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Religious Life in an Industrial Town

The Example of Ostrava, 1850–1950*

In the first half of the twentieth century, Ostrava (Moravian Ostrava, Greater Ostrava), as the center of the Ostravian industrial area (with a high concentration of plants that use coal, iron, and steel and were involved in the chemical industry in the nineteenth century), was not only an important center of Austria–Hungary and then Czechoslovakia, but also served as an important center of modern religious life in the Czech lands. Between the two world wars, the Ostravian area was the center of the Czechoslovak atheistic movement, the National Czechoslovak Hussite Church, and the Middle-European spiritualistic movement. In this essay, which is based on records and statistic materials from Ostrava City Archive and other Czech archives, will map religious life of Moravian Ostrava in relation to two social groups, the working class and the middle class of both the Czech and the German speaking populations, including German speaking people of Jewish origin. The second observed phenomenon, proselytism, will be described based on Books of religious conversions of the Roman Catholic Parish Office from 1854 to 1920. I consider the frequency of conversions between individual confessions, the most frequent reasons given for conversion, mixed marriages within working class and middle class environments, and Jewish converts to Roman Catholicism.

Keywords: religious life, industrial town, atheistic movement, national church, spiritualistic movement, proselytism, Ostrava, 1850–1950

There is a stereotype prevalent in the Czech and Central European historical scholarship in connection with a territory of temporal Ostrava and the Ostrava industrial area according to which they were the most important centers of the coal and iron industries of the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy and Republic of Czechoslovakia.¹ However, to mention Ostrava and the Ostrava industrial agglomeration² as an important center of modern Czech, Czechoslovak and even

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1 Karel Jiřík et al., *Dějiny Ostravy* (Ostrava: Archiv města Ostravy, 1993), 7–10; Blažena Przybylová et al., *Ostrava: historie / kultura / lidé* (Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2013), 7–8.

2 Milan Myška, “K vymezení ostravské průmyslové oblasti,” *Český lid* 53 (1966): 121–33; Olga Skalníková, “Problém Ostravska jako průmyslové oblasti (příspěvek ke studiu vytváření novodobé etnografické oblasti),” *Český lid* 60 (1973): 358–65. The Ostrava industrial area developed without regard to state, administrative,

Central European religious and spiritual history may sound a bit sensationalist.³ Nevertheless, Ostrava and Ostravsko underwent before and after World War I a dynamic economic, social and religious development that resulted in the emergence of interwar Ostrava as a center of the atheist movement, one of the Czechoslovak centers of the National-Catholic Czechoslovak Church,⁴ and local spiritualists who changed Ostravsko into a Central European spiritualistic movement.⁵

The following text is devoted to collective (institutional) and individual actors of the religious and confessional development of the region of Ostrava in 1850–1950 on the basis of the example of Moravian Ostrava. First, I consider the two traditional institutions of that process, the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church (the Evangelical Church of Augsburg) and the local Jewish community. The second part of the text is devoted to new institutional actors. They entered the religious life of the region and the whole state after World War I. The motivation for the establishment varied. The Czechoslovak Church used reformed Catholicism. The Association of Social Democratic Atheists was based on a scientific world view. The religious views of spiritualists were outside of the frames of institutional confessions. An analytical part of the text is addressed to inter-confessional mobility, conversions between individual

ethnic or ethnographic borders as an industrial region with an extreme concentration of industrial plants and workers' colonies, and without a connection to an older industrial tradition. The core of the Ostrava industrial area became the communities of Moravian and Polish (Silesian) Ostrava, Vítkovice, Petřvald and Karviná, and within the industrial area two settlement agglomerations emerged, Moravian (Greater) Ostrava and Fryštát (Karviná).

3 Martin Jemelka, "K náboženskému životu v Moravské Ostravě (1854–1920)," *Acta Facultatis Philosophicae Universitatis Ostraviensis*, Historica 15 (2008): 41–63; Martin Jemelka, "Proselytismus jako modernizační fenomén (na příkladu Moravské Ostravy v letech 1850–1920)," in *Město a městská společnost v procesu modernizace 1740–1918*, ed. Pavel Kladiwa, and Aleš Zářický (Ostrava: Ostravská univerzita v Ostravě, 2009), 168–78, 376–77, 393; Martin Jemelka, "Sociálnědemokratické bezvěrecké hnutí na meziválečném Ostravsku," *Ostrava: sborník k dějinám Ostravy a Ostravska*, 26 (2012): 135–65; Martin Jemelka, "The Social Democratic Atheist Movement in Interwar Ostravsko," in *Secularization and the Working Class: The Czech Lands and Central Europe in the 19th Century*, ed. Lukáš Fasora, Jiří Hanuš, and Jiří Malíř (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, Pickwick Publications, 2011), 174–92; Martin Jemelka, "Židovský proselytismus jako modernizační fenomén (na příkladu Moravské Ostravy v letech 1854–1920)," in *Židé a Morava XVI.: sborník z konference konané v Muzeu Kroměřížska 11. listopadu 2009*, ed. Petr Pálka (Kroměříž: Muzeum Kroměřížska, 2010), 75–88.

4 Antonín Barcuch, "Počátky církve československé (husitské) v Radvanicích," *Těšínsko* 48, no. 3 (2005): 20–23.

5 Martin Pilař, "Blouznivci a spiritisté v Ostravě," in *Bílá kniha: 17 příběhů z ostravské kulturní historie*, ed. Ivo Kaleta et al. (Ostrava: Statutární město Ostrava, 2009), 169–70.

confessions (with particular focus on conversions between Jews and Roman Catholics), and mixed marriages (which were the main reasons for conversions).

Traditional Actors in Religious Life in Terms of Industrial Cities

Up to the proclamation of the December Constitution in 1867, Moravian Ostrava kept the character of a homogenous town by confession, with clear domination of leading Roman Catholics. From the 1850s, however, the Roman Catholic town had to absorb Jewish immigrants from traditional Moravian Jewish centers and North-Eastern Hungary (Trencsén), and Lutherans from near Těšín Silesia. Up to January 1, 1907, a parish office of Moravian Ostrava provided the diocese and four other villages with 65,839 inhabitants (1900)⁶ and belonged to the deanery of Místek. The medieval church of Saint Wenceslas was the parish church up to the year 1890. Between the two world wars, the redemptorist convent for pastoral duties of the Eastern Catholics Rite emerged. It was then the newly built parish and dean Church of the Divine Saviour, with a capacity of 4,000 people, that was the second largest Roman Catholic church in Moravia, first consecrated in the year 1889.⁷

In Roman Catholic churches services had been held in Czech for a long time, but as of the 1880s attempts were made to preach in German as well, and in Moravian Ostrava Polish missionaries from the area of today's Poland, who led the missions for the Catholics from Silesia and Galicia, also held services in Polish. The last decade of the nineteenth century brought the enforcement of bilingual sermons in the main church, which was a great wish of the urban congregation. So already at the end of the century the linguistic or national part of the congregation played an important role in local religious life.

