

**University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice**  
**Theological Faculty**  
**Department of Theology of Service**

Master's Thesis

Missions in Modern Day Czech Republic

Advisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Michal Opatrný

Written by Andrew Bair

Study field: Theology of Service

Form of study: Full Time Student

**2020**

### **Prohlášení**

Prohlašuji, že jsem svoji diplomovou práci vypracoval samostatně pouze s použitím pramenů a literatury uvedených v seznamu citované literatury.

Prohlašuji, že v souladu s § 47b zákona č. 111/1998 Sb. v platném znění souhlasím se zveřejněním své diplomové práce, a to v nezkrácené podobě elektronickou cestou ve veřejně přístupné části databáze STAG provozované Jihočeskou univerzitou v Českých Budějovicích na jejích internetových stránkách, a to se zachováním mého autorského práva k odevzdanému textu této kvalifikační práce. Souhlasím dále s tím, aby toutéž elektronickou cestou byly v souladu s uvedeným ustanovením zákona č. 111/1998 Sb. zveřejněny posudky školitele a oponentů práce i záznam o průběhu a výsledku obhajoby kvalifikační práce. Rovněž souhlasím s porovnáním textu mé kvalifikační práce s databází kvalifikačních prací Theses.cz provozovanou Národním registrem vysokoškolských kvalifikačních prací a systémem na odhalování plagiátů.

V Harrisburgu 11. Března 2020

.....  
podpis

**Special thanks**

Thanks to my professor Michal Opatrný for being willing to work with me in English and the recommendations that he has given me over the course of this study. Thanks also to my students and friends who shared with me their culture and perspective on life while I lived in the Czech Republic. It has greatly changed how I see the world and I am very thankful for it. Last but not least, thanks to everyone who has supported me while I served as a missionary in the Czech Republic.

## Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	5
2. Current Context.....	
2.1. Modernization.....	
2.2. Religious Memory.....	
2.3. Survey and Results.....	
3. Desirability.....	
3.1. Desire in the Church.....	
3.2. Reawakening Desire.....	
3.3. Cultural Apologists.....	
4. Practical Engagement.....	
4.1. Theological Vision.....	
4.2. Listening.....	
4.3. Visible Faith.....	
4.4. Ministry Expressions.....	
4.5. Youth Focus.....	
5. Recovering Missions Personally.....	
6. Bibliography.....	
7. Abstract.....	
8. Abstrakt.....	

## 1. Introduction

The Czech Republic has the reputation of being the most atheistic country in the world. This statistic as well as its history and culture make it a unique and challenging place for believers. Lesslie Newbigin notes that “[t]here can never be a culture-free gospel.”<sup>1</sup> Culture and the gospel will always intersect and have unique characteristics. My goal in this thesis is to take a closer look at the modern context of the Czech Republic, including religious memory and desirability regarding gospel to be true, and how believers living here today may be able to communicate the gospel with a culture that has come to where it is today.

Often it is reported and shown in surveys that the Czech Republic is the most atheistic country in the world. This trend does not seem to be changing. A recent survey states that among young people in the Czech, unbelief is on the rise.<sup>2</sup> No matter how precise all of the percentages are that these surveys provide, it is clear that this trend is on the rise and there is a great need for the Czech people to encounter the true, living Jesus Christ. The living faith of those in the past have become known as a dark, dead belief of the past which has no bearing on the lives of those living today. The Christian faith has become so disconnected from practical, everyday life today that it is no longer even desirable for those who look at it from the outside. For this reason, in order for the gospel to be reawakened and again grab hold of the hearts and lives of Czech people, a renewed engagement between how the gospel and culture relate must take place.

To those who know Czech history, these statistics may be surprising considering the rich history of Christianity that it has. On top of that, missions often focuses on the Czech Republic

---

<sup>1</sup>Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Harriet Sherwood, “‘Christianity as Default is Gone’: The Rise of a Non-Christian Europe,” *The Guardian*, March 21, 2018, [https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/21/christianity-non-christian-europe-young-people-survey-religion?fbclid=IwAR307ewSaHTI-u\\_2zF1Stalrvqkj3LGiiM8\\_JFSXkaqBFMIcoLngljJ2Z04](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/21/christianity-non-christian-europe-young-people-survey-religion?fbclid=IwAR307ewSaHTI-u_2zF1Stalrvqkj3LGiiM8_JFSXkaqBFMIcoLngljJ2Z04).

because of it holding the title of being the most atheistic country in the world. Yet, despite the rich history of Christianity and the many missionaries who come to the Czech Republic, the country remains to be known as the most atheistic country in the world. It is this current cultural context that is a reality for those living in the Czech Republic find themselves in. This leads us to the questions of why is it that there is so little fruit and so few people coming to Christ today as well as what changed among Czech people and in their mindset that caused the gospel to be so firmly rejected today while such a rich history of Christianity exists?

No easy answers can be given as to how the Czech mentality, specifically toward the spiritual, came to where it is today. Their long history and all the factors that have influenced it makes sorting through it and coming to conclusions difficult. Undoubtedly certain factors, like that of the many wars, changes of power, and communism that plagued the Czech nation in the past, have a strong influence on bringing people to where they are today. And while these things cannot take all the credit, it is important to know and understand the tendencies that they produce in order to get a better grasp on the spiritual state of the Czech Republic and how to move forward in seeking to reach the country with the gospel of Jesus Christ. While fruit is ultimately up to God to produce, the gospel is communicated through speaking in a culture. Therefore, we should always seek to communicate the gospel message clearer and in a way that will be better understood.

For this reason, I believe that for a rekindling of the gospel in the Czech Republic, it is necessary to look more in depth at the culture, become aware of where these trends come from, and address Czech people with the gospel in order to have a more faithful and fruitful Christian witness in the Czech Republic. This kind of work is called contextualization. Newbigin writes, “The value of the word contextualization is that it suggests the placing of the gospel in the total

context of a culture at a particular moment, a moment that is shaped by the past and looks to the future.” Often times the context for the gospel is overlooked and Christians seek to proclaim the gospel message. Yet the better we understand the context we are living and serving in, the better we will be able to communicate the gospel message to those around us. However, if we ignore the context, we may really struggle to speak about the gospel in a meaningful way so that people will listen.

In other words, the purpose for writing this paper is for the goal of having a genuine missionary encounter with Czech people. Lesslie Newbigin coins this phrase in his book *Foolishness to the Greeks*. Upon returning to England after living in India for most of his life, he studies how the culture has changed and where he finds himself in his current situation so that he can have a genuine missionary encounter with those around him. He understands that communication is a two-way street and to be successful in communicating the gospel, he must speak in a way that they understand. To do this, one must understand the culture and the makeup of the culture well enough to be able to speak to and challenge its deepest core values. Only then will what one is saying hold credibility. This kind of engagement necessitates a thorough understanding of the culture and its plausibility structures. When these things are addressed, it will create credibility between the message givers and the hearers and it will speak to the cultural context that those living there find themselves in. This will in turn provide answers to the problems that they have. When answers to real problems are given and the beauty of the gospel is seen, then it will again be desirable for unbelievers. These things are crucial for a culture to listen to the gospel message to be true.

I approach this paper and topic as a foreigner living in the Czech Republic as a missionary for the past three years. While my own thoughts are culturally conditioned as well, I

would like to share my insights to this topic and I pray that it would be helpful for the building up of Christ's church among Czech people.



## 2. Current Context

The Czech Republic is unique in many ways. While located in the heart of Europe, it doesn't take long to see that it doesn't quite fit the mold. Looking at many different polls quickly shows this to be true as it would be a mistake to categorize the Czech Republic fully with either Western European countries or Eastern European countries. At times it looks similar to western countries and in other polls it looks like the eastern countries. Another divide that the Czech Republic breaks the norm for is between countries formerly controlled by communism and those that weren't. And again, at times the Czech Republic is on both sides of the divide and most notably with Slovakia, which was formerly together as one country.

The Czech Republic sits right in the center of Europe between the East and the West as it doesn't fit into either category neatly. Commonly known for having been a country under control of the Iron Curtain, the country was under communist control for forty years (1949-1989). At that time, it was a part of Czechoslovakia. And while it was more closely connected with Western Europe for so long, the beliefs and similarities that are still held in common are only a few. Like other western countries in Europe, Czechs carry a strong national identity. This is shown by a strong importance placed on growing up in the Czech Republic, learning their language, culture, and customs. Not as high of an emphasis is placed on these things for being considered a national citizen in the Western countries as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

A major difference, however, is the Czech Republic's view of God. Many polls have

---

<sup>3</sup> Neha Sahgal, "Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion Views of Minorities and Key Social Issues." Pew Research Center, October 29, 2018. <http://www.pewforum.org/2018/10/29/eastern-and-western-europeans-differ-on-importance-of-religion-views-of-minorities-and-key-social-issues/>.

been done and articles written on this. One article by Pew Research says that only 8% of Czechs consider themselves highly religious. This ranks 32<sup>nd</sup> out of 34 European countries polled.<sup>4</sup> A more recent article that focuses only on the Eastern European countries looks more broadly at those who say they believe in God. It states that only 29% of Czechs believe in God compared to an average of 86% of people believing in God among the 18 countries surveyed in this article.<sup>5</sup> The difference is staggering considering the many parts of history which have been alike and the similar ways that these countries view their cultural identity. One factor influencing this drastic difference is how Czechs as a whole don't see religion as part of their national identity as these other countries do.<sup>6</sup>

The dissimilarities continue. Not only are Czechs so much more irreligious than the other Eastern European countries, they also split away in regards to social issues. In similarity with more Western European countries are the trends to accept same-sex marriage and legal abortion. These make sense as the rejection of them tend to be a position that many religions take. So in taking an atheistic position or one of indifference to God at the least, these social trends may be expected. Where they differ however is in their unfavorable view toward Muslims. Sliding back in line with the eastern countries, they have a strong resistance toward Muslims and immigrants.

Interestingly enough, a survey from The Guardian notes that “the two most religious countries, Poland and Lithuania, and the two least religious, the Czech Republic and Estonia, are

---

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Evans, and Chris Baronavski, “How do European Countries Differ in Religious Commitment.” Pew Research Center, December 5, 2018, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/12/05/how-do-european-countries-differ-in-religious-commitment/>.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Evans, “Unlike Their Central and Eastern European Neighbors Most Czechs Don't Believe in God,” Pew Research, June 19, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/06/19/unlike-their-central-and-eastern-european-neighbors-most-czechs-dont-believe-in-god/>.

