
Religion in the Lyrics of the Czech Underground

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Abstract: The study analyses various types of religion manifested in the lyrics of Czech underground musicians in the 1970s and 1980s. The author primarily examines the religious, implicitly religious, and social sources of musicians and the recipient communities in religion. In the second part of the study, he focuses on the types and ways of presenting religious content. Although much of it was derived from ecclesiastical Christianity (which does not mean that it corresponded to specific confessions or religious traditions), he also notes non-Christian and alternative spiritualities parallel to any organised religion. Although the article does not pay much attention to the reception of the underground religion and its communities, the author concludes that this phenomenon was among the key manifestations of modern self-oriented spirituality in Czech society.

Keywords: religion; music; underground music; religious lyrics; religion and Communism; Czechoslovakia – 20th century

Abstrakt: Studie analyzuje různé typy religiozity manifestované v písňových textech českých undergroundových hudebníků v sedmdesátých a osmdesátých letech 20. století. Autor nejprve zkoumá náboženské, implicitně náboženské a sociální zdroje náboženských zájmů hudebníků i recipientských komunit, aby v druhé části studie obrátil pozornost k typům a formám prezentace náboženských obsahů. Třebaže většina z nich vycházela z církevního křesťanství (což ovšem nemuselo znamenat, že odpovídaly konkrétní konfesi nebo duchovní tradici), připomíná rovněž mimokřesťanské a alternativní spirituality bez vazeb k jakékoli organizované religiozitě. Článek sice nevěnuje větší pozornost recepci undergroundové religiozity a příslušným komunitám, autor však přesto ukazuje, že tento fenomén patřil mezi nejdůležitější projevy moderní osobní spirituality v české společnosti.

Klíčová slova: náboženství; hudba; underground; náboženské texty písní; náboženství a komunismus; Československo – 20. století

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Although there are cases of Christian rock music (and they are on the rise),¹ in the first decades of its existence, rock music carried rather anti-religious overtones, and the social revolt of rockers (and even more so, the representatives of underground music) went sharply against established religiosity.² On the other hand, representatives of the churches often dismissed rock as “the Devil’s music” and did not miss a single opportunity to warn against it.³ While in the free societies of the Western world, these hostile attitudes were revised or suppressed over time (although they never completely disappeared), they lasted a very long time in totalitarian Czechoslovakia.⁴ Rock music and its external attributes (long hair, clothing, noise, rejection of social norms) remained a symbol of the corruption of the modern world for many church leaders. In contrast, rock musicians were barely attracted by the traditionalist middle-class churches that had to adapt and succumb to the domination of the communist regime. Although both had a common enemy in the regime, they were often unable to find their way to each other.⁵

The quoted text and others show the complicated and long (if at all successful) way to mutual understanding, convergence, and eventual cooperation between Czech rock/underground musicians and revolting youth on the one side, and religious communities and their leaders on the other. However, mutual distance and misunderstanding did not necessarily mean complete neglect. Either because (the adored) Western rock began to contain religious themes and local musicians followed in its footsteps, or because these themes were, independently of the churches, perceived as riotous, political, and at the same time personally (existentially) significant. Religion, religious experiences and callings, which will be overviewed in this study, were not limited to ecclesiastical Christianity, whether Roman Catholic or Protestant. Even if the mainstream traditions served as fundamental sources, many of their forms and fragments were de-traditionalised. This entire “cultural heritage” was significantly supplemented with new and alternative religious forms, taken from the occult milieu

¹ E.g. STEVE TURNER, *Hungry for Heaven: Rock’n’Roll and the Search for Redemption*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity 1995, passim; CLITON HEYLIN, *Trouble in Mind: Bob Dylan’s Gospel Years*, New York: Lesser Gods 2017, passim.

² GLENN C. ALTSCHULER, *All Shook Up: How Rock’n’roll Changed America*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press 2003, passim; ALEX DI BLASI and ROBERT MCPARLAND (eds.), *Finding God in the Devil’s Music: Critical Essays on Rock and Religion*, Jefferson: McFarland & Co. 2019, passim.

³ BOB LARSON, *Rock & the Church*, S. l.: Creation House 1971, passim; ARTHUR LYONS, *Satan Wants You: The Cult of Devil Worship in America*, New York: Mysterious Press 1988, passim.

⁴ MIROSLAV MARVÁN, „O rockové hudbě nepopulárně“ [“Unpopularly about the Rock Music”], *Život v Kristu* 11 (5, 1993): p. 11–12; PAVEL ŠUPOL, *Křesťan a hudba [Christians and Music]*, Praha: Kartuziánské nakladatelství 2010, pp. 39–44; for a general overview cf. MIROSLAV VANĚK, *Byl to jenom rock’n’roll?: Hudební alternativa v komunistickém Československu 1956–1989 [Was it Just Rock’n’Roll? Musical Alternative in the Communist Czechoslovakia, 1959–1989]*, Praha: Academia 2010, passim.

⁵ MARTIN C. PUTNA, „Mnoho zemí v podzemí: Několik úvah o undergroundu a křesťanství“ [“Many Grounds of the Underground: Some Remarks on Underground and Christianity”], *Souvislosti* 1 (4, 1993), p. 14–32; ZDENĚK R. NEŠPOR, „Prolegomena ke studiu religiozity českého undergroundu“ [„Introduction to the Study of Czech Underground’s Religiosity“], in: LADISLAV KUDRNA (ed.), *Hvězdná hodina undergroundu: Underground a Československo v letech 1976–81*, Praha: ÚSTR 2020, p. 144–164.

and (often idealised) Eastern religiosity. This paper aims to cover all the mentioned forms of religion and religiosity, although often just in an overview.

