

Spiritual Landscape of the Czech Republic

With the passing of two decades since the Velvet Revolution of 1989 and the fall of Communism in Czechoslovakia, the new era was full of promise for the unshackled church to proclaim the gospel freely and for evangelical missions to partner together with Czech Christians for that purpose. There were in had hoped.

Churches in the Czech Republic have come through four decades of marginalization and opposition. The church was considered obsolete in the minds of the majority under Communism, and anyone who wanted to get ahead in life avoided the local church. Despite the freedoms of the current democratic government, this is an attitude that largely persists. And as such, the churches themselves have had a very difficult time breaking away from the "fortress mentality" to actually consider their mission to the world.

As for Czech society on the whole, the Revolution certainly brought a great openness to everything the world had to offer, with the dictates of the past regime thrown aside. And though for some this has included a spiritual search, it has by not been widespread. And among those seeking spiritual meaning in life, there has been a turning to a variety of diverse ideologies as much as to the historic Christian message. Czech spirituality is often one which is "goulash" -- a little bit of this and a little bit of that.

Still the predominant push in society has been to acquire all that one can, this after decades of doing without. The drive to gain all that money can buy has gripped the hearts of many and become the central focus in life. This is especially evident in Prague with the proliferation of new supermarkets, malls, cinemas, department stores, and car dealers. The eyes of the country are clearly focused on materialism and getting ahead. There is also a great desire among many to travel after years of restrictions -- visa requirements for Czech citizen wanting to travel to the US were lifted in the fall of 2008.

A rich spiritual heritage is in fact a strong part of the Czech history and includes Jan Hus, a Czech reformer who inspired Martin Luther, and the Moravian Brethren, who in a period of 20 years accomplished more missionary work than the entire Protestant church in the 200 years preceding.

In spite of this rich heritage, the earlier forced domination of the Catholic church and the legacy of communism thinking during the last century, have produced a nation that is profoundly secular and quite skeptical of religion and the church. With 70% claiming to be atheists, some say it is the most atheistic nation on earth, with the highest percentage of people convinced that God does not even exist, although there is evidence to suggest that there is a growing trend towards a belief in "somethingism" -- belief in a higher being or at least something beyond oneself. The number of evangelical Christians is small, making up less than one half of 1% (less than 50,000) -- this in a country of 10.5 million people.

Several cults have made significant inroads over the years, particularly the Jehovah's Witnesses. They number close to 25,000, making them twice as large as the largest evangelical denomination. Starting with the very first lecture series in 1999, we have been able to minister to many Jehovah's Witnesses (or former) including some who are library patrons and come regularly.

Despite the spiritual apathy, God is slowly and patiently adding to His Kingdom in the Czech Republic. It is not uncommon for people to consider the claims of Christ thoughtfully over many years before coming to faith. Once a decision to follow Christ is made, it is genuine and life-changing. Thank you for your partnership in reaching out to share Christ -- the Light of the world, in an otherwise spiritually dark land.

This is a summary and brief update from an article entitled *The Czech Spiritual Landscape in the Post-Communist Era* that we wrote for the East-West Report, Vol. 6, No. 2 Spring 1998.

<http://www.eastwestreport.org/articles/ew06205.htm>

(Updated July 2009)