion of Sudetenland to the definition of the nation-

related problems of the first Republic: Sudetenland have, in the long term, equaled betrayal and the root-cause of the breakdown of the first Czechoslovak Republic.⁴³

The after-war social, demographic and economic transformations led, besides others, to the effort to erase the term “Sudetenland” from the language. This effort was quite successful but it left, nevertheless, a mental shadow hanging over the minds of the newcomers. This negative feeling was even intensified during the after-war failure to re-settle and economically revive the region. It was not until the 1990's that a certain reflexion of all aspects of the Sudetenland after-war history was initiated.

The symbolism of Sudetenland, thus, was re-framed by the community (as a minority group) and serves now as a means to differentiate its perception from the mainstream view. Symbolic meaning as it is perceived and interpreted by the majority is delimited in a new way⁴⁴ and becomes a part of the community's own discourse. The purposes of this discourse is to preserve the community but it also helps set particular agenda, which, when incorporated into the every-day's life agenda of the community, helps to prove its sovereignty, confirmed in turn by a successful meeting of former and current inhabitants of the village.

But community's activism entails conflicts with priests. And, reversely, community criticizes official Church structures, pointing out that priests are burnt out and that they have not enough zeal to carry out their main mission (evangelization). In short, community and its sympathizers are quiet critical to Church and its activities in the region. We can sum up their objections as follows: (a) Church does not reflect appropriately the nature of the time we live in, (b) Church has adopted and sticks to defensive strategy when it comes to its relation to the majority society (c) the Church is not able to come up with and set relevant agenda , (d) the Church does not sufficiently support viable models and projects introduced by lay people, (e) the Church clings to an old, nonfunctional model of organization where lay people are supposed to act as a support for the priest. In other words, lay communities perceive the Church as poor-spirited, lacking both dynamism and a strategic plan that would take into consideration the current state of both the Church and the society.

According to lay communities active in the region, this is due to the rigidity of Church administrative units, inability to efficiently use the energy and capacities of lay people and

⁴³ Stanislav Biman and Sabina Dušková, *Kdo byl kdo v Říšské župě Sudety 1939–1945. Svazek 1. /Who was who in the Reich's Sudeten. Volume 1./* (Ústí nad Labem: Albis International, 2003) or Václav Kural and Zdeněk Radvanovský. *Sudety pod hákovým křížem /Sudetenland under the Swastika/* (Ústí nad Labem: Albis International, 2002).

⁴⁴ For further information on symbol redefinition and their utilization as “reversed” symbols see Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London – New York: Routledge, 2007 – [1st edition 1985]), 58–63.

obstinacy of priests who keep acting as if they were superior to lay people despite the fact that Church documents declare they are equal.

The testimonies of the members of the lay community lead to an assumption that activities carried out by most of the clerics are not functional and that they rather tend to suppress alternative forms of evangelization and life, which would better reflect the needs of both religious people and those who have been searching for spirituality. This is, according to them, also the reason why religious memory in the region has been weakening.

Priests

Many politicians and lay people, when interviewed, told us that religious memory should be maintained and taken care of by local priests. Let us now look precisely at these actors. Priests, when asked why religious memory and religiosity as such has been ruptured in the region, often said that it is due to the expulsion of religious Germans and to a practically total replacement of the population that, however, has never really been able to identify with the region. They feel, therefore, that problems are due to the impossibility to revive the “original” connection between the population and the land (Christianity): population was chased out of villages which have remained (half) empty forever, which, in turn, entailed the weakening of social control. When we talked to priests, they repeatedly mentioned this fact, complaining about single-parent families or about the lack of the generation of middle-aged people.

