

# **Cultural Issues and Leading the Churches in the Czech Republic**

Martin Huňát

## ***Table of Contents***

<b><i>Introduction</i></b>	Page 2
<b><i>Anti-church Attitudes and the Privatization of Faith in the Czech Republic, with respect to the European Context</i></b>	Page 2
<b><i>Family values and security endangered: Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, Cohabitation</i></b>	Page 10
<b><i>Family values and security endangered: Children endangered</i></b>	Page 16
<b><i>Conclusion</i></b>	Page 19
<b><i>Bibliography</i></b>	Page 21

# Cultural Issues and Leading the Churches in the Czech Republic

## ***Introduction***

It is my intention to consider here three issues related to the life of the Czech people. These issues are firstly, the privatization of faith, secondly, marriage and related questions, and lastly, the dangerous aspects of the life of children in our country. I will show how these issues impact church life and what the attitudes and reactions of church leaders towards these issues should be.

## ***Anti-church Attitudes and the Privatization of Faith in the Czech Republic, with respect to the European Context***

A significant proportion of the population of Europe has long believed that religions belong to the past. That modernisation, the growth of knowledge, the industrialization and the urbanization of society were expected to cause the decline and final death of religiosity. The social sciences should replace the primitive need for religion. (It was a difficult task for sociologists to explain why this concept did not fully fit the American picture.) Anyway, figures like Auguste Comte and Karl Marx considerably helped the cause of secularization in Europe.<sup>1</sup> The European resistance to religiosity originates firstly in understanding religiosity as a 'pre-rational approach to the world'<sup>2</sup> (my translation), in contrast to scientific progress; secondly, it is caused by a critique of the state churches; and

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<sup>1</sup> Zdenek R. Nespor, 'Jsou Cesi Skutecne Neverici? "Ateisticky" Narod v Sekularizovane Evrope a v Nabozenskem Svete', Are the Czechs Really Atheistic? An "Atheistic" Nation in the Secularized Europe and in the Religious World (my translation), in Hana Marikova, Tomas Kostecky, Tomas Lebeda and Marketa Skodova (eds.), *Jaka je Nase Spolecnost? Otazky, Ktere si Casto Klademe...* (Praha: Sociologicke Nakladatelstvi Slon, 2010), pp. 204-215 [204]

<sup>2</sup> Nespor, 'Jsou Cesi Skutecne Neverici?', in Marikova, Kostecky, Lebeda and Skodova, *Jaka je Nase Spolecnost?*, p. 205

finally, it is caused by a humanistic conception which says that God is only a distant projection of human desires.

Today it is quite clear that religiosity is back. It is discussed in connection with education, social law, politics and even with terrorism. Political scientist Samuel Huntington suggested (fourteen years ago) that the new disposition of the world will be guided by religious affiliation.<sup>3</sup> In connection with what I have mentioned up to this point I would like to present an interesting and, at the same time, surprising statement. Zdenek Nesp̄or, a Czech scientist on staff at the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic<sup>4</sup> says: 'Religiosity is conquering the world again, not so much in Europe, and not at all the Czech.'<sup>5</sup>

Why does Zdenek Nesp̄or think that the Czech Republic holds an extremely secularized position among the other European countries? Nesp̄or shows how the proportion of atheists in Czech society markedly exceeds that in other European countries. He uses a comparison of the type *unbelievers - Christians* (in the sense of the *atheists – church members*), and presents the results of different European countries in the year 2005: Belgium 24 - 55 (per cent), Czech Republic 61 – 38 (!), Finland 14 - 85, France 42 - 55, Denmark 12 - 86, Ireland 3 - 96, Cyprus 0 - 100, Latvia 34 - 66, Hungary 23 - 77, Norway 10 - 88, Portugal 7 - 92, Slovenia 18 - 80, Great Britain 42 - 54, Germany 35 - 62, Spain 11 - 89, Sweden 28 - 70, Switzerland 15 - 43. The rest are other religions, ranging between 0 and 4 per cent. In the case of the Czech Republic, if we included not just church members, but all private religious attitudes originating from Christianity, the gap between the Czech Republic and the rest of Europe

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<sup>3</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of the Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), p. 96

<sup>4</sup> Zdenek R. Nesp̄or, Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic <<http://www.soc.cas.cz/people/en/5/58/People.html>> [accessed 1/14/2011]

<sup>5</sup> Nesp̄or, 'Jsou Cesi Skutecne Neverici?', in Marikova, Kostelecky, Lebeda and Skodova, *Jaka je Nase Spolecnost?*, p. 205 Translation mine.

would be even more extensive.<sup>6</sup> The arising question is obvious: What is the reason?