<sup>6</sup> Authors, “Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion Views of Minorities and Key Social Issues.” Pew Research Center, October 29, 2018, <http://www.pewforum.org/2018/10/29/eastern-and-western-europeans-differ-on-importance-of-religion-views-of-minorities-and-key-social-issues/>.

post-communist states.”<sup>7</sup> This goes to show that just because of having a similar history with being controlled by the communist regime, the same results regarding the countries religious mindset do not follow. The mindset with which people in each country views the history is more important than this history itself. In other words, the individual interpretation which people give their own history differs and is more important than the general national events. The events and history itself does not determine the mindset toward issues such as religion. Rather, it is each individual’s interpretation which they place on these events and pass on to others in conversation. It also shows that communism is not fully to blame albeit a large influencing and culture forming factor. The individual mindset regarding his or her history that survives through generations is what is important for the makeup of each country and understanding why a country is the way it is today.

Aside from its geographical location and where it fits in with the surrounding countries, it is also important to note where it fits in within modernism since it is largely influenced by Western rationalism and secularism. A fundamental shift has taken place as to where identity is found. This greatly affects how people think and what one desires.

---

<sup>7</sup> Sherwood, “Christianity as default is gone.”

## 2.1. Modernization

As we look at the context for missions in the Czech Republic today, I will first look at where the world is as a whole and then focus in on the Czech Republic. At this point in history, the Czech Republic is right in the middle of the modernization movement that strongly affects western countries. Modernization greatly affects life as we know it today. Most pertinent to our topic is the disconnect between memory and tradition that comes about from secularization and individualization. Daniele Hervieu-Leger says, “one of the chief characteristics of modern societies is that they are no longer societies of memory, and as such ordered with a view to reproducing what is inherited.”<sup>8</sup> Collective memory, which formerly was the primary makeup of identity, is being replaced by experience. Remembering and being part of a family tradition is not as important for those living in modern societies. Identities are changing. The basis for a traditional identity and the foundation for a modern identity differ greatly.<sup>9</sup> Just as we see identity changing in modern societies, we also see memory changing.

Later on she writes, “Individual well-being and fulfillment take precedence; the family is expected to minister to an individual’s contingent emotional needs and forgo consideration of its own continuity...family stability and continuity are no longer the priority.”<sup>10</sup> She also notes that the mobility that we have today is a factor in making this possible. The more people move and are less geographically constrained, the easier it is to forget and not pass on an identity from older generations. As people move, many of the shared experiences and memories are not so easily a part of everyday life and passed on. A disconnect between one’s history and previous

---

<sup>8</sup> Daniele Hervieu-Leger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*. p.123.

<sup>9</sup> Timothy Keller, “Gospel Identity Conference” (Conference, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, November 17-18, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 134.

experiences is created making it harder to pass these on to future generations. When a person lives in the same place for generation after generation, the places invoke memories that can easily be shared with future generations. Once a person no longer lives there and is seeing these places every day, the memories invoked occur less and less and the opportunities to share these become harder and harder.

In the past, collective memory has often been made up of family traditions and ethnic traditions. Yet now, instead of these being a priority in people's lives and held onto, they feel as if it is "a norm imposed from outside and [far from] the authenticity of personal experience."<sup>11</sup> Many people would rather go out and find their own meaning in life that most comfortably fits with their personal experience and emotional needs. As can easily be seen, a great disconnect is created between collective memory and modern identities. While at times they are the same, it is more of a rarity and it is not for the sake of the family but because the individual has found it to make the most sense and give them the most meaning in life. The two are no longer assumed to go hand in hand.

The change in modern identity has also influenced individualization to reign unquestioned. Identity and collective memories are not something that is to be passed on but something to be realized in each individual. This means that he or she should come to their own way of knowing this. Passing on faith to future generations looks a little different because of this. What was attractive and desired before can end up being undesirable. For example, people who seek an identity on their own may be less attracted to the faith of their parents simply because their parents believe it. In the past, this would not have been the case.

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 132

Daniele's thoughts here remind me of Keller's sermon on identity. A change of memory also signifies a change of identity. It has gone from being based in the family and the place/community that you are born and grown up in to an "individual['s] well-being and fulfilment." Family still has its importance but no longer holds highest precedence. Rather it is in the individual experience which feels more authentic and real. Along with identity changing, memory also changes. How one views his or her history changes and what is held onto is different than before. More importantly in this conversation, individualization and secularization create a disconnect in memory making it difficult to be passed on, especially in regards to beliefs since they have become so personalized and private.

## 2.2. Religious Memory

The rise of modernity and the decline of religion in Europe has been a focus now in the area of sociology. This decline of religion, known as secularization has been on the rise in Europe. More recently, a shift toward the study of memory with regards to sociology of religion has taken place as a way to explain these current trends of secularization.

Czech history by itself is very long and complicated leaving a great challenge to those seeking to understand why the Czech Republic is the way it is today. Regarding this question, it may be helpful to break it up into two sub-questions. First, what is the general mindset that Czech people have toward their history and the world today that causes them to hold the title of the most atheistic country in the world today? Secondly, why is this trend rising among their youth?

In order to better understand the current religious landscape of the Czech Republic, it is important to understand how Czech nationals view their own history. One helpful resource for looking at this is a study that studies religious memory in the Czech Republic. A group of Czech sociologists came together to put together a survey to study religiosity in the Czech Republic. This survey is especially helpful for two reasons. Firstly, because it's not just looking at Czech history and what happened but rather how people remember this history. Secondly, because one of their goals in doing this study and writing in English was "to present non-Czech-speaking readers with a comprehensive work describing changes in religiosity in Czech society."<sup>12</sup>

By looking at religious memory, the researchers seek to show how past historical events are interpreted and what interpretation is being passed on through the generations. The collective

---

<sup>12</sup> Jan Váně et al. *Continuity and Discontinuities of Religious Memory in the Czech Republic* (Brno: Barrister Principal, 2018), 11.

memories that are passed on through from generation to generation are composed of an interpretation that is close to individuals and thus the society. These together are what make up the framework which is passed on for viewing their own history and the world. Better understanding this then will give important insights into the current cultural context and mentality that is held toward religion.

This kind of project gives better insight into the current context than simply understanding and evaluating Czech history because, as said before, many other countries have similar periods of history yet have vastly different outlooks on life today. The other reason that looking at religious memory is more helpful than only the history is because our task should be to understand Czech nationals themselves rather than how I may interpret their history and mindset as a result of their history. However, even when taking this approach there are no definitive answers or ways to interpret the data that will be accepted and applied by everyone.

In the Czech Republic, many different factors have affected the transmission of religious memory. The country finds itself within the western, modernized countries which has been taken captive by the rise of the modern scientific worldview, fundamentally changing the way people view the world and themselves. It has also lived through many years of the Christian tradition and the back and forth control between Catholics and Protestants and most recently going through the forty years of communism, all of which significantly influence Czech thought on religion.

None of these factors can be the sole reason or an easy explanation as to why the rise of atheism is so strong in the Czech Republic since other countries also share parts of this history with wildly different results. All in all, the way people remember religion is part of what forms a country's cultural memory which makes up the DNA of that society.



Daniele Hervieu-Leger writes about the challenges regarding religion and collective memory that modernity has brought with it in France.<sup>13</sup> Shortly after this she writes,

“Hence, rather than attribute the fall in conventional religious observance to loss of belief, and loss of belief to the growth of rationalism instilled by science and technology, one should look at the complex redistribution taking place in the sphere of believing and try to throw light on the social changes that have helped bring this about. ... The crisis in authority of the priesthood – a corollary of the distance each of the faithful feels entitled to set between a norm imposed from outside and the authenticity of personal experience – is clearly linked with the general deregulation of belief and observance which is the consequence of psychological modernity.”<sup>14</sup>

The change in modern identity clearly has a strong impact on the transmission of religious memory. This is on top of the fragmented religious memory that is found in the Czech Republic which we will look at in the next section.

---

<sup>13</sup> Daniele Hervieu-Leger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*. (France: Polity Press, 2000), 132.

<sup>14</sup> IBID 132.

## 2.3. Survey and Results

The study of memory has been of greater interest recently. This is especially the case with its influence on sociology. Many theories exist trying to explain this connection that memory has with sociology. One popular one and probably the most helpful is Assmann's theory. He sees memory operating on two primary levels and distinguishes between them. These are communicative memory and cultural memory.

Communicative memory consists of everyday experiences, conversations, and jokes. It is the things that we must remember every day in order to function in society with others from working a job, communicating with family, or hanging out with friends. "Its most important characteristic is its limited temporal horizon."<sup>15</sup> The memories consist of the more fluid, fragile memories of everyday life that haven't been written down and more concretely formalized. Therefore, these are not memories that have been passed on to us and they are probably not memories that will take a concrete form and be passed down to future generations, shaping future societies.

So if communicative memory is categorized by memory needed for the short term and everyday life, cultural memory is the opposite. It consists of the memories that last over a lifetime, are written down and passed down from generation to generation and are a part of forming culture. Assmann explains it himself like this. "Cultural memory takes shape gradually, and communicated meaning (memories) thus acquires an objectified form. That meaning then becomes binding and is what molds the self-image of a group and its value perspective. To put it more simply, cultural memory subsumes and encompasses all knowledge in a society, and that

---

<sup>15</sup> Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, *Collective Memory and Cultural Identity*. (Stanford University Press, 2006), 127.

knowledge normalizes society's actions and experiences and is handed down from generation to generation in the socialization process [Assmann 2015:54-57]" (18). Cultural memory takes on concrete forms.<sup>16</sup> Here Assman defines the unique aspects of cultural memory yet also goes on to show how it is intertwined with communicative memory. The two work together with cultural memory flowing out of communicative memory.

However, while they are distinct concepts, they also are intertwined with each other making it difficult to distinguish them fully. Assmann himself admits that research shows that distinguishing between individual and social memories is very difficult, if not impossible.<sup>17</sup> While distinct ideas, distinguishing them proves to be very difficult. For the purpose of this study on religious memory, Váně focuses on Assmann's approach of memory.

Assmann says it like this, "what communication is for communicative memory, tradition is for cultural memory."<sup>18</sup> Without the need to communicate, communicative memory is not needed. They go hand in hand. Tradition and cultural memory also go hand in hand which shows why cultural memory goes a long way in forming a nation's identity and should be included in the conversation of sociology. Traditionally, a culture is formed by a group of people sharing the same background and group identity. When formed, these groups are geographically located in one general region. They start to form a history with shared memories and traditions. Myths are formed leaving a story running throughout a culture's history that is a unifying cultural characteristic. These become essential aspects of culture's identity. Cultural memory of these identity shaping factors and what will continue to be identity shaping memories are then passed down. These together are part of the makeup of a culture.

---

<sup>16</sup> Jan Váně et al, *Continuity and Discontinuity of Religious Memory in the Czech Republic*. (Brno: Barrister Principal 2018). 17-18.

<sup>17</sup> Jan Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory*. 3.

<sup>18</sup> *IBID*. 8.