In addition to Czech, German and Polish nationalists from the municipal council and members of the nationally conscious working class, another opponent to Roman Catholicism emerged around the year 1900, and not only in Ostrava. This new opponent was the socialistically oriented industrial working class. The workers of rural origin were confronted, in the difficult conditions of Ostravian agglomeration, with the harshness of the reality of the industrial region and severed from traditional agricultural society. Paradoxically, the vast majority of Ostravian clergy of the second half of the nineteenth century and

6 Jiřík et al., *Dějiny Ostravy*, 670–71.

7 Libuše Cimalová and Karel Jiřík, *Farní úřady římsko-katolické církve na území města Ostravy: sdružený inventář (1609–1950)* (Ostrava: Archiv města Ostravy, 1963), 10; Jiřík et al., *Dějiny Ostravy*, 526, 536, 562, 614.

the first third of the twentieth originally came from the country.⁸ Priests who were not yet Roman Catholic were able, with some exceptions,⁹ to react around 1900 to the pastoral challenges of an industrial town and society, (matrimonial law and coexistence, birthrate regulation, political activities of labor.) The lack of social empathy, which can be excused by the rural origin of Ostravian clergy and its conservative value horizon, played a key role in the process of secularization, or at least in its interpretive narrative. This reality is retrospectively verified by the success of the Ostravian Salesian mission from the 1930s, which settled in Salesian oratory between two biggest Ostravian working class settlements of Hlubina a Šalomoun mines (approximately 5,000 inhabitants),¹⁰ and a role of socially empathic Roman Catholic priests in the collective memory of Ostravian working class.¹¹

Between the two world wars, Ostravian Roman Catholic priests opposed not only the organized working class and its political (The Czechoslovak Social-Democratic Labour Party, The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia) and worldview organizations (physical training and atheist social-democratic and communist organizations), but also the growing influence of the Church of Czech Brethren and the National-Catholic Czechoslovak Church, which grew from the postwar nationalist and pro-reformed ferment of Czecho(slovak) Roman Catholic clergy. During World War II, the majority of Ostravian priests managed to avoid any direct confrontation with the Nazi regime, but P. Štěpán Trochta (1905–74, 1969 cardinal “in pectore”), a cofounder of the Ostravian Salesian, work did not escape its attention.¹² However, the open confrontation

8 More Lukáš Vaculík, *Dějiny římskokatolického děkanství v Moravské Ostravě (1948–1989)* (Ostrava: Katedra historie Filozofické fakulty Ostravské univerzity v Ostravě, rukopis diplomové práce, vedoucí diplomové práce PhDr. Martin Jemelka, Ph.D., 2011), 104–10. We come across members of the Catholic clergy with proletarian origins only after World War II, when state socialism, at least in the 1950s, was supported by many priests of working class origin.

9 Petr Přebinda, “Působení kněze a pozdějšího slavného orientalisty Aloise Musila v Moravské Ostravě (1891–1895),” *Ostrava: příspěvky k dějinám a současnosti Ostravy a Ostravska* 26 (2012): 190–230. For example a legendary Biblicist, orientalist and traveler Alois Musil (1868–1944), who worked as a curator in Moravian Ostrava in 1891–95.

10 Martin Jemelka, *Na Šalomouně: společnost a každodenní život v největší moravskoostravské hornické kolonii (1870–1950)* (Ostrava: Filozofická fakulta Ostravské univerzity v Ostravě, 2008), 128–33.

11 “After Karas the other vicar from Heřmanice came to the Roman rectory, Václav Petr. He was the son of a peasant. When he came to us, he was a young, handsome man. He was frank, open-minded, he loved children, he was a priest, a democrat. He spoke openly with everyone, whether you were a member of the other church or not in a church at all. He came here in about 1935 and he was liked by everyone.” Ludmila Turecká, “Kronika,” in *Lidé z kolonií vyprávějí své dějiny*, ed. Martin Jemelka (Ostrava: Repronis, 2009), 124.

12 Jemelka, *Na Šalomouně*, 132.

with the regime was about to break at the end of the 1940s, when the era of state socialism began.¹³

Whilst the Christians who spoke Czech had the support of Roman Catholic priests in Ostrava, the local Lutheran Protestants were put under the intensive pressure of German speakers. They disappeared from Moravian Ostrava in the first half of the eighteenth century, but they were supported to come back after the Patent of Tolerance (1781) and the emancipation after 1848. Because of the insatiable demand for manpower in the following decades, at the height of industrialization the Lutherans from Těšínsko and Prussian Silesia began to arrive. The religious situation of Ostravian Lutherans was complicated by the resistance of the Catholic clergy, which through the municipal council interfered in the religious duties of Evangelical Christians. The local Lutherans nevertheless used the protection of coreligionists among the clerks of Emperor Ferdinand Northern Railway, who extorted permission to perform religious services in workshops and railway depots and also the protection of some influential industrialists and German members of the municipal council headed by mayor Dr. Gustav Fiedler (1849–1936). The first step towards the public emancipation of Ostravian Lutherans was the foundation of their cemetery and chapel (1862). In 1871, the first Protestant vicar was named. The independent Protestant community with its own rectory, with a congregation that numbered 1,456 souls, was formed in Moravian Ostrava only in 1875. The construction of a rectory was begun in 1901, and on October 22, 1905 the cornerstone of Moravian-Ostravian Lutheran Church was laid (Christuskirche). It was opened with the strong support of Prussian Gustav Adolf Foundation in 1907.

While the Roman Catholic diocese was consistently bilingual with a predominantly Slavic element, the Lutheran community in Moravian Ostrava was completely dominated by Germans.¹⁴ Only at the end of World War I and with the establishment of the Protestant Church of Czech Brethren, which also had the support of the new Czechoslovak elite, headed by president Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850–1937), there were significant linguistic and social-professional changes among Ostravian Protestants who called for a declaration of Hussite and Brethren Czech statehood. While the newly established national Church of Czech Protestant Brethren (constituted in December 1918) only addressed

13 More Vojtěch Vlček, *Perzekuce mužských řádů a kongregací komunistickým režimem 1948–1964* (Olomouc: Maticе cyrilometodějská, 2004).

14 *Die evangelische Gemeinde in Mährisch Ostrau* (Mährisch Ostrau: n.p., 1905; Miroslav Kroček, “Z místopisu staré Moravské Ostravy,” *Ostrava: sborník příspěvků k dějinám a výstavbě města* 14 (1987): 238, 246.

believers in Czech, the Protestant Church of Augsburg, which shared the Christ's church together with Czech Brethern, brought together mainly German and Polish speaking Ostravian Protestants who got no support from the Nazi occupation administration. After 1948 they had to go into internal exile.

The Protestant Church of Augsburg became a home for German and Polish speaking Protestant Ostravians after 1918, but before World War I even Ostravian Jews who had converted to Christianity either for personal or professional reasons sought refuge there. Up to 1860, the town of Moravian Ostrava managed to protect its right to prohibit Jews from settling in the town, so in the 1850s Jews first settled in the neighboring Polish-Silesian settlement of Zámostí. In the following decade they were able to move to Moravian Ostrava itself. In 1860, a Jewish Iconic Association for Moravian and Polish Ostrava (*Židovský kultovní spolek pro Moravskou a Polskou Ostravu*), which belonged to Těšín Jewish community, had already formed, but the Ostravian Israelites did not form their own religious community until February 9, 1875. After the cholera epidemic in 1873 the number of Jewish immigrants on both banks of the Ostravice River temporarily fell, but the following migration waves in the 1880s and 1890s brought a great number of poor Galician Hasidic Jews. The newly established Jewish religious community for Moravian and Polish Ostrava and the surroundings (*Židovská náboženská obec pro Moravskou a Polskou Ostravu a okolí*, 1873) included, in addition to the neighboring villages, the towns of Frýdek-Místek and Bohumín. The original chapel in Zámostí was replaced by the Reform Synagoge in Pittler Street (1879), and even seven years earlier the local Jews had begun to bury their deceased in the cemetery in Říšská Street next to the Municipal central cemetery. At the end of the nineteenth century, the Moravian-Ostravian Jewish religious community boasted numerous groups, such as a women's society, a choir, a crafts association, and scholarly and charitable foundations, as well as their own County House (1901) and organizationa physical education organization named Turnverein Bar Kochba (1899). The first rabbi of Moravian Ostrava was Samuel Friedmann (1875–90), who commuted to Ostrava from Těšín. His successors were Dr. Bernard Zimmels (1890–93), a native of Sankt-Pölten native, and Dr. Jakob Spira (1894–1942). The long-time chairman of the Jewish religious community was Markus Strassmann (1875–1903), an entrepreneur in brewing, who was followed by Dr. Alois Hilf (1903–34).¹⁵

15 Jiří Fiedler, *Židovské památky v Čechách a na Moravě* (Prague: Sefer, 1992): 117–18; Jaroslav Klenovský, *Židovské památky Ostravy* (Brno–Ostrava: Moravskoslezské nakladatelství, 1997–1998), 4–12.