Is it because Czechs have abandoned religiosity as a pre-rational approach, opted for scientific progress and today, as the result, are more advanced than other countries? This does not seem to be the case. French historian Rene Remond thinks that the roots of Czech atheism reach to the times of seventeenth century, especially to the Battle of White Mountain (1620) and the ensuing process of re-catholicizing.<sup>7</sup> The anti-clerical feelings were further strengthened at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this time of the forming of the modern Czech nation there was the inclination to remember the significant eras of Czech history, as Hussitism was. This was a *run away from Rome* [*turning away would be better*], from its anti-modern and anti-Czech tendencies, and from the union of the Austrian state and the Catholic Church which had resulted in the blessing of weapons during World War I. Zdenek Nespors arguments that it was not primarily the communist atheistic propaganda which built strong anti-church attitudes in the Czech Republic.<sup>8</sup> (This explains a different measure of atheism in Poland or Slovakia). But it was the 'atmosphere of the state communism'<sup>9</sup> (my translation) where these attitudes were fully developed. I can confirm from my own experiences, when talking to secular Czechs, they all too often mention the same issues again and again: the political and economic ambitions of the churches, the crusades, and the blessing of weapons.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Nespors, 'Jsou Cesi Skutecne Neverici?', in Marikova, Kostelecky, Lebeda and Skodova, *Jaka je Nase Spolecnost?*, p. 207

<sup>7</sup> Rene Remond, *Religion and society in modern Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 241

<sup>8</sup> Nespors, 'Jsou Cesi Skutecne Neverici?', in Marikova, Kostelecky, Lebeda and Skodova, *Jaka je Nase Spolecnost?*, p. 208

<sup>9</sup> Dusan Luzny and Jolana Navratilova, 'Nabozenstvi a sekularizace v Ceske Republice', 'Religion and Secularization in the Czech Republic' (my translation), *Socialni studia* 6 (2001), pp. 111-125 [125]

<sup>10</sup> Nespors, 'Jsou Cesi Skutecne Neverici?', in Marikova, Kostelecky, Lebeda and Skodova, *Jaka je Nase Spolecnost?*, p. 214

I have given a little more attention to the historical context in this paper in order to help clearly understand where Czechs are today and what should be taken into account in contemporary church leadership. Czechs reject the Church as organized religion, as established religiosity, as represented by existing, established churches (they do not distinguish between Catholics and Protestants), but they are not opposed to transcendent concepts, fatalism, mysticism or occultism (50% believes in amulets, 50% in horoscopes, and almost 70% in the ability of fortune-tellers). This opens an opportunity for 'commercial distributors of sacredness'<sup>11</sup> (my translation). Put differently, Czechs have found resources for their spirituality in magazines, books and spiritual personalities, who have become media stars. This has led to the de-traditionalism and individualism of religion in the Czech Republic.

Eva Hermanova, a specialist of Regional Department at the Economic University in Prague thinks that secularization in the Czech regions has especially affected traditional expressions of religion, the sort of institutionalized religiosity in established churches. As a consequence, religious organizations are losing their influence, but the popularity is increasing of non-church religiosity, of the non-traditional religious groups, and of religious experimentation.<sup>12</sup> Private spirituality and anti-ecclesiastical secularism has become the religiosity of most of Czech society. Paradoxically, we are "an atheistic" nation in secularized Europe and in the religious world'.<sup>13</sup> How should this reality be reflected in the leadership of the established churches?

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<sup>11</sup> Nespor, 'Jsou Cesi Skutečne Neverici?', in Marikova, Kostelecky, Lebeda and Skodova, *Jaka je Nase Spolecnost?*, pp. 211-212

<sup>12</sup> Eva Hermanova, 'Nabozenstvi a Religiozita', 'Religion and Religionism' (my translation) in Eva Hermanova and Pavel Chromy (eds.), *Kulturni Regiony a Geografie Kultury: Kulturni Realie a Kultura v Regionech Ceska* (Praha: ASPI, 2009), p. 45

<sup>13</sup> Nespor, 'Jsou Cesi Skutečne Neverici?', in Marikova, Kostelecky, Lebeda and Skodova, *Jaka je Nase Spolecnost?*, p. 204

I will begin with a few comments made by John Benton in his article about the privatization of religious belief.<sup>14</sup> (Benton is the managing editor of the *Evangelicals Now* forum and pastor of a Baptist Church in UK). Although he does not see the future of the world in very positive terms (in contrast to Lesslie Newbigin,<sup>15</sup> or Stuart Murray,<sup>16</sup> who is positive, although he speaks in terms of survival, not revival), I have found his observations helpful as a starting point. Benton understands the meaning of the word *privatization* in two ways. Firstly, it is the withdrawing of faith from communal life. Secondly, it is the adjusting of faith into one's own image. In other words, I decide who is to be my god and how I should approach him.<sup>17</sup>