When talking about the importance of a myth on a culture's identity, Váně writes, "the national mythology is the foundation of collective identity, so if we want to understand religious memory, it is necessary to discover where religion figures in this form of shared narrative or memory."<sup>19</sup> Every culture will have a myth that makes up its collective identity. One major challenge in Czech cultural memory is that the myths that make up their national identity are split and fractured. Váně continues with the three myths that he sees in Czech history. These three are Catholic, Protestant, and Communist. Each of them have their own heroes throughout Czech history. Depending on which group one identifies with, that individual interprets history through the lens of that myth with their national heroes.<sup>20</sup> Váně describes this split national identity as a "deep schism within religious cultural memory."<sup>21</sup>

Czech religious history, then, is not a unifying factor for culture, and thus, forming their national identity like many other countries have. In fact as the country with the highest percentage of non-religious people, it is clear that religion does not have a large place in society or a strong influence in the majority of people's lives. The schisms in religious cultural memory are a large factor for the present makeup of religion in the Czech.

In more detail than I will explain here, in the book *Continuity and Discontinuities of Religious Memory in the Czech Republic*, those who made the survey explain how they went about their questions in order to capture the flow of Czech thought toward religion based on communicative and cultural memory.

However, there are a few points to highlight about the survey that are relevant here because they seek to understand individuals' mindset when viewing their own history as well as

---

<sup>19</sup> Jan Váně, *Continuity and Discontinuity of Religious Memory in the Czech Republic*, 27.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 27-28.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

the “consistency of views between parents and their children.”<sup>22</sup> By seeking out to accomplish this task, they begin to show the change in religious identity between parents and children by the shared memory or lack thereof that exists between the two.

For the first part of this, they asked a series of questions to which the respondents could mark how strongly they agreed or disagreed. These questions focused on specific historical events, holidays, people, and places. From their response, they could measure the attitude toward these questions. They were just trying to determine whether people interpreted history from a spiritual or secular perspective. Yet, from the responses, they also found a third position. Some people simply had no interest in the correlation between religion and history.<sup>23</sup> However in the end they conclude, “The basic finding here is that religiosity is indeed reflected in how people interpret Czech national history.”<sup>24</sup>

The second important aspect they sought to measure was the continuity of religion. They chose to do this through asking a series of questions focusing on church identity, church attendance, and Christian items in a house to multiply members of the same family in different generations, for example mother or father and a son or daughter. They also poled these individuals asking them to answer the questions based on different stages in their lives. The categories were ages 0-18, 18-30, 31-49, (check these groups). This allowed them to see the continuity/discontinuity within one’s view on religion and whether it continued once people moved out and were living on their own. It also gave insight into which stages in life people are influenced the most and are forming their own views on the world.

What was the outcome of this? “In sum, elements of religiosity were most often (in 76%

---

<sup>22</sup> IBID.76.

<sup>23</sup> IBID.85.

<sup>24</sup> IBID.81.

of cases) lost during the period of young adulthood. The theories and research mentioned in the theoretical and methodological sections above regard the period of young adulthood (age 18-25) as crucial in determining whether religious identity is lost or maintained. Our findings confirm the expected significance of this ‘critical period’ in life. However, they also indicate that religious identity and, to some extent, religious practices in Czech society tend in a portion of the population to be lost somewhat earlier, that is, during childhood. The erosion of traditional religiosity in the memory of respondents was thus a steadily occurring process.”<sup>25</sup>

From a young age, youth and young adults in the Czech are struggling to see the importance of their religious identity in life. This causes many people to give little thought to their faith. As children are growing up and in such a critical period of their life, as the surveys show, religion is not understood to be important or have an impact on everyday life and very little desire for religion to be true is shown at all.

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 130.

### 3. Desirability

Over the three and a half years of teaching youth English and leading a youth group in the Czech Republic, I got to interact and ask youth many questions. Sometimes I would ask what do you think of when you think of Christianity or do you think Christianity is a good thing? Often I would hear about the wars throughout history where Christians were involved or even the reason for them. Other times I would hear that Christianity was important for the past but has no bearing on our lives today. Many think it is just a set of rules that is placed on one's life which takes the fun away from living. Others even added that Christianity was bad for the world because of its responsibility for so many wars throughout history and one is better off without it.

All of these responses view Christianity as undesirable. Something that even if it were true, it isn't wanted in people's lives. The perception built around religion focuses on mistakes of the past, things that are offensive to our culture today, misunderstanding about what Christians believe, and often negative encounters with friends, parents, or even individuals they have had with Christians themselves or with the church.

Yet others thought that it probably is important for their lives but struggled when it came to seeing how or what difference it made in the common everyday life. They were open to it on an intellectual level but didn't necessarily desire it in their own lives enough to pursue it. The difference that faith makes on one's life hasn't been explained or modeled for them. It isn't a part of their normal everyday conversations with people largely due to how few believers there are. On top of that, religion has been pushed into the personal, private realm of life and is not typically brought into the public sphere.

So the question again must be asked, how can the gospel again grab hold of people's

hearts in the Czech Republic? A world-renowned scholar, Lesslie Newbigin, talks about the need for real, authentic missionary encounters. He says that in post-Christian societies it is especially important for this to take place for the gospel to be received into people's lives. What he is pointing out is that in western post-Christian countries, society has changed but people are not aware that the foundation of these societies are changing and people are not addressing them with the gospel causing a large disconnect between the gospel and life.

What does he mean exactly when he speaks about a real authentic missionary encounter? The point he is trying to show is the need for understanding the mindset and framework of the culture we are communicating to. People who go to another culture outside of their own in order to share the gospel are often times considered missionaries. Because it is often a foreign culture than the one they know, in order for a missionary to have an authentic encounter with someone, they have to do the work of understanding how they think and are approaching the topic. When the work is done to understand this, the missionary is better able to address the point in a way that is meaningful to the hearer. In other words, in a way that connects the gospel to their lives. This is an authentic missionary encounter.

Czech history is long and complicated as are most countries' histories. Their history is part of what makes the Czech Republic so unique. It sits in the center of Europe and has been involved in so many different governments and powers while also being pulled back and forth between the east and the west because of its central location. It has gone through hundreds of years of Catholicism followed by Protestantism and back again to Catholicism along with the great battles that have characterized each of these religious/political shifts. They have gone through times of great prosperity and power as well as great low points of poverty, abusive regimes, communism, and countless periods of change by powerful countries sweeping through



the Czech lands. These times have been deeply engraved in Czech minds and thus Czech culture. In just the 100 years of Czech history, so much has happened and changed. Most recently, there is a new period of democracy bringing up a new generation which has not experienced the horrors of communism that plagued their parent's and grandparent's generations. This short period of so much change has done a lot in influencing their current situation and mindset leaving a great need for work to be done for Christians to connect the gospel to life in a meaningful way for Czech unbelievers.

The abusive powers, corruptive systems, interest only in its own good, persecution toward religion, harsh treatment toward anyone opposed to the system, among many other things flows out of the naturalistic materialistic atheistic belief in this world which greatly influenced the country during WWII and the period under communism. This has led to a great distrust toward institutions, individuals, a willingness to cheat and do what it takes to get ahead, privatized beliefs, harsh treatment of kids, overly sexualized media, and a belief that nature, away from people and the headaches of life, is the place where peace can be found. After communism fell, a strong push toward western influence has given rise to a western, rationalistic, scientific worldview focused only on progress. Christianity became disconnected from modern values and unrelated to everyday life and the church struggled to present the gospel as a desirable, meaningful message with great importance for addressing the challenges of the day.

Here we find ourselves today, after a very difficult period in Czech history where Christianity is seen as something of past importance without relevance on our modern scientific world and people's practical daily lives today. Christianity has lost its way in this culture and people struggle to see why it means anything for their lives today. It is not even desirable

whether people are convinced that it is true or not.

The need to ask what it takes to have an authentic missionary encounter with Czech people is great. There is so little fruit taking place and in my experience, many Christians want to stay with strategies and approaches that have worked in the past and have answered questions that people used to ask. The problem with it is that it answers the questions people had many years ago and with millennials in our society today different questions are being asked. Therefore, new strategy and a renewed engagement about how the gospel speaks to our world today is in dire need for people to listen. I believe that it is our job to do our best to live out our faith in a way that is visible to those around us and do our best to engage those around us with the gospel in a way that engages the questions and challenges that they have. I believe that God wants us to partner with Him in making His name known. Part of this requires us to present the gospel in a way that is true to its message and desirable for those who believe it.

This is why Paul Gould, professor at Oklahoma Baptist University, calls us to cultural apologetics. He defines cultural apologetics as “the work of establishing the Christian voice, conscience, and imagination within a culture so that Christianity is seen as true and satisfying.”<sup>26</sup> He argues that more is needed than just a presentation of truth because this truth has become detached from many parts of the world today. Work is needed to present that truth as desirable before people are going to be willing to receive it. Yet, as he argues, it is nothing new. This is exactly the thing that Paul is doing when dialoging with the Athenians in Acts 17.<sup>27</sup> It is also captured in a quote from Blaise Pascal who writes, “Men despise religion; they hate it and fear it is true. To remedy this, we must begin by showing that religion is not contrary to reason; that it

---

<sup>26</sup> Paul M. Gould, *Cultural Apologetics: Renewing the Christian Voice, Conscience, and Imagination in a Disenchanted World*. (Zondervan 2019), 21.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 25-34.

is venerable, to inspire respect for it; then we must make it lovable, to make good men hope it is true; finally, we must prove it is true.”<sup>28</sup>

A difficult concept for many to grasp is with the need for making the gospel desirable for individuals and in what manner to do this. On the one hand, people say just preach the truth and let the Holy Spirit do the rest. On the other hand, some change the truth in order to sound less offensive to the group they are preaching too which really changes the gospel message. However, both extremes miss the point entirely. The question must be, how can we communicate the gospel truth to a certain culture which thinks and asks different questions than those who came before us. Making the gospel message desirable to a group without changing the truth of the message is crucial for effective communication. For example, if I am trying to convince someone that a plant-based diet is better for them and start by explaining all about the diet, it may do very little if the individual doesn't desire it. No matter how well I explain the lifestyle, they will probably not want to do it. However, if I start by telling them why it is good for them, the problems with eating meat, and how good I feel by doing it then they will be more willing to listen to the ins and outs of the diet itself.

Making the gospel desirable is part of what is called contextualization. This seeks to form the message of Jesus Christ to a specific context in a way that will better be understood. For authentic missionary encounters to truly take place, contextualize must also take place. When explaining what this means exactly and defending against critics who say that contextualization is watering down the gospel, Timothy Keller helpfully explains it in this way. “Contextualization is not – as is often argued – ‘giving people what they want to hear.’ Rather, it is giving people the *Bible’s answers*, which they may not at all want to hear, *to questions about life* that people in

---

<sup>28</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (New York: Collier, 1910), 68, #187.

their particular time and place are asking, *in language and forms* they can comprehend, and *through appeals and arguments* with force they can feel, even if they reject them.”<sup>29</sup>

Contextualization then is not changing the truth of a message or simply adopting a culture’s influence.

