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# Religion, Spirituality, Worldviews, and Discourses: Revisiting the Term “Spirituality” as Opposed to “Religion”

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**Abstract:** In the last few decades, the usage of the term “spirituality” has plummeted in an unprecedented way and has significantly contributed to the question what “religion” is and is not. The notion that the word “spirituality” is an emic term, closely tied to the postmodern situation and specifically the New Age scene, is occasionally referred to by scholars, mainly by Steven Sutcliffe. However, the consequences of this remain largely unexplored. This article shows the term has been largely accepted by the scholarly community, with all its implicit emic baggage, and discusses various aporia and questionable results that emerge from its uncritical usage. Consequently, from the traditional perspective, the term should be treated as emic. At the same time, however, the term should be subject to rigorous discursive analysis to uncover all of its implications, contexts, and implicit relationships of power.

**Keywords:** religion; spirituality; theory of religion; religious studies; New Age

**Abstrakt:** V posledních pár desetiletích se začal v odborných kruzích stále více používat termín „spiritualita“ a způsob, jakým je uplatňován, výrazně přispěl k diskusi o tom, co je „náboženské“ a co ne. Je známo, že výraz „spiritualita“ je termínem emickým, který je úzce spojen s postmoderní situací a specificky s kontextem hnutí nového věku – stručné zmínky o tomto faktu se nacházejí především v textech Stevena Sutcliffea. Z širšího hlediska však tento problém dosud nahlédnut nebyl. Tento článek ukazuje, že termín „spiritualita“, ač rozsáhle přijatý odbornou veřejností, je používán nepřítliš reflektovaně a s celou svou implicitní emickou bagáží. To vede k mnohým aporiím a pochybným výsledkům, které s sebou takové nekritické přijímání přirozeně nese. Z tradiční perspektivy je proto třeba zacházet s tímto termínem jako s emickým. Zároveň je však vhodné podrobit jej pečlivé diskurzivní analýze a odhalit tak celý jeho kontext, všechny souvislosti i implicitní mocenské vztahy, které se s ním pojí.

**Klíčová slova:** náboženství; spiritualita; teorie náboženství; religionistické studie; New Age

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## From “New Age” to “Spirituality”

In the 1990s, when Wouter Hanegraaf wrote his extremely influential book *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, the term “New Age” was already problematic in a way. After the initial period, during which it was at least partly used for self-identification by the movement itself, it slowly waned from emic use until it basically disappeared, remaining only as a vague and somewhat derogatory notion. By that time, however, the term had already been accepted and adopted by the scholarly community and it has been in use ever since. This created a strange gap, in which the emic self-identification stopped matching the etic term. The ensuing problems can be beautifully illustrated by the situation in the Czech Republic, where New Age *sensu lato* arrived in the 1990s, that is, long after the term ceased to be used in an emic context. At my department at Charles University, there is at least one student at the New Age introductory class every year, who discovers with a great deal of surprise that they in fact belong to the New Age – without them ever even knowing what the term actually means.

Even without regard to the specific context of countries from behind the former Iron Curtain, this situation is hardly sustainable. Naturally, there were various attempts to accept the term or dispose of it, either by re-defining the “New Age” or by inventing a completely new label. Hanegraaf chose the first option, distinguishing the “New Age *sensu stricto*” and the “New Age *sensu lato*”. The former variant described the original movement that used the term “New Age” as an emic self-denominator; the latter one referred to the growing phenomenon from the 1980s onward that already managed to enter the mainstream and dissolved into it. In this latter stage, the “New Agers” themselves largely abandoned the term “New Age”.<sup>1</sup>

Contrary to Hanegraaf, other authors leaned towards discarding the term completely. Sociologically oriented scholars preferred to explore the form of the phenomenon and create a term that would emphasize its specific character. In this sense, “milieu” became quite popular, specifically among authors such as Colin Campbell (who created the term “cultic milieu”)<sup>2</sup> or William Sims Bainbridge, who adopted the term and at the same time coined the characterization of the New Age as a “loosely defined set of collective behavior”, partly belonging to audience and client cults, as opposed to cultic movements.<sup>3</sup> While these terms tried to capture borderlessness,

<sup>1</sup> WOUTER HANEGRAAFF, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*, Leiden: Brill 1996, p. 96–97; see also JÖRG STOLZ and JOËLLE SANCHEZ, “From New Age to Alternative Spirituality”, in MICHAELA MORAVČÍKOVÁ (ed.), *New Age*, Bratislava: Ústav pre vzťahy štátu a cirkvi 2005, p. 530–544; ROMAN SCHWEIDLENKA, “Die Geschichte des New Age”, in MICHAELA MORAVČÍKOVÁ (ed.), *New Age*, Bratislava: Ústav pre vzťahy štátu a cirkvi 2005, p. 517–523.

<sup>2</sup> COLIN CAMPBELL, “The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization”, in MICHAEL HILL (ed.), *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain* 5, London: SCM Press 1972, p. 119–136.

<sup>3</sup> WILLIAM SIMS BAINBRIDGE, “The New Age”, in WILLIAM SIMS BAINBRIDGE, *The Sociology of Religious Movements*, New York, London: Routledge 1997, p. 370; WILLIAM SIMS BAINBRIDGE, “New Age Policy”, in: MICHAELA MORAVČÍKOVÁ (ed.), *New Age*, Bratislava: Ústav pre vzťahy štátu a cirkvi 2005, p. 21–37.

spontaneous character and lack of central authority, they also helped to divert attention from the millennial connotations of the term “New Age”. Even Hanegraaff’s seminal work contains references to the waning of millennial ideas from the “New Age *sensu lato*”,<sup>4</sup> later proved premature by the wave of end-of-the-world expectations (or hopes for global transformation of consciousness) linked to December 2012.<sup>5</sup> Other types of terms emphasized a strong connection to the current of Western Esotericism<sup>6</sup> or insisted on the vague popular (as opposed to elite) character of the New Age, identifying it as a contemporary example of “popular religion”.<sup>7</sup> Finally, some even argued the lack of a common self-denominator indicated that we were in fact looking at a complex web of intertwined “elementary forms” (in the Durkheimian sense) and not at a homogeneous “religion”. According to those authors, we should abandon the attempts to find an adequate expression for it, since such attempts hardly help to clarify the matter and sometimes may obscure it even more.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, the milieu itself increasingly adopted the term “spirituality” as opposed to “religion” and scholars quickly followed suit. The most important example of scholarly usage of the term “spirituality” for the “New Age” phenomenon is certainly Paul Heelas. Although he originally subscribed to the “milieu” trend, christening the phenomenon as “holistic milieu”, later he started to emphasize the term “spirituality” much more, coining the label “Spiritualities of the Self” and finally his famous “Spiritualities of Life”. Where the term “New Age” suggested millennial content and all the diverse sociological terms emphasized its vague informal and individualistic character, here the attention turns to the central importance of “life” or “self”. The main point is its inward and heterogeneous character implied by the term “spiritualities” used in plural.<sup>9</sup>

While the full term “Spiritualities of Life” was never largely adopted by the scholarly community, “spirituality” or “spiritualities” started to appear everywhere. Even Hanegraaff himself, who in 1996 preferred to label the New Age as “religion”,<sup>10</sup> ap-

<sup>4</sup> HANEGRAAFF, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, p. 96.

<sup>5</sup> ZUZANA MARIE KOSTÍCOVÁ, 2012: *Mayský kalendář, transformace vědomí, dva světy a rovnováha*, Praha: Grada 2011, p. 55–127.

<sup>6</sup> Apart from Hanegraaff, see p. e. ADAM POSSAMAI, *Religion and Popular Culture: A Hyper-Real Testament*, Brüssel: P.I.E. Peter Lang S. A. 2012, 108–111.

<sup>7</sup> STEVEN SUTCLIFFE and MARION BOWMAN, “Introduction”, in STEVEN SUTCLIFFE and MARION BOWMAN (eds.), *Beyond New Age: Exploring Alternative Spirituality*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2000, p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> STEVEN SUTCLIFFE, “New Age, World Religions and Elementary Forms”, in STEVEN SUTCLIFFE and INGILD SÆLID GILHUS (eds.), *New Age Spirituality: Rethinking Religion*, Abingdon, New York: Routledge 2013, p. 17–34.

<sup>9</sup> PAUL HEELAS, *Religion and Spirituality in the Modern World: Spiritualities of Life: New Age Romanticism and Consumptive Capitalism*, [Oxford]: Willey-Blackwell 2009, esp. p. 26; PAUL HEELAS, “Challenging Secularization Theory: The Growth of ‘New Age’ Spiritualities of Life”, *The Hedgehog Revue* (1, 2006): p. 46–47.

<sup>10</sup> HANEGRAAFF, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, p. 7.

peared to have shifted his allegiance towards the term “spirituality” a few years later, albeit considered as a specific type of “secular religion”.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, regardless of multiple attempts to discourage it, the term “New Age” remained in use. This led to the invention of a hybrid label, “New Age spirituality” or “New Age spiritualities”. Even those authors who prefer not to name the phenomenon at all (arguing there is no “phenomenon” in the first place) are forced to use it in order to make their field of research understandable to others. On this note, while Sutcliffe argues against the use of the term “New Age”, he does so in an article called “New Age, World Religions and Elementary Forms”, included in a book (edited both by Ingvild Gilhus and Sutcliffe himself) with the title of *New Age Spiritualities: Rethinking Religion*. One can only conclude that Sutcliffe was in no great hurry to abandon the term at all.<sup>12</sup>

### A short history of “spirituality”

As for the term “spirituality”, it is in no way a new addition to scholarly debate. Originally connected to Christian theology, the term was historically used for a specific type of inner life, inherently (but not exclusively) connected to monastic orders and related to asceticism, mysticism, and other practices. The core of spirituality in this traditional sense was the monk’s or nun’s inner belief and their intimate and active connection with God. In this traditional sense, Christian theology distinguishes diverse “spiritualities” – Dominican, Carmelitan, Jesuit, etc., each connected to a specific type of monastic order. In more recent times, the concept has been somewhat widened to include every Christian’s inner spiritual life. For instance, *New Catholic Encyclopedia* characterizes spirituality as follows:

The spiritual life is the Christian life lived with some intensity. It is the serious response of man to the revelation of God’s love in Christ and consists in loving knowledge and service of God and one’s fellow men in the Mystical Body of Christ. Christian spirituality begins when God’s word is accepted in faith. It manifests itself in the expression and the development of the love of God in prayer and action. It is the subjective assimilation and living in charity of the objective, theological realities of revelation.<sup>13</sup>

This in many ways pre-defines the way the term “spirituality” as used in Psychology and Psychology of Religion. An eminent Czech psychologist of religion Pavel Říčan reflects the use of the term in his discipline: referring to Pargament, Emmons,

<sup>11</sup> WOUTER HANEGRAAFF, “New Age Religion and Secularization”, *Numen* 47 (2000): p. 300; WOUTER J. HANEGRAAFF, “New Age Spiritualities as Secular Religion: A Historian’s Perspective”, *Social Compass* 46 (2, 1999): p. 145–160.

<sup>12</sup> SUTCLIFFE, “New Age, World Religions and Elementary Forms”, p. 17–34.

<sup>13</sup> *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., Detroit et al.: Thomson Gale, and Washington: The Catholic University of America 2003, p. 437.

Reich, Corveleyn, and Luten, he uses such terms as “a relationship to the sacred”, “relationship to the transcendence”, “pursuit of sense of life, of unity, connectedness”, “the search for the utmost human potential”, “the most important of human experiences” or “conviction of an existence of a higher, supra-human force”.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, according to Říčan, the idea of “spirituality” carries a strong implicit emphasis on intense or (in Maslow’s words) “peak” experiences, both wonderful and scary (which of course alludes to Otto’s *mysterium tremendum and fascinans*).<sup>15</sup> In a similar fashion, David Wulff identifies a strong sense of personal growth that the term “spirituality” implicitly contains. Again, he puts a strong emphasis on inner experience as opposed to social growth embedded in the pre-existent institution and its hierarchy.<sup>16</sup>

Naturally, an important question arises: What is the relationship between religion and spirituality? At the original theological level of understanding, spirituality becomes a special case of religion (in other words, the category “religion” would contain spirituality as one of its parts, perhaps even the core or the most ideal part). On the other hand, at the level of psychology of religion, spirituality would become a basic human need, on which every religion is ultimately built (in other words, “religion” would become a kind of particular and culturally limited expression of a wider anthropological constant called “spirituality”). This is also reflected in the writings of different authors – Říčan uses the example of Pargament (who considers “religion” to be a wider category) and Zinnbauer (for whom the wider and more basic category is the term “spirituality”).<sup>17</sup> In Zinnbauer’s particular case, spirituality may even exist outside of religion, creating “non-religious spirituality”; in this case, “religion” is predominantly understood as organized, institutionalized and hierarchical, with a special emphasis on normative practices and teachings. In this sense, “non-religious spirituality” (understood again mainly as a profound religious experience or even “ecstasy”) may exist in this institutional frame or outside of it. A similar type of opinion can be found in the works of Ewert Cousins, who considers “spirituality” to be the core essence of every religion or its inner dimension, which consists of the experience of the ultimate reality.<sup>18</sup>

Contrary to the theological understanding of the term, this type of interpretation is already in a close relationship with the evolution the term has undergone in the New Age milieu. The word is increasingly used as self-definition by the participants of the phenomenon themselves – various authors quote self-identifications such as “I am a spiritual, not a religious person.”<sup>19</sup> Again, the question how the labels of “religion” and “spirituality” are understood remains. Most importantly and contrarily to the scholarly use, in wider popular culture and the New Age milieu the concepts are

<sup>14</sup> PAVEL ŘÍČAN, *Psychologie náboženství a spirituality* [Psychology of Religion and Spirituality], Praha: Portál 2007, p. 43–45.

<sup>15</sup> ŘÍČAN, *Psychologie náboženství a spirituality*, p. 44.

<sup>16</sup> DAVID M. WULFF, *Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary*, 2nd ed., New York et al.: John Wiley and Sons 1997, p. 5–6.

<sup>17</sup> ŘÍČAN, *Psychologie náboženství a spirituality*, p. 45.

<sup>18</sup> ŘÍČAN, *Psychologie náboženství a spirituality*, p. 45.

<sup>19</sup> HANEGRAAFF, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, p. 7.

cast in terms of good and bad, right and wrong. On one hand, “spirituality” retains its former theological heritage and psychological flavor: it becomes the deepest of human needs, a connection to higher forces of the universe, a language of one’s inner or higher self and the most important and purest part of every human being. Religion on the other hand is expressed mostly in terms of collectivity, authority, hierarchy, institution, and organization that typically create dogmatic teachings and force people to act according to their limiting norms by means of punishment, repression, torture or war. Religion means oppression or even slavery and repression of human-kind’s natural instincts; most importantly, religion tends to persecute true spirituality and limit or even forbid its natural expressions. “Spirituality” evokes radically different concepts: since every human being has slightly different emotional needs, desires, and goals, spirituality as such is highly individualistic, eclectic, and free, yet still connected to the utmost and deepest truths of this world. Where religion limits, spirituality gives wings. It is through spirituality that human beings can reach their highest potential, free themselves from everything that holds them back and thrive and flourish both in this world and beyond.

This is also an answer to psychologists’ concern of whether religion is a sub-category of spirituality or *vice versa*: according to the New Age, religion is something closely resembling a parasite on spirituality; a system which is misguided and outdated at best and wholly evil at worst. The stress on authority, centralism, and organizational character finds its best example in the Catholic Church which is often cited as the exemplary case of all the evils of religion incarnate, complete with blind dogmatism, a top-down approach to its members, pathological repression of natural needs (celibacy), and religious violence both towards believers (the Inquisition) and unbelievers (the Crusades).<sup>20</sup> At the same time, true spirituality with its “holistic” or “nondualistic”, experiential, and emotional character is sharply contrasted to traditional science. The latter is criticized for its extreme stress on rationality and both dualistic and essentially mechanistic interpretation of the world (stemming from the so-called “Cartesian-Newtonian paradigm”), which stripped life of its magic and is finally responsible for most of the evils of the world, such as the environmental crisis, poverty, and unsustainable lifestyle.<sup>21</sup> Spirituality thus becomes an answer to problems created both by religion and science. It holds keys to mankind’s brighter future, which may even arrive in the form of a new golden age accessible through a global transformation of consciousness. As Stolz and Sanchez phrase it:

New Age ideology states that modern society is submitted to a dualism and a reductionism which lead to several very harmful separations: the separation of (wo)man and nature, of male and female, of matter and spirit, of (wo)man and god(dess), of body, mind and spirit. These dualistic and reductionist views are said to have very practical con-

<sup>20</sup> See p. e. HANEGRAAFF, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, p. 77, 91, 303.

<sup>21</sup> HANEGRAAFF, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, p. 322–323.

sequences: pollution of the environment, illness of the body and mind, wars, religious dogmatism, authoritarianism, etc.

The *goal* of the New Age movement is to construct a view, monistic and holistic view to restore the (original) unity of (wo)man and nature, male and female, matter and spirit, etc. Its aim is to arrive at a society dominated by peace, harmony, health, and spirituality. Such a world will be a “New Age” or the “Age of Aquarius”.<sup>22</sup>

## Spirituality defined?

Naturally, these core ideas of the milieu are intimately known to every expert on the “New Age” at least since Wouter Hanegraaf’s masterpiece. Nevertheless and quite surprisingly, the term “spirituality” still tends to be seen as an etic term fully recommendable for scholarly discourse and its function as a common self-denominator and expression of identity of the members of the alternative milieu tends to be largely underestimated. This also means the New Age scholars usually accept the term at face value, with all its implicit emic baggage: in the most common case, the term is not even reflected as biased. The most notable exception is Steven Sutcliffe, who mentions the emic character of the term several times, albeit only *en passant* and while setting the New Age in the context of popular/vernacular religion.<sup>23</sup> However, he does not elaborate further to pinpoint all the necessary implications of this fact.

That does not mean some scholars do not try to define the term. For example, Norichika Horie devoted an entire article to a search for a satisfactory definition, reaching the following formulation:

Spirituality refers to both belief in what cannot usually be perceived but it can be felt internally, and practices to feel it with the whole mind and body, accompanied more or less by attitudes of individualism or privatism, anti-authoritarianism, and selective assimilation of religious cultural resources.<sup>24</sup>

Horie then proceeds to create four “quadrants” of spirituality – spirituality in an established religion, spirituality in popular culture, spirituality of “foreign religion” and “systematic spirituality”. This fourth component is defined as “the global and non-religious type”:

It has an intellectual foundation in inter-disciplinary scholarship (humanistic psychology, transpersonal psychology, Jungian psychology, mindfulness based stress reduction, etc.),

<sup>22</sup> STOLZ and SANCHEZ, “From New Age to Alternative Spirituality”, p. 531.