Recent research shows that despite the strong anticlerical repressions of the Communist regime, Czech religion was quite broad, multi-layered and multifocal in the 1980s.⁶ Traditional churches (regardless of their inner diversity) were just one category of players, and the religious revival witnessed by society was filled with alternative sources. Sociologist Jiřina Šiklová mentioned the rise of the so-called Young Christians: “they consider themselves Christians even though it often does not meet the usual criteria... Many of them do not know the difference between the Old and New Testaments, have never read one or the other, do not know what the Gospels are, do not know the content and interpretation of the Holy Mass, do not know the meaning of the Eucharist, or they cannot explain the difference between a Catholic, a Protestant or an Orthodox. For many, Christianity even merges with animism, belief in astrology, mysticism, and parapsychology.”⁷ It was more common for young Christians and other alternatives to intermingle with rock musicians/listeners than in other cases.

Although we certainly do not want to claim that religious elements and motifs formed the predominant part of Czech rock lyrics and values associated with this music and lifestyle, we should not forget their existence. In the era of late state socialism, characterised by a low degree of political faith and tacit social agreement on the division of power, many youths looked for a spiritual escape, and some of them found it in a combination of alternative/counter-cultural music, and religion and religious symbols (rather than in church attendance or even membership). If this was true about a significant part of society at the end of the communist regime in the 1980s (although it did not last long after its fall in the 1990s), a decade earlier, it characterised at least the avant-garde and revolting (small) circles associated with the underground. According to Jan Princ, “we made a makeshift altar with candles [in the cellar], and we always did spiritual exercises there on Sunday morning [...] During the day, we sat, drank, sang and played theatre, did anything, but always in the morning, whoever wanted voluntarily, so we went into that cellar, [where there was] an altar with candlelight, [...] and we held hands and gathered strength for the next week [...] And it went so far that those boys who had nothing to do with any church or Christianity they even began preparing for baptism.”⁸

If we agree with Martin Machovec that “the remarkable cultural hybrid, which the Czech underground culture of the 1970s and 1980s was, was created precisely on the basis of a certain collaboration, or even the coexistence of a number of [publicly

⁶ ZDENĚK R. NEŠPOR, „Der Wandel der tschechischen (Nicht-)Religiosität im 20. Jahrhundert im Lichte soziologischer Forschungen,“ *Historisches Jahrbuch* (129, 2009), p. 501–532; DAVID VÁCLAVÍK, *Náboženství a moderní česká společnost [Religion and Modern Czech Society]*, Praha: Grada 2009, pp. 115–129.

⁷ JIŘINA ŠIKLOVÁ, „Mládež v ČSSR a náboženství“ [*Czechoslovakian Youth and Religion*], *Svědectví* 79 (20, 1986): pp. 513–520.

⁸ FRANTIŠEK STÁREK ČUŇAS and JIŘÍ KOSTŮR, *Baráky: Souostroví svobody [Barracks: The Archipelago of Freedom]*, Praha: Pulchra 2010, pp. 162, 164.

muzzled] intellectuals and artists with rock ‘primitives’”,⁹ religion played a role in this partnership and its fundamentals. One can even encounter the extreme claim that “the Czech musical underground was a distinctly religious, convulsively Christian phenomenon.”¹⁰ Even if we do not go that far, we must pay attention to religiosity and religious elements in (rock) underground lyrics.

One more introductory comment is needed: If we understand religion quite broadly in this study, we must narrow the other side of our focus, the underground. Due to scope restrictions and other limits, the study will be limited to (persecuted) independent cultural activities under the Communist regime in the 1970s and 1980s.¹¹ Although underground was a fundamentally multidimensional and multi-genre phenomenon (including writing, theatre, recitation of poetry, happenings, land art, and many other art forms¹²), we will concentrate on its musical component. However, this focus allows us to see connections across musical genres, especially between rock and folk music (musicians, performances, and recipients). Despite these limitations, we cannot provide an in-depth overview of all the cases as the study does not aim to provide a detailed analysis of specific authors and performers. We would instead emphasise the general tendencies and variety of the use of religious elements in Czech underground lyrics.

Sources of underground religion

If the Czech underground was primarily a countercultural phenomenon¹³ and if the official and other established forms of culture were significantly anti-religious, it was inevitable that the underground community became religious or was at least more positively oriented towards religion. The ideological expression of the underground

⁹ MARTIN MACHOVEC, „Podzemí a underground: Postavení undergroundové komunity v české společnosti 70. a 80. let a specifické hodnoty undergroundové kultury“ [„The Underground: The Place of the Underground Community in the Czech Society of the 1970s and 80s and the Specific Values of the Underground Culture“], *Paměť a dějiny* (9, 2015): p. 7.

¹⁰ Jiří SUK, „Fenoménu underground“ [“The Phenomenon of the Underground”], *Paměť a dějiny* (9, 2015): pp. 134–135.

¹¹ Similarly JOSEF ALAN, „Alternativní kultura jako sociologické téma“ [“Alternative Culture as a Sociological Theme”], in: JOSEF ALAN (ed.), *Alternativní kultura: Příběh české společnosti 1945–1989*, Praha: Lidové noviny 2001, pp. 9–59; JONATHAN BOLTON, *Worlds of Dissent: Charter 77, the Plastic People of the Universe, and Czech Culture under Communism*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2012, passim; LADISLAV KUDRNA (ed.), *Od mániček k undergroundu [From Long-haired Men to Underground]*, Praha: ÚSTR 2019, passim; LADISLAV KUDRNA (ed.), *Hvězdná hodina undergroundu: Underground a Československo v letech 1976–81 [Underground’s Finest Hour: Underground and Czechoslovakia 1976–81]*, Praha: ÚSTR 2020, pp. 24–27.