To contextualize the gospel properly and faithfully, we must study culture more to learn how that specific group thinks and what is desirable to them. This all changes from one culture to the next and from one individual to the next within a culture. For the communication of the gospel to take place, it must be “in the language of the receptor culture.”<sup>30</sup> This happened from the beginning when God broke into our world through Jesus into that particular culture. Yet, just like Keller, Newbigin is careful not to argue that we must simply fit the gospel to a culture. Christianity is about the revelation of God speaking into our world and that revelation is only revelation if it involves contradiction and thus conversion. While speaking the truth of the gospel without contextualization means speaking in a way that the listeners don’t understand, fitting the gospel message into a culture to give them what they want to hear removes revelation from the message and thus the message itself.

Furthermore, plausibility structures must be taken into account. The term “plausibility structures” which Peter Berger coined is very important to this conversation. Every culture has a framework of ideas through which they understand the world. This framework must be understood for the world to make sense and for new ideas to be understood, they must be filtered through this framework. When ideas or beliefs presented fall outside this core set of values

---

<sup>29</sup> Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*. (Zondervan 2012), 89.

<sup>30</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*, 5-6.

(plausibility structure), individuals or cultures are not willing to see them as plausibly true.<sup>31</sup> If something said makes the message implausible then that message will not be received whether or not it is true.

Newbigin was able to see this clearly because of returning to England later in his life after being a missionary to India for forty years. The England he left was much different after forty years from how he left it and from how people thought in India. What was accepted before and in India was no longer viewed as plausible and thus was no longer accepted. He understood that for the gospel to then be communicated, his message had to be communicated differently in order to be received and then challenge the new structures ruling England.

Plausibility structures are very important for religious memory and thus it is vital to understand them for the transmission of religion. Váně states it in this way, “‘Plausibility structures’ are thus a tool for the maintenance and transmission of a certain definition of reality. Direct, face-to-face communication occurs within these structures, during which plausible definitions of reality are passed on and are reinforced, while the influence of competing definitions of reality is weakened. We can say, then, that plausibility structures are of key importance for religious cultural memory, because they constitute the space or milieu that facilitates the continuity of religious memory.”<sup>32</sup>

Along with many other western countries, the Czech Republic has a very scientific mindset underlining their plausibility structure. This is a very strong tendency that Czech people have that has pushed the spiritual world away. It is only what is seen and can be proven that is plausible. This makes it challenging since the spiritual realm cannot be proven in the way they

---

<sup>31</sup> Paul M. Gould, *Cultural Apologetics: Renewing the Christian Voice, Conscience, and Imagination in a Disenchanted World*, 140.

<sup>32</sup> Jan Váně, *Continuity and Discontinuity of Religious Memory in the Czech Republic*, 32.

want it to be and faith is often not seen as making a difference for most Czech people.

Another part of the Czech plausibility structure is the belief that faith and religion should be a private, individual choice. Within this understanding of reality, belief in God must come about on one's own. It is not a communal belief and primarily isn't brought about through group interaction. This has changed from when family took a greater role in an individual's personal formation. Back when families still primarily lived in rural communities, their family and community carried great importance when an individual learned how to understand life and other foundational thoughts about God and this world. However now in individualized, urban settings, the same conversations with family members and the community around them are no longer happening. This influence has been lessened which has been replaced by social media, popular culture, and the illusion that people come to their own conclusions about God and the world. In reality, they are not truly coming to their own conclusions even then because the culture is shaping their thought more than often times admitted. Yet because of the culture's plausibility structure, individualization takes priority and beliefs must be formed by an individual on their own.

### 3.1. Desire in the Church

The present state of Christianity in many Czech evangelical churches seems like it is out to simply survive rather than to engage a new generation with the good news of Jesus Christ. The persecution that took place under the communist regime and the beauty and desire for goodness that naturalism sought to eradicate brought many to a pretty mundane view of this world. A naturalistic view of life takes us out of the beautiful story that God has placed us in. Gould writes, “[Naturalistic e]volutionary accounts of man’s creative capacities don’t provide adequate justification for the imagination and our inventive faculties.”<sup>33</sup> Yet, the church is not void of the effects that this belief about the world brings. Instead of flourishing in what God has made good, the temptation from a disenchanted world is to find fulfillment in other places or to simply lose the sense of urgency and necessity that the gospel shows us we need in Christ.

Because of living in this kind of environment for so long, I can’t help but notice how this has affected the church as well. The challenges of living in this environment with so few believers and life-giving, Bible-oriented opportunities can be daunting. The church must continually seek to re-find itself in the story of Scripture and actively get involved in what God is doing. This can happen through stories, conversion testimonies, personal conversations, music, art, service, testimonies about the beauty of what God is doing in this world, etc. As leaders of Czech churches, I think this needs to be a focus in their work. Because of a culture with such challenging, slow-moving results and conversions, a pastor or leader must aim at encouraging people to look at how God is active in this world and what He is doing. Reasons on top of that to focus on this is because of the difficult history of communism being so recent and doing so much

---

<sup>33</sup> Paul M. Gould, *Cultural Apologetics: Renewing the Christian Voice, Conscience, and Imagination in a Disenchanted World*. 109

to privatize and quietize religion. People need to be reminded and encouraged to see what God is actively doing. This, I believe, will reawaken a desire for people to think about what God is doing and want to become part of it. Exercises to reawaken this desire even more may be through imagination. Imagine together ways that God may want to work or about what God is going to do.



## 3.2. Reawakening Desire

Gould writes, “Beauty calls us home. It awakens and transports us. Beauty – in nature, in art, in humans, in the divine – awakens a longing within us for a world where everything is as it should be, where everything fits together in the right way.” Shortly after this he adds, “the most beautiful thing you can do is locate your life in God’s story.”<sup>34</sup>

Meaning and beauty in life comes from the one true story: the gospel story. The more we are able to recognize this and see ourselves in it, the more beautiful this world becomes. The reality is that this world is God’s beautiful design and He is a creative God. God created this world good and made earth a place for humanity to flourish. The intention, design, and detail behind it all instills in us the wonder of God. Deeper still is the beauty and wonder of grace which we can experience ourselves in knowing Jesus Christ which is the core of the gospel story.

Gould goes on to give some practical encouragement for reawaking imagination for faithful, fruitful gospel witness. First, he calls us to what he calls “imaginative reasoning”. How we communicate in each area whether teaching, preaching, evangelism, etc., we must use our imagination to communicate gospel truths. He notes “[i]maginative reasoning is not easy. We must study theology, *and* we must study culture. Then we must learn to make thoughtful connections between the two.”<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, we must create avenues for art and artists within our churches as well as encourage their faithfulness to Christ. Expressions showing beauty has the power to open people’s minds to the beauty of God and point them to Him. It creates longings and desires for

---

<sup>34</sup> Paul M. Gould, *Cultural Apologetics: Renewing the Christian Voice, Conscience, and Imagination in a Disenchanted World*, 104-105.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 114.

something beyond a meaningless life that a world without God would mean.

As we create these avenues for the gospel to be seen through the imagination, art, beauty, and reason, we must also confront the idolatry in society. Paul “walked around, [...] outflanked the thinking of the Athenians, [...] and] confronted their rank idolatry”<sup>36</sup> When we look at our world today, we see that it is disenchanted, sensate, and hedonistic. These are all directly opposed to the way in which God created us and the world. God has created the world with truth, beauty, and goodness. However, these are all being replaced by disenchantment, materialistic, sensate individuals, and hedonism making it necessary for us to engage with each of these areas in order to show the beauty of God and reawaken desire for Christianity. Gould, along with many others, see the need for us to engage each of these areas through reason, imagination, and conscience.

Gould charts this out beautifully by showing the starting points we have in our culture today and how they lead to Jesus Christ. As we confront the false sources that our societies find fulfillment in, they also lead to avenues for presenting the gospel as desirable. As we point out how disenchanted, sensate, and hedonistic our society really is, we can show how they are really misplaced longings for truth and beauty. These longings point to a desire for Jesus Christ through our intellect, conscience, and imagination because God has designed us for Himself.

Furthermore, “Our job in seeking a missionary encounter with modern human beings is to reawaken the rational faculties of the soul to the reality of God and a God-bathed world.”<sup>37</sup> We need to show how this world points to God and how our lives are longing for the goodness of God’s created order which is not corrupted by sin. Christian societies already recognized a God-bathed world. Today, in post-Christian, post-modern societies, there is a need to show how our

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 30.

lives are ingrained with traces of God and present Christianity as something that is good and relevant for our world today.

Ways to do this are to point out that “[d]eep within the human conscience, we find an unexplainable longing for wholeness, justice, and a meaningful life.”<sup>38</sup> These universal longings are a testament to God’s design and goodness. They do not line up with the naturalistic, evolutionary worldview which argues that life arose by random chance and no design. Wholeness, justice, and a meaningful life come from a loving, relational, close God who made the world by design. These are great things for the world and, when believed, make the world a better place. Without them, society cannot be sustained and people cannot live satisfying lives. This goes to show that we are made by design.

There is a great void not being satisfied by worldly pleasures. Since 2008, suicide has again been on the rise in the Czech Republic.<sup>39</sup> This is an incredibly sad statistic which many different reasons could be given for what causes it. Yet at its very foundational level, I believe that it is evidence that lives are not satisfied by the temporary fulfillment that the world offers and a deeper longing exists. This deeper longing is for God and for a world that He made. The belief in a world without God that many believe is all that exists leaves many hopeless and seeking for something greater.

Disenchantment, which in the Czech, has been caused because of a naturalistic, materialistic worldview squeezes the beauty out of life. The disenchanted world of our day is most clearly seen by the widespread immediate gratification that our society says we should have, the materialistic focus of the world we live in, and the downward moral standards that

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>39</sup> This statistic is found at <http://www.praguemonitor.com/2017/09/11/czechs-lack-national-suicide-prevention-strategy>.

culture is moving toward. These things include moral distinctions being erased, acceptance of abortion, cheating in school and dishonesty in the workplace, overly sexual media, alcoholism, etc. Society has lowered the standard that God has set and replaced what is good for temporary fulfillments. Christianity's hope in a restored world that comes through Jesus Christ provides true hope for those living in an otherwise hopeless world. The church must be a place of authentic life-giving relationships that point people toward Christ.