<sup>23</sup> SUTCLIFFE and BOWMAN, “Introduction”, p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> NORICHIKA HORIE, “Narrow New Age and Broad Spirituality”, in STEVEN SUTCLIFFE and INGVLID SAELID GILHUS (eds.), *New Age Spirituality: Rethinking Religion*, Abingdon, New York: Routledge 2014, p. 111.

alternative medicine (Andrew Weil, etc.), terminal care (Kübler-Ross, etc.) environmental thought (deep ecology), cognitive science, and religious studies (M. Eliade, H. Campbell, H. Smith, etc.). It is also supported by the expert systems of those disciplines. This systematic spirituality plays a role as a “systematic theology” for the whole spirituality. It is rooted in individualism, psychologism, vitalism and romantic evolutionism. Its characteristics are the theorization of the plurality, fluidity and multilayeredness of the human psyche, the experience of transcendence from within, self-affirmation and self-responsibility, and positive thinking. Systematic spirituality is that intellectual discourse outside established religion which is nevertheless sympathetic towards religion. On the other hand, the discourse belonging to religion can be evaluated as “spirituality” if it shares these characteristics.<sup>25</sup>

Horie’s definition shows many clear signs of unconscious acceptance of the implicit emic context of the term. First, it shows the great stress on personal experience and “feeling” which has accompanied the term ever since its original Christian theological setting. Second, the “whole mind and body” character of spirituality is fully embedded in the “holistic” or “mind body spirit” context, which has been often defined as one of the core features of the New Age milieu.<sup>26</sup> And finally, the “individualism or privatism, anti-authoritarianism, and selective assimilation of religious cultural resources” recalls core features of “true spirituality” as understood by the New Age itself. As for “systematic spirituality”, the characteristics of the term perfectly match some important elite sources of the New Age *sensu lato* described by Wouter Hanegraaff in the discussion of scientific sources of the milieu.<sup>27</sup>

True, it may be argued that Horie’s fairly recent attempt to define spirituality has not reached wider acceptance and is therefore hardly representative of the scholarly community at large. Consequently, in order to show how far the emic content of the New Age concept of “spirituality” has penetrated Religious Studies and related disciplines, I would like to turn my attention to the famous Chicago University’s *Encyclopedia of Religion*. Originally edited by Mircea Eliade in the 1980s, the massive multi-volume work saw its second edition in 2005, created under the supervision of

<sup>25</sup> HORIE, “Narrow New Age and Broad Spirituality”, p. 114.

<sup>26</sup> See, among others, HANEGRAAFF, *New Age Religion in Western Culture*, p. 119–120; STEVEN SUTCLIFFE, “‘Wandering Stars’: Seekers and Gurus in the Modern World”, in STEVEN SUTCLIFFE and MARION BOWMAN (eds.), *Beyond New Age: Exploring Alternative Spirituality*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2000, p. 19–20; PAUL HEELAS, “Challenging Secularization Theory”, p. 46–47; POSSAMAI, *Religion and Popular Culture*, p. 52. In Czech context, see p. e. DUŠAN LUŽNÝ, *Nová náboženská hnutí [New Religious Movements]*, Brno: Masarykova univerzita 1997, p. 91; ZDENĚK VOJTÍŠEK, *Netradiční náboženství u nás [Non-Traditional Religions in the Czech Republic]*, Praha: Dingir 1998, p. 40.

<sup>27</sup> HANEGRAAFF, *New Age Religion in Western Culture*, p. 62–76; see also KOCKU VON STUCKRAD, *The Scientification of Religion: An Historical Study of Discursive Change, 1800–2000*, Boston and Berlin: De Gruyter 2014, *passim*.



Lindsay Jones. Mary McDonald, the author of the entry “Spirituality”,<sup>28</sup> tries to sum up the meaning of the term as follows:

Spirituality is the concern of human beings with their appropriate relationship to the cosmos. How the cosmic whole is conceived and what is considered appropriate in interacting with it differ according to worldviews of individuals and communities. Spirituality is also constructed as an orientation toward the spiritual as distinguished from the exclusively material. [...] By the end of the twentieth century spirituality, long considered an integral part of religion, was increasingly regarded as a separate quest, with religion being distinguished from secular spiritualities. A predilection to speak of having spirituality rather than having religion indicated a change in worldview and a transition from exclusive religious traditions to inclusive, overlapping expressions of commitment to world and community.<sup>29</sup>

McDonald then proceeds to distinguish three types of spirituality. First, the “classical spiritualities” are rooted in a specific worldview that helps the believers pursue their relationship with the cosmos and may be expressed in different ways depending on the culture the particular person belongs to. The second type are “contemporary spiritualities” characterized by a strong interest in the planet Earth and those that live on it. This type of spirituality is specifically influenced by the most frequent topics of civil activism, such as environmentalism, feminism, universal human rights, social justice, and other movements that fight for dignity and equality of diverse human groups and life forms. McDonald quotes Matthew Fox, who says the main motivation of this type of spirituality is “compassion” and a struggle to “survive” in a world threatened by an imminent disappearance of human groups, animal or plant species, or even of the entire planet.<sup>30</sup> McDonald dubbed this contemporary type of spirituality “a green spirituality”. Finally, the third type consists of those that consider themselves to be spiritual, while actively distancing themselves from “religion”. The New Age naturally belongs to this category. By the term “religion” McDonald explicitly means collective identity, shared past and specific teachings and disciplines that claim a normative status. Contrarily, McDonald defines “spirituality” as individual, eclectic and free in terms of choosing one’s own spiritual sources of inspiration.

Analyzing McDonald’s concept of spirituality, the first type mostly resembles the traditional Christian approach, albeit already stripped from its monastic context and cast as a general anthropological constant. This type also matches the concept of spirituality used in Psychology of Religion. In her definition, McDonald explicitly uses

<sup>28</sup> MARY McDONALD, “Spirituality”, in LINDSAY JONES (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., Detroit et al.: Thomson Gale 2005, p. 8718–8721.

<sup>29</sup> McDONALD, “Spirituality”, p. 8718–8719.

<sup>30</sup> For more details see MATTHEW FOX, *Original Blessing: A Primer in Creation Spirituality*, Santa Fe: Bear & Co. 1983, p. 12–16, and Matthew Fox’s personal website: “Creation Spirituality: Reawakening Mysticism, Protecting Mother Earth” [online], *matthewfox.org*, accessed January 2018, available online at <http://www.matthewfox.org>.

the term “quest” to describe spirituality, especially in its “secular” context – naturally, New Age seekership, a lifelong path leading to personal fulfillment and transformation, immediately comes to mind.<sup>31</sup> There is no need to stress the fact that in the last few years, seekership has become one of the most studied New Age phenomena. McDonald’s second type well matches those facets of the New Age strongly inspired by the environmental movement with its respect to the Earth; it also shows an unmistakable Buddhist flavor by the stress on “compassion”. Scientific and activist inspirations merge with the typical New Age eclecticism in much the same way as in some classic New Age writings, such as Rupert Sheldrake’s *Rebirth of Nature*.<sup>32</sup> And, finally, the third type is explicitly connected with the New Age by McDonald herself.

Comparing Horie’s and McDonald’s attempts to define “spirituality” and create some kind of typology, we can identify roughly the same outline: a) both authors struggle to maintain both concepts of “spirituality” at the same time, distinguishing “traditional” or “classical” spiritualities from “new spiritualities”, which comprise both of secular or scientifically inspired spirituality (Horie’s “systematic spirituality”, McDonald’s “green spiritualities”) and of the New Age milieu itself (as understood by those authors). On the one hand, the apparent paradox of a spirituality that is at the same time deeply “religious” and violently “anti-religious” is dissolved by the implicit understanding of spirituality as a mystical experience, which is at the same time cast as an anthropological constant. Nevertheless, this idea arrives accompanied by New Age flavored terms such as “quest” or “compassion” and exists within the context of environmentalist millennialism, new science, transpersonal movement, and an all-pervasive emphasis on individualism and anti-authoritarianism. In this sense, the stress on deep personal experience ultimately loses the remaining traces of scholarly detachment and becomes suspiciously akin to a typical New Age bias towards the individual, eclectic, spontaneous, and experiential – and against the collective, institutionalized, and authoritatively prescribed.

In sum, this leaves us with markedly circular reasoning. The New Age self-defines as “spirituality” and therefore it cannot be “religion” – because “religion” is defined (again by the New Age itself) as the opposite of “spirituality” in the first place. Of course, in the emic context of politics of identity, this works beautifully. Nevertheless, the question how to deal with it in scholarly discourse remains.

### **Traditional approach: Religions, spiritualities, and worldviews**

One possible way to approach the emic-etic question is to ask ourselves whether “religion” and “spirituality” are indeed two entirely different realms – in other words, whether the claim of “non-religious spirituality” can be proven. As for the question of “religion without spirituality” (which is rarely seriously raised outside of the most ex-

<sup>31</sup> SUTCLIFFE, “Wandering Stars”, p. 17–36.

<sup>32</sup> RUPERT SHELDRAKE, *Rebirth of Nature: The Greening of Science and God*, London: Century 1990, *passim*.

treme anti-religious type of New Age thought), we of course touch on an old problem here, which was widely discussed by such authorities as Rudolf Otto, William James or Mircea Eliade. For Otto, mystical experience and active relationship to the ultimate reality, culminating with the encounter with the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, is the core of all religion – to the extent that Otto insisted that those who did not have this experience should altogether refrain from writing about religion.<sup>33</sup> In pretty much the same way, James points out personal experience as the source of religion and researches “sick souls” as natural virtuosi of this kind of experience.<sup>34</sup> Mircea Eliade also speaks about relationship to the “sacred” as of the innermost characteristic of religion<sup>35</sup> – and in recent years, Ninian Smart included the experiential among his seven core dimensions of religion.<sup>36</sup> True, other theorists such as Durkheim or Weber put more emphasis on the social, institutional, and hierarchical, discussing religion as an incarnation of society and highlighting its collective functions, its relationship to authority and other topics closely related to the points of interest of Sociology of Religion.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, one approach does not invalidate the other – after all, social and institutional is, again, only one of Smart’s seven dimensions of religion. And if we still need more proof, it is noteworthy that the term “spirituality” itself was created by Christian, specifically Catholic theology. And, for the New Age, Catholicism is the prime example of “religion” as defined by those who claim to be “spiritual and not religious”.

Naturally, the universal presence of religious experience throughout all the different religions of the world is a long-standing matter of course, universally accepted by scholars of Religious Studies and related disciplines. But what about “spirituality without religion”? Does it really exist? Until recently, the seemingly universal scholarly answer was “yes, of course – it is the New Age and related popular spirituality”. Nevertheless, in a recent article by Ann Taves and Michael Kinsella<sup>38</sup>, serious doubt is cast on this answer. Taves and Kinsella show how the organizational elements of the New Age are “hiding in plain sight” in the form of local spiritual centers, one-to-one client-teacher relationship inspired by psychotherapy and, I would add, even charismatic leaders that emerge from the milieu from time to time and form a following or a “school”, sometimes forming an outright New Religious Movement, sometimes

<sup>33</sup> RUDOLF OTTO, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, London: Oxford University Press 1936, *passim*.

<sup>34</sup> WILLIAM JAMES, *Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, New Hyde Park: University Books 1963, *passim*.

<sup>35</sup> MIRCEA ELIADE, *Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, New York: Harcourt and Brace 1959, *passim*.

<sup>36</sup> NINIAN SMART, *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World’s Beliefs*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1996, *passim*.

<sup>37</sup> MAX WEBER, *Sociology of Religion*, Boston: Beacon Press 1993, *passim*; EMILE DURKHEIM, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, London: Allen and Unwin 1976, *passim*.

<sup>38</sup> ANN TAVES and MICHAEL KINSELLA, “Hiding in Plain Sight: The Organizational Forms of ‘Unorganized Religion’”, in STEVEN SUTCLIFFE and INGVLID SAELID GILHUS (eds.), *New Age Spirituality: Rethinking Religion*, Abingdon, New York: Routledge 2014, p. 84–98.

mostly remaining on a level Stark and Bainbridge<sup>39</sup> call a “client cult”.<sup>40</sup> True, at this moment the New Age has no central authority and is strongly opposed to it. On the other hand, organizational forms take time to develop and we sometimes seem to forget the milieu is only a few decades old. Why compare it to the enormous giant of the 21st century’s Catholic Church, which took two thousand years to develop to this stage? Why not use a more fitting comparison to the early Church that stood proudly in all of its local diversity, individual interpretations, and vivid spontaneity against the aging colossus of organized Roman priesthood?

To resort to Ninian Smart once again, we may clarify the matter somewhat by introducing the term “worldview”.<sup>41</sup> Though McDonald herself tries to employ it in her entry, she insists on the concept of spirituality (in Horie’s words) as a “broad” phenomenon that penetrates each and every religion and is at the same time fully capable of existing outside of it. In other words, “spirituality” is something more basic and universal, as opposed to particularities of different worldviews. Nevertheless, under close inspection, this statement makes sense only in the context of the New Age concept of “religion” as an organized, hierarchical, and authoritative institution. On the other hand, seen from the traditional Otto-Eliadian perspective, it would be roughly equivalent to say “religious experience is fully possible outside of religion”. For these authors, this would naturally be an oxymoron.

In much the same way, Smart himself identifies an “experiential” dimension of religion, which in this psychological sense would be more or less the same as “spirituality” and equal to the way the term is used in Psychology of Religion. And if we simultaneously identify “religion” with (or, perhaps more fittingly, reduce it to) Smart’s social and perhaps even doctrinal dimension, we could finally conclude that, indeed, “religion” and “spirituality” may or may not co-exist in different worldviews. But is this not throwing the baby out with the bathwater? According to this definition, no “pure” religion or “spirituality” could ever exist. Moreover, in this sense, Horie’s and McDonald’s typologies of spirituality would make even less sense – since, as we saw, it has been proven that the New Age, the “non-religious spirituality” *par excellence*, is busily and “in plain sight” developing its own organizational forms.

## Discursive approach to spirituality

Contrary to traditional phenomenological approach that seeks to capture the “true” nature of “religion” and “spirituality”, we may also resort to the discursive approach

<sup>39</sup> WILLIAM SIMS BAINBRIDGE, “The New Age”, p. 363–391.

<sup>40</sup> There are many examples of institutionalized New Age phenomena – some may even form a new religious movement centered around a spiritual teacher and/or charismatic leader. See for example DOUGLAS E. COWAN and DAVID G. BROMLEY, *Cults and New Religions: A Brief History*, Malden, Oxford: Willey Blackwell 2015, p. 59–77.

<sup>41</sup> NINIAN SMART, *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs*, Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall 2000, *passim*.

developed by Michel Foucault and adapted for the use of Religious Studies by Hans Kippenberg, Kocku von Stuckrad, Teemu Taira, Titus Hjelm and others.<sup>42</sup> Instead of asking “what religion/spirituality truly is”, we may focus on the discourse that employs those terms itself. Discourse, as defined by Foucault, is mainly a set of practices, rules and relationships of power closely related to particular institutions and binding every kind of human communication. Contrary to the essentialist phenomenological approach that emphasizes continuity, relatedness, and universality, focusing mostly on transcultural comparison, Foucault focuses on differences, discontinuity, gaps and changes. We may ask ourselves who is speaking, what is acceptable to say, under what conditions – and *vice versa*, what is deemed as unacceptable, outdated, even dangerous to say. What kind of discontinuity has enabled the current emergent use of the term “spirituality”? What are the core discursive changes that made it possible? What are the characteristics of the relevant discursive formation?

Again, this question is hardly new. In his last book, Kocku von Stuckrad traces the origins of the discourse of spirituality at least to the 19th century and relates it closely to vitalism. He points out the core importance of the 1960s, which saw the full development of the subsequent discursive formation. What is even more important, the mentions of “spirituality” are closely related to what von Stuckrad calls “the scientification of religion”, in other words, a perennial interaction between religious discourse and the discourses of the sciences (both social and natural, since a great part of the monograph deals with the historical interplay between Astrology and Astronomy). The book not only convincingly shows the historical instances of this discursive knot, but points out its essential inevitability.<sup>43</sup>

The Foucauldian focus on discontinuities and changes shows a strong divide between old and new discursive formations. Originally, “spirituality” had belonged to the discourse of Christianity in the widest sense. Later on, with the advent of the secular sciences, the term was adopted as a denominator for some general phenomena identifiable worldwide. While the scholars succeeded in emancipating it from its Christian origins, they kept linking it inseparably to “religion” at large, either neutrally (even favorably, as in Eliade’s case) or in an atheist, derogatory way. Finally, the term has been cast as *sui generis*, independent of “religion” and sometimes even contradictory to it. The original Christian flavor of “spirituality” has largely disappeared, opening the way to an entirely different discursive formation, strongly linked to the New Age milieu. In this sense, we are not only witnessing a “scientification of religion”, but also a “religification of science”, the seeping of a new alternative spirituality into various academic disciplines. Throughout this article, we have seen how scholarly concepts of “religion” and “spirituality” as used in the Religious studies increasingly conform to the New Age discourse.

<sup>42</sup> See esp. MICHEL FOUCAULT, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, London, New York: Routledge 1982, *passim*; VON STUCKRAD, *The Scientification of Religion*, see esp. p. 4–19.

<sup>43</sup> VON STUCKRAD, *The Scientification of Religion*, esp. p. 180.

## Conclusion

To sum up, the term “spirituality” as used in the discipline today is essentially emic and closely related to the New Age milieu. The most important thing is that in their original New Age context, the terms spirituality/religion are judgmental, creating a duality of good and bad, progressive and outdated, liberating and limiting, true and false. Of course in its strictly psychological sense, the term remains useful for the scholarly community. On the other hand, attempts to distinguish “spirituality” from “religion” and to define them in the sense the terms are used in the emic New Age context inevitably lead to problems. I hope to have proved this sufficiently in the analysis of Horie’s and McDonald’s definitions. In the latter case, the problem is all the more pressing, since the emic usage disguised as etic is unproblematically displayed on the pages of a famous and extremely influential encyclopedia.

Speaking from a Smartian point of view (as Taves and Kinsella sufficiently demonstrated), the New Age is by no means a pure “spirituality” – as a matter of fact, quite to the contrary. Using Smart’s categories, not only does it refuse to limit itself to the experiential dimension, but it also has a nascent doctrine and philosophy (based on such core emic terms as “holism”, “energy”, “higher self” etc.); highly developed ethics (which, among others, contain the “compassion” and nonviolence identified by McDonald as a basic component of “green spiritualities”); it is undergoing a process of invention and establishment of different types of rituals (the most evident case being various kinds of cleansing, both bodily and spiritual); shows rudimentary seeds of institutions and/or social organization; and, last but not least, has a truly massive material and commercial dimension closely tied to postmodern capitalism. In this sense, New Age checks all the boxes and is therefore undoubtedly a full worldview.