¹² Cf. JAROSLAV RIEDEL, *Plastic People a český underground [The Plastic People and Czech Underground]*, Praha: Galén 2016, passim; MICHAL PŘIBÁŇ, et al., *Český literární samizdat: 1949–1989 [Czech Literary Samizdat, 1949–1989]*, Praha: ÚSTR 2018, passim; see also an anthology made in the 1980s: HORNA PIGMENT [Ivan Lamper], *Cs. underground IA – IIB [samizdat]*, Praha: Mozková mrtvice 1984–85, passim.

¹³ See e.g. ALAN, „Alternativní kultura...“, pp. 43–48.

was “counter-values”, an alternative to the values of the mainstream culture, considered by its performers and recipients to be more significant, more profound, and fuller than others. They included values from existing religious traditions, especially from various interpretations of Christianity. This tendency was present even in the lyrics of the highly riotous (rather exclusive) music group Aktual, led by an artist and performer Milan Knížák, between 1967–73. Together with a concentrated attack on the established culture, it also offered a sort of a solution to an existential crisis, referring to religious values:

My bláznivý apoštolové
 My spasíme svět
 My převrácení hitlerové
 Zasadíme květ

My bláznivý apoštolové
 Rozbouráme zeď
 My bujně snící vandalové
 Naočkujem sněť

My bláznivý apoštolové
 Řeknem dneska teď
 My přiblíží kreténové
 Ukřížujem svět

My bláznivý apoštolové
 Poručíme let
 My opilci a narkomani
 Rozkmitáme svět

My bláznivý apoštolové
 Příští svět je náš
 My bláznivý apoštolové
 My sme mesiáš

(My blázniví apoštolové/Foolish Apostles)¹⁴

¹⁴ All the lyrics are quoted from samizdat sources, especially HORNA PIGMENT, *Cs. underground IA – IIB*, *passim*; the texts were collated by post-1989 editions including MILAN KNÍŽÁK, *Písňe kapely Aktual* [*Songs of Aktual Band*], Praha: Maťa 2003, *passim*; IVAN MARTIN JIROUS, *Magorova summa* [*Magor's Summa*], Praha: Torst 1998, *passim*; SVATOPLUK KARÁSEK, *Vrata dokořán: Texty písní a básně* [*Gates are Open: Lyrics and Poems*], Praha: Kalich 2010, *passim*; THE PLASTIC PEOPLE OF THE UNIVERSE, *Texty* [*Lyrics*], Praha: Maťa 1997, *passim*; KAREL SOUKUP, *Radio*, Praha: Torst 1997, *passim*; PAVEL ZAJÍČEK, *DG 307: Texty z let 1973–1990* [*DG 307: Lyrics from 1973–1990*], Praha: Vokno 1990, *passim*. Nevertheless, it is clear that certain lyrics occur in multiple variants; for the purposes of this article, the textual differences are not essential.

According to Machovec, “ignorance, rawness, ‘barbarism’ and contempt for established cultural values ... naturally eventually grows into a new positive ... Paradoxically, a new, even collectively acceptable hope is born out of absolute hopelessness.”¹⁵ This hope, which centred on the underground community, not the individual or even humanity as a whole, naturally called for a kind of cleansing cut, which would ground the underground in opposition to the contemporary decay of values and perhaps even a sense of redemption (the Messiah bringing the crucifixion). However, it only related to the established forms of Christianity vaguely and somewhat metaphorically. On the other hand, their systemic negation did not avoid the institutional forms of faith either. It ended outwardly quite surprisingly, but internally quite logically (albeit rhetorically provocatively) with ethical imperatives:

To všechno je lepší než válka
 To všechno je lepší než válka
 To všechno je lepší než válka
 V tomhle světě máme všechno co jen můžem mít
 Bláznit, lítat, potápět se, válet se či dřít
 A proto
 MRDEJ A NEVÁLČI

(Mrdej a neválči/Fuck and Don’t Fight)

Ethical and even religious references do not need to indicate a lived faith, which is quite unclear in the case of *Aktual*. As many times before in the history of art and literature, the references might have been employed simply because they were generally understandable – and had a roaring potential. However, even such use refers to a vicarious role of religion, because otherwise it would be meaningless. Nevertheless, *Aktual*’s influence remained only marginal due to its exclusive nature and inability to create a wider and longer lasting community and the extreme character of its expression. The same could have also applied to the psychedelic and underground music attempts of the late 1960s (Primitives Group, Plastic People of the Universe). However, the strict communist repression against the musicians and the ideological leadership of Ivan Martin Jirous, who created the ideology of Czech “second culture”¹⁶ (the most important ideological text was Jirous’ Report on the Third Czech Musical Awakening¹⁷), led to another end. The community around the Plastic People absorbed (some of) the marginalised intellectuals, including theologians and religious studies scholars who became influential in the relatively liberal second half of the 1960s or more liberal

¹⁵ MARTIN MACHOVEC, „Šestnáct autorů českého literárního podzemí (1948–1989)“ [“Sixteen Authors of the Czech Literary Underground (1948–1989)”], *Literární archiv PNP* (25, 1991): p. 52.