After World War I, like the Czech or Czechoslovak Jewry in general, the Ostravian Jewry found itself at a crossroads, compelled to decide whether to acculturate in the conditions of a new Czechoslovak state in which Czech and Slovak were the prevailing languages or to remain among the more than three-million German speaking inhabitants of the newly formed state. Only a few of Ostravian Jews used the opportunity to register as Jewish in interwar censuses of in 1921 and 1930.¹⁶ Together with the threat of the approaching invasion of Nazi Germany into the territory of Czechoslovakia, the flow of Jews seeking the exile in Palestine, the USA or Shanghai grew.¹⁷ About 8,000 Ostravian Jews who remained in the territory of the Czech lands even after the foundation of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia died in the Nazi extermination camps, and only 200 Ostravian Jews came back to Ostrava in 1945. The restoration of the religious life of the Jewish community in Ostrava after 1948, however, was in the hands of the Jews from other Czechoslovak towns, since, apart from a few individuals, the Jews who had survived went abroad in 1945–1948.

Up to the foundation of the independent Czechoslovak state (October 28, 1918), the religious rituals of the followers of other faiths (Helvetic, Old Catholic and Orthodox) were limited in Ostrava and the surrounding industrial villages to isolated visits of the clergymen, occasional visits to the nearest rectory, or giving confession. (For example the Catholics of Byzantine-Slavic Rite had to attend Roman Catholic services before they gained their own parish, which was provided for them as of 1927 by the redemptorists in Saint Wenceslas Church in Moravian Ostrava). Together with the foundation of the new Czechoslovak state, the diocese of the confessions that were only rarely represented before 1918 in Moravian Ostrava or had been newly established (The Czech Brethern Church, Baptists etc.) came into being. Nevertheless between the two world wars Greater Ostrava and the surrounding villages became important centers of the the Czechoslovak Church, Social-Democratic and Communist atheistic movement and spiritualism.

16 The interwar Greater Ostrava was more than the center of conservative Jewry or an important destination for the Czechoslovak reform-oriented Jews. It was the center for secularized Czechoslovaks of Jewish origin for whom Greater Ostrava, with its agile Zionist organizations, was a training ground and a transfer station on the way to Palestine, as it was described by Ivan Olbracht in his works (a novella *O smutných očích Hany Karadžičové* of the trilogy *Golet v údolí* from the year 1937).

17 Mečislav Borák, *Transport do tmy: první deportace evropských Židů* (Ostrava: Moravskoslezský den, 1994), 31–52, 67–116.

Confession	1880		1890		1900		1910		1921		1930	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Without confession	–	–	–	–	16	0.05	–	–	2214	5.3	4236	9.2
Czechoslovak	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	843	2.0	3257	6.7
Evangelical	403	3.0	684	3.6	881	2.9	1322	3.6	2119	5.1	2586	5.6
Israelite	724	5.4	1356	7.0	3272	10.9	4133	11.2	4969	11.9	5205	11.3
Roman Catholic	12,319	91.6	17,188	89.3	25,931	86.1	31,219	85.0	31,398	75.2	30,408	66.7
other/not stated	2	0.01	15	0.1	15	0.05	80	0.2	222	0.5	193	0.4
Total	13,448	100	19,243	100	30,115	100	36,754	100	41,765	100	45,885	100

Table 1. The Confessions of Moravian Ostrava Citizens in 1880–1930¹⁸

Ostrava as a New Center of Interwar Spiritual Life

Immediately after the foundation of the Czechoslovak Republic (October 28, 1918), in its industrial center three new institutional actors entered interwar religious life. They were the Czechoslovak Church, the Association of Social Democratic Atheists and a spiritual organization called the Brotherhood. These new players in both regional and national religious histories had several common denominators. They included Czech nationalism, hostility to the Roman Catholic Church, enthusiasm for modern science, support of women's emancipation, identical ethical imperatives (the struggle against alcoholism and opposition to smoking), and open attentiveness towards new mass media (radio, slides). With a few exceptions, the activities of all three groups targeted only Czech-speaking

18 Sources of Table 1: *Special-Orts-Repertorium von Mähren. Band X., Mähren* (Vienna: K. K. Statistischen Central-Kommission, 1885), 90; *Special-Orts-Repertorium von Mähren. Neubearbeitung auf Grund der Ergebnisse der Volkszählung vom 31. Dezember 1890* (Vienna: K. K. Statistischen Zentral Kommission, 1893), 117; *Gemeindelexikon von Mähren. Bearbeitet auf Grund der Ergebnisse der Volkszählung vom 31. Dezember 1900* (Vienna: K. K. Statistischen Zentral Kommission, 1906), 120; *Statistický lexikon obcí na Moravě a ve Slezsku. Úřední seznam míst podle zákona ze dne 14. dubna 1920, čís. 266 Sb. zák. a nař* (Prague: Vydán Ministerstvem vnitra a Státním úřadem statistickým na základě výsledků sčítání lidu z 15. února, 1921, 1924), 97; *Statistický lexikon obcí v zemi Moravskoslezské. Úřední seznam míst podle zákona ze dne 14. dubna 1920, čís. 266 Sb. zák. a nař* (Prague: Vydán Ministerstvem vnitra a Státním úřadem statistickým na základě výsledků sčítání lidu ze dne 1. prosince, 1930, 1935), 92.

inhabitants. However they were widely shared both by working class people and by state employees. The postwar liberalization of religious life helped them freely articulate their political rights and share cultural patterns.

The Czechoslovak Church

The important role of national and social fights in the spiritual and religious history of the Czech lands in the first third of the twentieth century can be illustrated by the adversities faced by the National-Catholic Czechoslovak Church (*Církev československá*) (since 1971, the Czechoslovak Hussite Church, *Církev československá husitská*). It rose within the two years between 1918 and 1920 from the unfulfilled requirements of the reform-oriented, modern Union of the Catholic Clergy (*Jednota katolického duchovenstva*), from the conditions of national rise around the establishment of Czechoslovak Republic, and from the resistance of a significant part of the Czech by nation clergy and believers to the aristocratic Roman Catholic hierarchy of German and Hungarian nationalities. The radical wing of the Union, the Catholic clergy organization, which had never been officially accepted by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, held a Congress of the reform priests in Prague, which on January 8, 1920 declared the foundation of the new Czechoslovak Church, which was legalized by the state on September 15, 1920. While the Czechoslovak Church, under patriarch Karel Farský (1924–27), officially declared itself an heir to the Hussite tradition and aimed to return to the early church principles, in reality it introduced the Czech national language as a liturgical language and, even before the official establishment of the church, it abolished celibacy. As early as 1921, 5.23 percent of the Czechoslovak population joined the church, and apart from the so-called Orthodox crisis (1924), which led a part of the clergy and believers (mainly in Moravia) to support the Serbian Orthodox Church¹⁹ (*srbská pravoslavná církev*), the percentage of believers grew to 7.3 percent in 1930, and to 10.6 percent in 1950. In March 1939 the Czechoslovak Church was disbanded in Slovakia