While discussing the causes, consequences and the possible cure of the privatization of faith, Benton suggests some areas where church leaderships may respond. Firstly, he thinks that religious leaders should just not be foolish. Some of them 'are simply aping the world',<sup>18</sup> thinking that they are relevant. In the Czech context, Eva Hermanova considers that if the church needs to be more commercial, it should use methods of marketing, public relations or of active recruiting of new members. Some churches have accommodated to these kind of approaches since 1990, but it does not seem to be contributing much to either their growth and influence.<sup>19</sup>

Secondly, Benton uses the expression 'the culture of disbelief' in relation to the postmodern conception of truth. Truth is used to manipulate individuals, to control them while they are becoming members of a particular organization (a

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<sup>14</sup> J. Benton, 'The Privatisation of Religious Belief', *Evangelicals Now* (2004), (no pages available), <<http://www.e-n.org.uk/p-2411-The-privatisation-of-religious-belief.htm>> [accessed 1/14/2011]

<sup>15</sup> L. Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK, 1989), pp. 243-244

<sup>16</sup> S. Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World* (Bletchley: Paternoster Press, 2005), pp. 283-284

<sup>17</sup> Benton, 'The Privatisation of Religious Belief', <<http://www.e-n.org.uk/p-2411-The-privatisation-of-religious-belief.htm>> [accessed 1/14/2011]

<sup>18</sup> Benton, 'The Privatisation of Religious Belief', <<http://www.e-n.org.uk/p-2411-The-privatisation-of-religious-belief.htm>> [accessed 1/14/2011]

<sup>19</sup> Hermanova, 'Nabozenstvi a Religiozita', p. 52

church or religious institution) and deprive them of their freedom. 'Disbelief, therefore, is the only safe choice. It alone preserves your autonomy. It alone guarantees your freedom to believe and act as you want. Belief is the oppressor.'<sup>20</sup> Here is an opportunity for the church to preach the gospel in a way which presents principles of freedom. Here is an opportunity for the church to preach the essential Christian truths not in a difficult way. 'The making of non-essentials into essentials'<sup>21</sup> questions the authority of the Christian truth. Stuart Murray presents the concept of Christian simplicity and what 'simple church'<sup>22</sup> should mean.

Thirdly, there is the issue of holistic mission. (Benton does not use this term but he generally deals with the concept.) Christians should not be creating religious ghettos but should be those who 'eat with pagans', those who live their lives in the world in the way which validate their witness. This way they will provoke questions because those around them will be challenged by their love. Churches should train disciples who will be able to witness not just on Sundays, but throughout the week. Churches should not lead Christians to the state where their faith becomes privatized. The Bible 'sees all life as worship ..., and all life as a point of witness'.<sup>23</sup>

It is equally important to be in the world as it is to be not of the world. It is this tension that God calls us to – an intersection of culture and communication. Incarnational ministry of this magnitude can be done, done well and in a way that both honors [sic] and glorifies God. Jesus pulled it off – the Word of God made flesh walked among us. The God of creation became a Jewish carpenter. He was in culture, a part of culture, transforming culture, creating culture. Through the church he continues this journey today.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Benton, 'The Privatisation of Religious Belief', <<http://www.e-n.org.uk/p-2411-The-privatisation-of-religious-belief.htm>> [accessed 1/14/2011]

<sup>21</sup> Benton, 'The Privatisation of Religious Belief', <<http://www.e-n.org.uk/p-2411-The-privatisation-of-religious-belief.htm>> [accessed 1/14/2011]

<sup>22</sup> Murray, *Post-Christendom*, p. 275

<sup>23</sup> Benton, 'The Privatisation of Religious Belief', <<http://www.e-n.org.uk/p-2411-The-privatisation-of-religious-belief.htm>> [accessed 1/14/2011]

<sup>24</sup> Erwin R. McManus, 'The Global Intersection', in Leonard Sweet (ed.), *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), pp. 235-265 [258]

Newbigin greatly supports the idea of church influence on society. Local churches should recognize that they 'exist for the sake of those who are not members'.<sup>25</sup> A Christian community can display its authentic life to all areas of the life of society. But the maintaining of authentic Christianity is possible only in a congregation, that is, a properly led congregation.<sup>26</sup> Here Newbigin exposes the issue of clericalism and anticlericalism. I suggest that some parallel could be seen between clericalism/anticlericalism and the privatisation of faith, because both have negative consequences for the participation of the individual believer in the fellowship of faith, and for sharing the Christian life in a secular community. When a church is led to understand the principle of the priesthood of every individual believer, then such an approach is naturally 'exercised in the daily life and work of Christians in the secular business of the world'.<sup>27</sup> Stuart Murray suggests redefining church leadership and empowering 'the whole people of God for ministry'.<sup>28</sup> Here is my final 'holistic' comment from Newbigin: Leaders of churches should be leading the congregations 'as a whole in a mission to the community as a whole'.<sup>29</sup>