¹⁶ Cf. BOLTON, *Worlds of Dissent*, pp. 72–114.

¹⁷ Published as samizdat in 1975 and as JAN KABALA [IVAN M. JIROUS], „Zpráva z českého hudebního podzemí“ [= Zpráva o třetím českém hudebním obrození] [“A Message from Czech Musical Underground“], *Svědectví* 51 (13, 1976): p. 571–586.

church communities (both of which could, of course, intermingle), who did not want to lose at least some of their influence. An example of the former is the lay Catholic intellectual, philosopher and essayist Jiří Němec; an example of the second would be Svatopluk Karásek, a protestant pastor banned from clerical work. Both strengthened the religiosity of the underground community significantly. Sometimes, pure coincidence played a role. Němec met not only with Jirous, who gradually became the leading “underground theorist”, but also with the frontman of the Plastic People, Mejla Hlavsa, who later also became his son-in-law. In addition, Němec’s wife (and Jirous’ mistress) Dana Němcová and their large apartment in Prague Ječná Street became an informal social and information centre for the community, having a vital role in the communication between what were initially quite incongruous personalities and ideologies. The underground community thus became an environment in which religious intellectuals who had lost their (public, academic) audiences could discuss and partially implement their church reformist or even evangelical intentions, which could no longer be presented elsewhere in the 1970s.

Karásek wrote homonymous Czech lyrics to American spirituals, through which he emphasised the parallels between the contemporary world and the biblical message. His style and performance (single man playing acoustic guitar) made him more of a folk singer, which he also admitted himself,¹⁸ but political bans drove him from the folk scene (and the Protestant church pulpit) to the underground, where he found a surprisingly warm reception.¹⁹ Among other actualisations of biblical stories (e.g. Abraham’s dispute with God over the fates of Sodom and Gomorrah in *Kázání o zkáze/Sermon on Destruction*, disobedience of pharaoh’s command in *Báby/Midwives*, or Peter’s denial in *Vy silní ve víře/You Who Are Strong in Faith*), Karásek emphasised personal responsibility and the primacy of God’s call, instead of the world according to the Barmen theses. At the same time, he warned against the temptations and pressure of the world and evil.

Sejmou ti podobu sejmou
 Sejmou ti podobu sejmou
 Tvář tvou zmažou ti hlínou
 Chtěj mít jen masku posmrtnou
 Sejmou ti podobu sejmou

Sejmou tvou bustu sejmou
 Sejmou tvou bustu sejmou
 Čas už hází proti skále

¹⁸ ZDENĚK R. NEŠPOR, *Děkuji za bolest: Náboženské prvky v české folkové hudbě 60.–80. let* [*Thank You For the Pain: Religious Motifs in the Czech Folk Music of the 1960s to 80s*], Brno: CDK 2006, pp. 226–231; MARTIN C. PUTNA, *Česká katolická literatura v kontextech 1945–1989* [*Czech Catholic Literature in Context, 1945–1989*], Praha: Torst 2017, pp. 785–791.

¹⁹ SVATOPLUK KARÁSEK, *Víno tvé výborné: Rozhovory – Štěpán Hájek – Michal Plzák* [*Your Excellent Wine: Interviews – Štěpán Hájek – Michal Plzák*], Praha: Kalich 2000, pp. 88–89.

Ty tvý hlavy sádrový
Sejmou ti podobu, sejmou

Say no to the devil, say no
Say no to the devil, say no
Devil is this evil
He won't treat nobody right
Say no to the devil, say no

Sejmou tvý obrazy sejmou
Sejmou tvý obrazy sejmou
Svezou je na velké louku
Shořej v moři ohnivým
Sejmou tvý obrazy sejmou

Pak se pod zdí prázdnu sejdou
Koho teď tak karty sejmou
Teď padlo jim žaludský eso
Tak ho hned do rámu daj
Sejmou nám karty sejmou

Sejmou ti otisky, sejmou
Sejmou ti otisky, sejmou
Pak teprve poznáš ďábla
V škebli se ti rozsvítí
Sejmou ti otisky sejmou

Say no to the devil, say no
Say no to the devil, say no
Devil is this evil
He won't treat nobody right
Say no to the devil, say no

(Řekni ďáblovi ne/Say No to the Devil)

Actualising the proclamation of the Gospel to the unchurched modern man naturally involved a critique of the current socio-political situation, not just the Marxist ideology's strict rejection of the Christian faith but, above all, a life neglecting the fundamental humanist (originally Christian) values. This criticism also often pointed at visible church structures (e.g. songs *Vy silní ve víře/ You Who Are Strong in Faith*, *Synodní rado/For the Synod Council*), and this sounded even more honest from the mouth of a former pastor, whose loss of support from the "ecclesiastical powers" (the leadership of the Protestant Church of the Czech Brethren) did not deprive him of

faith, even after he lost the state's approval to work as a cleric. This won him more followers, and Karásek became an informal religious teacher for the underground community, although he ostensibly rejected this position.

The rejection of the social and mostly even political conformation of official Christianity together with a claim for "true religion" was not solely the prerogative of Karásek in the underground. Other spiritual seekers also longed for religion, but not the church. This was the case of Pavel Zajíček, Vlastimil Třešňák, or Charlie Soukup. Vratislav Brabenec, a former student of Protestant theology, stated explicitly that he was interested in a religious message, but "I am trying to discuss Jesus' words [...] in my own way and look for what Jesus actually wanted to say. I think the current church does not understand him, it is moving away from Christ."²⁰ When Soukup referred to the biblical Cain, he did not need the church for anything and even implicitly accused it of inaction.