19 Pavel Marek and Volodymyr Bureha, *Pravoslavní v Československu v letech 1918–1942* (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2008); Jaroslav Šuvarský, *Biskup Gorazd* (Prague: Metropolitná rada Pravoslávnej cirkvi v ČSSR, 1979). Moravian native Matěj Pavlík (1879–1942) was ordained a Roman Catholic priest in 1902. After serving in some Moravian parishes (during World War I among others as a padre in the military and mental hospital in Kroměříž), he was excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church in 1920 for holding the Catholic liturgy in Czech. In the nascent Czechoslovak Church, he promoted an Orthodox orientation, and after he had separated from its members he was ordained a bishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church. As bishop Gorazd of Prague, he established fourteen Orthodox churches in

and Carpathian Ruthenia and it survived the Protectorate years as the Czecho-Moravian Church (*Církev českomoravská*). The Protectorate period, which was marred by the collaboration of the hierarchs, was followed after 1945 by a period of open cooperation with the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, even before the beginning of state socialism (1948).²⁰

Immediately after the end of World War I, in the atmosphere of the Czech-Polish border controversy about Těšínsko and in the climate of postwar existential reflection on the events of the war, the industrial Ostravsko (Region of Ostrava), headed by (Polish) Silesian and Moravian Ostrava, with surrounding urban and rural villages became the center of the forming Czechoslovak Church. On January 15, 1920, a week after the church constituent congress, a religious community of the Czechoslovak Church formed in Radvanice in Silesia as the first one in the republic. Two years later, it became the seat of the Moravian-Silesian diocese, headed by the bishop Ferdinand Stibor (1869–1956), originally a Roman Catholic priest who in 1908 became the first vicar in the newly established parish in Radvanice, which had predominantly a working class population. The immediate confrontation with complicated social, political and national reality put him on the side of Czech inhabitants of working class origin, and he was thus in conflict with the German authorities and Roman Catholic hierarchy. The marriage with the parson's cook in 1920 made the births of his two sons (one in 1910, the other in 1920) legal, and it became the first step towards his public affiliation declaration of the newly formed Czechoslovak Church, of which he was a signatory in January 1920. As of 1923, he served as a bishop, and in 1942–45—after the death of patriarch Gustav Adolf Procházka—even a land administrator.²¹ Stibor's lifelong popularity—as demonstrated by the crowds that attended his funeral—was a sign of recognition among the people of his profound social empathy and the emphasis he placed on Christian social practice in the difficult postwar times in a socially, politically and nationally heterogeneous region.

the Czech lands and became the main representative of Czech interwar Orthodoxy. He was shot to death in September 1942 in the Prague Orthodox Cathedral for sheltering the deputy Reich Protector Reinhard Heydrich's assassins. He was canonized as a martyr by the Orthodox Church in 1987.

20 Radoslav Daněk, "Tagliaferro Jan," in *Biografický slovník Slezska a severní Moravy*, 10, ed. Lumír Dokoupil, and Milan Myška (Ostrava: Ostravská univerzita v Ostravě, 1998), 146–48; Pavel Marek, *Církevní krize na počátku první Československé republiky (1918–1924)* (Brno: L. Marek, 2005), 212–13.

21 Jaroslav Pleskot, "Stibor Ferdinand," in *Biografický slovník Slezska a severní Moravy*, 9, ed. Lumír Dokoupil and Milan Myška (Ostrava: Ostravská univerzita v Ostravě, 1997), 100.

After Radvanice, Heřmanice, Michálkovice and Silesian Ostrava, in 1920–23 chapels of the the Czechoslovak Church were established in twelve parts of today's Ostrava, where up to the year 1934 the same number of Hussite chapels were built. However, at least in Radvanice and Michálkovice the establishment of the chapels and the temporary occupation of the Roman Catholic churches were dramatic, involving the police, organs of state administration, and the courts:²²

Just after the end of a political fight for Těšínsko and after the plebiscitary storms there appeared new nuisances, now the religious ones. [...] The vicar in Radvanice Ferdinand Stibor started to perform the speeches about the needs to establish the Czechoslovak Church in Michálkovice. [...] At the meeting of the local council in April 1920, the seizure of the Roman Catholic Church was negotiated because there was a majority of Czechoslovaks, and both Catholic and Czechoslovak worships were to be held. The Catholics could not give in without the church being taken from them by force. [...] After the negotiation with the representatives of both sides, the government bodies ordered that the church be handed up by a specific date. There was nothing else for the Czechoslovaks to do but to build their own church.²³

The success of the Czechoslovak Church among the Ostravian working class can be shown with numbers: in 1921 the members of the Czechoslovak Church was constituted 10.2 percent of the population, and by 1930 this number had grown to 15.8, while in the whole republic it was 5.2 percent in 1921 and 7.3 percent in 1930.²⁴ But one could also cite recollections of inhabitants from working class settlements:

In the class and in the settlement there were many Protestants and kids from the Czechoslovak Church, which was the largest, after the Catholic Church. Out of thirty kids in the class, there were ten who did not attend the religious education: three were atheists, two Protestants and the rest were from the Czechoslovak Church.²⁵

22 Jířík et al., *Dějiny Ostravy*, 498, 519, 526, 531, 547, 568, 593, 599.

23 Turecká, "Kronika," 121. Ludmila Turecká (1907–2005) described the situation in Michálkovice (today Ostrava-Michálkovice). She grew up in a Czecho-Polish Galician miner family in a miners' settlement.

24 Jemelka, "Sociálnědemokratické," 163–64.

25 Milík Gaj, "Všecko mělo smysl a jedno zapadalo do druhého," in *Lidé z kolonií vyprávějí své dějiny*, ed. Martin Jemelka (Ostrava: Repronis, 2009), 271.

Social-Democratic Atheistic Movement

Atheism became the most important opponent of the Christian religions in the territory of interwar Ostrava. Before World War I, it was promoted by Social Democracy and occasionally by Free Thought. In the interwar period atheism was propagated by the Association of Social Democratic Atheists and by the competitive Federation of Communist Cultural Units or by the Union of Proletarian Atheists. The first postwar census from February 16, 1921 indicated the significance of the tendency among inhabitants of Ostrava towards atheism. In the region of Moravian Ostrava, there were 81.5 people out of 1000 without faith (in Moravia this figure was 18.4 people and in the Czech Silesia it was only 14), which is unambiguously the highest rate in Moravia. The figure for Brno (land capital) was 40.8 and for Silesia (the region of Frýdek-venkov including Silesian Ostrava) it was 46.0.²⁶ Nine years later, the rate of people without faith was 11.1 out of 100 inhabitants in the region of Moravian Ostrava, 7.5 in the region of Frýdek (including Silesian Ostrava), 6.6 in the political region of Brno, and 5.0 in the political region of Fryštát.²⁷

Unambiguously the largest atheistic organizations in the region was the Union of Czech Atheists (*Sdružení českých bezvěrců*, 1919), the Union of Social Democratic Atheists (*Sdružení sociálnědemokratických bezvěrců*, 1919), and as of 1933 the Union of Socialist Free Thinkers (*Unie socialistických svobodných myslitelů*), one of the most powerful non-political and non-physically educational organizations of interwar Ostravsko.²⁸ The development of organized atheistic movement in Ostravsko, which benefitted from failure to translate Christian principles into social doctrine and from the anti-Catholic approach of the socially oriented working class majority, was allowed by the independent Czechoslovak state, and a postwar liberal social life was able to develop that followed the amended law about the right of association from November 15, 1867.²⁹ The postwar development of the atheist organizations in Ostravsko was not so much determined by prewar activities of Free Thought. This was mainly because of civilization and value changes in society after World War I. The Czechoslovak

26 *Statistický lexikon obcí v Republice Československé: úřední seznam míst podle zákona ze dne 14. dubna 1920 č. 266 Sb. zák. a nař., II – Morava a Slezsko* (Prague: Nakladatelství Státního úřadu statistického, 1924), tabulka IIA, XIX–XXII.