In many ways the Czech Republic is unique but in this way it isn't. Countries that are heading toward a postmodern, atheistic, scientific, view of the world are showing the signs of a disenchanted world. This is true in North America and all over Europe. However to me, it seems like it is a bit further along than the other countries around it due to the inundation of a naturalistic belief about the world from communistic thought and a Czech desire not to be religious.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Harriet Sherwood, "Christianity as Default is Gone: The Rise of a Non-Christian Europe." [https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/21/christianity-non-christian-europe-young-people-survey-religion?fbclid=IwAR307ewSaHTI-u\\_2zF1Stalrvqkj3LGiiM8\\_JFSXkaqBFMlcoLngljJ2Z04](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/21/christianity-non-christian-europe-young-people-survey-religion?fbclid=IwAR307ewSaHTI-u_2zF1Stalrvqkj3LGiiM8_JFSXkaqBFMlcoLngljJ2Z04).

### **3.3. Cultural Apologists**

When communicating the gospel in a post-Christian country, this question of desirability becomes especially important. For many, Christianity has become known as what it is against or the wrongs that have been done in the name of Christians rather than what the church is for. In a post-Christian country, Christianity has also often become disconnected from everyday life. The good news of Jesus doesn't necessarily become bad news but rather irrelevant and news that isn't desired.

As cultural apologists, we should approach this problem a different way. Instead of starting with a foundational understanding of Christianity, we must present our arguments from the ground up with different starting points. For example, instead of assuming a general knowledge of sin and a willingness to identify as a sinful individual, especially since science would say that this is a pessimistic way of thinking, we could start with the universal longing for goodness and justice or morality and show how we fall short (due to sin) and can only achieve it through Jesus Christ. This uses what is desirable to a specific culture, which will change between cultures, as a starting point for presenting the truth of Christianity. By engaging individuals in this way, I have found people to be more open and willing to listen. The key is to determine the good in what a culture desires, use that as a starting point, and show how we need Jesus to make it possible.

As culture changes and nations which have traditionally been Christian nations and now have moved or are moving to post-Christian nations, the effective starting points for the gospel change. This is because Christianity has become less familiar and desirable as well as less understood. While before Christianity was seen as a good thing, that can't be assumed anymore

and we now need to find what others find desirable. Because of being created for a purpose by God, humanity has universal longings and desires that can be used to point us back to God. The challenging part of this is that we must look for places to engage culture so that they will listen and we must address misunderstandings and barriers which people have toward the gospel. This kind of work on the front end must take place in order for people to listen and understand how the gospel is relevant and important for their lives.

Miroslav Volf, a renowned scholar originally from Croatia, talks about the problem we are now facing like this. “Our world has been split into two realities, the mundane and the transcendent, and we no longer know how these separate worlds fit together. Our innate longing for meaning compels us toward a transcendent while our longing for pleasure draws us to the mundane. Many of us languish in the valley between the transcendent and the mundane, too distracted and lethargic to commit one way or the other.”<sup>41</sup> Our world today doesn’t know how to reconcile the longing for a transcendent reality with the tangible material world we live in. Our job as believers trying to point others to Christ is to show this problem, point out why the mundane isn’t enough and why we were created for and need the transcendent reality.

Volf goes on to write, “Attachment to God amplifies and deepens enjoyment of the world.”<sup>42</sup> The gospel of Jesus Christ goes beyond a detached spiritual, transcendent reality that has no impact on our lives today. It is very much the opposite. It is a very connected spiritual reality that deeply affects the way we live today. Understanding this is correlated with the desirability of the gospel. Misunderstanding is often the cause of Christianity being seen as undesirable. When addressed and explained, the perception toward Christianity can change.

---

<sup>41</sup> Paul M. Gould, *Cultural Apologetics: Renewing the Christian Voice, Conscience, and Imagination in a Disenchanted World*, 175.

<sup>42</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 205.

When we speak about the desirability of the gospel and a culture that no longer sees the gospel as desirable, we must ask why not or what has taken the place of it? Gould has done a great job at looking at some of these things that have taken the place of a Christian worldview and keeps Christianity from being seen as desirable. Much of what has happened is from a purely naturalistic, rationalistic view of the world. The culture then becomes disenchanting, sensate, and hedonistic.<sup>43</sup> The beauty of the world that God has created is lost or blind to this kind of culture. The beauty and transcendence that we were created with is lost and taken place by a materialistic, hedonistic mindset that is only focused on what can be seen here and now.

What lies at the heart of the Christian worldview is truth, goodness, and beauty. These are inherent to us as human beings and for a genuine missionary encounter to happen, we must reawaken these. What a church gets involved in to show the goodness and justice of God will look different because of the different societal factors that have shaped each culture's worldview or what is seen as beautiful in the arts is different culture to culture. Therefore, how one church depicts God's beauty will be in a different way than other churches in other cultures. Once we understand and are able to connect a culture's influence on how people see and understand the world, then we are able to do the work of understanding how a culture thinks in order to speak about the gospel in a way that people understand and connect with. A starting point for a positive view of Christianity will then have been made.

One great starting point for the gospel in Czech culture is their great love for nature and spending their weekends away in nature. This love for nature is especially true in České Budějovice because of the beautiful part of the country the city is located in and how close it is to the Alps and other beautiful spots in the surrounding countries. There is a great longing to be

---

<sup>43</sup> Paul M. Gould, *Cultural Apologetics: Renewing the Christian Voice, Conscience, and Imagination in a Disenchanted World*, 27.

out in nature and for the most part, when the weather is nice, people are away from the city spending time in nature. I have found that many Czechs who lived during communism know all the cool places and castles around because it allowed for an escape. People are able to connect with the beauty of creation to a degree because that is where they find peace and refreshment. This is such a cool part of Czech culture and it can be a great starting point for showing the beauty of God when used to point people toward God.

Unfortunately, many good things take the place of God and we love them over God. Often, these are good things like nature, cool modern inventions, and material aspects of life that make it enjoyable. The problem we face is what we love.<sup>44</sup> These loves take place of God but cannot satisfy us in the way that God can. We want them and desire them to do what only God can do. Over time, we become hardened to God. The habits we form are hard to break.<sup>45</sup> They often don't change instantly. It takes time and learning a new way. This is reinforced by what we know about how the brain works. It forms pathways and the more we do something or think in a certain way, the stronger the pathways become and the harder it is to change them. We need to walk alongside individuals to allow them to see and learn what following Christ is all about. This goes for believers and unbelievers alike. We need to engage in the culture forming sacraments that makeup the church as a way to form new pathways in the brain and make them a habit to get them to stick in our lives.

As the church, are we forming the next generation to be part of the community of faith and being shaped around this? As Smith says, we are habitual creatures and the world is constantly shaping youth without them knowing it. How are we countering this for those in the

---

<sup>44</sup> Augustine talks about how our loves are ordered. The order falls apart from how God originally designed as a result of sin and will eventually destroy our lives if left untouched long enough.

<sup>45</sup> An idea that James Smith develops in his Cultural Liturgies series.



church? How are we connecting the gospel to their lives? Are we teaching them to take part in gospel community and teaching them to remember God's grace in the world? We must teach the foundational elements of our faith as the center pieces for understanding our world. When we do and show how God's grace is connected to our lives today, the gospel will become desirable for many.

As we seek to instill Christian doctrines into our lives and culture as cultural apologists, we must remember that this task is not strictly "about delivering true content. We must not neglect the relational aspect."<sup>46</sup> So often when people think of apologetics, they think of knowing the arguments to show unbelievers why they are wrong. It is important to remember that "the goal in effective persuasion is to be a faithful witness. The goal isn't to win the argument or shame a community or individual for holding false beliefs."<sup>47</sup> The job of a Christian isn't just to reason with people to show them they are wrong, although it is important to know why we believe what we believe. Our job is to show them Christ. This involves compassion, service, and relationship.

---

<sup>46</sup> Paul M. Gould, *Cultural Apologetics: Renewing the Christian Voice, Conscience, and Imagination in a Disenchanted World*, 126,128.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 142.

## 4. Practical Engagement

Over the past three and a half years, I have been blessed to be able to serve in the Czech Republic. This has provided me with countless opportunities to build relationships with people through teaching English, sports, and the university. Through these relationships, I have been able to share my faith with many of these friendships. Surprisingly, I have found people very open to talking about God and faith. Many view atheists as individuals who have already made up their mind and are against any kind of belief in God. However, with Czech people, I am not sure this is the case because so many were willing to talk and explore ideas of God but often told me that they don't know anyone else who is openly talking about their Christian faith like I was. Over and over, this reminded me that there is great opportunity for people to hear about Jesus and explore what the Christian faith means and how it engages with our world today.

With the current statistics showing a rising number of irreligious people between the ages of sixteen to twenty-nine, a continuing break in religion being passed on between parents and their children, as well as a continuing lack of fruit in many areas of the Czech Republic, a renewed vision and strategy is necessary for reaching Czech people: a vision and strategy that has been tailored to the Czech context at this point in history which incorporates the gospel into the current cultural mindset of Czech people today. The intentionality that it takes to form a vision and strategy is greatly needed for churches in the Czech Republic.

There is a great need to, in a sense, rewrite history. One of the problems today is the perception that people have about Christianity. It typically consists of a negative viewpoint and that Christianity is very disconnected and unimportant regarding their lives. It is also part of a

Czech history that is fractured, split, and disjointed.<sup>48</sup> Everyone interprets Czech history differently forming three main divisions as shown in the survey and results. It is often said to be a thing of the past and responsible for the many wars throughout its history. No wonder it is not desirable to many. The blame can only be put on the church. This perception must change and it must be the people of God who change it. The church today must begin rewriting this history in order for it to change how future generations view the church.

---

<sup>48</sup> Jan Váně, *Continuity and Discontinuity of Religious Memory in the Czech Republic*, 48-49.

## 4.1. Theological Vision

A theological vision is “a faithful restatement of the gospel with rich implications for life, ministry, and mission in a type of culture at a moment in history.”<sup>49</sup> In other words, a theological vision is presenting the good news of Jesus Christ in a way that speaks to the deepest needs and desires of a specific culture at a specific time. The need for a theological vision is necessary for people in every culture at every point in history because it is how the gospel is brought to bear on a culture and how it is communicated to those people. When the gospel speaks into a culture’s mindset so deeply that it addresses the foundation that people have within it, the gospel will become relevant and desirable to the audience listening.

When we look back 2000 years, or even 1000 years, it is clear that the world has changed. Scientifically, our understanding of the world has changed. Socially, the values that we place on certain relationships and family ties has changed. Internally, what motivates people has changed and what is valued in society has changed. Naturally, the mindset of those living today has changed from those in previous periods of history. The questions asked about God, the world, and ourselves have also changed. There are fundamental questions and things we strive for as humans but how they are articulated and talked about has changed.