Včera jsem zabil svýho bratra
Od těch dob říkají mi Kain
Jidášem nazvala mě chátra
Tehdy když visel mladej pán

Jak tě mám rád
Má krásná Vltavo
Nechám si zdát
O Noemovi, o krutém boji,
Krvavých jatkách na neviňátkách
Na kříži visí pán

Už nebaví mě mávat mečem
Tak jsem vynalez' střelnej prach
V ohni že lidi strašně ječe
Topím v plynovejch komorách

Jak tě mám rád
Má krásná Vltavo
Nechám si zdát
O černém moru, lidském hororu,
O svatých válkách, utatých lebkách
V plamenech hoří Jan

Ve světle nukleární pravdy
Poznáte, že mě poslal Bůh

²⁰ PETRUŠKA ŠUSTROVÁ, „Dvěštedvojka celej život...“ [An interview with Vratislav Brabenec], *Revol-ver revue* 30 (1995): p. 62.

A podle jedné smlouvy
Vrátíte nesplicenej dluh

Jak tě mám rád
Má krásná Vltavo
Nechám si zdát
O světě v troskách, věžeňských kobkách,
O neutronu, rudém teroru
Magor zas' sedí sám

Ve světle nukleární pravdy
Vrátíte nesplicenej dluh

(Kain/Cain)

Soukup also rejected any rituals or community other than a “minute of non-spirit” – “come together and realise how stupid we are, that we can’t think of anything at all. Let the misery resound. Not to try to defeat the right away, for example, by reading the psalm, which an honest man can do by himself; together we should only realise the inner emptiness.”²¹

At the same time, however, the essence of religion was not questioned, not even by the critics of established “bourgeois” churches. On the contrary, religious values were seen as an ideal for which there was no substitute. Underground “truth-seekers” did not understand modern philosophical substitutes for religion (and they did not even tolerate them), as Jiroum wrote in a programme poem critically reflecting the intellectual efforts of Egon Bondy (Zbyněk Fišer), in other cases considered an intellectual guru of the underground:

Pročpak mu říkáš vole
ontologické pole?
Tolik jsi zblbnul z láhve
že se bojíš říct Jahve?

(Proč mu říkáš vole/Dude, why do you call him; collection *Magorovy labutí písně*)

Bondy naturally did not answer, but in such a case, he could repeat the last vers-
es of his earlier poem (*K večeru/In the evening*): I am in fact a left Marxist (“nikdo
o mně neví/že jsem marxist levý”), intellectually more profound and straightforward
than the nominal Marxists from the Communist Party. However, such an attitude was
far from acceptable among the underground’s spiritual seekers.

²¹ KARÁSEK, *Víno tvé výborné*, p. 128.

However, the religious seeking of the Czech underground was by no means limited to Christianity, churchly or not. In virtually all the communities that took religion seriously, there were at least partial attempts to understand Buddhism and other Far Eastern religious traditions, the religion of American Indians, and Western esoterism. Brothers Jáchym and Filip Topol and specific lyrics of the group *Psí vojáci* in the 1980s are well-known examples. “As we grew older, other religions emerged, Buddhism, Zen, yoga, the whole East came to us,”²² which resulted from the (rather superficial) import of American counterculture and an expression of the older Czech inclination to spiritual alternatives.²³ However, such attempts have not led to a systematic interest in non-Christian spirituality in the long run. Instead, they only strengthened and thematically broadened the unchurched character of the originally Christian/Western ones.

Variety of underground lyrics

Ecclesiastically (re-)anchored underground members, or those spiritual seekers who found their way to traditional churches, could rely on their interpretation of official church teachings and consistent religious practice. Even that was quite wide. As Martin Fendrych recalled, “we thought that Jesus was with us, that he went with us to the pub, to concerts, to school, that he was with us when we prayed, when we stole our parents’ cars, when the cops came after us, when we fucked. He was with each and every one of us. He might fight with us, but he definitely loved us.”²⁴ A fundamental reliance on God, a combination of an awareness of man’s sinfulness and God’s forgiveness, often leading to a mystical approach to God, was to be found mainly among Catholic authors.²⁵ In the poetry of Fanda Pánek and sometimes Ivan Martin Jirous,²⁶ but especially in the lyrics of Dáša Vokatá, Christian God acquired the features of a partner, and sexual love served as an expression or symbol of eternal love like in a baroque metaphor.

Půjdu za tebou
Cestou zázraků
Půjdu za tebou
Polem bodláků

²² MARTIN FENDRYCH, „Žijte složitě: Zpochybněná generace“ [„Live Intricately: The Questioned Generation“], *Vokno* 9 (1991): p. 113.

²³ Cf. STANISLAV BALÍK, LUKÁŠ FASORA, JIŘÍ HANUŠ and MAREK VLHA, *Český antiklerikalismus: Zdroje, témata a podoba českého antiklerikalismu v letech 1848–1938* [Czech Anti-Clericalism: Sources, Themes, and the Shape of Czech Anti-Clericalism, 1848–1938], Praha: Argo 2015, pp. 382–392.

²⁴ FENDRYCH, „Žijte složitě“, p. 113.

²⁵ PUTNA, *Česká katolická literatura*, pp. 725–797.

²⁶ MARTIN C. PUTNA (ed.), *Ivan M. Jirous: Magorské modlitby* [Ivan M. Jirous: Magor’s Prayers], Praha: Biblion 2021, pp. 33–90.