This raises the following question: can some worldviews be “religions” and “non-religions” (or, in Waardenburg’s words, “implicit religions”), while others are “spiritualities”? We may possibly reach some kind of a truce here, defining “spirituality” as a specific post-modern type of worldview that has all the dimensions of religion, some even extensively so, but refuses to identify itself as one and labels itself “spirituality” instead. However, funnily enough, this category would only contain one specimen – the New Age itself. So, if we go to such lengths in order to respect the New Age’s emic self-identification, shouldn’t we respect other religions in exactly the same manner? True, we may for example be inclined, as Balagangadhara requires, to create a category of “tradition” that would encompass what we formerly labeled as “the religions of India”.<sup>44</sup> But it would for example also mean creating a serious etic category of “the one and only true religion” for Christianity. I, for one, would argue against this approach and opt instead for relegating the New Age version of the term “spirituality” (as opposed to “religion”) firmly and finally to emic realm (right next to

<sup>44</sup> S. N. BALAGANGADHARA, *“The Heathen in His Blindness”: Asia, the West, and the Dynamic of Religion*, Leiden, New York: Brill 1994, see esp. p. 41–51, 60, 108.

“the one and only true religion”). The only etic level of the term would then be the psychological usage, roughly equivalent to “religious experience”.

All this etic/emic confusion is further cleared by a discursive approach to the problem. Here we clearly see not only the various self-identifications of different religions, but also the inherent relationships of power implicitly or explicitly contained in them. When Balagangadhara seeks to re-define Indian religions as *traditio*, he clearly intends to distinguish them from Christianity (*religio*).<sup>45</sup> And *vice versa*, when Christianity defines itself against “paganism” or “heresy”, it does so in order to establish itself as the one and only true approach to the Divine. Finally, in much the same way, the New Age refutes the category of “religion” in favor of “spirituality”, distancing itself from traditional organized religions, especially Catholicism. And it is even more interesting that the New Age discourse, originally limited to the alternative religious scene and popular culture, is now apparently busily penetrating elite scholarly discourses, including contemporary Religious Studies. Not only that this process is still largely uninvestigated, but many of the scholars themselves remain oblivious to it.

I do not intend to finish this article with any kind of heated warning against this new “religification of science”. After all, Religious Studies are neither isolated from the rest of culture nor exempt from discursive practices. The powerful rise of the New Age in the Western mainstream culture becomes increasingly obvious and its ever stronger influence on the Academia is probably inevitable. As von Stuckrad shows, the interplay between science and religion has been part of the history of Western sciences from its dawn up to now. On the other hand, Religious Studies apparently need a better understanding of “spirituality” not only as a phenomenon, but especially as a discourse. This way we may still complement the discipline’s traditional Christian origins and its modern, strictly secular core with new alternative perspectives – but without drowning in them.

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<sup>45</sup> BALAGANGADHARA, “*The Heathen in His Blindness*”, see esp. p. 139–140, and *passim*.

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# Religious Situation in Contemporary Czech Society

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**Abstract:** The study deals with the analysis of the religious situation in Czech society after 1989. The starting point is the analysis of the broader historical and sociopolitical context. The study itself examines an analysis of the key census data from 1991, 2001, and 2011, together with the results of research explicitly focused on the religion and religious behavior of the Czech population. These are mainly international studies, such as the EVS, ISSP or AUFBRUCH, and Czech research in the field of DIN. The study also includes an identification of topics and problems that have not yet been sufficiently explored in the context of studying the relationship between religion and contemporary Czech society.

**Keywords:** religion; modern Czech society; secularization; state; sociological data analysis

**Abstrakt:** Studie se věnuje rozboru náboženské situace v české společnosti po roce 1989. Východiskem je rozbor širšího historického a sociopolitického kontextu. Samotná analýza se pak opírá o rozbor klíčových údajů z cenů z let 1991, 2001 a 2011, které jsou doplněné o výsledky výzkumů zaměřených explicitně na náboženství a náboženské chování české populace. Jde především o mezinárodní výzkumy EVS, ISSP či AUFBRUCH a český výzkum DIN. Součástí studie je i identifikace témat a problémů, které zatím v souvislosti se studiem vztahu náboženství a současné české společnosti nebyly dostatečně zkoumány.

**Klíčová slova:** náboženství; moderní česká společnost; sekularizace; stát; sociologická analýza dat

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## (1) Introduction

In a number of international comparative surveys, the Czech Republic has been steadily occupying a position among countries with the lowest levels of religiosity.<sup>1</sup> Several sociological studies accentuate the fact that the secular profile of the Czech Republic is an exception even among post-Communist Central and Eastern European countries whose religious development has been strongly formed by an explicit anti-religious regime for almost half a century.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, when comparing populations of the Czech and Slovak Republics, countries that formed one state for a significant part of the 20th century, one finds a curiously dramatic difference between their religious profiles.<sup>3</sup> In this context it suffices to note that the Czech Republic represents a ‘special case’, comparable to that of Eastern Germany (former German Democratic Republic) or Estonia, which are commonly regarded as the most irreligious places in Europe.<sup>4</sup>

However, several studies have been published in the last few years that questioned the widely held assumption about the Czech society as one of the most atheist countries in present-day Europe.<sup>5</sup> They maintain that this assumption is based on a lack

<sup>1</sup> DUŠAN LUŽNÝ and JOLANA NAVRÁTILOVÁ, “Religion and Secularisation in the Czech Republic”, *Czech Sociological Review* 9 (1, 2001), p. 85–98; ANDREW M. GREELEY, *Religion in Europe at the End of the Second Millennium: A Sociological Profile*, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers 2003, *passim*; DAVID VOAS, “The Rise and Fall of Fuzzy Fidelity in Europe”, *European Sociological Review* 25 (2, 2009), p. 155–168; TOM W. SMITH, “Beliefs about God across Time and Countries”, in INSA BECHERT and MARKUS QUANDT (eds.), *ISSP Data Report: Religious Attitudes and Religious Change*, Köln: GESIS 2013, p. 13–28.

<sup>2</sup> SINIŠA ZRINŠČAK, “Generations and Atheism: Patterns of Response to Communist Rule Among Different Generations and Countries”, *Social Compass* 51 (2, 2004), p. 221–234; OLAF MÜLLER, “Secularization, Individualization, or (Re)vitalization?: The State and Development of Churchliness and Religiosity in Post-Communist Central and Eastern Europe”, *Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe* 4 (1, 2011), p. 21–37.

<sup>3</sup> GREELEY, *Religion in Europe at the End of the Second Millennium*, p. 130–131; PAUL FROESE, “Secular Czechs and Devout Slovaks: Explaining Religious Differences”, *Review of Religious Research* 46 (3, 2005), p. 269–83; cf. JAN VĀNĚ and MARTINA ŠTÍPKOVÁ, “The National Religious Environment and the Orthodoxy of Christian Beliefs: A Comparison of Austria, the Czech Republic and Slovakia”, *Sociologický časopis / Czech Sociological Review* 49 (3, 2013), p. 403–425.

<sup>4</sup> DETLEF POLLACK, “The Change in Religion and Church in Eastern Germany After 1989: A Research Note”, *Sociology of Religion* 63 (3, 2002), p. 373–87; PAUL FROESE and STEVEN PFAFF, “Explaining the Religious Anomaly: A Historical Analysis of Secularization in Eastern Germany”, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44 (4, 2005), p. 397–422; MONIKA WOHLRAB-SAHR, “‘Forced’ Secularity?: On the Appropriation of Repressive Secularization”, *Religion and Society in Central and Eastern Europe*, 4 (1, 2011), p. 63–77; ATKO REMMEL, “Ambiguous Atheism: The Impact of Political Changes on the Meaning and Reception of Atheism in Estonia”, in ROBERTO CIPRIANI and FRANCO GARELLI (eds.), *Sociology of Atheism*, Leiden: Brill 2016, p. 233–251.

<sup>5</sup> DANA HAMPLOVÁ and ZDENĚK R. NEŠPOR, “Invisible Religion in a ‘Non-believing’ Country: The Case of the Czech Republic”, *Social Compass* 56 (4, 2009), p. 581–597; OLGA NEŠPOROVÁ and ZDENĚK R. NEŠPOR, “Religion: An Unsolved Problem for the Modern Czech Nation”, *Sociologický časopis / Czech Sociological Review* 45 (6, 2009), p. 1215–1237; ZDENĚK R. NEŠPOR, *Příliš slábi ve víře: Česká ne/religiozita v evropském kontextu [Too Weak in Faith: Czech Non/Religiosity in the European Context]*, Praha: Kalich 2010, *passim*; DAVID VÁCLAVÍK, *Náboženství a moderní česká společnost [Religion and the Modern Czech Society]*, Praha: Grada 2010, 243 p., *passim*; DANA

of understanding of the fact that Czech religiosity is characterized by high levels of privatization and individualization, as well as strong distrust in traditional religious institutions, especially in the mainstream Christian churches. These studies rely on data from empirical surveys and their authors emphasize that the individualized and privatized spirituality is often mistakenly interpreted as atheism. Based on data from a national survey *Detraditionalization and Individualization of Religion (DIN 2006)*, Hamplová and Nešpor<sup>6</sup> showed that despite low levels of membership in religious institutions and low participation in religious activities, Czechs are not indifferent toward religious and spiritual phenomena. A rather high level of ‘religious illiteracy’ is another important feature of the Czech religious landscape.<sup>7</sup>

## (2) Historical indication/examination

To correctly understand the complicated and ambiguous attitudes of the Czech population toward religion, one needs to consider several political, social, and demographic developments in the 20th century. A specifically Czech attitude toward religion and religious institutions was visible as early as in the period of the so-called First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938). This period was characterized by a rising distrust towards religious institutions, a tendency for privatization of religions and a growing indifference towards religion. This religious transformation was dominated by the efforts to distance oneself from the dominant Catholic Church. The most dramatic changes took place in the first years of the independent Czechoslovak state’s existence, i.e. approximately until 1925.<sup>8</sup> The comparison of the data from the 1910 and the 1921 Censuses shows that the Roman Catholic Church lost more than 1.2 million members in this period. This decline, however, affected different regions and ethnic groups to a different extent. Its decline was most profound in Bohemia (the Western part of the country), less so in Moravia and Silesia. The ‘renegades’ were mostly of Czech nationality and the number of Czech (Sudeten) Germans who have left the Church was small.

After World War II, the above-described tendencies were strengthened by two factors: deportation of the German minority from the Czech borderlands in the years 1945–1947 (approximately 2.6 million individuals were affected) and the establishment of Communist rule in 1948. As a consequence of the deportations, the country lost a significant proportion of its Catholic population. However, the deportations also profoundly influenced other denominations (German Evangelical Churches, New Apostles Church and Old Catholic Church). The demographic and socio-eco-

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HAMPLOVÁ, *Náboženství v české společnosti na prahu 3. tisíciletí* [*Religion and the Czech Society on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*], Praha: Karolinum 2013, *passim*.

<sup>6</sup> HAMPLOVÁ and NEŠPOR, “Invisible Religion in a ‘Non-believing’ Country”, p. 594.

<sup>7</sup> Comp. f.g. STEPHEN PROTERO, *Religious Literacy*, New York: HarperOne 2008, *passim*.

<sup>8</sup> Comp. CYNTHIA J. PACES, “‘The Czech Nation Must be Catholic!’: An Alternative Version of Czech Nationalism During the First Republic,” 1999

conomic changes brought on by the removal of German population were even more serious. The formerly German regions (the so-called Sudetenland) were essentially depopulated. The resettlement of these borderland areas was centrally organized<sup>9</sup> but the strategy was to send in individuals, not communities, as was the case of Silesia in Poland. The settlers were often recruited from the supporters of the political Left, from lower social classes and groups with poor education. In particular, 'politically reliable' sympathizers of the Communist Party were often selected for the task. As a consequence, there was a higher proportion of individuals 'without any religious affiliation' arriving to the borderlands.<sup>10</sup> This manner of re-settlement of the areas previously inhabited by Germans created a discontinuity of family and community ties and contributed to the disintegration of local religious memory. However, we ought to mention that there were some exceptions, such as settlements by re-immigrants from Eastern Europe (e.g. communities of ethnic Czechs from Volhynia). They predominantly belonged to the Orthodox Church and greatly contributed to its transformation after World War II.

After 1948, when the Communist regime was established in Czechoslovakia, the social, demographic and cultural transformation of Czech society continued. This development also included a rapid decline of participation in religious activities. Even though the downturn started in the late 1940s, the most profound transformation occurred only in the 1960s and again in the mid-1970s. However, it is necessary to emphasize that the Communist regime did not come with a distinctively new attitude towards religion. It skillfully used pre-existing tendencies (e.g. anticlericalism of intellectuals). Thus, in the Czech case, the classical Marxist interpretation of religion built on and drew its credibility from nationalist anti-Catholicism of the pre-WWII period. However, the anti-religious ethos did not radically transform the Czechs' attitudes to religion. It only further deepened the distrust towards religious institutions, strengthened indifference towards religion, and successfully contributed to 'religious illiteracy'. It did not produce a conscious acceptance of atheism in Czech society.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, the gradually increasing indifference towards religion had rather ambiguous consequences. On one hand, the role of religion in everyday life was weakened. On the other hand, religion was regarded as something 'clandestine', encompassing both protest and an alternative. However, the newly gained attractive-

<sup>9</sup> Historically speaking, it would be appropriate to distinguish between a so-called wild resettlement and a 'spontaneous' inhabiting of the borderlands related to it, which happened in the first months after the war, and the later, organized depopulation of the areas.

<sup>10</sup> The strategy of the Communist Party was carefully 'phased'. In the years following the war, it relied on a form of cooperation with some religious groups, e.g. the Czechoslovak Church. The Communist Party then advocated a cooperation with churches; recruitments for the Czechoslovak Hussite Church even took place in the borderlands (with respect to the Church because of the property of German Evangelical Church in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia; with respect to the Party due to a proclaimed anti-clericalism). After 1948, however, this kind of 'cooperation' ceased to be of interest to the Communist Party.

<sup>11</sup> Given the available data, the rate of the so-called analytical atheism (i.e. a conscious rejection of whatever kind of supernatural based on relatively clearly formulated reasons) in Czech society is spread as widely as in other countries of Western and Northern Europe.

ness did not mean that religion started to exert more influence on everyday life. This fact emerged fully in 1968 when the Communist rule lost its last bits of legitimacy in the eyes of absolute majority of population. In the 1970s and 1980s, the religious organizations, particularly the Catholic Church, but in some respect the religion itself, gradually became a symbol of dissent and hope. Yet, this protest and hope was political rather than an expression of a spiritual search for a new life. The everyday life was more and more enmeshed in consumerism and individualized materialism.

### (3) **The religious situation in Czech society after 1989 in census data**

The first relevant information regarding Czech religiosity after the collapse of the Communist regime in November 1989 was provided by the 1991 Census. Yet, its results need to be interpreted with the utmost caution since they reflect a specific situation of the early 1990s, strongly echoing recent political developments.

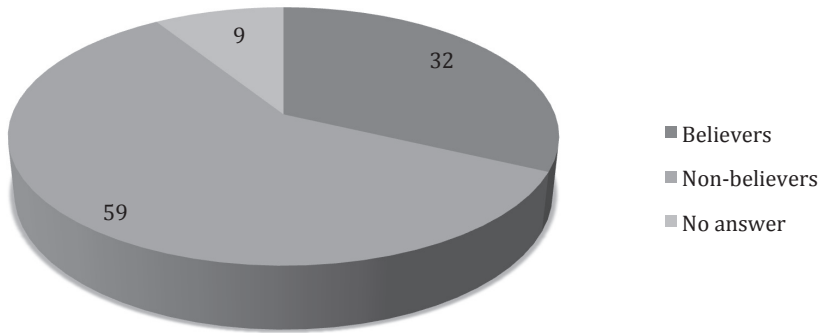
Based on the 1991 census, 44% of population declared a religious affiliation, whereas slightly less than 40% said they did not have any. The remaining 16% refused to answer the question. The Czech Statistical Office explains this relatively high figure by the fact that this information was not asked in previous years and even in the 1991 census, the answer was voluntary.<sup>12</sup> The religious plurality typical for the late 1990s was only emerging in the 1991 census and the Roman Catholic Church was clearly the strongest religious institution, accounting for 39% of the population. Some representatives of the Church interpreted this result as evidence of the Catholic ‘character’ of the Czech nation and as a promise for the future. Nevertheless, it was based on incorrect interpretation of the data or more accurately, it was a consequence of an inadequate expectation based on the euphoria of the ‘post-revolutionary society’. Nevertheless, despite its limitations, the first post-Communist census highlighted some principal features of ‘Czech religiosity’. In particular, it demonstrated important regional differences along two main axes: a) the ‘traditional’ axis of West-East (Bohemia and Moravia), which had already been noticeable before 1948; and b) the borderlands-inland axis, which is clearly a consequence of the sociodemographic changes after 1945. These regional differences – as many other surveys have shown – apply not only to the levels of traditional church religiosity, which is markedly lower in the Czech borderlands. They also apply to non-traditional and alternative religious groups.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The respondents had the option, for various reasons, to simply skip the question. Another possible reason could have been the fact that even before the census there had been an upsurge of disputes over whether to include the question on religious affiliation into the questionnaire. The annulment of a law prohibiting the question caused protests from some citizens, who may then have refused to answer the question. One also needs to take into consideration the option that some respondents refused to align their faith with a specific traditional church or religious group, and hence opted for this answer.

<sup>13</sup> Comp. to e.g. VÁCLAVÍK, *Náboženství a moderní česká společnost*, p. 135f.

The data from the 2001 census showed a completely different and more realistic picture of the Czech religious landscape. However, it needs to be emphasized that every census since 1991 has used a different measure of religiosity. Thus, it is necessary to treat the results with some caution and confront them with data from specialized surveys.

Nevertheless, in the 2001 census, the share of people belonging to any religion dropped by more than 10%, whereas the proportion of those ‘without any religious affiliation’ increased by 20%. Interestingly, the number of refusals also dropped by nearly a half. It is possible that at the beginning of the third millennium, the question of religion and its perception became a relevant part of life in Czech society. Overall, the second post-Communist census confirmed the trends that had been predicted by some surveys and demonstrated the weakening position of mainstream religious denominations.