Change is constantly happening between generations, cultures, and families. Clearly, the change is often slower and not as drastic when we look at periods of history closer together or similar cultural outlooks but there is still change and as believers seeking to be faithful witnesses

---

<sup>49</sup> Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*, 19.

to Jesus Christ, we must seek to better understand how the change affects our audience's lives in order to address them with the gospel.

I was recently having a conversation with a friend of mine who is also a missionary. He said something to the extent of, a mature believer is one who understands the gospel so well that he or she is able to communicate it and apply it to the specific needs of their culture at their specific time in history. It is easy to simply relay a message in the same way that it has been given to us but it is hard to understand it so well that we can keep the same message but say it in a different way so that people will understand as their own understanding of the world changes.

He is right on when he says this. This is a challenge I have seen among Protestant Czech churches keeping the gospel from being understood and desirable. The work of understanding the audience and using the gospel to speak into the present day has not been done. The need then is to form a theological vision that understands the culture's questions, hesitations, and desires well enough to speak directly to them with the gospel.

Notice that it is not the doctrinal foundations that must change or be reinvented. Keller helpfully shows how our doctrinal foundation forms our theological vision which in turn forms our ministry expressions.<sup>50</sup> So it is not the doctrinal foundation which must be changed but the theological vision out of which ministry expressions flow. Forming a theological vision takes a lot of study and thought. Because of this, many churches don't even have one. This vision will drive what a ministry looks like in a particular church. While churches may have the same doctrinal foundation, their theological vision and ministry expressions will still be different based on the city and community where they are located.

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 20.

Forming a theological vision requires finding the balance of how the gospel engages a specific culture. How a church engages with the world around them by deciding what to accept or reject is part of what gives a church a theological vision. In order to do this well, those in the church must know the culture around it in order to know where it is possible to speak into a culture without compromising the truth of Christianity as well as being faithful witnesses and effective communicators in the culture God has placed us in. Developing a theological vision involves contextualizing the gospel. While the gospel message is the same, the way it speaks to people is different. For example, in honor/shame cultures the gospel must be communicated differently than in guilt/innocence or fear/power cultures. These factor into it because people see the world differently and loves differently. How we communicate to people that they have a need for God must change then if they are going to understand it. When emphasizing the importance for contextualization, Keller states, “[s]kill in contextualization is one of the keys to effective ministry today.”<sup>51</sup>

“Active contextualization involves a three-part process: entering the culture, challenging the culture, and then appealing to the listeners.”<sup>52</sup> Before we are able to tailor the gospel message to a specific audience, we must ourselves become an essential part of the makeup of that community. We must learn to think and reason as they do in order to ask and wrestle with the questions that they wrestle with. Once we do, we will be able to challenge our audience in where they fall short and their understanding is wrong. This is what makes the gospel desirable and appealing. Finally, we must appeal to our audience in a way that speaks to their deepest needs and desires with the gospel message.

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 90.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 120.

Yet in every gospel presentation there is a challenge to the listener that they are wrong in their understanding of God, have a need for God because of being separated from God, and a presentation of Christ who makes a way to God for us.<sup>53</sup> The message of the gospel does not change. Rather, what changes is the way in which we communicate it and the way in which we challenge an audience in order to show them of their need for Jesus.

An important question that shapes theological vision is who or what is the church. “What is the church? [Searle asks] ... It is significant that in the whole Bible there is no single reference to the Church as an organization or as a building.”<sup>54</sup> It is not a program or a building. It is the group of people who have been called out by God. Our need is to know the love of God through Christ for us. This comes through compassion and seeing God’s love through God’s people. Most times this comes through relationship. The church (people of God) cannot run from society, rather we must bring the gospel to bear on it. Wherever we are we must wrestle with how theology intersects with it. In our work places, homes, schools, friendships, etc.

Furthermore, in forming a theological vision, we must answer the questions about how the church will interact with culture. What is good? What is bad? What will a church accept from a culture and what will they reject? Then, how will a church get involved and be a part of the culture in which they live? In asking these questions, it will reveal the idols of a society and help give clarity on what issues and attitudes are contrary to the gospel, which must then be addressed.

In some ways, forming a theological vision and ministry expressions is similar to the paradigm of seeing, judging, and acting. They are similar in that everybody comes to the table

---

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 113.

<sup>54</sup> Joshua Searle and Mykhailo Cherenkov, *A Future and a Hope: Mission, Theological Education, and the Transformation of Post-Soviet Society*, 2245.

with some kind of theological base seeking to understand the context they are seeking to serve. Then, as we see what is going on in our communities around us, we must judge to see what is good and bad and where is help needed. This is similar to forming a theological vision because of the practical aspect of a church's theological vision and what they are seeking to do in that specific community. It is different, however, because with a theological vision the primary goal is to present the gospel. The challenges are focused on the idols and the heart. The goal is communication of the gospel. So if the see/judge/act paradigm is focused on social justice and the betterment of a society, these may be included in a church's ministry expressions but a theological vision focuses more on communicating the truths of Scripture. In both cases, those having an impact in communities are very intentional in doing this process to one degree or another as it helps make clear the needs of their specific context.

Forming a theological vision is part of the contextualizing process. This is desperately needed for the message of Jesus to be relevant and understood in our day today. As Keller points out, contextualizing the gospel to a specific culture goes deeper than just being relevant and having a presence in society. It addresses the heart and points people to Christ in a way they understand and find important for their lives today. He says, "Sound contextualization shows people how the plotlines of the stories of their lives can only find a happy ending in Christ."<sup>55</sup> This is part of awakening desire. When Christianity speaks so deeply that it is seen to be relevant to their lives, people will begin to desire it. The other part of it is when people see Christianity to be good, they will begin to desire it.

Contextualizing the gospel to the Czech context is also important so that an American gospel is not adopted. Even when contextualizing, everyone brings their own presuppositions

---

<sup>55</sup> Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*, 90.



and cultural norms. However, I often see missionaries try to impose an American point of view on Czech people and Czech pastors adopting views from American scholars without being aware of how the context is different. Contextualizing is important to connect with an audience today so that methods and evangelical tactics are not blindly adopted from the past or from the American context.

A large part of the gospel that I believe many American churches miss is with striving for the kingdom of God here on earth. The kingdom of God must be the goal as it is what Jesus prayed for and the picture that Scripture paints in Revelation rather than a distant, spiritual heaven. N.T. Wright reminds us of the New Testament's focus on the kingdom of God and how we are called by God to be active participants in bringing his kingdom here to earth.<sup>56</sup>

In every culture, those working in it must do the work to find the balance of the gospel when communicating it to those in the culture. Grace is a very challenging thing for us to understand because we do not grow up hearing messages of grace. Most people grow up learning that they must work for it. Others think they are entitled to it. Both sides don't truly understand it. The attitude that the gospel brings is so contrary to the world we live in. Every culture emphasizes one attitude or another that is contrary to the gospel. As cultural apologists, we must find this understanding that is wrong and speak to it. Only by doing so will the gospel be faithfully communicated.

---

<sup>56</sup> N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, (HarperOne 2008).

## 4.2. Listening

A key element in forming a theological vision and then for engaging a culture is listening to the culture. Communication is always a two-way street. Just speaking does not mean that a message is being communicated. In order for communication to happen, it must also be heard and understood. For this reason, it is so important to first listen and understand a culture. Only by doing so will one know how to relate to a culture and become an effective communicator. By first understanding a culture, an individual will know how to tailor a message so that it will be received.

In regards to communicating the message of the gospel, Keller states, “All throughout our gospel communication, we are seeking to connect to our listeners’ deepest desires.”<sup>57</sup> The gospel speaks to the core of who we are. In order to communicate the gospel well, we need to know what the listener’s deepest desires are and how the listener will be open to receiving the message. We must have listened and asked good questions to get to know our listeners. Many times Christians only speak thinking they have the answers instead of listening to get to know those they are speaking to.

Showing the importance of listening and walking beside individuals in the mystery of God for overcoming atheism in the Czech Republic, Tomáš Halík does a wonderful job allegorizing the story of Zacchaeus to depict the current state of Czech people. He sees Czech people being like Zacchaeus in Luke 19. After communism fell and freedom of religion was again recognized, many Christians publically confessed their belief in God and were excited about the new freedom. However, there were others, as Halík notes, who were shy about

---

<sup>57</sup> Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*, 130.

jumping up to exploring Christianity. After all, they did just live through many years of communist pressures and probably wrestled with why God, if he exists, seemed so distant to them throughout their history. They, like Zacchaeus, wanted to keep their distance. They like how Zacchaeus was small in stature were a little shy and wanted someone to understand all they had gone through and why they doubt. They want to see Jesus but also wanted to keep their distance just like Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus probably struggled in a personal battle because of being a tax collector and the reputation that was given to him because of it. Czechs lived through many horrible things and like many of us also struggled in a personal battle over some of the things they have done. They wanted someone to understand and walk alongside of them. They wanted someone to call them by name.

Jesus did this very thing when he saw Zacchaeus in the tree. Jesus called him by name because he knew his struggles. Jesus knew what he had gone through. Jesus knew him intimately. “The only person capable of addressing Zacchaeus is someone who ‘knows his name’ and knows his secret.”<sup>58</sup> Jesus noticed him where others didn’t and while Zacchaeus thought he was safe and unnoticed, watching from a distance, Jesus unexpectedly knew his name and spoke directly to his heart. Jesus knew him by name. In the same way, Halík believes that atheism is just a disguise for Czech people. It is not that they have even necessarily made up their minds that God doesn’t exist. They are just a little shy and hesitant to approaching Jesus directly and publically. What they need is for someone to call them out by name and walk through the mystery of God’s hiddenness with them. Calling them out by name requires gospel contextualization. It requires that Christians understand their listeners well enough to speak into their lives while walking through life with them.

---

<sup>58</sup> Tomáš Halík, *Patience with God, The Story of Zacchaeus Continuing in Us*. (Doubleday 2009), loc 213.



### 4.3. Visible Faith

Moving outside the walls of the church allows others to see our faith at work. It allows for a visible faith that seeks the good of the city. This is what God called the Israelites to do in Jeremiah 29. Even though they were exiled, they were to seek the good of the pagan city.<sup>59</sup> As Christians, we are not to retreat from the city but build it up and seek influence in it.

At the heart of Jesus' time on earth was showing compassion to those around him and genuinely loving them through relationship. As followers of Jesus, we are to model our lives and our relationships after his. For the church to do this well, believers must take their faith to their work places, families, friendships, schools, and the public square with a desire to have the gospel speak to their everyday lives and interactions. Czech people are not going to come to church on their own. They are not seeking God because, for the most part, they don't see the spiritual realm as relevant to their lives. They want to see what faith really looks like. They want to see what difference it makes. A visible faith outside the walls of the church is necessary for a reawakening of faith in the Czech Republic.