Půjdu za tebou
Na cestu se dám
Půjdu za tebou
Abys nešel sám

Hvězdy nám září nad hlavou
Svou svatozáří sálavou
nás hřejí strážní andělé
I naši duši raněnou
I naše tělo zemdlelé
Než ztuhne hrůzou na posled
Zahřejou strážní andělé

Půjdu za tebou
Cestou zázraků
Půjdu za tebou
Polem bodláků
Půjdu za tebou
Na cestu se dám
Půjdu za tebou
Abys nešel sám

Tvá cesta plná kamení
Změní se v řeku oblázků
Protože věříš na lásku
Zaslechneš boží znamení
Není už cesty nazpátek
Mlčí lesy křížů
Řvou hory oprátek
Ošlehán ohněm
Zmrazen tmou
Jdeš do betléma za hvězdou
S růžencem slzí na vlásku

Větve se mazlí ve květu
Vzduch voní jarem zas a zas
Od Betléma až k Tibetu
Člověk je zrozen pro úžas
Slunce zas vklouzne do klásků
To pole, které spálil mráz
Vábí na letní procházku
A kdyby se náhle setmělo
Otrásl námi noční chlad

Přitisknem tělo na tělo
A spolehnm se na lásku

(Půjdu za tebou/Following You)

However, such attitudes were undoubtedly in the minority. Most underground members had to find their own ways to religion and God. While Zajíček's early poet-ics (written for the DG 307 and less often for the Plastic People) was full of nihilism close to Knížák, later on, the nihilism in the field of religion became a mere means of purification. "He became a chiliastic preacher, appealing in a language – in which, despite all the slang, neologisms, and anxious effort to speak as his beak grew, is to feel the lessons of reading the New Testament – to all of us who chose to create and live in underground so that we do not lose courage and humanity."²⁷ With his lyrics, Zajíček mainly criticised the pseudo-religious modernist "enlightened humanism," which he clearly considered a sign of inordinate human pride.

Čemu se podobáš
Ve svý velikosti
Seš dotek
Hvězda
Nebo zbytek kostí
Čemu se podobáš
Ve svý velikosti
Seš spasitel
Zvláštnost
Nebo plamen
Čemu se podobáš
Ve svý velikosti
Seš pravda
Bůh
Nebo tuna ješitnosti
Čemu se podobáš
Ve svý velikosti
Hovnu hovnu hovnu hovnu
Hovnu hovnu hovnu hovnu

(Podoba/Face)

This was not just a criticism. Zajíček also showed the way out, often inspired by early Christianity. The (ideal) religion was again seen in opposition to the corrupted world, though churches were uncompromisingly linked with the latter.

²⁷ KABALA [= JIROUS], „Zpráva...“ p. 577, cf. p. 584.

Sv. Pavel
 Celý život stíhán
 Sv. Štěpán
 Ukamenován
 Jan Křtitel
 Štát
 Ježíš
 Ukřížován

Seká tobě někdo do hlavy
 Seš snad hříčkou popravý
 Máš nedostatek potravy
 Obavy vo svý zdraví
 Bořej se ti kostí základy
 Připravujou proti tobě úklady
 Mlátí ti někdo šutrem do hlavy?

Čeho se tedy bojíš?

Však ty víš!

Seš zakrnělej
 Zbabělej živočich
 Hlavně že seš
 Prasácky dobře veleživ!

Sv. Pavel
 Celý život stíhán
 Sv. Štěpán
 Ukamenován
 Jan Křtitel
 Štát
 Ježíš
 Ukřížován

(Sv./St.)

At the end of the 1970s, Zajíček's lyrics moved further towards subjectivism. "They have turned into the testimony of a man whose fear of the pressure of an alienated and abused word leads to an ever-forgiveness of expression, to resignation not only to appeal in the political, religious or moral sense, but also to any 'disputes with the world'. The individual texts become the records of a fragment of a story, a shadow of existence and a dream; they are full of gloomy symbols and para-

bles.”²⁸ The “prophetic” certainty of salvation and perhaps religiosity in general has disappeared, but only in order to make space for a pessimistic vision of extinction, projected onto decadent images.

Marný je putování k vrcholům
Když kořeny zarůstaj do bahna
Marná je šíleně jasná představa
Když v oku se odráží hrob

Stojíme nad propastí
Jedna noha hnije v pasti

Svůj popel vznášíš do hor
Abys ve svejch dlaních přines oheň
Osamělý vrcholy nabízej nejkratší cestu
Zastavení před smrtelným skokem

Stojíme nad propastí
Jedna noha hnije v pasti

Stvořil sis záhrobí do svýho žití
Tělo je ohořelej kmen napadenej snětí
Slzy sou chorobou
Slaným nánosem na srdci

Stojíme nad propastí
Jedna noha hnije v pasti

Neohlížej se dozadu stojí tam temná minulost
Temno se vplížilo i do tvýho přítomna
Vrůstáš do skleněný mohyly jak kalnej
Zvěstovatel smrti

Stojíme nad propastí
Jedna noha hnije v pasti

(Zvěstovatel smrti/Herald of Death)

A similar trajectory of eventually unsuccessful religious search can be traced for the most important Czech underground representative, the Plastic People of the Universe

²⁸ *Slovník českých spisovatelů od roku 1945 II.* [*Dictionary of Czech Writers since 1945, part II.*], Praha: Brána and Knižní klub 1998, p. 693 [entry by M. Machovec].