Lastly, here is an issue which I consider most important in relation to the life of privatized faith: it is faith shared in community. Here is an opportunity for churches to explain that, for example, the doctrine of *justification by faith alone* does not mean separation from a public expression of faith in a Christian community. Balanced teaching on the importance of Christian community is necessary. Benton concludes with a concrete challenge: a small group of obedient disciples has significant potential, enough to make an influential change. (Similarly, this happened in the days of the Judges of Israel).<sup>30</sup> I would emphasize the word *group* here. It indicates the strength present, as is obvious,

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<sup>25</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, p. 233

<sup>26</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, p. 235

<sup>27</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, p. 235

<sup>28</sup> Murray, *Post-Christendom*, p. 264

<sup>29</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, p. 238

<sup>30</sup> Benton, 'The Privatisation of Religious Belief', <<http://www.e-n.org.uk/p-2411-The-privatisation-of-religious-belief.htm>> [accessed 1/14/2011]



only in a community, a congregation, a cluster of people who share religious attitudes.

Newbigin thinks that faith shared in community is important. He believes that if a Christian community is shaped according to its calling, it gives its members the ability to approach the world with the proper attitude. 'Jesus ... did not write a book but formed a community.'<sup>31</sup> Although Newbigin expressed this attitude more than twenty years ago, it seems today, in the postmodern context, to be more rather than less important. He thinks that for the forming of an authentic community of faith, discipleship is the crucial issue, impacting upon how churches should be led.<sup>32</sup> When we share the truth about Christ in a pluralist society, there should not be any arrogance in church leadership. Arrogance causes timidity or anxiety in the lives of ordinary disciples. But they rather need confidence through learning that 'the initial faith is confirmed, strengthened, and enlarged as we go on through life'.<sup>33</sup> Then we experience something that Stuart Murray calls 'churches at their best',<sup>34</sup> something which reaches postmodern people who desire to experience 'authentic community and friendship'.<sup>35</sup> Although in the church environment there is always the potential for conflict 'due to the diversity of constituencies that make up many congregations',<sup>36</sup> churches have the capacity to handle their inner conflicts and this may positively influence the society around.<sup>37</sup>

I have briefly considered the religious situation in Europe and particularly in the Czech Republic. The issue of the privatization of faith is an actual issue here and churches should be openly considering it. The privatization of faith is

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<sup>31</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, p. 227

<sup>32</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, pp. 240-241

<sup>33</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, p. 243

<sup>34</sup> Murray, *Post-Christendom*, p. 254

<sup>35</sup> Murray, *Post-Christendom*, p. 254

<sup>36</sup> Eddie Gibbs, *Church Next: Quantum Changes in Christian Ministry* (Leicester: IVP, 2001), p. 112

<sup>37</sup> Robert Warren, *Being Human, Being Church: Spirituality and Mission in the Local Church* (London: Marshal Pickering, 1995), p. 17

definitely impacting the leadership attitudes of churches. I have tried to point out a few crucial points, suggesting how to deal with these issues. In summary, I have considered the importance of relevance, truth, holistic mission and community. These issues are dealt with rather superficially here, as the scope of this essay precludes a more in-depth analysis.

### ***Family values and security endangered: Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage, Cohabitation***

The second cultural issue, which also seems to impact churches, is an approach to marriage. I have been ministering as a pastor of church for fifteen years and I have seen church leadership to be challenged with this issue, and related issues, many times. The New Bible Dictionary, issued almost fifty years ago, treats with the concept of marriage in the modern world context. It is expressed in the conclusion of the chapter which deals with the marriage issue that Christian church is directly confronted with chaos about this matter – people are divorced and married again.<sup>38</sup> Currently, especially in the postmodern context of the western world, the situation does not seem to be much different, and there is another phenomenon which became common - cohabitation.

There are different forms of cohabitation. Some live in cohabitation with the goal to get married soon, some live in cohabitation to ‘try it before marriage’ and then get married or leave each other. Some live in cohabitation for just a short time, some plan long-term relationship without marriage and without children. Finally, some choose cohabitation as an alternative to marriage, with children included.<sup>39</sup> 73 % of Czech people think, that it is good to cohabit first, if

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<sup>38</sup> J. S. Wright and J. A. Thompson, ‘Manzelstvi’, ‘Marriage’ (my translation), in J. D. Douglas (ed.), *New Bible Dictionary*, 1<sup>st</sup> Czech ed. (Praha: Navrat Domu, 1996), pp. 580-583 [583]

<sup>39</sup> Jana Chaloupkova, ‘Je manzelstvi prezitkem? A pro koho?’, ‘Is Marriage an Anachronism? And for Whom?’ (my translation), in Hana Marikova, Tomas Kostecky, Tomas Lebeda and Marketa Skodova (eds.), *Jaka je Nase Spolecnost? Otazky, Ktere si Casto Klademe...* (Praha: Sociologicke Nakladatelstvi (Slon), 2010), pp. 367-385 [368]

the goal to finally get married is present. It is 55 % of Czech population thinking, that it is good to cohabit without the goal of getting married.<sup>40</sup> And still, there is a significant difference between what people consider good, and how people really live. Women mostly consider marriage as an ideal. But in connection with marriage they also expect a change of social status (ascending social mobility) and marriage is conditioned by adequate economical provision from the husband's side. If a man does not fulfil these requirements, they often choose to stay unmarried (in the Czech context of social provision it often means better financial conditions).<sup>41</sup>