The church should be visible and in the public square not to just have a program or get something done but as a means of building relationships, caring for their communities, and showing compassion. In a summary to what the church should be Joshua Searle says, "Compassion is expressed primarily not through programmes and initiatives, but through relationships. Compassion is the defining character of the Kingdom of God. This Kingdom is

---

<sup>59</sup> Jeremiah 29:7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

concerned with relationships.”<sup>60</sup> Relationship is such a powerful thing because it connects us to other people’s lives and deals with real problems and challenging situations. Relationship also breaks down many barriers. Barriers like mistrust, hesitations, and many wrong perceptions about the church.

It is especially important for churches in post-Soviet contexts to move outside of the walls of the church to preaching the gospel through showing compassion in the city. A church’s influence should be more than just preaching from the pulpit or telling people how they can come to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Joshua Searle has worked extensively in the Post-Soviet context. He has spent most of his time in Ukraine but was also in Prague for at least a year. With regard to the current state of the church and where it is headed he writes,

“churches that will flourish in the post-Soviet missional context will be those communities that integrate mission into their ministries of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18) and are prepared to take risks by breaking down social barriers of race, nationality, language and even religion itself—all for the sake of the gospel. Churches that abdicate this responsibility—by maintaining an inward-looking concern with personal salvation or saving souls at the exclusion of redeeming people from social and economic injustice—will become more and more sidelined and eventually rejected as having nothing to say to the surrounding culture.”<sup>61</sup>

In agreement Tomáš Halík writes,

“Throughout the history of the church, solidarity with the poor and socially deprived, care for the sick and handicapped, and courage to stand up for the oppressed, the

---

<sup>60</sup> Joshua Searle and Mykhailo Cherenkov, *A Future and a Hope: Mission, Theological Education, and the Transformation of Post-Soviet Society*. (WIPF & STOCK), Loc 2315.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, Loc 441.

exploited, and the persecuted, have been part and parcel of Christian witness in this world, and maybe it is now more necessary than ever before.”<sup>62</sup>

It has also been my experience with many Protestant churches. These churches are inward focused rather than seeking to show the world the same kind of compassion and love that Jesus himself showed. A growing separation between the church and culture has been felt by many. The Protestant church has been reluctant to get involved with social issues of the day and instead has focused solely on the spiritual inner relationship we can have with God through Jesus with a hope in a future heaven. This however is not the prayer that Jesus prayed asking the father to bring His kingdom here on earth. Our job as he notes is to reconcile people to the Lord but this includes social justices rather than excludes them. What needs to change is its theological vision and application because right now in most churches, there is no vision for engaging the culture with the gospel. This is especially true in a post-Soviet missional context but is also true in many other countries today as well.

“Resurrection doesn’t mean *escaping from* the world; it means *mission to* the world based on Jesus’s *lordship over* the world.”<sup>63</sup> Mission is based on Christ’s resurrection and the kingdom that he is bringing to earth. Christ has inaugurated the kingdom and is working to bring it about through the Holy Spirit. As Christians then, we should be seeking to bring the good news of Christ’s kingdom in a tangible, practical way to life today. This requires us to live out our faith in our areas of influence. Simply preaching a gospel that is all about what happens after we die is not the kingdom that Christ had in mind.

---

<sup>62</sup> Thomáš Halík, *Patience with God, The Story of Zacchaeus Continuing in Us*, Loc 342.

<sup>63</sup> N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 235.

Historically, the church has not done a very good job in the realm of the public square. When looking at how a disconnect in religious memory has come about, Jan Váně says,

“It appears, moreover, that after being oppressed by the communist regime for several decades, the Church became forever cautious [...] about presenting its opinions to majority society. This attitude was also the source of the Church’s evident unwillingness to address current issues in the public space. This unwillingness is not limited to the communist era; the Church has made and continues to make no visible effort to influence public opinion. Its tactic is rather to wait things out. The problem of the Church’s irresolute behavior is amplified by the hesitant and unclear approach it has taken to solving its own internal problems, which includes a failure to adequately address the legacy of the collaboration of priests with Communist regime, the lack of transparency in its financial management, and sexual wrongdoing by some priests [Hanuš 2005; Prudký 2005]. It has also been claimed that the churches and their position in society in the late 1980s and early 1990s were overly and erroneously idealized (or overestimated out of ignorance) as an important positive force in society [Nešpor 2004: 25].”<sup>64</sup>

Searle gives a response to how the church should be instead of a passive, unwillingness to engage in the public space. He says, “Instead of trying to attract people into buildings where religious events take place, the evangelical churches situated in post-Soviet societies should instead become outward-looking, boundary-pushing communities that infiltrate the surrounding population with the transformative message of the gospel.”<sup>65</sup> A mindset shift is needed in order for the reawakening of the gospel in the Czech Republic. This shift must be from trying to

---

<sup>64</sup> Jan Váně, *Continuity and Discontinuity of Religious Memory in the Czech Republic*, 60-61.

<sup>65</sup> Joshua Searle and Mykhailo Cherenkov, *A Future and a Hope: Mission, Theological Education, and the Transformation of Post-Soviet Society*, Loc 493



survive and operating out of the confines of the church to serving outside of the walls of the church to engage that community with the gospel.

The distrust and skeptical view that people have on the church must be overcome gradually. The best way to do this is to show that the church is for the community and cares for those in it whether they ever step into the doors of a church or not. For people to see this, they must seek faith and love taken to the public square.

Part of the vision that I have is seeing the church re-engage the culture with the gospel in order to bring hope to a city and regain relevance in the city. I envision a church that is actively seeking the good of the city and showing the love and compassion of Jesus to the world around it. A place where believers seek to join in with God's world restoration project. I envision a group of people who are seeking to genuinely walk alongside the hurt and broken to understand their doubts and still invite them into their community. The church should be a place known for the life-changing power of the gospel in a more holistic way than just an inward, spiritual conversion. It should push people to compassion and social justice.<sup>66</sup>

So what does it look like for a church to be actively engaging a culture with the gospel? If the church does this, it will be in the public square and serving outside the walls of the church showing the compassion and love of Christ to the world around it. A church in the public square is not necessarily political, although not excluding politics, but will have a presence in the society around it outside of the church building.

While it will ultimately change between churches and cultures, some ideas may be to have English camps, regular youth clubs, tutoring, serving the poor and needy, getting involved

---

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, Loc 360.

at a retirement home, prison ministry, marriage courses, home groups, volunteering for community events, camping trips, some kind of sports league and talking about your faith over a beer afterwards, etc. What ministry expressions flow out of our theological vision is what we will turn our attention to next.

## 4.4. Ministry Expressions

Ministry expressions are defined as “How the gospel is expressed in a particular church in one community at a point in time.”<sup>67</sup> They are the direct application of a theological vision. For successfully engaging a culture with the gospel, a theological vision must inform what a church looks like. Three important things must be grasped for this to be implemented successfully. First, ministry expressions are not confined to programs. A program can be the outworking of a theological vision which would be categorized as a ministry expression. However, a conversation or relationship can also have traces of ministry expressions. Second, as a church decides where it is to get involved, it is important to again remember that the church must be looking to the needs of their own city rather than to what another church has done that works. Simply recreating what someone else is doing is not applying a theological vision to the specific context that a church finds itself in. Other reasons it won’t work are due to each church being made up differently. Different location is one aspect but having different people who have different lives, passions, and giftings greatly changes what ministries a church should have. Lastly, ministry expressions must focus on relationship and flow out of relationships. Programs can’t communicate the gospel to a person like a relationship can. People are people not numbers.

Ministry expressions can take on all kinds of forms. It could be the kind of music sung at church, the style of the worship service, forms of discipleship, ministries involved in, how a church gives back to its community, ways to share the gospel, etc. The extent to which this practically looks is endless.

---

<sup>67</sup> Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*, 20.

Different ministries make more sense in some contexts over others. For example, in the United States, youth groups are often places where religious memory is passed on for believers and unbelievers alike. However, in the Czech Republic, a youth group at a church may not be the best way for this. While an English club is not likely to work as well in America, it may work very well in the Czech for communicating the Christian faith if it is also focused on teaching the Bible. Teaching English as a second language makes more sense in southern countries close to the border with Mexico than in North Dakota.

What is needed is ways to build authentic relationships with individuals and organically integrate the gospel into life today. These are going to be practical ways that we can put our theological vision to work to engage individuals by connecting the gospel to their lives. This focus must be kept in order for Christianity to have relevance again. People don't want more programs to be involved in, people want answers to their problems and the other challenges that our world brings on a regular basis. Ministry must stem from relationships that seek to understand and implement the gospel in the lives of those living today.

People want real answers to real life and they want to see that faith is real and makes a difference. This is a key to sharing one's faith. Live it out. Especially today, in the scientific age we live in, people only want to believe what they can see and prove. Faith isn't this way but I believe that people do want to see that it is genuine and makes a difference.

Based on the results of the work done on religious memory in the Czech Republic, ministries focused on children and youth may take on a greater significance for many churches. These results show that children who participated in some kind of religious practice as a child

were around 20 times more likely to hold orthodox beliefs as an adult.<sup>68</sup> It is clear that this age is very important for children's development and for them learning what to believe.

From a young age, it should be a Christian's desire to instill a desire and credibility for Christianity in children's lives. When children are exposed to Christian practice at a young age, studies show that they are much more likely to show signs of faith later on in life. This goes to show how important youth ministry is.

---

<sup>68</sup> Jan Váně 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, no. 3 (2013): 403-25. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23535184>. 418-419.

## 4.5. Youth Focus

Say a church's vision statement was to reach the next generation of youth with the gospel of Jesus Christ. One example of how this could look and something that could work based on my experience in České Budějovice, could happen by establishing a youth center in the city. This center could have any sort of things like an after-school program, language classes, tutoring, youth group, etc. It could meet on certain nights of the week, weekend, or every day. It could be a place for youth to have fun, be cared for, get help, build relationships, and learn about Jesus Christ.

For it to work, the leaders must first and foremost be about the relationships and the individuals themselves. They must show the love and compassion of Christ in all that they do. This can go a long way to overcoming the hesitations that many Czechs have when meeting new people and the negative view of the church that many people have. I believe that people really do desire to be known and be loved. This is often times more attractive than the program itself in the long run.

From my experience in the České Budějovice, I have found great success in building relationships with youth through teaching English. This came primarily through teaching in a language school and by leading a youth group. These environments provided a safe place for youth to come learn English and to talk about who Jesus Christ is and whether or not he still means anything for people today. I found that when I built relationships in these settings, the conversations about God were more natural. It wasn't done in a way that forced it down their throats or made anyone there uncomfortable. People knew that I genuinely wanted to hear their

thoughts and were very interested whenever I posed a good question that made them think about what Christianity means for life today or how it is important for their lives.

