

# The Czech Ecumenical Translation of the Bible: The Historical Contexts of Its Genesis

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**Abstract:** The paper concentrates on the circumstances of the genesis of the Czech Ecumenical Translation of the Bible (1961–1979). It presents the preparation and finalization of the project which can be labelled as unique in relation to the former Eastern Bloc countries and remarkable with respect to the church and religious history of the Czech Lands. The text consists of six contexts – the first one concerns global church history, whereas the remaining five contexts concern various aspects of Czech church history. 1) Global church history offers an insight into the paradigmatic shift of the Second Vatican Council in relation to Bible studies and ecumenism. 2) The second context describes the readiness of the non-Catholic and Catholic milieu for a new translation into the national language. 3) Subsequently, the process of the translation is briefly introduced as well as the non-implementation of this translation in the Roman Catholic Church with respect to liturgy. 4) The paper then shows contemporary pillars (i.e. at the time) of the communist church policy and the matter of the ecumenical relations between the Czech Christians. 5) Within an analysis, a paradoxical situation is shown when ecumenical activity was not systematically suppressed by the state; reasons for such an approach are considered. 6) The paper addresses a positive perception of the translation in the contemporary and later reception and in the church collective memory.

**Keywords:** 20th Century; Czechoslovakia; Communism; Church History; Ecumenism; Czech Ecumenical Translation of the Bible

**DOI:** 10.14712/30296374.2025.18

## Introduction

“For biblical quotations in this book, we use the Czech Ecumenical Translation.” A formulation of this kind can be found in a number of Czech publications which make use of the translation of the Bible made between 1961–1979 (and later revised in details). Such publications need not be from the fields of theology, philology, or translation studies, as their authors simply wanted to refer to the specific wording of a biblical passage in the Czech language and they often employed the Czech Ecumenical Translation (CET). This translation is also owned by households and is widely available

in Czech bookstores and libraries with a varying extent, format, and graphic and typographic treatment.

The foreword to the first edition of the Bible in CET (1979) addressed the tradition of Czech biblical translations, explicitly acknowledging the Bible of Kralice and ecumenical cooperation and observing the uniqueness of a collective effort: “The work that we present to the public on the 400th anniversary of the Bible of Kralice is the result of a long-lasting ecumenical cooperation (since 1961). In this regard, it is the first collective, inter-church biblical translation in our history. [...] The translators thank everyone who has been of any assistance in their effort; they wish the ancient Book of Books in the new form could speak, with new urgency, to many and bring them as much benefit and spiritual enrichment as it has brought the translators.”<sup>1</sup> The commencement and realization of the project were enabled by convenient happenstance.

In this paper, I focus on five historical contexts related to the genesis of CET. First, I introduce a general context of global church history in the form of a paradigmatic shift of the Second Vatican Council. Second, I deal with Czech church history. Next, I address the issue of the inner readiness for a new translation as well as basic information about the genesis of such a translation. Subsequently, I discuss the contemporary options of ecumenical cooperation and the state’s interference in the whole process. Finally, I address the reception of CET in the intra-church collective memory.

CET was a remarkable feat that produced a complete and modern translation of the Bible into Czech, with the participation of Catholic and non-Catholic Christians in the context of rather unfavorable conditions. It remains influential to this day (for instance, the non-Catholic *Bible 21* from 2009 follows directly on CET). Ecumenical cooperation also occurred in other biblical translations of the last third of the 20th century, for example *Tradução Interconfessional em Português Corrente* (Portuguese, 1972), *Traduction oecumenique* (French, 1972/1978<sup>2</sup>), *Einheitsübersetzung* (German, 1979/1980),<sup>3</sup>

1 *Bible. Písmo svaté Starého a Nového zákona. Ekumenický překlad* (Praha: Ústřední církevní nakladatelství, 1979), 6.

2 See Frédéric Delforge, *La Bible en France et dans la Francophonie. Histoire, traduction, diffusion* (Paris: Publisud, 1991).

3 See Helmut Haug, “Ein Vergleich zwischen den großen ‘Gebrauchsbibeln.’ Lutherbibel – Einheitsübersetzung – Gute Nachricht,” in Walter Gross (ed.), *Bibelübersetzung heute. Geschichtliche Entwicklungen und aktuelle Herausforderungen. Stuttgarter Symposium 2000* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2001), 329–364.

and *New Revised Standard Version* (English, 1990/1991 – following of previous translations<sup>4</sup>). *Bibbia Concordata* (Italian, 1968) even interconnected Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Protestantism and Judaism in its preparatory team.<sup>5</sup>

In the same period and in the context of national translation traditions, confessionally grounded translation were also being published, for instance the Italian translation of 1971/1974 initiated by the local bishop conference,<sup>6</sup> the Italian non-Catholic translation *Nuova Diodati* (1991), and others. Confessionally separated projects were running in the former Eastern Bloc countries, too: for example *Biblia Tysiąclecia* (1965 – catholic), *Biblia Poznańska* (1975 – catholic) and *Biblia Warszawska* (1975 – protestant) in the Polish People's Republic;<sup>7</sup> *Szent István Társulati Biblia* (1973 – catholic) and *Bible of the Magyar Bibliatársulat* (1975 – protestant) in the Hungarian People's Republic; *Biblia adecă dumnezeiască scriptura a vechiului și nouului testament* (1988 – orthodox) in the Socialist Republic of Romania.