27 *Statistický lexikon obcí v Republice Československé, Místní obce, osady a jejich části v Zemi moravskoslezské* (Prague: Nakladatelství Státního úřadu statistického, 1934), XX–XXII.

28 Jemelka, "The Social Democratic."

29 Jemelka, "K náboženskému životu," 41.

state had its war experiences, anti-clerical propaganda of a socialistic press, and anti-Catholic ideology. As of 1924, the Ostravian Social-Democratic atheists were affiliated with the Atheists' International and together with three other Czechoslovak atheist organizations (the Federation of Communist Cultural Units, Bund der proletarischen Freidenker, the Socialist Atheists in Most), they counted some 35,000 paying members by the mid-1920s.³⁰

An initial step towards founding the first Czechoslovak atheist organization was the establishment of *Volné slovo* [Free Word], a periodical which, according to the subheading of its first edition (which came out in Přívoz on March 1, 1919), “defended and promoted the interests of Czech atheists” and used the slogan according to which “*a Czech man cannot be a man of Rome.*”³¹ In the first half of the 1920s, the Ostravian Social-Democratic atheists were agile in establishing of local organizations, in addition to leaving legally and officially the Church. They promoted the secularization of schools and funerals in the newly built (Feb. 1, 1925) crematorium in Ostrava.³² They mainly used common activities, such as slide lectures and theater performances, to fight the opponents among the communist atheists and the priests of the Czechoslovak Church, which was labelled “the old fiddle under a new firm.”³³ Ostravian atheists demonstrated for freedom of conscience (1925) and secular education (1935). They also held ceremonies, such as the unveiling of a monument to the Spanish agnostic Francesco Ferrer (1935). However, the key period for the unification process of the Czechoslovak atheist movement was 1932, when the Union of Socialist Free Thinkers (Unie socialistických svobodných myslitelů) was established. In the district of Moravian-Silesia 68 local branches were established in 1933.³⁴ Before the clouds began to gather over the Ostravian atheist Union in 1938–39, they had problems with memberships waning (1925: 7,516 members, 1937: 3,500 members), out of which only a small fraction stayed in the successor to the organization, the Educational Union (Osvětový svaz, November 20, 1938).³⁵ The last issue of *Volné slovo* was edited on October 1, 1939. The activities of

30 AMO OMA, *Volné slovo*, 7, 11. 9. 1925, č. 34, s. 1: Mohutná protiklerikální manifestace v M. Ostravě.

31 Ibid., 1, 1. 3. 1919, č. 1, s. 1. [Enhancement – M. J.]

32 Ibid., 7, 1925, č. 3, s. 6 a č. 4, s. 3–4.

33 Ibid., 1, 1. 10. 1919, č. 15, s. 3.

34 AMO OMA, Fond Spolky na území města Ostravy, Župní výbor Unie socialistických svobodných myslitelů, Stanovy Unie socialistických svobodných myslitelů (přírůstkové č. 216, karton č. 1, evidenční číslo 1).

35 AMO OMA, *Volné slovo*, 20, 1. 12. 1938, č. 12, s. 1.

The Educational Union were brought to an end in 1940 and two years after the Reinhard Heydrich assassination (June 4, 1942) it ceased to exist.

Spiritualism

Lesser Ostravsko was not only the Moravian-Silesian center of the National-Catholic Czechoslovak Church and the midpoint of the Czechoslovak atheistic movement, in its history the spiritual movement played an important role with its Czechoslovak and Central European center in Radvanice in Silesia (today's Ostrava-Radvanice), with the spiritual association Brotherhood (Bratrství) (1914), and with its Association house and periodicals entitled *Spiritistická revue* [Spiritual Revue] (1920–38), *Československá revue psychická* [The Czechoslovak Psychic Revue] (1938–40), and *Psychická revue* [The Psychic Revue] (1946–49). Radvanice and Silesian Ostrava³⁶—where the roots of spiritualism dated back only to the last decade of the nineteenth century (the miners' settlement of Zárubek) and the beginnings of an organized spiritual movement up to the time of the association of Brotherhood—formed (apart from the Protectorate period up to the liquidation of Brotherhood in the early 1950s) the midpoint of the Czechoslovak spiritual movement. In interwar period, the latter had almost 200,000 followers and supporters, agnostics as well as denominationally organized Christians.³⁷

Whilst the spiritualists and the occult devotees are connected in the Czech lands consistently with the Czech Krkonoše and Jizerské mountains, the Ostravian spiritual tradition was essentially forgotten. Both Czech and Ostravian spiritualists read the spiritual literature of German origin, and this connected them, but the multi-cultural background of Ostravsko, with its Czech, German and Polish languages and international contacts in the interwar period (at least with the spiritualist circles in Vienna) separated them. Ostravsko bore witness to the birth of a specific spiritual culture and spirituality connecting the Czech tradition of Anti-Catholic individual religiosity with rational moral imperatives on the one hand with the Polish exalted rural religiosity on the other, which was also influenced by the major Jewish Hasidic community in the south of today's Poland, which neighbors Ostravsko and is to the northeast of the Czech Republic.

36 In fiction, see for example Ota Filip, *Nanebevstoupení Lojzka Lapáčka ze Slezské Ostravy* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1994).

37 Jiřík et al., *Dějiny Ostravy*, 568; Pilař, "Blouznivci," 169–70.

In northern and northeastern Bohemia the central person of spiritualism was Karel Sezemský (1860–1936) and his periodical *Posel zúbrobní* and *Edice Spirit*. In Ostravsko the same role went to Jan Rösner, an editor of the *Spiritistická revue* [Spiritual Revue] and a front person of the Brotherhood. *Spiritistická revue* was addressed to those interested in somnambulism, magnetism, levitation, occultism, metaphysics, predictive power, telepathy, suggestion, phrenology, hypnotism, graphology, astrology, abstinence, non-smoking, morals and psychology:

Spiritualism is not about faith, it asks for study and research. Spiritualism works for intellectual and emotional purification, it leads mankind towards brotherhood, and it lessens social differences [...]. Spiritualism does not agree with clergy or religious dogmas, however it teaches the religion of tolerance.³⁸

These official spiritual documents were referring ecclesiastically to the Old and New Testament tradition, as well as to Ancient Egyptian and East-Asian religious traditions. While in the Czech spiritual regions, in addition to reading the spiritual texts, the mediumistic paintings played an important role, in the Association house in Radvanice theater performances were in the focus (one-act plays on spiritual topics), together with the contemporary classical music of the composers who were respected by spiritualists (Leoš Janáček).

While the members of the spiritual association of Brotherhood were organized in three hierarchical stages and only abstinent non-smokers and vegetarians could become proper members, the charismatic spiritualism and its practices (raising a spirit of deceased) met with an enthusiastic response among the Ostravian working class, mainly among working class women, who had never lived in the shadow of aggressive social agnostics.