**Figure 1:** Religious affiliation according to the census in 2001 (in %).

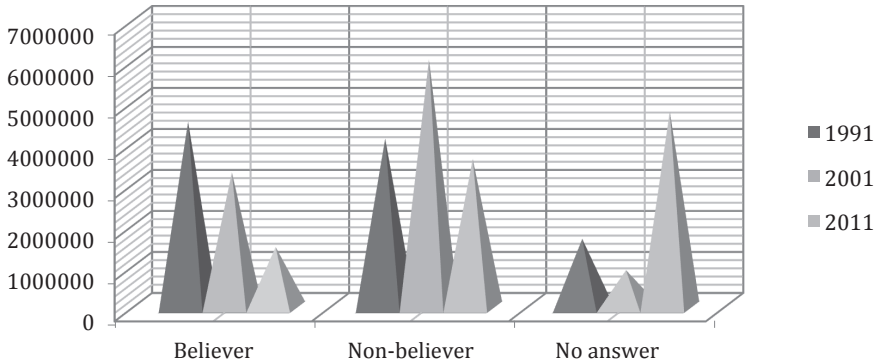
During the 1990s, mainstream churches lost a significant proportion of their memberships for several reasons. First, they were affected by demographic changes, particularly aging and mortality. Moreover, they were not able to address potential converts effectively. Some of them were also closely connected to specific cultural, regional, or historical circumstances related to their emergence or activities, which were obscure for contemporary believers, or else there may have been internal discrepancies leading to separation.

This development was most striking in the case of the Silesian Evangelical Church of Augsburg Confession that dwindled to only 42% of its former membership between 1991 and 2001. Furthermore, the Czechoslovak Hussite Church lost 44% of its members, the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren dropped by 43%, as well as the Roman Catholic Church, which experienced a decline of 32%.<sup>14</sup> Such decline did

<sup>14</sup> In terms of absolute numbers, however, the greatest loss affected the Catholic Church (1,280,605 members) and the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren (86,784 members).



not, however, affect all religious groups. On the contrary: a number of them experienced an expansion. This was true especially for small evangelical denominations, particularly those influenced by the Pentecostal and charismatic movements. This shift reflects similar developments in many West European countries.<sup>15</sup>



**Figure 2:** Religious affiliation in Czech society according to the censuses in 1991, 2001 and 2011.

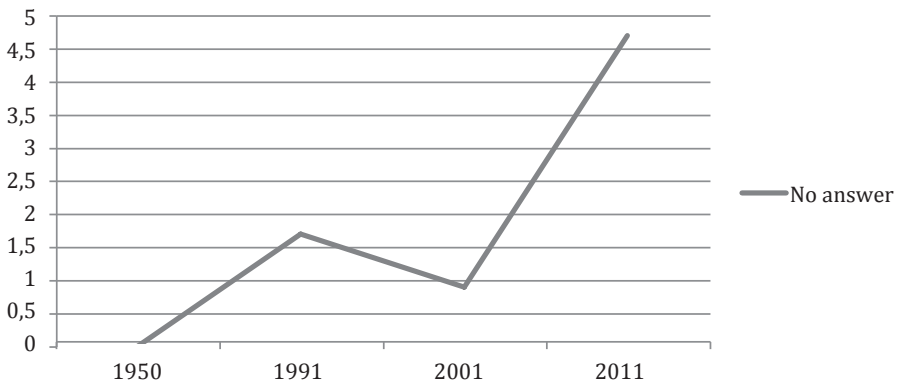
The 2001 census showed that the regional differences had become even deeper than before. However, the decline of membership in traditional Christian denominations, especially the Roman Catholic Church, was proportional and did not selectively affect only specific regions. A comparatively highest number of Catholics still remained in southern Moravia, while their numbers were the lowest in northern and north-western Bohemia, as was the case in the early 1990s.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, the relatively weak position of the traditional religious institutions in the regions previously populated by Germans does not mean that these places are a 'spiritual desert'. For small and alternative groups, Christian and non-Christian alike, these regions constitute a relatively promising area. In contrast to traditional religious groups that have suffered a considerable loss of members, small and alternative groups have been relatively successfully taking roots here.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Comp. ALISTER E. MCGRATH, *The Future of Christianity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002, *passim*.

<sup>16</sup> It is nonetheless interesting that while in 1991 Roman Catholics accounted for the majority of the entire populace in 22 districts, in 2001 this was true only for three of them (Uherské Hradiště, Opava and Hodonín).

<sup>17</sup> This growing religious plurality is further emphasized by the fact that, according to the 2001 census, the county of Liberec was home to 27,800 worshippers and 4,650 (16%) of these were sympathizers of small and in our environment non-traditional religious groups, whose majority we can define as the so-called new religious movements. A similar occurrence can be observed in other districts in northern Bohemia: in the district of Jablonec nad Nisou it was 16.6%, in the Ústí nad Labem district 16% and in the Most district 15.2%. By contrast, in districts where traditional religious groups had a strong position, such as in Moravian districts, the proportion of non-traditional religious groups did not reach 10 percent: in Zlín district 6% registered as supporters of small and

The last census from 2011 demonstrated another radical shift away from traditional religious groups, with growing indifference or even apathy towards religion. However, similarly to previous censuses, one needs to consider the data with some caution. In contrast to the previous data collections, the question about religious affiliation was explicitly marked as voluntary. Partly as a consequence, only 14% of Czechs adhered to a specific religious group or denomination, while 7% said they were believers without belonging to any denomination or a religious group. Another 34% proclaimed themselves as non-religious. In total, 45% of the population refused to answer the question. Thus, in comparison with 2001, the decline affected not only those who explicitly declared a religious affiliation (dropping from 32% to less than 21%) but also those who said they were not religious (dropping from 59% to 35%). Moreover, the number of individuals refusing to answer rose dramatically (from 9% to 45%).



**Figure 3:** Growth in the “category” no answer between 1950 and 2011.<sup>18</sup>

It is clear that these changes cannot be interpreted using the census data. A more detailed survey would be necessary to see whether this development indicates increasing religious indifference. It is also possible that the question about religious/non-religious identity lost its meaning.<sup>19</sup> Yet there are other potential explanations. Some religious groups might have refused to answer the question for dogmatic reasons. For example, the leadership of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

non-traditional religious groups, in Hodonín district their numbers reached 4.2% and in Žďár nad Sázavou district 4.5%.

<sup>18</sup> The answer on religious affiliation was obligatory in the census in 1950 and even in 1991 (but during this census, it was not strictly required). It has been facultative since 2001.

<sup>19</sup> In 2011, persons not stating their relationship to faith (not marking they were either religious or without creed) but who wrote they were atheists, were not included in the basic structure of population. The number of such persons was 1058; 698 men and 360 women. This number, however, only accounts for those who remembered and noted it down; such possibility was not offered in the manual.

that recommends its member not to fill in the answer adopted such strategy. Similar reasons can be assumed in case of some members of established churches.

Additional data related to regional differences or sociodemographic indicators confirm the already known trends. The last census demonstrated a further weakening of traditional religious groups on one hand, and strengthening of ‘small’ Christian evangelical groups (e.g. Brethren Church, Apostle Church), alternative religious communities, and other non-traditional groups (e.g. individuals declaring themselves as Buddhist<sup>20</sup>). In contrast to the previous censuses, respondents were offered an option “believer without religious affiliation”. If we also add to this group those who declared themselves as Catholic or Christian but did not specify any church or Christian denomination, the size is by no means negligible. It includes nearly 800 thousands individuals.

**Table 1:** Changes in membership in chosen religious groups between 1991 and 2011.

	1991	2001	2011
Catholic Church	4,021,385	2,740,780	1,083,899
Czech Brethren Evangelic Church	203,996	117,212	51,936
Czechoslovak Hussite Church	178,036	99,103	39,276
Jehovah's Witnesses	14,575	23,162	13,097
Orthodox Church in Czech Lands	19,354	22,968	20,628
Silesian Evangelic Church of Augsburg Confession	33,130	14,020	8,162
Brethren Church	2,759	9,931	10,872
Seventh Day Adventists	7,674	9,757	7,394
Greek Catholic Church	7,030	7,675	9,927
Christian bodies	3,017	6,927	3,458
Apostolic Church	1,485	4,565	4,934
Brethren Unity of Baptists	2,544	3,622	3,208
Methodist Evangelic Church	2,855,	2,694	1,952
Old-Catholic Church	2,725	1,515	1,736
Federation of the Jewish Communities in the Czech Rep.	1,292	1,515	1,132
Neo-Apostolic Church	427	449	98

The census data do not provide any information about the trust in religious institutions or churches. However, it is an important issue if we want to understand the public role of religion in modern Czech society. The degree of trust in religious institutions is regularly asked for, together with the degree of trust in other key social institutions (political bodies, courts, army, education system etc.). Based on accessible data, it becomes clear that after a few years in the early 1990s when religious institutions enjoyed a rather satisfying amount of trust of their followers (over 50%),

<sup>20</sup> The strongest group was *Diamond Way Buddhism – Karma Kagyu Lineage* claiming 3,484 followers in the census.

in the late 1990s at the latest, this declined significantly and today, religious organizations account for one of the least trustworthy public institutions in Czech society.

The Czechs are keen to negatively perceive any kind of occurrence that can be interpreted as an attempt by churches or religious organizations to influence public affairs. It is then irrelevant if these occurrences relate to potential political declarations or the opportunity to influence economic developments. The lowest level of trust, however, has certainly been affected by disputes over restitutions of church property.

#### **(4) Trends and transformation of “Czech religiosity” as seen by quantitative surveys from the start of the new millennium**

As repeatedly stated above, the census data must be treated very carefully. It is better to view them as “illustrative” only, or as signals of certain trends, e.g. the decrease of the number of members of traditional religious institutions involving a certain de-institutionalisation of Czech religiosity. However, to adequately analyse these trends, we need to use data from more specific surveys. The vast majority of these took place before 2011 and cannot therefore help much to clarify questions raised by the last population census.

Still, their results bring numerous valuable pieces of information. We can use them to explain some trends in Czech religiosity at the turn of the millennium. The changing position of institutionalized religiosity is one of these trends. Almost all relevant surveys conducted in the 1990s, just like the few realized after 2000 have unequivocally demonstrated that this kind of religiosity underwent a relatively important decline in the 1990s. Of course, the question is how to interpret such decline. One possibility is to see it as the consequence of the long-term Czech distrust towards religious institutions, which may be tracked as far as to the end of the 19th century. In line with this explanation, the majority of Czechs seem to identify the Roman Catholic Church with religion in general. This means that the attitudes towards the Church reflect the overall stance to religious institutions. The relatively high degree of trust in churches in the early 1990s, as well as the relatively high percentage of people declaring support for a specific religious group, were clearly consequences of the exceptional situation given by specific circumstances of the transforming post-Communist society.

From as early as 1993, there were some signs of de-institutionalization of religious life. This may have been seen as returning secularization of Czech society – if we understand secularization as progressive marginalization of traditional religious institutions accompanied by an increase of religious plurality. However, it would be more precise to say that after the mid-1990s the Czech society started to experience demopolization and deinstitutionalization of religious life. As a consequence, a spiritual marketplace has developed,<sup>21</sup> where the concept of believing without belonging de-

<sup>21</sup> Comp. WADE CLARK ROOF, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1999.

veloped by the British sociologist of religion Grace Davie has become increasingly relevant.<sup>22</sup>

In this respect, information on practices linked to traditional forms of institutionalized religiosity is of key importance. Past surveys dealt mainly with participation in regular religious rites and key life rituals (e.g. baptism, weddings, funerals). As far as taking part in regular religious practices (at least once a month) is concerned, all available survey data show it is rather low even compared to most ex-Soviet bloc countries, reaching some 7%. Compared to the situation in the early 1990s and the first years of the new millennium, the decline is clear, but not dramatic. However, if we consider longer-term trends, the situation seems to be relatively stable. Other religious practices (e.g. baptism) are also relatively insignificant. According to the surveys, only 1/3 of respondents considered baptism to be important. However, this does not mean that religious acts, like baptism or religious wedding, are not interesting or even popular for a subgroup of the population. Being “interesting”, however, means that some individuals consider them to be an alternative to ordinary secular ceremonies. They are viewed as something that brings a kind of “invigoration”. Another explanation could be found in Grace Davie’s concept of vicarious religion and its functions.

Aside from the information about the changing role of religious institutions, the respondents’ personal attitudes towards religion are also important. According to the *AUFBRUCH 2007* survey, only 23% of respondents claimed being religious, while 65% declared themselves as not religious. Another 11% considered themselves as neither religious nor irreligious. These results may be interpreted as another piece of evidence about the deepening secularization of Czech society. However, this interpretation is put into doubt if we compare the *AUFBRUCH 2007* survey with data from the *DIN 2006* survey. The latter survey provides a somewhat different view of this issue, as more than 50% of respondents claimed to be spiritual and more than 20% were unable to state whether they were spiritual or not.<sup>23</sup>

The weakening of traditional institutionalized religiosity or self-reflection of one’s own religiosity are not the only important issues. We also need to consider the role and transformation of the religious, as well as the acceptance of certain spiritual and religious practices. The two key surveys conducted in the first decade of the new millennium, such as the *DIN 2006* survey, the *AUFBRUCH 2007* focusing on religiosity in Central and Eastern European countries, as well as large comparative surveys (*ISSP* and *EVS*), showed that a large proportion of the Czech population (40 to 50%) believes in a certain form of transcendence. At the same time, the surveys showed that religious views have become greatly differentiated. Only a relatively small part of respondents (around 10%) identified with a traditional Christian idea of a personal

<sup>22</sup> GRACE DAVIE, “Believing without Belonging: Is This the Future of Religion in Britain?”, *Social Compass* 37 (4, 1990), p. 455–469.

<sup>23</sup> Respondents were to comment on four specific characteristics of their own religiosity: (1.) I am spiritual and live according to religious teachings. (2.) I am spiritual in a certain way. (3.) I cannot say if I am spiritual or not. (4.) I am not spiritual and I am not interested in these things.

God. Respondents were much more inclined to believe that God is a supernatural force, a form of spirit or life energy. Even a significant portion of those who declared as Christians adopted these ideas.<sup>24</sup>

**Table 2:** Belief in God and stability of belief (in %), ISPP 2008.

<b>Belief in God</b>	<b>%</b>
I don't believe in God	40.3
I don't know if God exists and I don't believe if it is possible to find out	14.8
I don't believe in personal God, but believe in some Higher Power	16.3
Sometimes I believe, sometimes not	6.9
Although I doubt about His existence, I believe in God	10.5
God really exists and I don't doubt about it	11.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Stability of belief in God</b>	<b>%</b>
I don't believe in God and I have never believed in God	60.4
I don't believe in God, but I believed in God earlier	11.4
I believe in God, but I didn't believe earlier	4.9
I believe in God and I have always believed in God	23.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Thus, this data demonstrates the plasticity and multifaceted character of Czech religiosity in the beginning of the new millennium. “Religious belief” – if we use a simplified term – is going more and more in the direction of what the British sociologist Paul Heelas calls spirituality.<sup>25</sup> This term refers to a deinstitutionalized form of religiosity, characterized by a strong tendency to syncretize and detraditionalize religious views. Its goal is individual development and consumption; religion is not a goal, but rather an instrument. It is not surprising that in the given context, transcendence takes the form of something more “in accordance” with other discourses and narrations in the pluralistic late-modern identity.

This trend is confirmed by other data concerning individual religious beliefs. Relatively low importance is assigned to traditional religious ideas linked to institutionalized religiosity, e.g. the belief in heaven, hell or resurrection. Less than 30% of respondents identified with these in the surveys (DIN 2006, AUFBRUCH 2007, ISSP 2009). On the other hand, things such as healing powers of amulets, the ability to foresee future or reliability of horoscopes are acceptable for more than 40% of

<sup>24</sup> Specific results were somewhat different, which resulted from different perception of the options given to the respondents. While, e.g. the AUFBR 2007 survey offered only the option *I do not believe in God as a person but I do believe in a higher power* (16%), the DIN 2006 survey used two variants: (1.) *There is some form of spirit or life power* and (2.) *There is a supernatural power*. More than 40% of respondents chose one of these variants.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. PAUL HEELAS, LINDA WOODHEAD, et al., *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality*, Oxford: Blackwell 2005, *passim*.

respondents. In some cases (e.g. the ability to foresee future) the positive answers exceeded 50%. Once again it is true that ideas corresponding to the subjective spirituality of a late-modern consumer get more and more attention. It is irrelevant whether the “believer” claims to be a Christian, Buddhist or Neo-pagan. Obviously, this does not mean that this is the only “viable” form of religiosity in Czech society. Next to this one, there are other, relatively influential options. For example, these may include evangelical groups in Christian churches and denominations, which seem to be more successful and attractive than traditional Christianity even in the Czech context.

**Table 3:** Acceptance of religious ideas (in %), DIN 2006.

	Yes		No		Total
	definitely	probably	probably	definitely	
<b>Afterlife</b>	11.9	24.2	26.4	37.5	100.0
<b>Heaven</b>	10.2	16.0	49.3	24.5	100.0
<b>Hell</b>	8.3	13.2	24.8	53.7	100.0
<b>Miracles</b>	8.4	18.6	26.1	46.8	100.0
<b>Amulets</b>	5.6	37.0	27.0	30.3	100.0
<b>Stars</b>	9.6	36.5	26.3	27.6	100.0
<b>Fortunetellers</b>	10.8	42.2	24.0	23.0	100.0
<b>Healers</b>	9.3	31.8	25.3	33.6	100.0

It is clear that many representatives of traditional religious groups, as well as supporters of the “non-religious” approach will interpret this development as something that jeopardizes or degrades religion. Nevertheless, from the point of view of viability of religion in the following years, this tendency will probably be only marginal. The principal role is likely to be played by religious experience and the ability of individual religious groups and currents to offer an acceptable and sufficiently attractive alternative to the increasingly chaotic, less comprehensible, and thus more dangerous, technically depersonalized (post)modern society.

One must interpret the traditional “Czech atheism” in this context. There is no space for deeper analysis but let us say the following. The group that can be called analytic atheists is small and its size is close to the average of Western European countries. Yet, except for this group, the idea of “Czech atheists” usually helps to “hide” other phenomena, such as religious apatheism or individualized religiosity which are very common in Czech society.

## (5) **Conclusions**

Surveys from the last two decades allow us to formulate conclusions concerning the relationship of Czech society to religion. They are crucial for understanding Czech religiosity:

1. *“Czech atheism” is not atheism.* Most of the relevant survey data shows that truly atheistic attitudes are held only by a small minority of people. “Czech atheism” tends to be confused with other religious phenomena, such as deinstitutionalized religiosity and apathy towards religion (religious apatheism).

2. *Low level of institutionalization of religious life.* The attitudes of the Czech public towards religious institutions, particularly traditional churches, tend to be negative or indifferent at the very best. However, even those who are willing to explicitly declare affiliation to a specific religious group often do not participate in its “religious life”. Such tendencies seem to be more obvious in case of the Roman Catholic Church and mainstream non-Catholic denominations (Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, Czechoslovak Hussite Church).

3. *Deep individualization of religion.* These tendencies of Czech religiosity are in line with its significant individualization. It is reflected in both the ambivalent attitude to religious institutions and the high levels of religious syncretism.

4. *Low level of commitment.* One of the most obvious aspects of the high level of individualization of religion is its relatively ambivalent position in daily life. Commitment to religious practices is low and religious ideas and values exert only a small influence on other attitudes and behaviours.