In addition, there were instances of mere parts of the Bible being published in countries suppressing freedom of religion; sometimes, persecution even made any work on translations and their publishing impossible. It is also noteworthy that the Slovak ecumenical translation of the Bible was commenced in 1988, but published in 1995. The successful project of the new Czech translation is surprising not only with respect to the communist church policy, but also with respect to the church and religious history of the Czech Lands. Thus, the phrase “Czech Ecumenical Translation” must not be perceived in a trivial manner; it needs to be scrutinized productively and the layers of its genesis must be analyzed.<sup>8</sup>

4 Cf. Bruce Manning Metzger, *The Bible in Translation. Ancient and English versions* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2001), 144–174.

5 Cf. Ryszard Wróbel, “Przekłady Biblii na język włoski (XX wiek),” *Ruch biblijny i liturgiczny* 64:3 (2011), 197–219, here 204–205.

6 Cf. Wróbel, “Przekłady,” 205–207.

7 See Bernard Wodecki, “Polish Translations of Bible,” in Jože Krašovec (ed.), *The Interpretation of the Bible. The International Symposium in Slovenia* (Ljubljana, Sheffield: Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 1201–1233. See also Josef Bartoň, “Na okrajích moderního polského biblického překladu. Text Písma v nestandardních jazykových podobách,” *Acta Universitatis Carolinae Theologica* 10:1 (2020), 163–186.

8 See Peter C. A. Morée, “The Making of the Czech Ecumenical Bible Translation (1961–1979). Shaping a new ecumenical community in times of communist oppression,” in Henk de Roest and Wolfgang Wischmeyer (eds.), *Heiliger Text. Die identitätsbildende Funktion klassischer Texte innerhalb einer Gemeinschaft* (Groningen: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 2007), 144–158.

## The context of global church history: The Bible and the end of the Pian era

The period between 1789–1958 (from the start of the French Revolution to the end of Pius XII's pontificate) is, in church history, known as "the Pian era" or "very long 19th century". The first phrase refers to "Pius" which was the most common papal name then; the second phrase alters an established historiographical term. In this period, the Roman Catholic elites were strongly opposed to modernity and its manifestations and they supported the conservative representatives of the Concert of Europe (or the Pentarchy) in order to forestall any further revolutions. The *Syllabus of Errors* (1864) is considered to be the essence of papal stances, listing unacceptable opinions and ideas. At the turn of the 20th century, the atmosphere escalated even more, owing to the "fight against modernism" in the church.<sup>9</sup>

Self-enclosing and striving for an immutable interpretation also applied to studying the Bible and commenting on it, exegesis, and biblical archaeology. Church representatives, specifically the Papal Biblical Committee (*Commisio Pontificia de re Biblica*), held the view that a potential revision of certain opinions – for instance considering Moses to have been the author of the Pentateuch – would lead to defamation of the entire institution and to the emptying of the spiritual contents of the Bible. As a result, the historical-critical method was rejected and theologians having progressive views were silenced.<sup>10</sup> It was only Pius XII's encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* (1943) that brought new possibilities of Bible studies into the Catholic milieu. This document highlighted the study of the actual sense of a text and respect for a variety of literary genres.<sup>11</sup> The exceptional position of the Vulgate was

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Christopher Alan Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World. 1780–1914. Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 325–355; Tomáš Petráček, *The Bible and the Crisis of Modernism. Catholic Criticism in the Twentieth Century* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2022).

<sup>10</sup> See Johannes Beumer, *Die katholische Inspirationslehre zwischen Vatikanum I und II. Kirchliche Dokumente im Licht der theologischen Diskussion* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1966). See also Joseph Ratzinger, "Zum Hundertjährigen Bestehen der Päpstlichen Bibelkommission. Die Beziehung zwischen Lehramt der Kirche und Exegese." Source: [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb\\_documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20030510\\_ratzinger-comm-bible\\_ge.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20030510_ratzinger-comm-bible_ge.html) (accessed 30. 5. 2024).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Pius XII., "Divino afflante Spiritu," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (1943), 297–325. See also Tomáš Petráček, "Papež Pius XII. a biblická otázka. Geneze a poselství encykliky Divino afflante Spiritu," *Salve* 18:3 (2008), 77–97.

preserved. However, the encyclical stressed the need for interconnecting Latin translations with the original texts in Hebrew and Greek. In 1945, Pius XII issued the motu proprio *In cottidianis precibus* in which he authorized a revision of the translation of psalms in the breviary as well as pericopes read (sung) during the mass. The motu proprio, following on the encyclical, made it possible to modify Latin translations.<sup>12</sup>

Another significant impulse inwards the church (at first, it was only the French speaking Catholics) was the complete edition of *The Jerusalem Bible* (1956). This translation was entirely French, containing glosses and references to relevant pericopes. It was a collective work created by scholars from École Biblique and other specialists.