Grandma prayed secretly, but only when grandpa was not at home. Once grandpa was not at home, I came home from school and I was passing two or three women in the hall. Grandma sent me away and did not explain to me who those women were. When I had come back from the aunt's place or somewhere grandma was in tears, her eyes were really weepy. The women were apparently the spiritualists who would go around the settlement and who raised spirits of deceased. They were in the bedroom and had raised my mom, who had talked to

³⁸ Pilař, “Blouznivci,” 169–70.

my grandma. My mom apparently knew that I studied well and that she was in purgatory and that we were to pray for her to get into heaven.³⁹

While in the interwar period the Ostravian spiritualists could rely on their own organized membership base and on numerous supporters in culturally and denominationally heterogeneous working class background, in the period of the Bohemian and Moravian Protectorate and later on after the disbanding of the Brotherhood in 1950 (in other words during the times of liquidation of the association life after February 1948), Ostravian spiritualism fell into isolation, persecution and in the end into oblivion. Spiritualism plays only a tiny role in collective memory, mainly with reference to the moment when the Association house of Brotherhood in Radvanice was expropriated after 1950.

Proselytism and Mixed Marriages as Modern Phenomena

Collective (institutional) actors in the religious life of Moravská Ostrava, both traditional and new ones, communicated with one another in public spaces via cultural and political entities and community life. In the city, the population of which was growing, schools and cemeteries proved especially neuralgic points of confessional coexistence. In the era of modernization and emerging civil society, individual actors became bearers of denominational mobility, the main manifestation of the conversions between different confessions. As the population grew, the number of conversions increased. Conversion ceased to be rare, and pragmatic reasons for the change of religion (usually a marriage) gave way to philosophical and political reasons. The study of denominational mobility is limited by methodological constraints, corresponding to the intimate nature of conscious confessional affiliation. The following section shows, within the limits set by the types of available sources, changes in the correlation of Roman Catholic denomination and other confessions. The most intimate area of research is the analysis of mixed marriages that were and still remain a conflicting point of inter-confessional dialogue.

39 Jaroslava Houžvová, “V naší havířské rodině v životě nepadlo sprosté slovo” in *Lidé z kolonií vyprávějí své dějiny*, ed. Martin Jemelka (Ostrava: Repronis, 2009), 239.

Changes in confession

The primary source of this section of my inquiry is *Knihá o změnách vyznání* (1854–1920) [The Book of Conversions (1854–1920)], held in Ostrava City Archive,⁴⁰ which reflects Moravian Ostrava in the period of the transformation from a serf town with traditional society to an industrial center of the Austrian state to an administrative, industrial and cultural metropolis of the infant Czechoslovak state. *Knihá o změnách vyznání* was formed as an official book into which the priests in the frame of the parish region recorded the reported changes of confession, in other words people who converted to the Catholic Church of Roman Rite and instances of people who left this Church. With 863 records, *Knihá o změnách vyznání* includes some columns that were meticulously filled in up to World War I, when the book recordings became schematic because of a change of conditions in the society and because of mass conversation from Roman Catholicism. After 1920, conversions to Catholicism and instances of people who left the Catholic Church had to be registered in different books.⁴¹

The first column contained data about the date of converting to or leaving the Roman Catholic faith, the certificate identification of the district office which had to be informed about the changes even after the foundation of the Czechoslovak Republic, and identification about ordination permission to enter the Catholic Church. The second column contained the information about the name, age, address and the birthplace of the registered person, as well as the names and marital status of his or her parents. The other column concerned the act of converting to or leaving the Church, and the original and new confessions are included. The penultimate column gives the name of the priest who led the catechization, and accepted the confession with a witness (frequently it was only a sacristan) or baptized the convert, in the company of the godfathers. The last column contained reasons for the change in confession (this column was often filled in schematically or even contained conflicting information).

Knihá o změnách vyznání begins in the year 1854 with the data about three converting female Protestants of the Augsburg Confession (in the source there is no information about the conversion of a Protestant of Helvite Confession)

40 AMO, Fond Římsko-katolický farní úřad Moravská Ostrava, *Knihá o změnách vyznání* (1854–1920), inv. č. 73.

41 AMO, Fond Římsko-katolický farní úřad Moravská Ostrava, *Knihá vystouplých z církve* (1920–1922), *Knihá vystouplých z církve* (1923–1930), *Knihá vystouplých z církve* (1931–1952), *Knihá přijatých do církve* (1922–1938), *Knihá přijatých do církve* (1939–1947), inv. č. 74–78.

who converted to Catholicism in order to be able to marry a Catholic. Up until 1920, 97 Lutheran males and 159 Lutheran females converted and became members of the Roman Catholic Church. The wave of Lutheran conversions to Catholicism culminated in 1897–99, 1901, and 1905. From 1906 on, a permanent decrease of conversions among Protestants can be seen, because they could already support an agile clergy administration with a new church. The main reason for Lutherans' conversion to Catholicism was marriage, mainly the marriage of Lutheran girls from nearby villages who married local Catholics and worked in Moravian Ostrava as workers, day laborers, charwomen and laundresses. Among men, miners were the largest group (17.5 percent of all converting Lutherans), then workers, metallurgical workers and day laborers. While among the converting Lutherans there was not a single convert with a so-called liberal profession, among the Catholics converting to Lutherans this situation was quite the reverse.

The most numerous group was formed by Roman Catholic believers who converted to the Augsburg confession. There are only twenty entries up to 1898, but from 1899, when more people left the Roman Catholic Church in Moravian Ostrava than entered it, there were several such people every year. The wave of conversions from Catholicism to Protestantism culminated in the years 1901, 1909 and 1919. While among the Protestants, women dominated, in the reverse direction men outnumbered women (in a proportion of 144:126). If among the female Catholics who converted to the Augsburg confession there were mainly housekeepers, charwomen, cooks and single girls as future brides, among new male followers of the Augsburg confession there were, in addition to workers, also members of liberal professions (an editor, sons of the pharmacist and the mayor, etc.). The reason for their conversions could have been “frenzied German nationalism,” the movement “Los vom Rom,” “Romhetze” or “furor teutonicus.” The local Lutheran community thus grew not only by its own reproduction but also by a linguistically, nationally and culturally German oriented movement which was supported by women from the local notables. For example, in 1903 the factory owner Karel Elbertzhagen's granddaughter Alice Elisabeth Koberová, converted. Her mother Božena Elbertzhagenová, who was the wife of an entrepreneur who belonged to a Protestant confession, converted in 1910, and Ida Fiedlerová converted in 1904 (she was the daughter of a Moravian-Ostravian sugar refinery owner and the wife of advocate and burgomaster Dr. Gustav Fiedler, who was mayor in 1901–18). The reason for her conversion was recorded as “indifferentism and modern movement.”

The third largest group was formed by people who left the Catholic Church and did not join another confession: there were 299 such cases in the period that began in 1854 and ended in 1920. The first “renegade” was Konrád Kubala, who at first left the Catholic Church in 1882 but five years later, presumably because of a marriage, entered its ranks again. In the *Knize změň vyžňání* the Catholic Church withdrawals and subsequent agnosticism can be found only from 1900. Men outnumbered women among those who left the Catholic Church and did not join another confession (170:59), and the number of withdrawals rose rapidly after the foundation of the newly independent state—up to 1918 inclusive there were 117 believers who left the Catholic Church and did not join another denomination, and in the last two years (1918–20) it was just 112 believers. Before the foundation of the Czechoslovak Republic the withdrawals culminated in 1909 and 1913–14. Allegedly, the main reason were “agitation against Rome” (around 1900), “spiritualism” (1905, 1907) and only then such influences as “socialist thought, social movements, democratic socialism and frenzied socialism.” In 1911 Dr. Mořic Kohn, advocate, left the Roman Catholic Church. His example may suggest the fragility of the attachment of a Jewish proselyte to the new religion. Eight years later, a town mayor Jan Prokeř (mayor in 1925–35) did the same thing. The reasons for withdrawals might have been just personal ones, for example a bad experience with pastoral duties or with an individual priest. So in 1908, a twenty-year-old student left the Catholic Church and the priest recorded the reason simply as the “student’s stupidity and vindictiveness.”