The church is confronted with these challenges because Christian understanding for both divorce and cohabitation in general is seen as being not the ideal state and not according to God's plan. Or, better said, the church should be confronted with these issues followed with the tendency to help people, get them closer to God's ideal and not isolate itself from those in moral difficulties. While commenting the Bible view on marriage and divorce, John Stott is aware the tension between the Scripture demands and the reality. He does not tend to reduce either the first or the second. He thinks that we should face both, develop a 'Christian mind' on the issue, 'resist the temptation to take short cuts' and do a 'decision which has practical consequences'.<sup>42</sup> Such an approach seems to me to be useful and balanced as a starting position when we deal with this issue.

Although our examination will be mainly led by Christian theology, on both theoretical and practical level, it is also useful to study the matter from the secular point of view. Generally said, those who live in cohabitation (without any regard to the fact that children are present or not) create less stable environment than those who live in marriage. They are considered to be an incomplete institution and the roles of partners are not defined as clearly as in marriage. Those who

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<sup>40</sup> Jana Chaloupkova, 'Je manzelstvi prezitkem?', p. 369

<sup>41</sup> Jana Chaloupkova, 'Je manzelstvi prezitkem?', p. 378

<sup>42</sup> John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1991), pp. 274-275

cohabitators have often an individualistic approach and show less solidarity in many practical aspects of the relationship (egalitarian attitude). On the other hand those who live in marriage have their roles naturally divided and complement each other. Those who cohabit and have children do not differentiate from those in marriage and with children 'so much', but still, those families unyoked by marriage represent more fragile and less stable environment than those in marriage.<sup>43</sup>

Here I will examine the issue of current approaches to marriage from biblical perspective. It will be crucial for any church leadership board to have solid information to start with.<sup>44</sup> I think that there it is not necessary, (although likewise possible and useful), to approach the most current studies about marriage. The conservative understanding of the biblical principles for marriage does not seem to alter much during last decades (although it would be another case to consider how to apply it at different periods and in various contexts). I suggest considering, for example, John Stott's approach. In his book *Issues Facing Christians Today* Stott discusses the Old Testament and the New Testament teaching on the issue of marriage and divorce.

Stott investigates meaning of the bible passage Genesis 2:24 and come to the basic affirmation, that 'the marriage union is exclusive ....., publicly acknowledged ..., permanent ..., and consummated by sexual intercourse'.<sup>45</sup> Divorce is permitted but hated by God. It definitely was not his original intention. This leads Stott to examine Deuteronomy 24:1-4, 'the only Old Testament passage which refers to grounds and procedures for divorce'.<sup>46</sup> A careful examination of this passage exposes that its application is conditioned by

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<sup>43</sup> Jana Chaloupkova, 'Je manželství prežitkem?', pp. 379-381

<sup>44</sup> For example, Assemblies of God Position Papers on 'Divorce and Remarriage Application of Biblical Principles',  
<[http://ag.org/top/beliefs/position\\_papers/pp\\_downloads/pp\\_4189\\_divorce\\_remarriage.pdf](http://ag.org/top/beliefs/position_papers/pp_downloads/pp_4189_divorce_remarriage.pdf)>  
[accessed 22/2/2011]

<sup>45</sup> John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, p. 262

<sup>46</sup> John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, p. 262

historical context much more than it is usually anticipated. This law does not approve divorce but it protects the divorced party, which anyway does not have chance to change the partner's decision.<sup>47</sup> Stott continues in the New Testament and explains that 'Jesus endorsed the permanence of marriage ... declared the provision of divorce to be a temporary concession to human sin ... called remarriage after divorce "adultery" ... permitted divorce and remarriage on the sole ground of immorality.'<sup>48</sup> The apostle Paul expresses himself in similar terms and confirms Jesus' perspective.<sup>49</sup> Such a conservative attitude serves as a foundation for many books, which deal with the issue of marriage, more in a popular than academic way. These books are usually influencing Christian minds, both ordinary members of churches and their leaders.