## (6) **Blank spaces**

Religion-related surveys provide us with relatively large datasets that may be used to analyse the form and tendencies of current Czech religiosity. However, we are still confronted with several gaps in the current scholarship when trying to compile a sufficiently representative “map of the current Czech religion”. The following five clusters of issues are considered to be of the greatest importance and we believe they deserve appropriate attention.

1. *Study of religious communities.* Available data provide a certain picture of the macro-level of religious life. These are often used to formulate unfounded generalizations. Aside from this, the bits of information concerning this very layer do not allow us to adequately study the dynamics of activities of specific religious groups.

2. *Study of compactness, differentiation and distribution of power of individual religious groups.* Ideas of compact operation of individual churches and religious movements or even traditions tend to provide gross misinterpretation of available data. It shows that partial surveys focused on specific churches and movements will have to significantly deal with the internal dynamics and differentiation thereof.

3. *Commitment to religious activity.* Most surveys claim that one of the key problems of “Czech religiosity” is the low level of commitment. Yet no survey deals with this phenomenon to a sufficient level and this is why the analyses and interpretations thereof lack depth and relevance

4. *Study of key strategies of religious groups.* The vast majority of surveys ignore the fact that religious groups have their own strategies, which determine their activities.



The study of such strategies would not only allow for a better understanding of motives underlying the behaviour of specific groups, but also the discrepancies among the expectations of their members or surrounding society in daily reality.

5. *Study of Czech atheism.* Even though the cliché of a high level of atheism in Czech society appears in almost all depictions of the Czechs' relationship to religion, this phenomenon appears to lack deeper examination. Most available studies tend to acquire historic or theoretical works and do not reflect the current scholarly debate focusing on the topics of unbelief and non-religion. They also rarely use empirical data.

## (7) Appendix: Studies of religion in the Czech Republic (Czechoslovakia) after 1989

While the Communist government decree of 25 July 1954, following after freedom of confession was declared in the Constitution, banned state institutions from inquiring into the population's religious faith and from maintaining relevant registers, this does not imply no sociological and other religiosity-related survey took place under the Communist regime. The design, methodology and results were generally influenced by the prominent anti-religious ideology and the acquired data or the interpretations thereof were not available to public.<sup>26</sup> Ideologically unbiased surveys started to appear only after 1989, while at the same time the academic and public discussion focused on the results was open; as for most of these, financed from public sources, primary data are available (cf. Váně 2012). The elementary overview may be divided to (a) representative quantitative studies, (b) qualitative studies and (c) historical-sociological studies.

Other than that, it is vital to mention census data (1991, 2001 and 2011), including religious belief declared by the population; this question was voluntary in the census, while in the last one, 45% people did not answer. Another problem is the changing census method; the differing interpretations of and answers to this only question focusing on religiosity; and the unavailability (incomplete availability) of primary data caused by personal data protection imposed by law. However, it is vital to note that the 2011 census allowed the respondents, aside from declaring membership in a church or explicit refusal thereof, to declare themselves as believers without any church membership. This was the option more than 700 thousand of Czechs (7% of the population) chose.

### (7.1) Representative quantitative surveys

Questions concerning population religiosity, especially declared religious belief and participation in religious services, are present in the majority of representative socio-

<sup>26</sup> ZDENĚK R. NEŠPOR, *Vývoj české sociologie náboženství v mezinárodním a interdisciplinárním kontextu* [Evolution of the Czech Sociology of Religion in the International and Interdisciplinary Context], Praha: Scriptorium 2008, *passim*.

logical surveys and public opinion polls after 1989. Deeper surveys focusing on this area are much less numerous. The first surveys were conducted under the sponsorship of church bodies, especially the Roman Catholic Church (*AUFBRUCH* ad.), and soon thereafter, the Czech Republic started participating in international religiosity surveys (*ISSP*, *EVS*). In 2006, the only independent Czech sociological survey focusing on religion (*DIN*) was conducted.

The very first quantitative survey concerning religion, in 1991, sponsored by the Czech Bible Society, was conducted in Czechoslovakia and other post-Communist countries after 1989. It monitored the relationship of the population to (the Christian) religion and the Bible. The survey took the form of a quota sampling on a two thousand respondents and the acquired data are available, as in the case of standard sociological surveys, through the Czech Social Sciences Data Archive at the Institute of Sociology ASCR. Unfortunately, this does not apply to further church-related surveys. This concerns especially the large international survey *God after the Communism* (*AUFBRUCH*), conducted by the Roman Catholic sociologist Paul Zulehner, the first portion of which took place in 1997 and the second one in 2007. While table outputs of the first portion were published,<sup>27</sup> primary data are not available to the public and the survey method is unclear as well. The results of such surveys are usually processed and used only by their direct participants,<sup>28</sup> who comment on the long-term decline of traditional religiosity and the increase in self-orientation and fatalism.

Such limitations apply also to recent surveys ordered by the Catholic Church, focusing on religiosity of youth (2011) or social perception of the Church (2014), as well as to the case of a (selective) presentation of statistic data concerning the religious life of church corporations.<sup>29</sup> Whether other churches active in the Czech Republic maintain such statistics or not, such data is not public in most cases and thus it are unavailable for further sociological analyses.<sup>30</sup>

In the 1990s, the Czech Republic accessed international sociological survey programs, some of which deal with religion from a detailed perspective: this means especially the Religion module within the *International Social Survey Programme* (*ISSP*), conducted in 1998 (the collection of Czech data took place in 1999) and in 2008, and the *European Values Study* (*EVS*), which took place in 1990 (data collection in 1991), 1999, and 2008. In both cases, these are random sample surveys, representative for the whole adult population (18+).

<sup>27</sup> MIKLÓS TOMKA and PAUL M. ZULEHNER, *Religion und Kirchen in Ost (Mittel) Europa*, Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag 2008, *passim*.

<sup>28</sup> LIBOR PRUDKÝ, *Církev a sociální soudržnost v naší zemi* [*Churches and the Social Cohesion in Our [Czech] Country*], Praha: FSV UK 2005, *passim*; LIBOR PRUDKÝ, *Inventura hodnot* [*The Stocktaking of Values*], Praha: Academia 2009, *passim*.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. RADEK TICHÝ, “Lidé, skupiny a praktiky v české katolické církvi 1997–2005” [“People, Groups, and Practices in the Czech Catholic Church, 1997–2005”], *Pražské sociálně vědní studie*, SOC-015 (2008), p. 3–33.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. ZDENĚK R. NEŠPOR and ZDENĚK VOJTÍŠEK, *Encyklopedie menších křesťanských církví v České republice* [*Encyclopedia of Small Christian Churches in the Czech Republic*], Praha: Karolinum 2015, *passim*.

The ISSP survey is realized in the Czech Republic by the Institute of Sociology ASCR (Dana Hamplová). The data was collected in June and July 1999 by the SC&C agency (N = 1224, return 39%), and in September 2008 by the Factum Invenio agency (N = 1512, return 44%). The relevant survey module includes the personal, political and religious positions of respondents, with the religious area specializing on personal religious ideas and practices, religiosity of loved ones, social impacts of religiosity, and religious extremism in later surveys. The questionnaire includes a large socio-demographical part. The main notions were published by Hamplová<sup>31</sup> and Hamplová and Řeháková.<sup>32</sup>

The EVS survey has been conducted in the Czech Republic (or Czechoslovakia in 1991) by the Faculty of Social Studies of Masaryk University in Brno (Ladislav Rabušic). Data was collected in August to October 1991 by the survey department of the Czechoslovak Radio (N = 2109); in March to May 1999 by SC&C (N = 1908); and in May to November 2008 again by SC&C (N = 1821). These surveys were not focused exclusively on the field of religion, although it represented a significant portion of the studied topics, but also on life values, goals and preferences, leisure time, work, and family life. Overall results summarizing all three portions were published by Rabušic and Hamanová.<sup>33</sup>

The only independent Czech religiosity survey *Detraditionalization and individualization of religion in the Czech Republic* (DIN) was conducted in September and October 2006 by the Institute of Sociology ASCR (Zdeněk R. Nešpor). The survey was a part of a larger study, which will be mentioned later. Data was collected by SC&C (N = 1200, return 53%), and this survey used a random sample and is representative for the whole adult population. For the purpose of data comparability, it reflected the topics dealt with in the ISSP surveys – Religion, but it included more questions focusing on religious ideas (including nonconformist ones) and practice, relationships among different types of non/belief, and perception of death. Main results were published by Hamplová<sup>34</sup> and Lužný and Nešpor.<sup>35</sup> Recently, there has been a new attempt to resume the *DIN* survey (Dušan Lužný) at the Palacký University in Olomouc, but the results are not closed nor known as of yet.

<sup>31</sup> DANA HAMPLOVÁ, *Náboženství a nadpřirozeno ve společnosti: Mezinárodní srovnání na základě empirického výzkumu ISSP* [*Religion and the Supernatural in the Society: International Comparison Based on the ISSP Survey*], Praha: Sociologický ústav AV ČR 2000, *passim*; HAMPLOVÁ, *Náboženství v české společnosti na prahu 3. tisíciletí*, *passim*.

<sup>32</sup> DANA HAMPLOVÁ and BLANKA ŘEHÁKOVÁ, *Česká religiozita na počátku 3. tisíciletí: Výsledky Mezinárodního programu sociálního výzkumu ISSP 2008 – Náboženství* [*Czech Religiosity at the Dawning of the Third Millennium: Results of the International Social Survey Program ISSP 2008 – Religion*], Praha: Sociologický ústav AV ČR 2009, *passim*.

<sup>33</sup> LADISLAV RABUŠIC and JANA HAMANOVÁ, *Hodnoty a postoje v ČR 1991–2008* [*Values and Attitudes in the Czech Republic, 1991–2008*], Brno: Masarykova univerzita 2009, *passim*.

<sup>34</sup> DANA HAMPLOVÁ, “Čemu Češi věří: dimenze soudobé české religiozity” [“What Do the Czechs Believe in: The Dimensions of Contemporary Czech Religiosity”], *Sociologický časopis / Czech Sociological Review* 44 (4, 2008), p. 271–294.

<sup>35</sup> DUŠAN LUŽNÝ, ZDENĚK R. NEŠPOR, et al., *Náboženství v menšině: Religiozita a spiritualita v současné české společnosti* [*Religion in Minority: Religiosity and Spirituality in the Contemporary Czech Society*], Brno, Praha: Masarykova univerzita, Malvern 2008, *passim*.

### (7.2) Qualitative sociological and socio-anthropological surveys

Deeper understanding of different dimensions of the current Czech non/religiosity, consequent social acting and the subjectively felt importance thereof come from qualitative surveys. Their informative value is often restricted by small survey samples within regional, community or topical limits. Many minor surveys have been conducted within qualifying university theses, systematically assigned mainly at the Faculty of Arts of Masaryk University in Brno (Dušan Lužný, David Václavík), the Hussite Theological Faculty of the Charles University (Zdeněk Vojtíšek) and the Faculty of Humanities of the Charles University (Zdeněk R. Nešpor). Diploma and doctoral theses of students usually suffer from failings linked to such types of surveys and only a small portion of these got to be published. Wider, academically funded qualitative sociological and socio-anthropological surveys are much less numerous; in the last twenty years principally three community-type surveys took place (Filipov, *Český Kendal* (Czech Kendal), *Bůh ví proč* (God knows why)), as well as alternative religiosity surveys (Zdeněk Vojtíšek) and surveys concerning dying and death (Olga Nešporová).

The first anthropological survey to focus on religion in the scope of a community survey of a smaller town of Moravia, was conducted in 1997–99 by the Faculty of Social Studies of the Charles University in the so-called *Filipov* (Jiří Kabele, Dan Ryšavý). This combined a field stationary survey involving interviews and analysis of source materials. Aside from religiosity it focused on the area of (local) politics, family and social life, work, entrepreneurial activities, and the overall post-revolutionary transformation of society. A specific local feature was a relatively strong evangelical minority, whose congregational life and modifications were the focus of the survey. The main results were published by Ryšavý (1999) and Kabele (2004).

Another community-related survey was *Český Kendal*, realized within the aforementioned *Detraditionalization and individualization of religion in the Czech Republic* during 2006–08 as a counterweight and addition to the representative quantitative survey. The survey took place in two mid-scale towns; in Mikulov in South Moravia (Dušan Lužný) and in Česká Lípa in Northern Bohemia (Zdeněk R. Nešpor). It was linked to the religiosity survey methodology used in Kendal, Great Britain.<sup>36</sup> This involved focusing mainly on the field of religion, dealing with religious and social practices of traditional and alternative believers and their social representation or perception. Given the selection of survey localities, the survey also dealt with social processes in border regions repopulated after WWII or even later. The principal results of the survey including the comparison of religious lives in both localities were published by Lužný and Nešpor.<sup>37</sup>

The last larger-scale socio-anthropological survey *God Knows Why* was conducted in the Northern Bohemian border region in 2003–2008. The author, Barbora Spalová focused on the functioning of several confessionally defined local communities, their

<sup>36</sup> Cf. HEELAS and WOODHEAD, *The Spiritual Revolution*, *passim*.

<sup>37</sup> LUŽNÝ and NEŠPOR, *Náboženství v menšině*, *passim*.

internal power regimes, and memory constructions (this involved two Roman Catholic parishes, a Baptist Union congregation and a Unity of the Brethren congregation). In this survey, the widest spread elements were those of reflective anthropology. Its main focus was understanding the inner motivations of different actors, which, however, renders it less usable for generalization. In summary the results were published by Spalová.<sup>38</sup>

Aside from these surveys, it is necessary to mention long-term *monitoring* of the so-called religious movements and other *alternative forms of religiosity* including non-church and non-organized ones done by the scholar of religion Zdeněk Vojtíšek. While Vojtíšek's previous works were influenced by the ideological perspective of an anti-cult approach, the author progressively freed himself from this approach, providing an objective elementary overview of all religious organizations active in the Czech Republic.<sup>39</sup> His perspective is primarily academic, and as such he concentrates only on monitoring institutions on the "supply side" of the religious marketplace. Such an approach is similar to the project focused on studying and monitoring all protestant congregations<sup>40</sup> and communities of 27 smaller Christian churches.<sup>41</sup> However, this includes social, socio-geographical, and historical dimensions of the religious institutions' activities; other segments of organized Czech religiosity (Roman Catholic Church, Czechoslovak Hussite Church, non-Christian churches and centers of non-church spirituality) have not been studied yet.

A long-term survey of attitudes (of various segments) of Czech society relating to dying and death including the realization of relevant transitional rites and ideas of a life after death has been conducted by Olga Nešporová since the start of the millennium. The survey combines quantitative and qualitative sociological and socio-anthropological approaches, paying special attention to changing requirements, needs and habits of the dying persons, as well as survivors. The principal results were published by Nešporová.<sup>42</sup>

### (7.3) Historical-sociological surveys

A number of authors believe that the specific form of Czech non/religiosity has its roots at least in the development of Czech attitudes towards religion and churches during the 20th century, if not even earlier. Thus, in the last decades, there has been a rise in historical and historical-sociological monitoring of the field. Here, we will

<sup>38</sup> BARBORA SPALOVÁ, *Bůh ví proč: Studie pamětí a režimů moci v křesťanských církvích v severních Čechách* [God Knows Why: A Study of Memories and Power Regimes in the Christian Churches of the North Bohemia], Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury 2012, *passim*.

<sup>39</sup> ZDENĚK VOJTÍŠEK, *Encyklopedie náboženských směrů a hnutí v České republice: Náboženství, církve, sekty, duchovní společenství* [Encyclopedia of Religions and Religious Movements of the Czech Republic: Religions, Churches, Cults, Spiritual Communities], Praha: Portál 2004, *passim*.

<sup>40</sup> ZDENĚK R. NEŠPOR, *Encyklopedie moderních evangelických (a starokatolických) kostelů Čech, Moravy a českého Slezska* [The Encyclopedia of the Modern Protestant and Old Catholic Churches of Bohemia, Moravia and Czech Silesia], Praha: Kalich 2009, *passim*.

<sup>41</sup> NEŠPOR and VOJTÍŠEK, *Encyklopedie menších křesťanských církví v České republice*, *passim*.

<sup>42</sup> OLGA NEŠPOROVÁ, *O smrti a pohřbívání* [On Death and Burials], Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury 2013, *passim*.

however mention only those studies which combine analyses of historic material with the current religiosity status of Czech society.

Nešpor<sup>43</sup> and Václavík<sup>44</sup> published overview works indicating a progressive deviation of a large part of the society from the traditional church-related religiousness and a search for various religious alternatives. The Communist era strengthened the former and hid, while not eliminated, the latter. The scholarly debate significantly benefited from a collection of studies dealing with past and current religiosity from the point of view of (changes of) religious cultures,<sup>45</sup> or a similar work focusing on older roots of Czech anti-clericalism.<sup>46</sup> The surveys, which all these works were based on, document the aforementioned notion of continuity (not invariability) of long-term processes of religious evolution within Czech society and the relation of the current state not only to the Communist regime but also to older institutions and tendencies.

The level of elaboration on the institutional history of individual church communities after the 1950s and in the context of their free operation after the fall of the communist regime is unbalanced. While some studies of the socio-culturally created history of the Czech Roman Catholic Church<sup>47</sup> and some smaller church communities (Seventh-day Adventist Church<sup>48</sup>) are available, this is only a handful of cases – it does not apply to any other socially established and politically, socially or culturally influential Czech churches (Czechoslovak Hussite Church and Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren), and even less so to nonconformist and/or non-church or other socially unorganized spiritual communities.

#### (7.4) Foreign overviews

Data from publicly available quantitative surveys of Czech religiosity is available for the international research community via the Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences (GESIS) data archive or through the Czech Social Sciences Data Archive at the Institute of Sociology ASCR. Almost all the aforementioned studies analysing and interpreting sociological or historical data concerning Czech religiosity were published only in Czech, thus being not directly available for foreign researchers. This does not

<sup>43</sup> ZDENĚK R. NEŠPOR, et al., *Náboženství v 19. století: Nejcirkevnější století, nebo období zrodu českého ateismu?* [Religion in the 19th Century: Century of the Churches or the Birth of Czech Atheism?], Praha: Scriptorium 2010, *passim*; NEŠPOR, *Příliš slábi ve víře*, *passim*.

<sup>44</sup> VÁCLAVÍK, *Náboženství a moderní česká společnost*, *passim*.

<sup>45</sup> MILOŠ HAVELKA, et al., *Víra, kultura a společnost: Náboženské kultury v českých zemích 19. a 20. století* [Belief, Culture, and Society: Religious Cultures in the Czech Lands of the 19th and 20th Century], Červený Kostelec: P. Mervart 2012, *passim*.

<sup>46</sup> STANISLAV BALÍK, LUKÁŠ FASORA, JIŘÍ HANUŠ, and MAREK VLHA, *Český antiklerikalismus: Zdroje, témata a podoba českého antiklerikalismu v letech 1848–1938* [Czech Anticlericalism: Sources, Topics, and Shape of Czech Anticlericalism, 1848–1938], Praha: Argo 2015, *passim*.