Kniba o změňách vyžňání also provides data about sporadic conversions between the Catholic Church and other confessions than the Augsburg confession. In 1882, the twenty-four-year old native from Moravian-Ostrava who dwelt in Galician Czernowice converted because of a marriage to Catholicism of the Eastern Rite—the conversion had only an administrative character, not a dogmatic one. The conversion of a single girl in 1918, who converted to Judaism, is also rare. The Jewish wedding was a presumable reason for a nineteen-year-old girl’s conversion, though together with the other seven girls—during the period under investigation—she did not specify the confession she was adopting. The conversions of three men Catholicism (1905–06, 1919) for which the priests recorded “Romhetze” and “the renegade’s agitation work” as the reasons for the conversions were also rarities. World War I, which turned Moravian Ostrava into a military town, might have attracted four men of Orthodox confession from the Eastern parts of the

monarchy to have found their partners there and then to have accepted their Catholic confession.

The specific group is formed by about twenty people who as agnostics entered the Catholic Church in 1887–1919. There are people among them who stated the traditional reason (marriage) for entering the Catholic Church, but there was also a primary school teacher (25 years old) and a municipal clerk (27 years old) for whom the reason for entering the Catholic Church could have been evoked by the pressure from their employer. In 1903, a non-practicing Jew named Gisela Munková, the daughter of Viennese innkeeper Josef Krippel, converted to Catholicism, and after a civil wedding in 1894 so did the wife of Moravian-Ostravian notary Dr. Richard Munk. In 1854–1920, 862 people entered or left the ranks of the Roman Catholic Church in Moravian Ostrava. Before 1918, this happened primarily mainly due to a marriage with a member of the Lutheran Confession. In 1899, for the first time more people left the Roman Catholic Church than entered it. While transfers between the Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches had the character of social advancement, Jewish conversions were, up to the foundation of the Czechoslovak Republic, a manifestation of the decision assimilate completely with the majority society.

Jewish proselytism

The last two cases have brought me to the specific group of people of Jewish confession whose decision to convert to Catholicism, even after the emancipation of the Jew of the Monarchy (1867), was one further step towards their full assimilation with the majority Christian (Catholic) society. The oldest recordings⁴² about two female Jews' decisions to convert to Catholicism in the presence of Roman Catholic Church priests from Moravian Ostrava are from 1870 and 1873. The other sporadic recordings appear in the 1880s, however from 1890 several people converted annually, with the exceptions of the years 1893, 1900, 1905, 1908–10 and 1919. Almost one-third of the entries about Jews who converted to Catholicism come from the last decade of my research (1911–20). The largest number of people converted in 1906, 1915 and 1920. The vast majority of Jewish proselytes in the period in question were females (43 women compared to only 15 men) who converted to Catholicism almost exclusively for

42 Blažena Przybylová, “Projednávání přestupu židovky Rachel Tausk na katolickou víru magistrátem Moravské Ostravy v roce 1831,” *Ostrava: příspěvky k dějinám a současnosti Ostravy a Ostravska* 26 (2012): 328–35.

the sake of marriage (seventeen of them explicitly stated that they were single, only three were married). The average age (24.8 years) corresponds with this. Professionally, most of them were cooks, charwomen, rentiers, or around the years of World War I also clerks.

While marriage remained the main reason for conversions among female converts in the period, the men's situation was not so clear. In addition to two people for whom profession is not specified, there were eight manual laborers, a locksmith, a fitter or a stable-boy and two sales agents among the male converts, as well as three members of liberal professions—a doctor at the municipal hospital, a physical education teacher at a secondary school and a manager of the municipal power station. For these men, conversion could have been a precondition for social advancement. The fact is that the priests in principle did not mention the reason for conversions men, unlike in the case of female converts. The possible success of conversions and the fact that the majority society accepted proselytes is proven by the fact that in the *Knize o změnách vyznání* I have found three (maybe four) cases in which both sisters converted: thus marriage was a common fate for sisters Marie Josefa and Antonie Tereza Perlová (1870, 1882), Vanda and Terezie Geradová (1911, 1913), and three sisters Marta, Kamila and Flora Wulkanová (1917, 1918, 1918) and maybe also sisters Olga and Hermína Bergová (1911, 1913).

After the foundation of the independent Czechoslovak state and after the liberalization of Czechoslovak society, conversion to Catholicism lost its power for Jews, and they basically disappeared from Ostravian religious life in the second half of 1920s and first half of the 1930s.⁴³ They appeared again only in the second half of 1930s, as Nazi ideology was gaining ground to the west and the threat of German occupation of the Czechoslovak Republic was ever more imminent.

Mixed marriages

Marriage was the most frequent reason for religious conversion in 1854–1920, but after 1900 national and political reasons came to play increasingly important roles. In spite of the fact that at the beginning of the twentieth-century inter-confessional marriages attracted attention and were causes of many family conflicts, marriages that were confessional mixed do not belong

43 Jemelka, “Židovský proselytismus,” 187–213.

to the frequent topics of the Czech historiography or historic demography.⁴⁴ While proselytism and changes of religion were widely accepted after the foundation of the Czechoslovak Republic in the times of political and social liberalization, at the beginning of the twentieth century changes in religion and inter-confessional marriages were a phenomenon peculiar almost exclusively to the middle or upper classes. For example, one can consult a statistical survey of 376 Christian household owners with 2,174 citizens (7.2 percent of all present inhabitants) of the town center of Moravian Ostrava who lived in 1900 on the territory of two main Moravian-Ostravian squares—the Main Square (Marktplatz) and Rynek (Franz-Joseph-Platz)—and ten adjacent streets in the town center.⁴⁵ While the lesser central Rynek was mainly inhabited by Jewish merchants, craftsmen and members of liberal professions, the Main Square and newly built Johanny Avenue was home to the majority of Moravian-Ostravian atheists, who still were quite rare.⁴⁶ Four out of sixteen atheists of Moravian Ostrava lived in this part of the town, forming 0.05 percent of the population of Moravian Ostrava in 1900. Out of 248 married couples at the end of 1900, there were thirteen inter-confessional couples (5 percent), eleven of which were Protestant-Catholic, one of which was Jewish-Protestant, and one of which was Jewish-Catholic. The majority was formed by a Catholic man and a Lutheran woman from near Těšinsko or from Lutheran regions of Moravia, Galicia and Rhineland. Usually they had gotten married only after having come to Moravian Ostrava. Thus inter-confessional marriages had strong ties with a new dwelling in a dynamically changing industrial center that was affected by the largest immigration wave in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The town was flooded by single young men, and with the growing wave in marriages the rate of inter-confessional marriages also rose, and that happened despite the existing social and administrative barriers. Without meticulous study of the records of the church registry office, it is not possible to prove precisely if the marriages were of a socially exogenous character or not, but they seem to be registered

44 About the retrospective and contemporary context of the problem, see for example: Walter Schöpsdau, *Konfessionsverschiedene Ehe: Ein Handbuch. Kommentar und Dokumente zu Seelsorge, Theologie und Recht der Kirchen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995); Beate Bayer, *Konfessionsverbindende Ehe: Impulse für Paare und Seelsorger* (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald, 1991); Uwe Begerhause, *Die konfessionsverbindende Ehe als Lehr- und Lernprozess* (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald, 2001).

45 Martin Jemelka, *Křesťanské domácnosti centra Moravské Ostravy roku 1900: ke srovnání jejich biologických, kulturních a socioprofesionálních charakteristik se zvláštním zřetelem k ženské populaci* (Ostrava: Katedra historie Filozofické fakulty Ostravské univerzity v Ostravě, rukopis diplomové práce, 2002), 1, 10.