Among many books and approaches to Christian marriage and related concepts I would present here the opinion of Ed Wheat, a physician who analyses many experiences acquired in his practice as a marriage counsellor. Similarly as Stott, Wheat's approach is based on the first chapters in the book of Genesis. He presents God's original plan for marriage and related blessings<sup>50</sup>, he confirms devastating results of divorce, in both secular and Christian environment and presents hope for healing of that which was broken in this sense.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, Tim and Beverly LaHaye demonstrate similar basic marriage principles while mostly dealing with the aspect of sexuality.<sup>52</sup> A comprehensive and wide-ranging approach is given from the pen of Nicky and Sila Lee who present marriage as a

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<sup>47</sup> John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, p. 262-263. See also AoG PP on 'Divorce and Remarriage', p. 4

<sup>48</sup> John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, p. 265-266

<sup>49</sup> John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, p. 269

<sup>50</sup> Ed Wheat, *Love Life For Every Married Couple* (Czech Edition, Trinec: Biblos, 1995), pp. 22-29

<sup>51</sup> Wheat, *Love Life For Every Married Couple*, pp. 31-39

<sup>52</sup> Tim and Beverly LaHaye, *The Act of Marriage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), *A Budou Jedno Telo*, Czech ed. (Albrechtice: Krestansky Zivot, 2000)

long-term run.<sup>53</sup> Lastly I would mention here a unique approach of Gary Thomas, who associates marriage with one's spiritual relationship with God.<sup>54</sup>

Most of these books describe the ideal plan for marriage. Church leaders may feel frustration (my experience as well as the experience of many pastors I personally know) when they open themselves and their churches to the 'real world' which commonly practice not only divorce but other forms of 'partnership', which are regarded sinful from the Christian point of view. It seems almost impossible, when the real facts are honestly considered, to put these two worlds together, God's ideal concept for partnership and the real situation. It is even more challenging when a church considers 'sinful' past of those with leadership ambitions. On this, for example, Wesley Ellis speaks in a challenging way in his article 'A Scriptural Viewpoint on Divorce'.<sup>55</sup> Paradoxically, it still seems beneficial to educate Christians in the 'good picture' about partnership than to focus the most of our energy on correcting the 'bad picture'. It does not definitely mean that the church and its leadership will ignore the real conditions in which people live and difficulties that people experience.<sup>56</sup>

The complexity of this issue is discussed carefully by the Roman Catholic Church in the Czech Republic. Although there still are significant doctrinal differences between evangelical and catholic churches, there is much more sympathy concerning moral things, including family issues. A psychologist and the leader of the marriage and family centre Bethesda in Brno Josef Zeman

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<sup>53</sup> Nicky and Sila Lee, *The Marriage Book: How to Build a Lasting Relationship* (London: HTB Publications, 2000)

<sup>54</sup> Gary Thomas, *Sacred Marriage: What if God Designed Marriage to Make us Holy More than to Make us Happy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000)

<sup>55</sup> W. G. Ellis, 'A Scriptural Viewpoint on Divorce', *Theological Educator* 38 (1988), pp. 33-40

<sup>56</sup> AoG PP on 'Divorce and Remarriage', p. 11; see also Stanovisko Studijního odboru Rady Cirkve bratske – Positron of the Study Department of the Brethren Church Council (my translation), August 2006, 'Manželství, rozvod a nový sňatek', 'Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage' (my translation), p.2

<[http://www.cb.cz/main/file/download/203/man%C5%BEelstv%C3%AD,\\_rozvod\\_a\\_nov%C3%BD\\_s%C5%88atek.pdf](http://www.cb.cz/main/file/download/203/man%C5%BEelstv%C3%AD,_rozvod_a_nov%C3%BD_s%C5%88atek.pdf)> [accessed 17/3/2011]

interprets marriage and family in historical context.<sup>57</sup> He says that the current days are specific, because it is possible to separate sex and reproduction, and to experience both out of the marriage borders. In the past it was the marriage which legitimated sexual relationship. Today young people think that it is the relationship of a good quality that legitimates the sex out of marriage. I think, it is important for church leadership to understand this shift in peoples' minds. Zeman presents arguments which show why cohabitation results difficulties in partnership, although its goal is to have an honest relationship. For example, we live in cohabitation because we like it, not because we want to solve problems; 'trying' partners consumes amount of the lifetime of an individual and that way it causes a delay of parenthood; the expectation to know each other well before marriage can not be truly fulfilled as the cohabitation state can never simulate conditions in marriage, and that way we judge the quality of the partner mostly in positive circumstances, and get a false information about him or her.<sup>58</sup> Patrick Dixon speaks about relationships in context of the AIDS threat (being the expert on this issue) and says that 'there is no such a thing as free sex without any cost'.<sup>59</sup> For a few years I personally was a lecturer of ACET (AIDS Care, Education and Training). Patrick Dixon is the founder of this organisation in the UK and also its international agency. I have lectured in many schools and classes and I had an opportunity to talk to some of the students about their intimate issues. Although they were not HIV positive, they were confirming the harmful results of 'free sex'.