<sup>47</sup> STANISLAV BALÍK and JIŘÍ HANUŠ, *Katolická církev v Československu 1945–1989* [The Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia, 1945–1989], Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury 2007, *passim*.

<sup>48</sup> JIŘÍ PIŠKULA, *Dějiny Církve adventistů sedmého dne v Čechách, na Moravě a ve Slezsku* [History of the Church of the Seventh Day Adventists in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia], Praha: Advent, Orion 2009, *passim*.

mean that there are no overview or even analytical studies published in internationally comprehensible languages.

The most accessible manual of modern Czech church history compiled according to the development in particular churches was published by Schulze Wessel and Zückert.<sup>49</sup> An overview of data concerning religious confession based on population censuses and sociological surveys for the whole of the 20th century was published by Nešpor.<sup>50</sup> Sociological analyses of the *DIN* and *ISSP* surveys – Religion were published by Hamplová and Nešpor<sup>51</sup> and by Vido, Václavík and Paleček.<sup>52</sup> Some results of surveys concerning dying and death<sup>53</sup> or socio-geographical surveys of traditional and emerging holy places in the landscape<sup>54</sup> are also available.

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# Yoga, Tantrism, and Persecution: MISA, a New Religious Movement in Social Conflict

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**Abstract:** Known since the 1990s as Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute (MISA), Gregorian Bivolaru's movement has a history of four decades of conflict with Romanian society, represented by the police and courts as well as the media, which have given a lot of attention to apostates and anti-cult activists. In the perspective of new religions studies, the conflict seems to be a typical case, albeit an exceptionally severe one. The article offers basic information about the MISA movement and its conflicts. It suggests an explanation of these conflicts in five possible misunderstandings, due to which the relationship between the new religious movement and the surrounding society becomes extremely complicated.

**Keywords:** new religious movements; Gregorian Bivolaru; MISA (Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute); social conflict; Yoga; Tantrism

**Abstrakt:** Hnutí Gregoriana Bivolarua, od 90. let 20. století známé jako MISA prochází už čtvrté desetiletí konfliktem s rumunskou společností, reprezentovanou policejními i soudními úřady a médii, která poskytují prostor apostatům a antikultovním aktivistům. V rámci studia nových náboženských hnutí se tento konflikt jeví jako typický, ačkoli výjimečně ostrý. Následující článek poskytuje základní informace o hnutí MISA a jeho konfliktech. Nabízí vysvětlení příčin těchto konfliktů v pěti možných nedorozuměních, která vztah mezi novým náboženským hnutím a okolní společností mimořádně komplikují.

**Klíčová slova:** nová náboženská hnutí; Gregorian Bivolaru; MISA (Hnutí pro duchovní integraci do Absolutna); společenský konflikt; jóga; tantra

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## Introduction

The conflict between the MISA religious movement and representatives of Romanian society is surprisingly severe. Part of this conflict was formed by a judicial process followed by the imprisonment of its founder and spiritual leader Gregorian Bivolaru. In 2004, Romanian police organized a violent raid on the movement's Bucharest centers, which would deserve a whole chapter in the recently published book of *Storming Zion: Government Raids on Religious Communities*.<sup>1</sup> Media and apostates refer to the movement and its leader in a hostile way, using typical stereotypes. This happens regardless to the political regime, in which those references take place, since the movement was persecuted both in Communist Romania and contemporary Romania, which is an EU member state. At some moments, the conflict even had an international dimension. Nevertheless, Sociologists of religion and Religious Studies scholars have paid little attention to the movement.

The goal of this article is to introduce the MISA movement as a new religious movement, showing that its surrounding conflicts may be understood neither as the effect of moral failures of the group's members nor as the outcome of intolerance and prejudices of Romanian society, but as a result of misunderstanding. Needless to say, both parties had their share in it. Therefore, the article summarizes the history of the MISA, describes its doctrine, allows better comprehension of its community, offers a testimony of a secret tantric initiation and, in conclusion, tries to understand the causes of the extraordinary tension experienced by the movement specifically, although not exclusively, in the Romanian society.

I use the terms “the MISA movement” or “Bivolaru's movement” for an entire cluster of both national and international organizations. The national ones consist for example of the Danish and Finnish Yoga centers “Natha”, “German Academy for Traditional Yoga”, the Slovak school of Yoga “Mystérium”, the Czech spiritual school “Rezonance”, the Indian “Satya Yoga Center”, Yoga centers “Tara” in Great Britain and many others. On the international level, there are two organizations, “Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute – MISA” and “The International Federation of Yoga and Meditation – ATMAN”; the former one (the older of the two) forming a part of the latter. Members of the MISA movement share spiritual practices based on Gregorian Bivolaru's teachings, as well as their respect to him. To illustrate their devotion, one of Bivolaru's followers described his spiritual leader as an “utterly exceptional being, a genuine living tantric master, who has deeply and radically transformed their life in a positive way”.<sup>2</sup>

Among academic sources, initially the only two relevant sources were a short article by Indian Studies specialist Moti Lal Pandit, who described the Scandinavian

<sup>1</sup> STUART A. WRIGHT and SUSAN J. PALMER, *Storming Zion: Government Raids on Religious Communities*, New York: Oxford University Press 2016.

<sup>2</sup> MIHAI STOIAN, “Gregorian Bivolaru – an exceptional spiritual destiny, an example of life”, in GREGORIAN BIVOLARU, *The Secret Tantric Path of Love to happiness and fulfillment in a couple relationship*, Denmark: Natha Publishing House 2010, p. 308.

branch of the movement,<sup>3</sup> and a better and more detailed study of the same topic by Religious Studies scholar Sara Møldrup Thejls.<sup>4</sup> In 2016, a more serious academic discussion was finally opened by the CESNUR (Center for Studies on New Religions) conference in South Korea, since one of its panels was dedicated to Bivolaru's movement. The papers presented by lawyer and New Religious Movements scholar Massimo Introvigne, Sociologist PierLuigi Zoccatelli, Psychologist Rafaella Di Marzio, and Religious Studies scholar Gordon J. Melton were published the following year in *Journal of CESNUR*.<sup>5</sup> Later the same year, Massimo Introvigne offered the sum of facts relevant to MISA to The World Religions & Spirituality Project.<sup>6</sup>

Apart from academic sources, this article also makes use of publicly available promotional and apologetic texts published by the MISA movement.<sup>7</sup> Another document, a Czech M.A. thesis of a long-time member of the movement, is also of an apologetic nature.<sup>8</sup> During the preparation of this article I conducted a personal interview with Mihai Stoian,<sup>9</sup> a spiritual teacher considered to be the second most important authority after Bivolaru. A great deal of information was gathered from internal texts: I used the educational material of the courses of the third grade (the grade consists of about forty courses): they contain instructions related to Yoga, the chakras, mudras, alimentation, self-healing, positive thinking, etc. Some parts of these texts are considered to be "secret", "a secret revealed", etc. I studied these courses in Czech. As for their authorship, they are supposed to have been written by Bivolaru himself and we can therefore reasonably suppose that similar texts are distributed in other branches of the MISA too. Among these internal materials I also count programs of the "Holiday Spiritual Yoga Camps" complete not only with many educational texts and commentaries, but also with readings about different mysteries and their uncovering, prophecies about an imminent destructive earthquake and other topics related to pop-culture and religion.<sup>10</sup> Other similar materials can be found in documentaries and movies contained on special edition of DVDs, which are not for sale and can be only acquired in the community. I had a total of fourteen of these discs at my dis-

<sup>3</sup> MOTI LAL PANDIT, "An Evaluation of Natha" [online], *TheoNet*, accessed 27. 1. 2002, used to be available online at <http://www.theonet.net>.

<sup>4</sup> SARA MØLDRUP THEJLS, "MISA and Natha: A Peculiar Story of a Romanian Tantric Yoga School", in JAMES R. LEWIS and INGA BÅRDSSEN TØLLEFSEN, *Handbook of Nordic New Religions*, Leiden – Boston: Brill 2015, p. 62–76.

<sup>5</sup> *Journal of CESNUR* 1 (September–October 2017), p. 3–60.

<sup>6</sup> MASSIMO INTROVIGNE, "Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute" [online], *World Religions & Spirituality*, 1. 6. 2017, accessed 9. 8. 2016, available online at <https://wrldrels.org/2017/05/31/movement-for-spiritual-integration-into-the-absolute>.

<sup>7</sup> These texts, accessed 9. 8. 2016, are available online at <http://www.yogaesoteric.net> and at <http://gregorianbivolaru.net>.

<sup>8</sup> MARTIN HELMAN, *Rumunská škola jógy MISA a stavy osvícení [Romanian Yoga School MISA and States of Enlightenment]*, M.A. thesis, Hussite Theological Faculty, Charles University, Prague 2010, available online at <https://is.cuni.cz/webapps/zzp/download/120111753>.

<sup>9</sup> He also uses the name Advaita or Advaitananda Stoian. The interview took place on 7 November 2016, in Prague.

<sup>10</sup> *Program of the Holiday Spiritual Yoga Camp*, Shambala Publishing 2012; *Program of the Holiday Spiritual Yoga Camp Costinesti 2013*, Shambala Publishing 2013.

position. In addition, they contained an audio recording of fifty “Tantra Lessons”. Another source of better understanding of Bivolaru’s concept of Tantra is his book *The Secret Tantric Path of Love*,<sup>11</sup> which addresses the public.

Other type of documents I studied were the public announcements of support to Bivolaru, which were made by some trustworthy public figures and institutions.<sup>12</sup> I took considered testimonies of the apostates in the international Internet presentation Exmisa<sup>13</sup> and I conducted an interview with a woman who was initiated into Tantra by Bivolaru himself.<sup>14</sup>

As was already mentioned, during the research for this article I studied the internal and apologetic texts mostly in Czech; my presentation of the community and tantric ritual is therefore influenced by a Czech perspective. Nevertheless, due to the international character of the movement, it is highly probable that the description is also valid in case of other national organizations. On the other hand, this perspective naturally leaves out the Romanian sources and the literature reacting to the local controversies, as well as the texts produced by the Romanian civil services and declarations by the local Orthodox Church. This Romanian perspective would merit a separate academic treatment.

## MISA as a New Religious Movement

The Sociological and Religious Studies category “New Religious Movement” was coined in the beginning of the 1970s. The term “New Religious Movement” describes an ideal type and serves to explain the position of some religious institutions in society, the internal dynamics of these institutions, and their interaction with their surroundings. This position is characterized by the attribute of “new” in the sense of “socially unaccepted”, “not integrated”, or “not established”. The dynamics of a “new religious movement” are defined by its innovative and protesting attitude, with which it distances itself from the socially accepted convictions, values, and norms represented by established institutions. The socially unstable character of a New Religious Movement requires charismatic leadership, as well as enthusiastic engagement of its members. The reaction of the majority society to religious innovation, the outcomes

<sup>11</sup> GREGORIAN BIVOLARU, *The Secret Tantric Path of Love to Happiness and Fulfillment in a Couple Relationship*, Denmark: Natha Publishing House 2010.

<sup>12</sup> The most important of these figures is Gabriel Andreescu, who was a dissident during the Romanian Communist period; he also spoke at the CESNUR conference. The Romanian branch of the Helsinki Committee of Human Rights also publicly supported Bivolaru. A detailed history of Bivolaru’s persecution was offered by GABRIEL ANDRESCU, *Radiografia unei represiiuni [Radiography of a Repression]*, Bucureşti: Polirom 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Until August 2016, the material was available on <http://exmisa.org>, later at <http://exmisa.comuf.com> and [www.exmisa.int.eu.org](http://www.exmisa.int.eu.org). At this moment, the material is unavailable.

<sup>14</sup> The woman was initiated twice in Paris. The information I gathered appears mainly in the chapter on Tantric initiation. I conducted the interview on 9 September 2016.

of protesting attitudes, the execution of charismatic authority, and the high level of commitment of its followers may create tension or even unleash a conflict.<sup>15</sup>

As we will see below, the MISA movement can be listed in the “New Religious Movement” category. A conflict was indeed sparked in Romanian society and its echoes have affected other countries as well. On the other hand, no trace of the conflict can be found in the Czech Republic, to which the movement only expanded in the beginning of the 21st century. Possible reasons for this may be that the Czech branch is not too big and its public presentation, which mostly relies on posters and invitations, is not too excessive. Another – and more important – reason may be that Yogic movements are well known to Czech society and were tolerated even by the Communist authorities since the 1960s. The Czech MISA branch therefore operates in the shadow of other international Yogic societies, which, by the virtue of being older and bigger, enjoy a good social standing; this applies specifically to the Czech Union Yoga in Daily Life and to Sahaja Yoga. Moreover, there is competition of dozens of local Yogic communities.

### **MISA in Romania: the history of success and resistance**

The biographies of Gregorian Bivolaru (born 12 March 1952) tend to start with mentions of his childhood spiritual experiences;<sup>16</sup> his childhood dreams, in which he was a high-level Tibetan Yogi; his young adulthood interest in Eastern Philosophy (specifically Ramakrishna, Shivanananda, and Yogananda);<sup>17</sup> and with his interest in scientific literature belonging to different disciplines.<sup>18</sup> According to his own autobiography,<sup>19</sup> as early as at nineteen years, he became an unofficial Yoga teacher and taught unofficially in the Socialist Romania. Bivolaru’s correspondence with Mircea Eliade, a Romanian Religious Studies and Yoga scholar considered an enemy of Romania and living in American exile, attracted the interest of the Romanian intelligence service. The agency isolated Bivolaru from those potentially interested in spiritual teachings<sup>20</sup> and he was therefore only able to gather his first circle of followers as late as in 1981–1982, after becoming a Transcendent meditation enthusiast.<sup>21</sup> In 1982, along with other members of the Romanian Transcendental meditation community,

<sup>15</sup> A great merit in the establishment of the term of “New Religious Movement” belongs to British Sociologist Eileen Barker. Basic description of new religious movements is contained e.g. in her textbook EILEEN BARKER, *New Religious Movements. A Practical Introduction*. London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office 1992, first published 1989.

<sup>16</sup> STOIAN, “Gregorian Bivolaru ...”, p. 30.

<sup>17</sup> See e.g. J. GORDON MELTON, *Melton’s Encyclopedia of American Religions*, 8th ed., Farmington Hill: Gale 2009, p. 1019.

<sup>18</sup> “Who is Gregorian Bivolaru: Biography of Gregorian Bivolaru” [online], *Gregorian Bivolaru*, accessed 9. 8. 2016, available online at <http://gregorianbivolaru.net/whoisgb-1.php>.

<sup>19</sup> “Who is Gregorian Bivolaru. Biography of Gregorian Bivolaru”, <http://gregorianbivolaru.net/whoisgb-1.php>.

<sup>20</sup> STOIAN, “Gregorian Bivolaru ...”, p. 310.

<sup>21</sup> HELMAN, *Rumunská škola jógy ...*, p. 15–16.

Bivolaru was registered by the intelligence service and persecuted.<sup>22</sup> He continued teaching Yoga illegally to 170 students and he raised the first generation of instructors, who were able to keep organizing secret Yogic groups even after Bivolaru's arrest in 1984.<sup>23</sup> Bivolaru was charged with an alleged intent to kill the Romanian Communist leader Nicolae Ceaușescu by paranormal means – he was supposed to carry out this task with his Yoga students.<sup>24</sup> Both Bivolaru and his biographers insist that he escaped from custody by means of his psychic abilities acquired by Yogic practice and after getting enough attention for his cause this way, he voluntarily returned to the prison.<sup>25</sup> In the subsequent political process, Bivolaru was condemned to 1.5 year of prison, specifically because of his escape from custody. In July 1989, a new wave of repressions ensued, affecting Bivolaru, as well as his closest students. Against his will, Bivolaru was interned in a mental asylum. The severe persecution of the members of his Yogic school only ended in December 1989, when the Communist regime in Romania crumbled.<sup>26</sup>

In January 1990, shortly after the fall of the regime, Bivolaru founded a non-profit organization, the Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute (MISA).<sup>27</sup> He gained international recognition in Yoga, which allowed him to use the title “Yoga Professor”. Meanwhile, his movement grew as a “compact and organized group of young people”<sup>28</sup> and apart from founding new centers all over Romania, it had many other activities as well. 1990 saw a summer camp, which was to be the first of a long series of camps, which have remained the “peak of MISA's festival life” until present day.<sup>29</sup> The movement organized lectures and other public presentations, in 1991 it founded a magazine dedicated to Yoga, etc. While MISA grew in Romania, its mission also enjoyed success abroad: at this moment, Bivolaru's movement is active in 28 countries. In Denmark, MISA's most important foreign organization was founded in 1990 under the name of Natha; in 1999, the German Academy for Traditional Yoga was created; and in 2001, Eduard Selea, one of Bivolaru's first pupils, founded the Rezonance society in the Czech Republic. To supervise the international activities of Bivolaru's movement, ATMAN – the International Federation of Yoga and Medita-

<sup>22</sup> Between 1977 and 1981, the Transcendental meditation movement operated in Romania peacefully, despite the fact that the state was aware of it. Unfortunately, this only lasted till 1981 – since the following year the members and supporters of the movement were harshly persecuted. See also ADAM BURAKOWSKI, “‘Transcendental Meditation’ Affair in Romania 1976–1982” [online], *Studia Polityczne* 17 (2005), p. 119–152, accessed 9. 8. 2016, available online at <http://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/cejsh/element/bwmeta1.element.b8ba523a-2edd-34bd-a622-cf3234bca494>.

<sup>23</sup> “Who is Gregorian Bivolaru: Biography of Gregorian Bivolaru”, <http://gregorianbivolaru.net/whoisgb-1.php>.

<sup>24</sup> STOIAN, “Gregorian Bivolaru ...”, p. 311.

<sup>25</sup> “Who is Gregorian Bivolaru. Biography of Gregorian Bivolaru”, <http://gregorianbivolaru.net/whoisgb-1.php>; STOIAN, “Gregorian Bivolaru ...”, p. 311–312.

<sup>26</sup> BIVOLARU, *The Secret Tantric Path ...*, p. 312.

<sup>27</sup> Mișcarea pentru Integrare Spirituală în Absolut.

<sup>28</sup> HELMAN, *Rumunská škola jógy ...*, p. 27.