46 *Ibid.*, 17.

within the frame of identical social groups. Even today, Christian Churches pay attention to the religious education of the children of an inter-confessional married couple, and this issue is still a key point of Christian ecumenicalism. In Moravian Ostrava at the end of the nineteenth century it was the fathers who made decisions about the child's religion, as evidenced by the fact that there was only one case in which the children were recorded as belonging to either the father's or the mother's confession, depending on the gender of the child in question.⁴⁷

The example of the family of Dr. Gustav Fiedler, one of the wealthiest inter-confessional families in the community, is worth citing. He was a Protestant, the mayor of Moravian Ostrava (1901–18), and a local politician. In 1919, he served as a member of a delegation demanding, on the basis of the example of Gdansk, that Ostrava be withdrawn from the Czechoslovak state and be a multinational region subordinated to the League of Nations. Fiedler as a Protestant—with his wife Ida as a Catholic (born Goldová, she was a native Jew) and their only son as a Protestant—dwelt in the luxurious newly constructed residential house at no. 1083 of Johanny Avenue. He was a leader in the Lutheran community, and he represented Ostravian German nationalists. Also in his case the connection between Lutheranism and aggressive German nationalism was significant.⁴⁸

In the case of a couple both members of which had a working class background, a difference in confessional belonging was more a cultural barrier than a social one. The progressive prevalence of inter-confessional marriages among members of the lower classes can be demonstrated with reference to the following examples from the working class environment. In 1890, in the largest Moravian-Ostravian workers' settlement of the Šalomoun mine, there were 1,632 inhabitants and 218 married couples, out of which only four were inter-confessional (all four were Protestant-Catholic). Children were recorded in accordance with their fathers' or their mothers' confessions, depending on gender. In 1910, when 2,094 inhabitants and 330 married couples lived in Šalomouna, only one marriage was mixed (Protestant-Catholic). Twenty years later, this community, the largest Moravian-Ostravian workers' settlement, was inhabited by 2,078 people and 336 married couples, out of which twenty were mixed (6 percent). Half of the mixed marriages were formed by a couple consisting of an atheist man and a Catholic woman when a child's future confession was a

47 Ibid., 64–67.

48 Ibid., 70–71.

decision shared equally by parents. Three couples were between members of the Czech Brethern Church and atheists. Two couples were relationships between male atheists and female members of the Czechoslovak Church, and another five couples were marriages between members of the Roman or Greek Catholic Church on the one hand and members of Protestant, Czech Brethern or Czechoslovak Churches on the other. While the growing number of inter-confessional marriages proves the modernization and liberalization of the working class and the liberalization of matrimonial law, the available data does not prove that the children's membership to either their mothers' or their fathers' confessions was strictly ruled or dominated by the Roman Catholic Church.⁴⁹

Conclusion

In 1890–1950, the villages in the center of today's Ostrava underwent great economic, social, demographic and cultural changes. The town completely changed its urban profile, and habits and attitudes in the at times confrontational environment of an industrial town and region also changed.⁵⁰ The tendency to base identity on denominational belonging was gradually waning as other factors gained prominence in the social life of a nationally, linguistically, and religiously diverse industrial town undergoing relatively rapid change. Moreover, given the absence of traditional rural society and the pressures of atheist attitudes and increasingly prevalent anti-Catholicism (which was also linked to Czech nationalism), confessional belonging came to be seen increasingly as a private matter, making conversion less socially problematic and at the same time also less of a precondition of acceptance or social advancement (for instance for Jews). Catholicism stopped being the dominant confession, and in 1900 the town was affected by waves of conversions to Lutheran Protestantism under the influence of German national propaganda (*Kulturkampf*). Already before the war, people had begun leaving the Church under the influence of agnosticism,

49 AMO OMA, Fond Okresní úřad Moravská Ostrava, Sčítání obyvatelstva 31. 12. 1910, Moravská Ostrava (karton č. 88, 91, 92, 95, 97, 103–05); Národní archiv Praha, Fond Státní úřad statistický I – sčítání obyvatelstva v roce 1930, Moravská Ostrava (karton č. 9016 – sčítací obvody č. 62, 63; karton č. 9018 – sčítací obvod 66); Státní okresní archiv Frýdek-Místek, Fond Okresní úřad Místek, Sčítání obyvatel 31. 12. 1890, Moravská Ostrava (inv. č. 1039, mikrofilmy č. 1, 6, 7, 10, 11, 13); Jemelka, *Na Šalomouně*, 88–89.

50 Martin Jemelka, “The Ostrava Industrial Agglomeration in the First Half of the Twentieth Century: Where the Urban Countryside met the Rural Town,” in *Mastery and Lost Illusions: Space and Time in the Modernization of Eastern and Central Europe*, ed. Włodzimierz Borodziej, Stanislav Holubec, and Joachim von Puttkamer (Europas Osten im 20. Jahrhundert 5) (Munich: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2014), 71–98.

and the declared reasons for change of confession shifted from purely pragmatic (marriage, work) to ideological (socialism, German nationalism, free thinking, atheism). World War I, the creation of the Czechoslovak Republic, and foundation of the Czech Brethern Church and the Czechoslovak Church are usually considered breaking points in the religious life of Czech citizens. In Ostrava, however, 1899 can be regarded as a breaking point. More people left the Roman Catholic Church in Moravian Ostrava in 1899 than entered it.

The geopolitical position of Ostrava on the border of the historical lands of Moravia and Silesia, on the borders of state formations (in 1742–1920 and 1938–45 Ostrava was a border town), and on the borders of linguistic and ethnological regions (Lutheran Těšínsko, the Catholic northeast of Moravia, the closeness of Protestant centers in German Silesia, the economic pull of Ostrava for Jewish immigrants from Galicia, Moravia and Hungary) predestined the town to play the role of a social, national and cultural melting pot and a pioneer in the modernization of religious life, giving its religious heterogeneity. The anonymous environment of industrial Ostrava severed immigrants from their traditional and family relationships and confronted their religious and ideological orientation with the socially, culturally and nationally precarious conditions of modern industrial society. The most visible signs of these processes can be seen in marriages that were mixed by confession (though they were socially more endogenous than exogenous in the period) and the growing influence of atheism. Before World War I, conversion to Catholicism played a particularly important role for Jewish immigrants because it meant a step towards full assimilation. However, this strategy lost its meaning after the foundation of the new state. Before the foundation of the Czechoslovak Republic, inter-confessional marriages in Moravian Ostrava were peculiar to the middle and upper classes. In the working class milieu, they were more frequent only after the liberalization of religious life after 1918. In the pre-war middle class environment, fathers decided about the confessional belonging of children. In the working class environment, children were usually equally recorded according to the denominational affiliation of their parents, on the basis of gender.

Precarious social and national conditions, sharply socially stratified local society, and the explosive postwar development of Ostrava, which became an important administrative and cultural center of the region and which played down the importance of the traditional centers of Opava and Těšín, all made Ostrava a center of religious and spiritual life, at least in the sphere of atheism, spiritualism and the mass operation of the Czechoslovak Church. All three spheres

were connected by resistance to traditional Catholicism and the support of the infant modern Czechoslovak state, with its Hussite and Hus ideology.⁵¹ Whilst during the First Republic, atheists, spiritualists and the Czechoslovak Church believers competed against one another, during World War II they had to face together the decline or even illegality of their systems of faith, as they lost their Czechoslovak identity and were under the tightening control of Protectorate and Nazi authorities. After World War II, under state socialism they had to go the ways of ideological canonization (agnosticism), instrumentalization in the service of communist propaganda (the Czechoslovak Church), or a proscription, which led to elimination from collective memory (spiritualism).

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