band.²⁹ Its way from psychedelic music through the decadent and ironic (and certainly irreligious) poetry of Egon Bondy to religious lyrics might be seen as rather coincidental. However, it was well understandable in light of the above-mentioned similar attempts for religious seeking. In the case of the Plastic People, it was also somewhat paradoxical. The group leader Mejla Hlavsa sought to depoliticise the group's repertoire, and writing music for the passion, which another band member, Brabenec, had originally made for the church choir, seemed like a good idea.³⁰ The outchurched Christian Brabenec himself found it a good idea, too, fitting in with the spiritual mood of the band and underground in general: "Mejla [Hlavsa] was a crazy Catholic, Jirous a Catholic peasant from Vysočina, so I didn't impose myself with that [Christian topic] there."³¹

Thanks to Brabenec, the group, which earlier fostered nihilism and uncertain religiosity at best, found its firm point in biblical Christianity. However strange (and hardly acceptable for any traditional churchmen) in performance, the album *Pašijové hry velikonoční/The Passion* (1978) followed the story of Jesus' passion literally and reverently, making its mark at the same time as one of the best (if not just the best) recordings of the band's history.

Otče, proč jim neodpustil?
Podej mi kalich hořkosti ode mne

Ale je-li to vůle Tvá, ne jak já chci,
Ale jak Ty chceš.
To jste nevydrželi ani hodinu bdít se mnou?

Otče, podej mi kalich hořkosti ode mne
Ale vůle Tvá, ne jak já chci, ale jak Ty chceš
Nevydrželi bdít ani hodinu

Petře, dřív než kohout zakokrhá,
Zapřeš mne, zapřeš
Ty jsi ta skála, otče, nevydrželi bdít ani hodinu

Otče, proč jim neodpustil?

Šimone, Jakube, Tomáši, Ondřeji,
Nespěte, jen hodinu bděte se mnou
Počkejte, teď je ten čas, ta hodina
Šimone, Jakube, Tomáši, Ondřeji

²⁹ For a comprehensive history see FRANTIŠEK STÁREK ČUŇAS and MARTIN VALENTA, *Podzemní symfonie Plastic People [The Underground Symphony of the Plastic People]*, Praha: Argo and ÚSTR 2018, *passim*; see also BOLTON, *Worlds of Dissent*, *passim*; RIEDEL, *Plastic People*, *passim*.

³⁰ RIEDEL, *Plastic People*, p. 224.

³¹ PETR PLACÁK, *Kádrový dotazník [Personal Data Questionnaire]*, Praha: Babylon 2001, p. 77.

Otče, podej mi kalich hořkosti ode mne
Ale ne jak já chci, jak Ty chceš
Nevydrželi bdít ani hodinu

Vím, vím, písma se naplnila
O moje roucho trhajelos'

Otče, pročs jim neodpustil?

Golgota, místo popravčí
Ještě kus cesty nes Šimone jeho kříž
Golgota, místo popravčí
Ještě kus cesty nes Šimone jeho kříž

Vykoupení, smrt, smrt, vykoupení
Smrt, vykoupení, smrt
Jak je psáno a říkají proroci

Otče, pročs jim neodpustil?

Golgota, místo popravčí
Jsi-li syn boží, sestup z kříže,
Sbory andělů at tě snesou

Volej Boha, pomůže synovi
Nebo písmo chceš naplnit?
Sestup a uvěříme

Otče, pročs jim neodpustil?

Jako lotra jali jste mne
Učil jsem v chrámě, nejali jste mne
Ten dav, jako lotra vedou mne,
S lotry ukřížují

Otče, podej mi kalich hořkosti ode mne
Ale ne jak já chci, ale jak Ty chceš

Otče, pročs jim neodpustil?

(Otče/Father)

Religious (or at least existential) interests remained essential for the Plastic People for the next several years, although they gradually lost their Christian character. From the pious, if not “fully orthodox” Passions, the poetics of the group led through transcendence in the poetry of Ladislav Klíma (*Jak bude po smrti/How It Will Be After Death*, 1979) to a more distinctive, albeit perhaps less successful album *Co znamená vésti koně* (*Leading Horses*, 1981), also written by Brabenec. The album provides an absurd intertextual game leading to a kind of (unchurched) spiritual message of hope, and Brabenec himself started to identify closer with Judaism than Christianity.³²

Jsem sám Osip a hostinská a hospoda jeho
 Sám utrápení a utracení všeho
 A jeho bába svíčková umodlená a usouložená
 Božízní po životě v ráji v háji
 V báni budeš sedět a truchlit
 Tak se pušť háčku nebo zalovím
 A píchnu a říznu
 A pušť krev za odpuštění našich hříšků brácho
 Pomodli se ať neupadnem v pokušení
 Tě tady zmalovat
 Těmadle rukama jsem vychoval dvanáct pacholků a nosil vodu do rozžhavený
 hlavy mološí
 Matičky vlasti a tobě rostou kozlí rohy nevděčníku
 Amen pravím tobě
 Nebude více zatvrzelosti a zlosti
 Nebude nebe nebude tebe nebude
 Vozíš se dlouho na ocase mé trpělivosti
 A stín tvůj jako stín můj
 Vrahu hvězdo anděli strážný čerte a potomku
 Zlořečím a proklínám tě a ty se držíš
 Válime se oba v bahně i v mracích
 Pláčeme oba nad sebou stejně
 Ty víc ne já víc ty lépe
 Ne já lépe sedíme spolu v cele i u řeky
 S nadějí na neshledání na návrat na cestu
 K á d á

(Osip, nebo Modlitba za Osipa Mandelštama/Osip,
 or Prayer for Osip Mandelstam)

³² VRATISLAV BRABENEC and RENATA KALENSKÁ, *Evangelium podle Brabence* [*Gospel According to Brabenec*], Praha: Torst 2010, p. 44.