<sup>29</sup> HELMAN, *Rumunská škola jógy ...*, p. 27.



tion was established in 2004.<sup>30</sup> The number of members of Bivolaru's movement is unknown: Bivolaru speaks about 35 thousand,<sup>31</sup> his latest biography about 40 thousand.<sup>32</sup>

Unfortunately, despite of this successful development, the movement didn't manage to avoid problems and controversies in its country of origin. Just like New Religious Movements in other post-Communist countries, Bivolaru's movement became a target of one-sided criticism of the media,<sup>33</sup> specifically in the 1990s: the tabloid character of the criticism was incited by the spiritual use of sexuality. Apart from media attacks, the movement – and Bivolaru personally – had to face violence: in 1994, unknown persons attacked Bivolaru in his hotel room, beat him, and destroyed his belongings.<sup>34</sup> Next year, someone installed explosives in his apartment in Bucharest, which devastated the place and started a fire.<sup>35</sup> In the same year, in 1995, the police was monitoring the telephones of the movement's leading members of and in the following years, new cases of police investigation kept appearing: the movement has interpreted them as bullying.<sup>36</sup>

The pressure on the movement culminated after 2000. On 18 March 2004, the police organized a massive raid on the Bucharest Yogis, searched 16 facilities in which they lived, detained some of them and confiscated their belongings. The media presented the raid as a major operation against drug and human trafficking. The testimonies made by the Yogis, e.g. in a documentary series *M.I.S.A. – Looking for the Truth*<sup>37</sup>, are extremely disquieting. Bivolaru as a teacher was charged with having had sexual intercourse with a minor. Yet the very next day, the seventeen-year-old girl insisted her statement was given under pressure and retracted it. After five days of custody, Bivolaru was released under investigation and, out of fear of unjust trial, he escaped to Sweden. In 2006 he was indeed granted asylum there. The conduct of the officials in the “Bivolaru case” raised questions, which were discussed during the European Union accession negotiations. Since there was doubt about whether the charges were justified, the Romanian ordinary courts acquitted Bivolaru; nevertheless, in 2013 the Supreme Court sentenced him to six years in prison. As Bivolaru was in France at that time, the French police arrested him on 26 February 2013 by request of the Romanian authorities and a French court decided on 13 July 2016, to extradite

<sup>30</sup> In its online presentation, the federation announces its presence in more than thirty countries of the world. “Members” [online], *Atman*, accessed 9. 8. 2016, available online at <http://www.atman.yogafederation.org/members>.

<sup>31</sup> See, e.g., “Who is Gregorian Bivolaru. Biography of Gregorian Bivolaru”, <http://gregorianbivolaru.net/whoisgb-1.php>.

<sup>32</sup> STOIAN, “Gregorian Bivolaru ...”, p. 313.

<sup>33</sup> DANIELA POPESCU, “The Effect of the Persistent Media Campaign on the Public Perception – MISA & Gregorian Bivolaru Case Study”, *World Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 2 (2, 2016), p. 29–36.

<sup>34</sup> “Who Is Afraid of Gregorian Bivolaru” [online], *YouTube*, accessed 9. 8. 2016, available online at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hr4sCZUxS\\_s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hr4sCZUxS_s), 5:50.

<sup>35</sup> STOIAN, “Gregorian Bivolaru ...”, p. 313.

<sup>36</sup> HELMAN, *Rumunská škola jógy ...*, p. 33.

<sup>37</sup> GEORGE ADAMESCU and MIHAELA CREȚU, *M. I. S. A. – In Cautarea Adevarului* [M. I. S. A. – Looking for the Truth] [online], *Sophrozin* 2009, Part 1–10 with English subtitles, 1st part accessed 9. 8. 2016, available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwYdY4gkb-8>.

Bivolaru to Romania. The media coverage of the case sparked a new wave of hostility against the movement: in May of 2016, a Yogi was stabbed in the entrance to a MISA building, while writing on a wall close by stated “death to Bivolaru”. In June, another Yogi was beaten and the attackers accused him of being in contact with Bivolaru.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, Gregorian Bivolaru served a sentence in Romania: he was released conditionally on 13 September 2017. According to the Romanian media, Bivolaru insists he is innocent.

During these events interpreted as persecution by the MISA, the movement also received some support. One of the organizations, which have been openly supportive of MISA for a long time, is the Helsinki Committee of Human Rights, followed by other non-governmental organizations that monitor the respect for human rights. Gabriel Andreescu, a dissident who fought against the Communist regime and authored two books about the repressions against Yogis during Communism<sup>39</sup>, has repeatedly, personally, and publicly supported the movement. Short after Bivolaru’s extradition, he wrote an open letter to the President of Romania, summing up all the arguments inciting doubt of the authorities’ conduct and appealed to him to pardon Bivolaru.<sup>40</sup> The European Court of Human Rights repeatedly stood up for different individual members of the MISA. In 2014, the Court stated that the Romanian state violated the rights of a MISA member, who was interned in a mental asylum against her will.<sup>41</sup> In 2016, it awarded financial compensation to 26 Yogis for the losses they suffered during the police raid of 2004.<sup>42</sup> And for the illegal arrest of Bivolaru, the European Court of Human Rights ordered the Romanian state to compensate him financially in 2017.<sup>43</sup>

## The basics of the doctrine

Members of Bivolaru’s movement consider their doctrine to be Yoga and regard it not as religion, but as a doctrine of the essence of all religions. In their point of view,

<sup>38</sup> GABRIEL ANDREESCU, “Apel la grațierea lui Gregorian Bivolaru adresat Excelenței Sale, Domnul Klaus Iohannis, Președintele României” [“Call to pardon Gregorian Bivolaru addressed to His Excellency, Mr. Klaus Iohannis, President of Romania”] [online], accessed 26. 7. 2016, available online at <http://www.comanescu.ro/p-apel-la-gratierea-lui-gregorian-bivolaru.html>.

<sup>39</sup> GABRIEL ANDREESCU, *Reprimarea mișcării yoga în anii ‘80* [*Repression of the Yoga Movement in the 1980s*], Iași: Polirom 2008; GABRIEL ANDREESCU, *Radiografia unei represii* [*Radiography of a Repression*], București: Polirom 2013. Andreescu also authored the Romanian Helsinki Committee reports of the Bivolaru case.

<sup>40</sup> ANDREESCU, <http://www.comanescu.ro/p-apel-la-gratierea-lui-gregorian-bivolaru.html>.

<sup>41</sup> “*Atudorei v. Romania*” [online], Strasbourg 16. 9. 2014, *Juridice*, accessed 26. 7. 2016, available online at <https://www.juridice.ro/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/CASE-OF-ATUDOREI-v.-RO-MANIA.pdf>.

<sup>42</sup> “*Amarandei and Others v. Romania*” [online], 26. 4. 2016, *European Court of Human Rights*, accessed 26. 7. 2016, available online at <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng-press#%22itemid%22:%22003-5358361-6688251%22>}.

<sup>43</sup> “*Affaire Bivolaru c. Roumanie*” [online], 28. 5. 2017, *European Court of Human Rights*, accessed 26. 7. 2016, available online at <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%22itemid%22:%22001-171550%22>}.

Yoga “does not stand against any religion” and may even become a tool to enhance each and every spiritual path.”<sup>44</sup> The followers postulate an existence of objective and universally valid spiritual principles, two sets of which are of a supreme importance. First, the laws that relate to the unity of all reality and the identity of this reality with God; all the cosmic and local realities correspond with each other (Correspondences between Microcosm and Macrocosm); they contain each other (every part of cosmos carries the image of the whole); and all the cosmic and local events reflect each other (as above, so below, and vice versa). And second, there are laws of polarity. These laws cause the dynamic character of reality, which is being held by a balance of two opposing principles called “masculine” and “feminine”, traditionally represented by Shiva and Shakti as two aspects of God. The contrasting nature of these principles creates an energy which in itself is neutral and brings about the cosmic “interplay” of phenomena and forms. By means of their consciousness, human beings can influence it both positively and negatively: modulate it, control, transform, and even merge with it.<sup>45</sup>

In this concept, God is “the infinite whole that embraces everything”. The concept “can only be understood in His indivisible unity and this beyond the various modalities that can serve to represent Him, according to the temporal needs of the manifestation.”<sup>46</sup> Being in all, “God is present in each of us and waits for us to discover Him in the mysterious center of our being, where He exists ...”<sup>47</sup> All “elements of the Universe (things, beings, processes, created phenomena)”<sup>48</sup> communicate with each other on the basis that in God’s Creation, “everything, without exception, begins and is maintained by processes of resonance”.<sup>49</sup> According to this doctrine, the Yogic and Tantric techniques serve precisely to tune the consciousness in and to create a resonance with respective cosmic energies. Yoga’s goal is thus to create and sustain a process, which helps human beings to perceive, modify, and transform cosmic energy’s impulses.<sup>50</sup> Bivolaru’s concept of Yoga as a technique that allows resonance with cosmic energy is integral. In other words, it comprises of a combination of traditional Yogic methods: Hatha Yoga, Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Raja Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Mantra Yoga, Tantra Yoga, Kundalini Yoga, and Yantra Yoga. A specific place is reserved for Tantra Yoga.

In this context, the term “resonance” equals to “spanda” and its meaning is close to “movement”, “vibration”, “movement potential”, or “movement energy”. *Spanda*

<sup>44</sup> “Víceletý kurz integrální jógy” [online], *Rezonance*, accessed 9. 8. 2016, available online at <http://www.jogin.cz/kurzy-jogy>.

<sup>45</sup> “The Law of Resonance” [online], *Natha*, accessed 30. 4. 2002, used to be available online at <http://www.natha.dk/Resonance.htm>.

<sup>46</sup> “Glossary: ‘God’”, in: GREGORIAN BIVOLARU, *The Secret Tantric Path of Love to happiness and fulfillment in a couple relationship*, Denmark: Natha Publishing House 2010, p. 363.

<sup>47</sup> “Glossary: ‘God’”, in: BIVOLARU, *The Secret Tantric Path ...*, p. 365.

<sup>48</sup> “Yoga and resonance” [online], *Yogaesoteric*, accessed 9. 8. 2016, available online at <http://www.yogaesoteric.net/content.aspx?lang=EN&item=3663>.

<sup>49</sup> “Glossary: ‘God’”, in: BIVOLARU, *The Secret Tantric Path ...*, p. 364.

<sup>50</sup> “The Law of Resonance”, <http://www.natha.dk/Resonance.htm>.

is one of the core terms of Kashmir Shaivism, a North Indian religious philosophical tradition that, in contrast to South Indian Shivaism, absorbed more influence from the Advaita philosophy and developed into a relatively independent system. Even before Abhinavagupta (975–1025), who shaped Kashmir Shivaism into its specific form, this term had been used by Vasugupta and his disciple Kalatta in *Shiva Sutras* and *Spandakarika*. With the ever increasing influence of Islam during the first centuries of the second millennium AD, Kashmir Shivaism started to lose importance. Finally in the 20th century it was restored in India and, mostly thanks to Lakshman Joo (1908–1991), expanded to the West.

Gregorian Bivolaru created his own system, which relied on the philosophical basis of Kashmir Shivaism combined with Yogic and Tantric practice and integrated many other elements into it. These other motifs stem from the Indian spiritual tradition (Ayurveda, Indian astrology, some gods and goddesses, the doctrine of Prana and Chakras, and other techniques, sometimes also called “Yoga”, etc.), Christianity (apocalyptic expectations, the Lord’s Prayer, the revelations of Fátima), Daoism (Ying/Yang polarity), Western Esotericism (astrology), and the New Age movement. This last tradition is represented e.g. by the belief in angels and extraterrestrials (the evil of them known as “reptiloids” or “reptilians”) or the expectations of the coming of the Age of Aquarius, positive thinking, Feng-Shui practices, Parapsychology, and others. The doctrine also contains traces of conspiracy theories (the interpretation of the Freemasons as the biggest enemies of the humankind)<sup>51</sup> and question of the so-called “mysteriology”. This vast synthesis is possible by means of replacement of some religious terms (such as Gods and Goddesses) by non-religious expressions (energies, power spheres, cosmic powers, etc.). Just as in the New Age movement, the belief in these secondary doctrines and their elements is not compulsory for Bivolaru’s followers.<sup>52</sup> Another quest MISA shares with the New Age is its search for scientific explanations of spiritual techniques; the intention to prove the objective character of their effects; and the tendency to distance itself from the term “religion”.

While the acceptance of different popular religious phenomena creates a permissive environment open to new worldviews, the basic Yogic and Tantric teachings are presented as unique and secret. The vision of Romania and the MISA schools’ central role in “the spiritual revival of the entire planet” reinforces their unique character.<sup>53</sup> Since we are presently in the transition to the Age of Aquarius, this role becomes crucial. The conviction that “Yoga will help to bring about a major change on a national level”<sup>54</sup> appeared among Bivolaru’s persecuted disciples as early as 1984. After his

<sup>51</sup> THEJLS, “MISA and Natha ...”, p. 69–71.

<sup>52</sup> The collection of all the necessary elements of MISA movement’s orthodoxy may be found e.g. in this article: GREGORIAN BIVOLARU, “The 17 unsuspected dangers of the demoniac doubts” [online], *Yogaesoteric*, accessed 27. 7. 2018, available online at <http://www.yogaesoteric.net/content.aspx?item=5650&lang=EN>.

<sup>53</sup> Eduard Selea, the founder of the Czech branch of Bivolaru’s movement, puts it this way. ELINOR SELEA, “Lidé a duchovno – dotazy na Eduarda” [online], *Rezonance*, accessed 9. 8. 2016, available online at <http://www.jogin.cz/lide-a-duchovno-dotazy-na-eduarda/strana-2>.

<sup>54</sup> HELMAN, *Rumunská škola jógy ...*, p. 19.

return from prison the following year, Gregorian Bivolaru confirmed this opinion of some of his Yogis; he put the idea in context of different prophecies stemming from various historical epochs and religions;<sup>55</sup> and he spread it among the rest of his followers. The belief that Bivolaru's movement is not only a set of Yogic techniques, but a unique path to truth and salvation, is still present among the movement's leaders<sup>56</sup> alongside the idea that Bivolaru's texts are divine inspired.<sup>57</sup>

In free society, the main means of spreading their doctrine have been printed two-page or four-page leaflets, which are given to each student after every class and which are kept during the following grades. They contain the main theme, which may be supplemented by secondary themes, proverbs, aphorisms etc. The movement insists that their author is Bivolaru himself, who is supposed to write them every week.<sup>58</sup> This way Bivolaru's "school opens, step by step and to all those interested, the secret spiritual tradition of India and Tibet's schools and their masters, a tradition, which was originally only transmitted orally."<sup>59</sup>

## The community

The basic form of the movement consists in a school, that is, a system of courses, which are studied and practiced in a set of grades in two mutually interconnected lines – Yoga and Tantra – and physically located in one of the movement's centers. The meetings take place once a week; they comprise of a theoretical and practical part and last from two to four hours.<sup>60</sup> The movement insists on the importance of being in contact with the community at least once per week – not only due to the interconnected character of the lessons, but also because the doctrine deems it specifically important for the transition to the Age of Aquarius.<sup>61</sup> Apart from the regular meetings, the movement also organizes weekend workshops, occasional cycles of theoretical or practical classes, and voluntary meetings such as those that deepen the relationship between the aspirant and his or her spiritual guide.<sup>62</sup> There are also joint Karma Yoga workshops in the center or in the Ashram. Moreover, the Czech

<sup>55</sup> The most influential among them is perhaps the prophecy of an Indian Christian by the name of Sundara Singh. "The Sundar Singh prophecies about THE SPIRITUAL FUTURE OF ROMANIA" [online], *Yogaesoteric*, accessed 27. 7. 2018, available online at <http://www.yogaesoteric.net/content.aspx?item=2257&lang=EN>.

<sup>56</sup> THEJLS, "MISA and Natha ...", p. 71.

<sup>57</sup> "Divine Inspired Texts" [online], *Yogaesoteric*, accessed 9. 8. 2016, available online at <http://www.yogaesoteric.net/content.aspx?lang=EN&item=1660>.

<sup>58</sup> HELMAN, JOSSE, "Škola jógy MISA a život v ášramu" [online], *Rezonnance*, accessed 9. 8. 2016, available online at <http://www.jogin.cz/skola-jogy-misa-a-zivot-v-asramu>.

<sup>59</sup> "Víceletý kurz integrální jógy", <http://www.jogin.cz/kurzy-jogy>.

<sup>60</sup> HELMAN, "Škola jógy MISA ...", <http://www.jogin.cz/skola-jogy-misa-a-zivot-v-asramu>.

<sup>61</sup> SELEA, "Lidé a duchovno ...", <http://www.jogin.cz/lide-a-duchovno-dotazy-na-eduarda/strana-2>.

<sup>62</sup> "Gurujóga (setkání skupiny)" [online], *Rezonnance*, 12. 6. 2016, accessed 9. 8. 2016, available online at <http://www.jogin.cz/gurujoga-setkani-skupiny>.

Rezonnance center, for example, organizes a public weekend-long Tantra festival every year. During these events, most people that come in contact with the movement remain on the lowest levels of Yoga.<sup>63</sup>

The apex of the movement's activities are the spiritual camps that take place every year in Romania and which comprise of different programmes aimed at the graduates of the different levels. There is the ten-day camp in the mountain center Baile Herculane and, most importantly, the up to five weeks long camp in the seaside resort of Costinești, which is attended by thousands of Yogis from the entire world. The summer camp tradition goes back to 1990.<sup>64</sup> One of the conditions of admission to one of these camps is to send one's photograph in swimsuit and confirmation that the applicant is free from syphilis and HIV. While ex-members and opponents argue that the camp, as the whole life of the community, is "infused with sexuality",<sup>65</sup> the movement's leaders insist that the doctrine of the spiritual importance of sexuality is only present in a small fragment of the educational materials.<sup>66</sup> The idea that sexuality is put on spotlight is, among other reasons,<sup>67</sup> probably caused by the Miss Shakti female beauty contest.<sup>68</sup> While for the movement members the core of this pageant is to boost female energy, the movies shot during the contest appeared on erotic Internet servers. Among the less controversial activities is another special summer camp event – the Yang spiral group meditation, whose photographs tend to figure as symbols of the camp in contact with the public.<sup>69</sup>

Apart from the spiritual camps, there are also other opportunities for the student to reinforce his or her contact with the community – for example shared accommodation of a group of Yogis or Ashram life. The Ashram also organizes spiritual events and houses visitors. According to the movement, there are at least 40 of these Ashrams in Bucharest only: about 2000 people live in the biggest and best known one, which lies in the Pipera suburb.<sup>70</sup> Another option of deeper personal engagement with the movement is to become an instructor: this requires an intense two-year course, a series of exams, and an authorization by Bivolaru himself.<sup>71</sup> The instructors are also supposed to have passed a tantric initiation, which is available only after the Yogi has

<sup>63</sup> Theijls insists that in the Danish organization of Natha (a part of MISA), only 15% of the school's students attend the retreats or summer camps. THEIJLS, "MISA and Natha ...", p. 66.

<sup>64</sup> HELMAN, *Rumunská škola jógy ...*, p. 27.

<sup>65</sup> One of the Czech participants in the interview with the Author, 16. 9. 2016.

<sup>66</sup> In an interview with the Author (7. 11. 2016), Advaita Stoian estimated that the topic figures in no more than 8% of the movement's education.