The disintegration, according to priests, has the following reasons: first, the religious generation to generation identity transfer was interrupted because, among others, families today prefer to fulfill their individual needs rather than maintain stability and continuity by sticking to religious identity. The most characteristic features of the region, according to priests, are strong migration and population instability which leads to a situation in which people do not identify with their homes. The priest see this as a result of the practice of past decades during which the region was, under the rule of Communists, populated mainly by soldiers serving their two years in the army, members of the secret police and its auxiliary bodies and members of the border patrol. No religious community could survive for long in such an environment. Consequences are felt even today: from the point of view of the religion, a mere desire to have one's children baptized or have a Church wedding or funeral are seen as a promise of something positive.

„I would not dare to say that this region is completely irreligious because, paradoxically – and even though we, the Church, have been constantly accused of just longing for money and having these

pedophile scandals, you never hear anything else about the Church – the services we provide, such as funerals, baptisms, weddings, at cetera, when I sum it up, these are the most frequently used by people who declare no affiliation to the Church.” (priest)

„They visit, they come to study religion with us here, we have a class tomorrow (...) you have to believe and tell yourself, hopefully, all this effort will not be lost, hopefully it will not be forgotten, let us believe that each little seed planted in a child will grow, maybe not immediately but possibly in twenty, thirty years. One wise priest used to say, why, it's like this: you're going to teach religion to children and then they are going to leave into the wide world, maybe they're not going to go to the church so often, but maybe one of them becomes a journalist and then he'll remember – Father, when he was teaching us religion, was always nice to us, he used to give us candy – and he would at least not write a nasty article about the Church. This is also the way how to influence people, these basics of ethics, basics of awareness about Christian holidays” (priest)

Here again we see that the Church maintains religious memory in the region and that it serves it by playing the role of a service organization concentrated on spiritual matters. Those who are sorry about the poor state of the situation are not concerned only with the lack of families with children but mainly with the prevailing passiveness among religious lay people. This passiveness would be manifested by the fact that despite the fact that religious lay people are well aware that priests are overloaded with work, they come with no initiative to help them. When we talked to priests, they enumerated the following activities they would expect lay people could offer (and which they would consider, at the same time, as a demonstration of the continuity of religious life): the joint rite of the Stations of the Cross, praying the rosary or the May (Marian) worship. These ceremonies do not require the presence of a priest. In other words, priests are persuaded that religious memory could be maintained and reinforced if popular piety was renewed through, for example, the above activities.

Testimonies we have gathered from the priests have also shown that in order to cope with the situation, they developed a strategy that we named as “seed strategy”. It resides on the hope that as a result of interacting with priests, people would always keep some memory related to religious life which would either bring them back to the religion later or, at least, suppress negative feelings towards the Church or religion. The problem is that it is really hard to evaluate such expectations.

There is a lack of religious people who would be able to act as mediators of religious memory, the region, however, is full of various material objects, such as churches, chapels and crosses that, according to priests, can play the mediating role. But, despite the fact that they are quite numerous, they have to be (in order to fulfill the memory-bearing function) linked with people.

„When it comes to buildings, we have places to go, we have places where to celebrate liturgy and more or less, we have nothing to complain about when it comes to the technical state of the churches. But memory, it's not just houses. If it was just houses, we would be doing great because we have everything repaired. But memory, it's mostly people, and that's where there will be a problem.” (priest)

We had already pointed out that priests are persuaded that religiosity is hard to maintain, let alone reproduce, because lay people are very passive. One of them commented on this as follows: *„If we were to go by what people want, we would be finished soon. Because what they want is: first, they want us to leave them alone. They want us not to disturb so they can watch their soap operas, etc. Second, if we looked at what they want through the lenses of where they go, then I can say that the Church is full in Christmas, but only on the Christmas Eve, at the midnight Mass. And then it is full for funerals. And then, there are some people at the funfair services but not very many.”*

It is therefore quite surprising that most priests look at the evangelization attempts carried out by the newly coming lay communities without enthusiasm or even with contempt. We have already mentioned the fact that relations between priests and one of the most active lay religious communities in the region are more than chilly.