I may continue in listing other good reasons but my goal here is to show, that our reasoning with people needs to be both biblical and practical, showing both doctrinal and social concern. I think that Christian leaders should

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<sup>57</sup> J. Zeman, 'Souvislosti a dusledky nesezdaneho souziti partneru', 'Context and Consequences of Cohabitation' (my translation), Pracovni setkani Center pro rodinu (CRSP), Vranov u Brna 16. 1. 2008 (Brno: CRSP, 2008), p.1  
<<http://www.crsp.cz/cesky/odborne-clanky/souvislosti-a-dusledky-nesezdaneho-souziti-partneru.html>> [accessed 20/3/2011]

<sup>58</sup> Zeman, 'Souvislosti a dusledky nesezdaneho souziti partneru', p. 1

<sup>59</sup> Patrick Dixon, *The Truth about AIDS: What You Must Know, What You Can Do*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1994), p. 316

understand these practical consequences, not just Bible quotations, provided often with insufficient exegetical understanding. The final word in this paragraph I would like to direct again at John Stott who appropriately comments the dilemma, the tension:

And how can we frame our policies and practice in accordance with biblical principles? To be sure, there are no easy answers. In particular, the church feels the tension between its prophetic responsibility to bear witness to God's revealed standards and its pastoral responsibility to show compassion to those who have been unable to maintain his standards.<sup>60</sup>

### ***Family values and security endangered: Children endangered***

The last cultural issue I would like to consider in this essay concerns children living in current society. I will also consider related challenges for churches. We have seen that less stable environment in families opens doors for some negative issues, which can damage those who cannot protect themselves sufficiently.

I am aware of the fact that I will repeat some of my statements here, but I want to mention again the extreme level of secularisation of the young Czech society, especially in the area of sexual attitudes. I do not think that other western society would be dramatically different and better in these attitudes. But the difference is obvious when we consider the openness how these attitudes are presented in public in the Czech Republic. I mean, for example, the pictures on billboards in towns and along roads and highways. Also, I personally remember amazement of the team of English students when they participated in English classes at a school in Chomutov (town in the North–Western part of the Czech Republic) in the year 2009. In the conversations some students presented very

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<sup>60</sup> John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, p. 261



low sexual morality as a norm (I am not saying that all of them plan to live that way).

The picture becomes even clearer when we consider, for example, methodical instructions on sexual education at elementary schools, issued by the *Ministry of education, youth and sports* in the Czech Republic in April 2010 and recommended for teachers to use it.<sup>61</sup> Among other things it presupposes that children are familiar with pornography or the difference of what is 'real' in normal life and what is 'just movie' should be discussed in the classes. A game is suggested in the beginning of a class where it is allowed to use vulgarisms (in relation to genitals). Finally these materials stress a children's right to be sexually educated, despite parents' disagreement about this issue. These methodical instructions were criticised by many people and so finally its influence was reduced.<sup>62</sup> My intention here is not to consider sexual education of children but to give a feeling of the actual secular atmosphere that also influences children in the Czech Republic.

As I have presented in the section about marriage, families tend to create rather less stable environment. Also, it seems unwise to expect strong moral values from the educational system in our country. What can the church offer? I

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<sup>61</sup> Ministry of education, youth and sports (MSMT), 'Doporučení MSMT k realizaci sexuální výchovy v základních školách', 'MSMT Proposal for Realization of Sexual Education at Elementary schools' (my translation) (Prague: MSMT, 2010), <<http://www.msmt.cz/vzdelavani/doporučení-msmt-k-realizaci-sexuální-výchovy-v-základních?lang=1>> [accessed 21/3/2011]; see also Ministry of education, youth and sports (MSMT), 'Průručka Sexuální Výchova – Vybraná Temata', Průručka pro Učitele, 'Manual for Sexual Education – Chosen Themes', Manual for Teachers (my translation) (Praha: MSMT, 2009) <[http://sexualnavychova.files.wordpress.com/2009/04/sexualni\\_vychova\\_vybrana\\_temata.pdf](http://sexualnavychova.files.wordpress.com/2009/04/sexualni_vychova_vybrana_temata.pdf)> [accessed 21/3/2011]

<sup>62</sup> Czech Evangelical Alliance (CEA), 'Vyjádření České Evangelické Aliance k Otázkám Sexuální Výchovy na Školách', 'Declaration of Czech Evangelical Alliance Concerning Sexual Education at Schools' (my translation) (Praha: CEA, 2010), <[http://www.ea.cz/aktuality\\_leve/sexvychova](http://www.ea.cz/aktuality_leve/sexvychova)> [accessed 21/3/2011]; also Minutes of the Meeting of the Main Board of the Apostolic Church in Czech Republic 2.9.2010, appendix 'Prohlášení Apostolské Cirkve k Sexuální Výchově na Základních Školách', 'Declaration of the Apostolic Church in Czech Republic Concerning Sexual Education at Schools' (my translation), personal visit of the Bishop's office 12/1/2011, Kolin, V Zidkách 402, (Kolin: Bishop's Office, 2010)

think it is not possible to expect any revolutionary cure which would quickly heal our society. Both modern and postmodern generation is rather skeptic. So, going back to traditional, general morality, which is accepted by Christians for ages (but not just by them) seems to be a way forward. This is the opinion of Oldrich Psenicka, an excellent Czech specialist in the area of breast cancer diagnosing.<sup>63</sup> He presents an excellent symbiosis of sexual education in a family and traditional family values, a symbiosis of practical and professional views, and poetry at the same time. So I suggest that focusing on building healthy family relationships is an appropriate starting point and a goal.