<sup>67</sup> Such as the printed programs of the camps, which contain many explicitly erotic photographs and drawings.

<sup>68</sup> Even the interview about Miss Shakti contains photographs of naked bodies. "Rozhovor: Miss Šakti – soutěž vnější a vnitřní krásy" [online], *Rezonnance*, accessed 9. 8. 2016, available online at <http://www.jogin.cz/miss-shakti-soutez-vnejsi-a-vnitрни-krasy/strana-2>.

<sup>69</sup> For more information, see e. g. "Mezinárodní tábory jógy (Baile Herculane a Costinești, Rumunsko)" [online], *Rezonnance*, accessed 9. 8. 2016, available online at <http://www.jogin.cz/tabory>.

<sup>70</sup> HELMAN, "Škola jógy MISA ...", <http://www.jogin.cz/skola-jogy-misa-a-zivot-v-asramu>.

<sup>71</sup> HELMAN, "Škola jógy MISA ...", <http://www.jogin.cz/skola-jogy-misa-a-zivot-v-asramu>.

passed the first grade (for details, see below). Conversely, even the non-initiated may reside in the Ashram.

The organization of the Yoga and Tantra school requires a hierarchy of instructors according to their initiation, experience, and years of service. The top of this informal pyramid is reserved for Bivolaru, known among his disciples as Grieg. His guru authority is fully comparable to other Yoga teachers and spiritual celebrities,<sup>72</sup> which are believed by their disciples to have reached the highest spiritual goals. In much the same way, Grieg's disciples tell stories about the impact of his siddhi (psychic abilities)<sup>73</sup> and attribute extraordinary abilities to him. Bivolaru's unique position is also caused by the fact that until now, he is the only person authorized to bestow the tantric initiations. The Yogis who gradually adopt the doctrines of Bivolaru's school and who wish so may allow for the ever increasing influence of the community and its values in their daily activities and other (possibly all) spheres of their lives. Thanks to regular yogic exercise and the custom to dedicate food or other activity to God through a short meditation, even the Yogis' daily life is filled with awareness of their belonging to the doctrine and the community. Through the community, their spiritual teacher Bivolaru urgently recommends specific dietary practices to them (the so-called Yoga dietetics, purifying methods, and, most importantly, fasting) and preventive and healing procedures that come mostly (but not exclusively) from Ayurveda.<sup>74</sup> Among these techniques, the dominant position is reserved for the drinking of one's own urine, but the Yogis are also strongly motivated to abstain from tobacco and alcohol. The Yogi's intense life also requires the separation from people that lead him or her astray from "the spiritual life and gradually lessen his or her internal vibrations to their own limited level."<sup>75</sup>

The relationship between spiritual progress and interest in one's own body is clearly visible from the great attention the movement pays to techniques of sexual continence; these are supposed to help Yogi couples to explore spiritually all the potential sexuality offers.<sup>76</sup> The male Yogi gradually learns to prevent ejaculation and separate it from the orgasm, while the advanced female Yogi is supposed to lengthen her menstrual cycle by means of meditations, asanas, and purifying methods, until, in the ideal case, she completely stops menstruating.<sup>77</sup>

The MISA movement also offers its own models of relationships. Exclusively dyadic marital relationships complete with procreation and maintaining of a stable home are considered egoistic and not valued,<sup>78</sup> although they are tolerated, specifically when they were established before the decision to devote oneself to Yoga. On the other hand, friendships between Yogis both of the same and the opposing sex are

<sup>72</sup> See e.g. the leaflet ("kurz") 37 in the first grade of Integral Yoga course.

<sup>73</sup> HELMAN, "Škola jógy MISA ...", <http://www.jogin.cz/skola-jogy-misa-a-zivot-v-asramu>.

<sup>74</sup> See e.g. the leaflets ("kurzy") 24, 25, 27, and 28 in the first grade of Integral Yoga course.

<sup>75</sup> See e.g. the leaflet ("kurz") 28 in the second grade of Integral Yoga course, p. 3–4.

<sup>76</sup> See e.g. "Co je sexuální kontinence" [online], *Rezonance*, accessed 9. 8. 2016, available online at <http://www.jogin.cz/co-je-sexualni-kontinence>.

<sup>77</sup> Leaflet ("kurz") 10 in the second grade of Integral Yoga course, p. 1.

<sup>78</sup> SELEA, "Lidé a duchovno ...", <http://www.jogin.cz/lide-a-duchovno-dotazy-na-eduarda/strana-2>.

valued, specifically when, thanks to tantra, the relationships develop in a great intimacy, due to which the friends “know almost everything” about each other.<sup>79</sup> In case of Yogis of different sexes, these relationships can develop into sharing of sexuality. Its eventual non-binding character and possible experimenting both with sexuality and the relationship itself are justified by the shared belief that thanks to tantric initiation, Shiva manifests in every man and Shakti in every woman. On the other hand, the movement clearly signals that the goal of tantric initiation is not mere pleasure or irresponsibility. Sexual sharing between same-sex couples is forbidden: as Eduard Selea, the Czech MISA Yogi’s chief authority said, “there is no place for homosexuals in the tantric practices.” Even though homosexuals have their place in human society, Tantra explains homosexuality as an “unnatural, dangerous thing.”<sup>80</sup>

The long-standing tension, which the movement has been experiencing in Romania (and, to a lesser extent, even in other countries) has naturally had its impact on the teachings and life of the community, including in such countries as the Czech Republic, where there is no pressure from the authorities or the public. It is probably precisely this tension that creates a harsh rejection of opposing views. There is a widespread supposition in the movement that every doubt is a result of an attack of demons, which try to stop the adepts’ spiritual development.<sup>81</sup> Ex-members are also demonized. For example, they are to be punished for their leaving by the fact that in the following incarnations, they will have no possibility for spiritual growth. If the movement members still decide to leave, these tense attitudes may liken them to the role of apostates,<sup>82</sup> whose negative testimonies may cause further escalation of the tension.

## Tantric initiation

Tantric initiation<sup>83</sup> by the spiritual teacher Grieg himself is only available for women and there is no available information on whether any other MISA instructor was ever authorized to initiate women. The ceremony is preceded by several steps. First of all, there is the invitation from master Grieg communicated to the adept by a female initiate, who points out how extraordinary the adept’s personality is and that the master’s offer is truly exceptional. All communication regarding the initiation is

<sup>79</sup> SELEA, “Lidé a duchovno ...”, <http://www.jogin.cz/lide-a-duchovno-dotazy-na-eduarda/strana-2>.

<sup>80</sup> SELEA, “Lidé a duchovno ...”, <http://www.jogin.cz/lide-a-duchovno-dotazy-na-eduarda/strana-2>.

<sup>81</sup> BIVOLARU, “The 17 unsuspected dangers ...”, <http://www.yogaesoteric.net/content.aspx?item=5650&lang=EN>.

<sup>82</sup> This role, typically, consists of an explicitly hostile stance towards the apostate’s former community and alliance with those who oppose it. See DAVID G. BROMLEY (ed.): *The Politics of Religious Apostasy. The Role of Apostates in the Transformation of Religious Movements*, Westport, London: Praeger 1998, passim. Cecilia Tiz, a Romanian woman who is mentioned below, is a typical example of apostasy.

<sup>83</sup> The secret ritual is described on the basis of personal interviews with two female Yogis: one described the rite to the Author and the other corrected the description and added other information based on her own experience. The resulting description may of course be not fully valid for rites conducted in different years.



held secret and the adept is explicitly forbidden to speak about it. The woman is also asked to make a payment, but this is more akin to a financial deposit, which is usually returned after the event, because all the expenses related to the initiation are understood as a gift from the master. During the time of Bivolaru's hiding, all the transfers were kept completely secret,<sup>84</sup> which means that neither the address of the Paris ashram inhabited only by women nor the place of the initiation was known by the women. The adepts (in varying numbers) resided in the closed ashram with blinded windows without their personal belongings and with no possibility to communicate with the outside world; they had to wait there for a varying number of days under supervision of the ashram's permanent residents, until new instructions came. The period of waiting was to be filled with Yogic preparation and reading of recommended texts. It was precisely in this environment where the close friendships described above flourished, along with the feelings of togetherness and belonging. Apart from the spiritual preparation, the adept was supposed to make a written acceptance of her own responsibility, an oath of silence, and nude photos and videos. Little gifts and presents sent by the master increased the positive expectations of the imminent initiation, the awareness of the adept's own femininity, and self-confidence.

Blindfolded and in an atmosphere of secrecy and conspiracy, the adepts were finally transported to an apartment, where they waited for the individual initiation by Gregorian Bivolaru. The waiting was mostly spent in purifications, consuming of aphrodisiacs, Yogic exercise, watching erotic movies, and talking with those who had been initiated earlier. The initiation itself had a varying length (it may have been as short as an hour but could also exceed eight hours) and it comprised of an interview and a ritual intercourse. Tantric sex made use of different positions corresponding to different energetic centers (chakras) and its goal was to incite different types of female orgasm (vaginal, clitoral, and urinal), while the biggest stress was put on the last one, since drinking the master's urine is considered to be the highest level of tantric ritual. During the interview and when confronted with questions, the master showed a great empathy and knowledge of the women's lives. Empathy and kind insight was also apparent in the subsequent electronic correspondence between Grieg and the initiate.

The woman's first urine after the ritual was to be shared with the other women, while any following urine for up to 24 hours after the initiation she drank on her own. Upon request, Gregorian Bivolaru entirely returned the financial deposit to the women, sometimes even adding to it. In this latter case, the contribution helped to motivate the woman to attend the ceremony again, since it was considered to be crucial for her spiritual growth. The second apex of the initiation came after 11 days. The woman prepared for it by keeping the schedule of Yogic exercise, which was established by her master according to her spiritual condition and current needs. Exactly after 11 days the women had an ecstatic experience described as a strong orgasm and reaching *Samadhi*, the highest spiritual state. Even this event is determined by

<sup>84</sup> In order to keep it a complete secret, the adepts were transported with sunglasses on their eyes and a hat put over the glasses.

Bivolaru's assumptions about the importance of the urine, water circulation in human body and the way it carries information. The complexity of the tantric experience then fades away in the mentioned correspondence with the master. Men are initiated in an analogical way by means of a ritual sexual intercourse with a woman initiated by Bivolaru. For this reason, married men encourage their wives to get initiated by their master. It is equally possible that in the local communities, in which a second generation was already produced (mainly in Romania, but possibly also elsewhere), the Yogi parents are interested in the initiation of their adolescent daughters.

### **Conclusion: a misunderstanding?**

The Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute (MISA) is a community that can be listed under the sociological category of New Religious Movements and it shows many (if not all) characteristics of this phenomenon: new religious idea, protesting attitude against the majority concept of spiritual life, charismatic leadership, millenarian expectation (of the end of this world or age), attraction to certain segments of society, dynamic community with a high level of commitment, harsh distance from their critics, demonization of apostates and other "enemies", etc. In this sense and in comparison with other new religious movements, the criticisms with which the media and apostates target the movement are hardly exceptional, although their intensity and long-standing presence is indeed remarkable. The truly extraordinary aspect is only the intensity and length of the repressions which the movement has been facing in Romania, its place of origin, where it is still very popular. This repression have been affecting both Bivolaru and his disciples for three decades already (with some intermissions) and they peaked a few years ago with his long term imprisonment.

To assess whether this repression is justified would greatly exceed both the goals and the possibilities of this Religious Studies article. On the other hand we may suggest that the core target both of the criticism and repression of Romanian authorities is Bivolaru's and his disciples' concept of sexuality and its consequences for human relationships. It is symptomatic that the best known among the apostates that attack the MISA movement is a woman that left the community in the aftermath of a marital crisis, which according to her stemmed precisely from those parts of doctrine and practice that have to do with sexuality. This Romanian woman by the name of Cecilia Tiz was, according to her own statement one of the movement's members since the beginning of the 1990s and by the end of the century she even became one of the founders of the MISA centers in Germany. Only after the crisis did she start her struggle against the movement.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>85</sup> "Cecilia Tiz Interview" [online], *ProTv*, 8. 2. 2010, accessed 9. 8. 2016, available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W5LSG76phc0>.

Nevertheless, the attitude towards sexuality, as it seems, follows in a consistent way from Bivolaru's interpretation of ancient Tantra and this interpretation is not very far from similar ways, in which other Western spiritual teachers work with the obscure and multifaceted Tantric tradition (or with what they think is Tantric tradition). Perhaps we may therefore suggest that the roots of the conflict, which the movement suffers, stem more from misunderstanding and less from malice or flawed character. Even though the movement does not hide its interest in the spiritual use of sexuality,<sup>86</sup> it is still understood mostly as a Yogic school, and this category is rarely associated with sexual activity. The image of a standard Yogic school is further reinforced by its autodenomination as a school of "integral Yoga" which resides in "Yogic centers".

A similar misunderstanding may arise from the fact that external observers and beginners may see MISA as an "open", syncretic Yogic community similar to other New Age Yoga centers, which are able to integrate different elements of popular culture and religion and whose doctrine and practices are individual and optional. Only after closer examination it starts to be apparent that the MISA movement regards itself as a unique community with exclusive access to truths about humanity and this world.

More confusion may arise from the usage of the term "religion". The movement tends to avoid it and to describe its doctrine by non-religious language: this creates an impression in the newcomers and onlookers that they are witnessing ordinary leisure activities and not religion. This language notwithstanding, the commitment to the community, lifestyle changes and other time and emotional investments of their members greatly exceed a leisure activity and are more proportionate to a radically lived religion. Moreover, this religious engagement – and here we come to the fourth source of misunderstanding – is tied to an esoteric community that at the same time makes active public appearances. However, it is typical for esoteric fellowships to bestow their doctrine gradually and to lead their members to secret ceremonial initiations. Those groups generally avoid the interest of the public. In case of Bivolaru's movement, the combination of its public mission and esoteric character may naturally lead to suspicions that the gradual way of secret doctrine's transmission and keeping of secrets is caused by the desire to hide the "true" *raison d'être* of the community. And thus follows that "in fact", this true reason must be morally dubious.

And finally, the fifth misunderstanding may originate from the role of the spiritual master (guru Bivolaru) equipped with supernatural authority. This type of spiritual leadership, which is typical for Indian traditions, is not widely known and understood in the West. Subsequently, the phenomenon provokes suspicions of abuse of power. These types of misunderstandings between the new religious movement and society at large are hardly exceptional and they usually do not lead to serious conflicts. The most important remedy that mitigates and ultimately eliminates them is time.<sup>87</sup> Even though

<sup>86</sup> For example, the student is introduced into the role of sexuality in the "quickening of spiritual development" as early as in the 8th lesson of the basic course of Integral Yoga. Leaflet ("kurz") 8 in the first grade, p. 2–4.

<sup>87</sup> EILEEN BARKER, Plus ça change ..., in: *Social Compass* 42 (2, 1995), p. 165–180.

this perspective may seem to be distant at this time, it is very probable that even the MISA movement will in time join the spectrum of established and respected religious societies. Bivolaru's release from prison and his generally forgiving reactions give hope that the tension may diminish and the intensity of the conflict will gradually subside.

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## From Repression to Aggression: New Religions and Violence (Review)

Zuzana Kosticová

Zdeněk Vojtíšek's *Nová náboženství a násilí* [*New Religions and Violence*] is a fresh take on a subject to which the author, the leading Czech scholar of new religions, has dedicated most of his professional life. As the author himself states in the Introduction, he has already published one wide-ranging book on the subject in 2009, *Nová náboženská hnutí a kolektivní násilí* [*New Religious Movements and Collective Violence*].<sup>2</sup> The older book gave a general scholarly introduction into the problem; an overview of nine movements most commonly associated with violence (Branch Davidians, Aum Shinrikyo, Heaven's Gate, etc.); and added a vast theoretical chapter which comprises more than half of the book. In this latter part, he characterized the most influential scholarly theories regarding new religions and violence and introduced his own theory. According to that, the movements run a greater risk of an explosion or implosion of violence if they fail in the process of denominationalization (tied mostly to the institutionalization of charisma, softening of the movement's boundaries with the outside world, creation of a multi-generation space, etc.). In this sense, *Nová náboženská hnutí a kolektivní násilí* was a full-fledged academic work complete with complex terminology and presentation of the contemporary scholarly debate.

*Nová náboženství a násilí* follows up on this older work in many respects – but in a different way. First and foremost, the new book is intended for a wider readership, ranging from scholars and students to educated public. While the attention given to the contemporary scholarly debate is much lower, the space dedicated to individual movements is much bigger and the number of covered NRMs much greater. At the same time, the language of the book is more accessible and the structure of the monograph suggests that it was written with regard to university classes taught by the author. In other words, the book is not only a comprehensive introduction into new religions, but also a practical university textbook. While the book features full academic paraphernalia (complex footnotes and extensive bibliography), it is relatively easy to read and thus accessible for the readership which it means to address.

Another specific trait, in which the monograph differs from its predecessor, is both its rich palette of case studies and its emphasis on the Czech environment. While some attention is given to classical Western contemporary cases such as the Solar

<sup>1</sup> ZDENĚK VOJTÍŠEK, *Nová náboženská hnutí a násilí* [*New Religions and Violence*], Praha: Karolinum 2017, 285 p.

<sup>2</sup> ZDENĚK VOJTÍŠEK, *Nová náboženská hnutí a kolektivní násilí* [*New Religious Movements and Collective Violence*], Brno: L. Marek 2009, 460 p.

Temple or Aum Shinrikyo, the vast majority of the cases are recruited from different historical periods (a lot of space is given to the history of the religious persecution of Anabaptists, Old Believers, and Shakers) and different geographical locations (apart from the usual American cases, the book is overflowing with mentions of China, India, Russia, Ukraine, Uganda, Iraq, and Iran). The book also lists long-established denominations with a rich history of persecution, such as Baha'i, Jehova's Witnesses, and the Latter Day Saints. The specific Czech flavor of the book is unmistakable – since it is apparently specifically aimed at Czech readers, it gives a lot of space to the Immanuelites (a branch of the Grail movement to which the Author dedicated a whole separate chapter) and the Bridge to Freedom. The current character of the monograph is attested by the inclusion of the Islamic State (ISIS), which is analyzed from the perspective of New Religion Studies and interpreted as a millennial Islamic movement.

Analyzing these different movements (24 in total) gives the author an opportunity to explore core themes around which the book is organized – repression, conflict, martyrdom, communities, children, terrorism, charisma, revolution, aggression, and ritual violence. Every chapter is dedicated to some of them and illustrates the topic on specific religious societies and movements. While the themes are well rounded and attest for the erudition of their author, the book would certainly benefit from a more substantial theoretical conclusion, larger than the current simple, five-page epilogue. The lack of it again proves that the book is mainly intended less as a scholarly monograph and more as a popular introduction and university textbook. This only fault notwithstanding, the book is an important contribution to New Religion Studies and Czech Religious Studies in general and will undoubtedly benefit scholars, students, and members of the public alike.

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