Working with youth in the Czech Republic also provided many challenges and connecting with youth for the first time was often difficult. Some of the factors presenting challenges were early independence, sports commitments, and reserved manner toward new relationships. The level of commitment at young ages required for sports is pretty astounding. This varies based on the sport but weekends are often days for games with practices on week nights. This made it difficult to find a time to have youth group that sports kids could come to. A youth center would certainly provide more opportunities if it was open daily.

In České Budějovice, children have a lot more freedom here at younger ages. This is partly due to the small city of České Budějovice with how easy it is to get around and how safe it is. Another part that I see pertains to the parent's involvement in the lives of youth. Youth seem to have more of a say, from a younger age, whether they want to attend the youth group or get involved in some area of life. They are much more likely to say well it is up to the child whether he or she wants to come or wants to be involved in an activity. This can present a challenge to getting kids to come to religious gatherings and activities. Outreach must attract the kids and when they come they must feel cared for in order for them to want to come back.

Children also seem to have less direct religious influence from their parents due to the individualization and pluralization that rules our society today. While the religious influence isn't directly talked about, children easily pick up on the religious attitudes of their parents. This also has a big impact since family is so important in Czech culture.

Whatever one's theological vision and form of ministry may be, here are some things to keep in mind. Continue to be focused on the gospel. Form a holistic approach that seeks to connect the gospel to the specific context that you are in. Remember the relationships. Live out your faith in public.



## 5. Recovering Missions Personally

A common misconception in many Protestant churches must be reversed. It is that “it is inaccurate to think the gospel is what saves non-Christians, and then Christians mature by trying hard to live according to biblical principles. It is more accurate to say that we are saved by believing the gospel, and then we are transformed in every part of our minds, hearts, and lives by believing the gospel more and more deeply as life goes on (see Rom 12:1-2; Phil 1:6; 2:13-14).”<sup>69</sup>

Recovering missions personally takes preaching the gospel to ourselves and letting it permeate our own lives first. When we do so, we will find the passion that will drive us to sharing the incredible news of Jesus Christ with others. God’s grace must make a difference in our own lives before we will be driven to share it with others. “Effective mission requires conviction, passion, and deep and authentic personal faith.”<sup>70</sup> All throughout Scripture, we are reminded to remember. Remember what God has done in history. Remember what God has done in our own lives. Remember what God is doing and what he has promised to do. So often we forget. So often we are distracted by the tasks of everyday life. If we are not careful, this can quickly sidetrack us from God’s story and again we need to be reminded of it. In a world constantly preaching different messages to us, are we intentionally remembering God’s grace and shaping our lives around the gospel?

Renewing a passion for the gospel in our lives isn’t enough. We must take part in it. N.T. Wright says, “Scripture—the Old and New Testaments—is the story of creation and new

---

<sup>69</sup> Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*, 48.

<sup>70</sup> Joshua Searle and Mykhailo Cherenkov, *A Future and a Hope: Mission, Theological Education, and the Transformation of Post-Soviet Society*, 1949.

creation... We read it as the narrative in which we ourselves are now called to take part.”<sup>71</sup> As God’s people, we must be the church. This happens when we join in with what God is doing in the world. We do this as we live out our faith in the areas of influence (work, school, friendships, etc.) that God has given us and as we take part in what God is doing through the local church.

One of the most attractive things Christians can do is live out their faith in an authentic way for the world to see. This doesn’t take large programs. It doesn’t take a lot of money. It doesn’t even have to start with a lot of people. It starts with those of us who believe. We must love those around us by making ourselves a neighbor.<sup>72</sup> This is how the passiveness, unwillingness, or an inability to change one’s life for the better that is said to exist from the soviet mentality<sup>73</sup> will be changed.

---

<sup>71</sup> N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 281.

<sup>72</sup> Thomáš Halík, *Patience with God, The Story of Zacchaeus Continuing in Us*, 2048.

<sup>73</sup> Joshua Searle and Mykhailo Cherenkov, *A Future and a Hope: Mission, Theological Education, and the Transformation of Post-Soviet Society*, Loc 668.

## 6. Bibliography

Albright, Madeleine. *Prague Winter: A Personal Story of Remembrance and War, 1937-1948*. Harper Perennial, 2013.

Assmann, Jan, and John Czaplicka. "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity." *New German Critique*, no. 65 (1995): 125-33. doi:10.2307/488538.

Assmann, Jan, and Rodney Livingstone. *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*. Stanford University Press, 2006.

Evans, Jonathan, and Chris Baronavski. "How do European Countries Differ in Religious Commitment." Pew Research Center, December 5, 2018. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/12/05/how-do-european-countries-differ-in-religious-commitment/>.

Evans, Jonathan. "Unlike Their Central and Eastern European Neighbors Most Czechs Don't Believe in God," Pew Research, June 19, 2017. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/06/19/unlike-their-central-and-eastern-european-neighbors-most-czechs-dont-believe-in-god/>.

Gould, Paul M. *Cultural Apologetics: Renewing the Christian Voice, Conscience, and Imagination in a Disenchanted World*. Zondervan, 2019.

Gould, Paul M. "What Is Cultural Apologetics?" *ChristianityToday.com*, Christianity Today, 15 Apr. 2019, [www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/april-web-only/what-is-cultural-apologetics-paul-gould-excerpt.html?utm\\_source=ctdirect-html&utm\\_medium=Newsletter&utm\\_term=23852560&utm\\_content=645632710&utm\\_campaign=email](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2019/april-web-only/what-is-cultural-apologetics-paul-gould-excerpt.html?utm_source=ctdirect-html&utm_medium=Newsletter&utm_term=23852560&utm_content=645632710&utm_campaign=email).

Halbwachs, Maurice. *The Collective Memory*. Harper & Row, 1980.

Halík Tomáš. *Patience with God: The Story of Zacchaeus Continuing in Us*. Doubleday, 2009.

Hervieu-Leger, Daniele. "Religion as a Chain of Memory." (France: Polity Press, 2000).

Keller, Timothy. *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*. Zondervan, 2012.

Keller, Timothy. "Gospel Identity Conference." Conference lectures, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, November 17-18, 2017.

Lanier, Sarah A. *Foreign to Familiar: A Guide to Understanding Hot- and Cold-Climate Cultures*. McDougal Publishing, 2010.

Lingenfelter, Judith. *Teaching Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Learning and*

*Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

Moreau, A. Scott, et al. *Introducing World Missions*. Baker Academic, 2004.

Newbigin, Lesslie. *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986.

Piper, John. *Let the Nations Be Glad!: the Supremacy of God in Missions*. Baker Academic, 2010.

Rattay, Mgr. Petr. *Atheism in the Czech Republic*.

Raus, Pavel, et. al. *Barriers to Church Growth in the Czech Culture*.

Sahgal, Neha. "Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion Views of Minorities and Key Social Issues." Pew Research Center, October 29, 2018. <http://www.pewforum.org/2018/10/29/eastern-and-western-europeans-differ-on-importance-of-religion-views-of-minorities-and-key-social-issues/>.

SEARLE, Joshua and Mykhailo Cherenkov. *A FUTURE AND A HOPE: Mission, Theological Education, and the Transformation of Post-Soviet Society*. WIPF & STOCK, 2014.

Sherwood, Harriet. "'Christianity as Default is Gone': The Rise of a Non-Christian Europe," *The Guardian*, March 21, 2018. [https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/21/christianity-non-christian-europe-young-people-survey-religion?fbclid=IwAR307ewSaHTI-u\\_2zF1Stalrvqkj3LGiiM8\\_JFSXkaqBFMIcoLngljJ2Z04](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/21/christianity-non-christian-europe-young-people-survey-religion?fbclid=IwAR307ewSaHTI-u_2zF1Stalrvqkj3LGiiM8_JFSXkaqBFMIcoLngljJ2Z04).

Smith, James K. A. *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology*. Baker Academic, 2017.

Smith, James K. A. *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*. Brazos Press, a Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016.

Urbaniak, Jakub. "Religion as Memory: How Has the Continuity of Tradition Produced Collective Meanings? - Part One." *HTS Theological Studies* 71, no. 3 (2015): 1–8. doi:10.4102/hts.v71i3.2815.

Urbaniak, Jakub. "Memories as Religion: What Can the Broken Continuity of Tradition Bring about? - Part Two." *HTS Theological Studies* 71, no. 3 (2015): 1–10. doi:10.4102/hts.v71i3.2933.

Váně, Jan, Dušan Lužný, František Kalvas, Martina Štípková, and Veronika Hášová. *Continuity and Discontinuities of Religious Memory in the Czech Republic*. Brno: Barrister Principal, 2018.

VÁNĚ, JAN, 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, no. 3 (2013): 403-25. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23535184>.

Vane, Jan. "How/What to Tell to Make Them Listen or the Czech Catholic Church Setting Agenda in the Public Space." *STUDIA THEOLOGICA-CZECH REPUBLIC* 17, no. 3: 203–29. Accessed October 24, 2019. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edswah&AN=000367114200013&lang=cs&site=eds-live>.

Volf, Miroslav. *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World*. Yale University Press, 2017.

Wright, N. T. *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. HarperOne, 2008.

## 7. Abstract

Keywords: Religious memory, desire, culture, authentic missionary encounter, apologetics, the gospel, contextualization, theological vision

The Czech Republic is a unique country with a unique history. It is often known for being the most atheistic country in the world. While an indifferent attitude toward God and religion exists throughout the country today and this trend only growing, it shows that in order for the gospel to again grab hold of the hearts and lives of Czech people, a renewed engagement between how the gospel and culture relate must take place. This paper looks at the current state of religion in the Czech Republic through the lens of religious memory and the current attitude toward the gospel. It then looks at the necessity for addressing this attitude by engaging the culture with the gospel through the outworking of a theological vision. This is then followed by a personal challenge for recovering missions in one's life.

## 8. Abstrakt

Klíčová slova: Náboženská vzpomínka, touha, kultura, autentické misijní setkání, apologetika, evangelium, kontextualizace, teologická vize

Česká republika je jedinečná země s jedinečnou historií. Je o ní známo, že je nazývána nejvíce ateistickou zemí na světě. I když dnes po celé této zemi je rozšířený lhostejný postoj k Bohu a náboženství a tento trend dále roste, ukazuje se, že aby evangelium znovu uchopilo srdce a životy Čechů, musí dojít k novému propojení evangelia a kultury. Tato práce se zaměřuje na současný stav náboženství v České republice prostřednictvím pohledu náboženské vzpomínky a současného přístupu k evangeliu. Dále se zaměřuje na nutnost řešení tohoto postoje propojením kultury a evangelia prostřednictvím propracování teologické vize. Poté následuje osobní výzva k obnovení misie v životě člověka.