Another important issue in this discussion is ... time. The basic question is not complicated: Do we spend enough time with our children? Or: Do we invest our free time in the important relationships? One of the titles of a Czech sociological study about children, youth and free time says: 'The beginning is in the family'<sup>64</sup> (my translation). Bretislav Hofbauer speaks about crisis of a family in connection to the individualization and losing the basic relationships among the family members.<sup>65</sup> Psenicka points out, for example, the simple fact, that adolescents need to be staying in their families even more than children. It is a mistake to think that the opposite would encourage their self-reliance. They need their parents' time. It does not matter that they may be taller or better educated than their parents are; emotionally they are still children who need love.<sup>66</sup>

Because of the limited scope of this essay I will not describe other traditional family values as acceptance, concern, personal value, attention, physical contact, communication<sup>67</sup> or educational values as decency, diligence or

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<sup>63</sup> Oldrich Psenicka, *Sexualni Vychova v Rodine: Radost Byt Matkou a Take Otcem, Sexual Education in the Family* (my translation) (Pardubice: Hnutí Rodina, 1995), p. 12

<sup>64</sup> Bretislav Hofbauer, *Deti, Mládež a Volny Cas, Children, Youth and Free Time* (my translation) (Praha: Portal, 2004), p. 56

<sup>65</sup> Hofbauer, *Deti, Mládež a Volny Cas*, p. 56

<sup>66</sup> Psenicka, *Sexualni Vychova v Rodine*, p. 301

<sup>67</sup> H. N. Wright, *The Power of a Parent's Words: How You Can Use Loving, Effective Communication to Increase Your Child's Self-esteem and Reduce the Frustrations of Parenting* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1991), p. 12

responsibility.<sup>68</sup> Any sensitive leaders will discern the needed values and can educate their churches both personally and publicly, both believers and interested attendants.

## **Conclusion**

I am aware of the amount of the secular sources used in this essay. One reason is that it is possible to find accurate information and wisdom also in the secular literature. Another reason is that if the church has to respond to the current situation in the surrounding society it should 'feel' the reality also from its own perspective. Then it could be confronted with the Christian perspective. This way church demonstrates awareness of the reality and strengthens its trustworthiness in the eyes of the surrounding community. At the same time in the 'inner' life of the church, principles of godliness should be firmly established and initiated by the church leadership. It is one of the most challenging tasks for the church leaders to 'synchronize', connect these two worlds without compromising the core Christian values. Courage will be needed and people should be encouraged in reaching this goal, in regard to Jesus, the excellent example of the Holy, who lived so much in the context of his world and society and at the same time he was able to pass this ability onto his followers. That way he had demonstrated his leadership abilities and skills. So today leaders should be open to take no short cuts where the situation needs more discussion, no hiding behind the church 'easy walls' when the situation does not seem to have an easy solution.

Looking back at the three issues I have considered in this essay, the privatization of faith, challenges of the marriage and dangers in children's life,

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<sup>68</sup> M. Rabusicova and L. Rabusic, 'Czech Educational Values: Traditional or Modern?', *Socialni Studia* 6 (2001), pp. 127-148 [144],  
<<http://socstudia.fss.muni.cz/archiv.php?ukol=2&clanek=206&cislo=7&rok=0>> [accessed 22/2/2011]

one word becomes crucial to me in relation to the church leadership: *interconnectedness*. By this I mean the ability of churches and its leaders to understand the timeless principles of the Scripture, to understand the times in which we live, be able to connect with people and empower them with a vision, example and hope. Hope ‘provides a vision that lifts the eyes of the follower up from the path they are walking to the horizon of God’s eternal perspective and reminds them why they have life – to enjoy a relationship with God!’<sup>69</sup> It is not an easy task and we as leaders need not only to start strong, but also to finish well and strong. This is ‘the only applause that counts’<sup>70</sup> and those that we lead need to see a good example, not only a good explanation of an issue.

Our times are challenging. We can take it as an opportunity or we can become pessimistic. My goal in this essay was to encourage the first one.

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<sup>69</sup> Walter C. Wright, *Relational Leadership: A Biblical Model for Influence and Service* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000), pp. 15-16

<sup>70</sup> Neil Cole, *Organic Leadership: Leading Naturally Right Where You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), pp. 155-156

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