Let us briefly outline the nature of this clash between the main bearers of religious memory: (a) generation gap problem: community members and their sympathizers are young people not older than 45. Most of the priests in the region are over 60 (b) liturgy problem: there is a controversy about how to approach religious practice (c) the urban vs. the rural (most of the members of the lay communities are from the town but they currently live in the country).

CONCLUSION

The goal of the present study is to explore the way key actors (politicians, priests and lay people) reflect the position of the Catholic Church in the Tachov region (the Czech Republic) and what is the way they think about the forms of religious memory. We have tried to find out what events, places or buildings are considered as the main bearers of religious memory and what is the role played by religion in this micro-region, characteristic by its low religiosity, marked with the massive exodus of Sudetenland Germans after the World War II and considered, by the Communist regime, as a “barrage to stop Western imperialist”. And because it is the Catholic Church that used to dominate the region and because the Catholics represent the largest religious minority in the Czech Republic, we have concentrated on this particular Church (being, however, aware of the fact that other religious groups are active in the region).

The findings of our ethnographic research show us the following: Priests who have lived and worked in the region since the communist era are perceived as key bearers of religious memory. The problem, however, is that even these priests are quite resigned. Why? They are

very little in number, most of them are quite old and they feel overburdened with work. We have established that priests complain about lay people being passive. But priests, too, are somehow passive and they expect that it should be their superiors, mainly the Bishop, who should initiate a modification in the way religiosity is mediated. Priests concentrate often on the reconstructions of buildings (churches, chapels, etc.). Their attitudes (resignation) may also be put into the context of somehow unclear personal management of the Bishop, this state of lethargy being emphasized also by the fact that an election of a new Bishop is awaited.

The only strategy (except for conserving religion through the administration of standard religious acts, such as celebration of masses, etc.) that we were able to register was what we started to call „seed strategy”, based on the expectation that at least some individuals who have contacts with priests or the Church may retain the „seed of knowledge”. These strategies, however, are neither carefully elaborated nor attractive and have not the potential to inspire people to join the Church.

The situation is furthermore complicated by the Church's relationship to lay religious communities that have been settling in the region. They have been carrying out various activities and trying to symbolically re-frame the idea of the Sudetenland region. They have been regarded as highly unorthodox, as a result of which quite a strong tension developed. But even communities have their limits in capacity, they tend to fall apart and depend on large cities from which they recruit their young members. Results from this the inability to establish links with local religious people.

The effect of all of this is that the region has known repeated inflows and outflows of religious people. And it seems that people just have to start over and over again. There is a lack of religious families living in the region for at least three generations.

When talking about religious memory, the following must be said: all groups of respondents link the weakening of memory and religiosity to the expulsion of Germans, which creates a thought figure about the irreplaceableness of the loss. The departure of German would entail a disappearing of a tradition that would normally bind people and create ties of solidarity, expressed not only by the will to help neighbors but also by the will to work “for a common goal”. This aspect explains a certain admiration for the concept of community-organized activities that was characteristic for German villages: all respondents praised this practice.

It seems that memory in the Tachov region is mostly influenced by the fact that the region's inhabitants do not admit that they do not know and, therefore, do not acknowledge their past. This, at the same time, means that there is no source of collective identity. The generally acknowledged milestone – after-war expulsion of Germans – is reflected in historical literature

but not really in the minds of “local” people. And if it is, then just as a *topoi*: it used to be Catholic here. The oldest generations who had come to the region right after the war do not want to think about the past. The younger (second) generation or those who came in the 1960's do try to establish some relation with the Germans but their activities are not able to initiate a thorough reflection of the past.

It has become evident that the Catholic Church is not successful in finding some kind of positive constituent event (memory) that would represent a milestone helping to break individual biographies and that would become The social event that would bind the inhabitants of the region and help enhance and reproduce religious memory. Otherwise, there is the one link that weighs hard on everybody: the myth of expelled religious Sudetenland German. We believe that the next step, when studying religious memory in the region, should be the verification of this figure of thought, framing testimonies of all actors living in the region.

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