Although many of these symbols and metaphors came from a Christian background, something like this was entirely unacceptable for most (contemporary) religionists.

On the contrary, “easy” church religion was often the core target of Brabenec’s provocative efforts, trying to incite people “to live wisely”³³ and manifesting this (religious? existential?) wisdom through the love of one’s neighbour and an ecological balance – or human values that constantly referred to their religious basis. However, while Karásek and the Christian-oriented underground representatives did so through biblical parallels, Brabenec reached deeper into subjective (fear of) existential experiences similar to Zajíček in his late period. Czech underground – not only in these cases – found hope in the transcendence of this world, just as it found it socially in overcoming the interests and needs of the individual, in a kind of self-sacrifice.

If the Marxist ideologues accused rock artists of hidden religious aims, that “the super-revolutionary practice of rock music, beatniks, free ‘artistic’ improvisations in happenings [is] very close to the mysticism ... of religious consciousness,”³⁴ in the case of the Czech underground one cannot but agree. Unlike them, however, we do not have to see anything negative in that. Nevertheless, we cannot overestimate or generalise it either. The later production of the Plastic People of the Universe (in which Brabenec no longer participated due to his exile) went in a different direction and left out religious motifs and elements almost entirely. This was not an exception – quite on the contrary, for many underground artists and performers, the religious search was only a temporary or partial source of inspiration, which they eventually abandoned.

Conclusion

The length of this article and the current state of knowledge do not allow us to examine all the various sources and forms of religiosity in the Czech underground’s lyrics. The rather extensive cultural-historical research is in its very beginnings. However, even the mentioned and described forms show the considerable breadth and significance of the manifestations of religion, both private and communitarian, within the underground counterculture. It also shows that the underground was predominantly limited to unchurched, somewhat idealised Christianity, a mystical or apocalyptic rejection of ordinary conformist society, whether it lived under communist or capitalist rules, and the churches that had adapted to it.

Cultural historian Martin C. Putna believes that the reason for this affinity for religion in the Czech underground – or at least one of the sources – was the exis-

³³ MACHOVEC, “Šestnáct autorů...”, pp. 56–57.

³⁴ JEVGENIJ GEORGIJEVIČ JAKOVLEV, *Umění v zrcadle světových náboženství [Art in the Mirror of the Religions of the World]*, Praha: Panorama 1983, p. 268.

tence of a Catholic countercultural milieu. Following the underappreciated Catholic Romanticism and especially the apocalyptic pamphlets of Léon Bloy, an influential centre of radical Catholic conservatism was established around Josef Florian in Stará Říše in the interwar period, with a far-reaching significance. According to Putna, “this is ... a form of Christianity that can be attractive to the underground: Christianity in its martyr-apocalyptic beginning, Christianity in various historical twists and turns of minority, protest and persecution. The form in which the underground recognises how its own situation resembles that of Christians in such periods and communities.”³⁵

However, one must ask whether this is more than just wishful thinking. It is doubtful that the (majority of) underground artists and performers knew the Catholic counterculture of Florian’s cycle at the beginning, and although some of them later established direct personal ties to the “survivors” of Stará Říše, both personal and ideological, the influence cannot be overestimated. The underground interest in Christianity and other religious sources did not necessarily need such mediation, nor did it manifest just in radical Catholic traditionalism, mysticism or eschatology. Instead, this interest seems to have been based on the traditional grounding of Western culture and cultural values within the Christian tradition, which seemed to be the (only) real alternative to communist ideology. The Protestants had their Bible, and no one else needed to know anything about Florian to realise the closeness of early Christianity and the persecuted underground communities in their anti-social struggles. Putna himself later broadened his interpretation and contextualised it more widely,³⁶ though some of his new ideas about “moronic prayers” are also rather dubious.

It seems more fundamental to draw attention to the mentioned “normal” cultural values. In its consistent public reminder of the cultural (often religious) values that were paid lip service to but, in practice, were abandoned, the Czech underground was very close to Czech folk music (and its social milieu),³⁷ although their verbalisation and performance acquired utterly different forms. If we accept this analogy, we do not have to look for personal or ideological connections between marginal countercultural groups (although such ties may have formed later). It is quite sufficient to assume that the social and cultural conditions of the underground community’s existence directly implied its (often temporary and non-institutionalised) interest in religion. The absence of institutional ties – both to the established churches and the marginalised communities of the “bourgeois churches” opponents – led personal ideological creativity, albeit often caused by mere ignorance. Such a “bric-à-brac Christianity”, extraordinarily rich but hardly disciplinable in various religious images, experiences and communities, was an essential aspect of the phenomenon of the Czech underground in the 1970s and 1980s.

³⁵ PUTNA, *Česká katolická literatura*, p. 736.

³⁶ PUTNA (ed.), *Ivan M. Jirous: Magorské modlitby*, pp. 261–290.

³⁷ See NEŠPOR, *Děkuji za bolest*, pp. 228–248.

At the same time, it is very close and attractive to the postmodern spiritual quests of contemporary society.³⁸

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³⁸ Cf. STEPHEN HUNT, *Religion and Everyday Life*, London and New York: Routledge 2005, *passim*.

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