Between 1962–1965, the Second Vatican Council was held,<sup>13</sup> which meant a paradigmatic shift for Catholicism. Instead of the previous rejection of the modern era, the church opted for a dialogue with the world and reformulated its stances (typically from the Pian era) that had remained unchanged for a long time. For instance, the church accepted the hitherto dismissed concept of human rights,<sup>14</sup> began to communicate more obligingly with non-Catholic Christians and members of non-Christians religions<sup>15</sup> as well as with eastern Catholics; in the case of the Roman Catholic rite, the Church commenced

12 Cf. Pius XII., "Motu proprio 'In cottidianis precibus,'" *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (1945), 65–67.

13 See Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, *History of Vatican II. Volume 1. Announcing and Preparing Vatican Council II. Toward a New Era in Catholicism* (Leuven: Orbis Books, 1995); Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, *History of Vatican II. Volume 2. The Formation of the Council's Identity First Period and Intersession October 1962 – September 1963* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997); Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, *History of Vatican II. Volume 3. The Mature Council. Second Period and Intersession. September 1963 – September 1964* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2009); Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, *History of Vatican II. Volume 4. Church as Communion. Third Period and Intersession. September 1964 – September 1965* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2010); Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, *History of Vatican II. Volume 5. The Council and the Transition. The Fourth Period and the End of the Council. September 1965 – December 1965* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006).

14 See Martin Baumeister (ed.) et al., *Menschenrechte in der katholischen Kirche. Historische, systematische und praktische Perspektiven* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2018).

15 See e.g. Edward Idris Cassidy, *Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue. Unitatis Redintegratio, Nostra Aetate* (New York: Mahwah, 2016); Dennis Joseph Billy (ed.), *Continuing the Search for Religious Freedom. Fifty Years after Vatican II's Dignitatis Humanae* (Phoenix: Leonine Publishers, 2016).

an important liturgical reform.<sup>16</sup> In areas related to Bible studies and to the approach to the Bible as such, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei verbum* (1965) became a normative text.

In *Dei verbum*, the part devoted to the translations of the Bible states explicitly: “Easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful. [...] But since the word of God should be accessible at all times, the Church by her authority and with maternal concern sees to it that suitable and correct translations are made into different languages, especially from the original texts of the sacred books. And should the opportunity arise and the Church authorities approve, if these translations are produced in cooperation with the separated brethren as well, all Christians will be able to use them.”<sup>17</sup> Another crucial provision, which significantly extended lessons read in the Roman Catholic liturgy, was included in Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum concilium*: “The treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly, so that richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God’s word. In this way a more representative portion of the holy scriptures will be read to the people in the course of a prescribed number of years.”<sup>18</sup>

The official incentives aimed at biblical studies soon influenced the social practice, so the atmosphere changed greatly not only within Catholicism. In the case of the hitherto clearly separated Catholic and non-Catholic biblical studies, there occurred shifts, for instance when Catholic theologians became members of a committee preparing critical editions of the Bible in the originally Protestant series *Nestle-Aland. The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, an important document issued by The Pontifical Biblical Commission (1993), perceives the ecumenical translations of the Bible and their critical apparatus as the evidence of progress in ecumenical relationships

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<sup>16</sup> See e.g. Gordon W. Lathrop and Martin Stuflesser (eds.), *Liturgiereformen in den Kirchen. 50 Jahre nach Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2013). See also Annibale Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948–1975* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1990); Alcuin Reid, *The Organic Development of the Liturgy. The Principles of Liturgical Reform and Their Relation to the Twentieth-Century Liturgical Movement Prior to the Second Vatican Council* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005).

<sup>17</sup> Second Vatican Council, “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei verbum*” (1965), art. 22.

<sup>18</sup> Second Vatican Council, “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum concilium*” (1963), art. 51. See also *ibid.*, art. 24, 36 § 4, 90, 101.

and it openly supports them, “since having a common text greatly assists reading and understanding together.”<sup>19</sup>

## The first context of Czech church history: the need for a translation

In the course of the 20th century, the Czech Catholic and non-Catholic Christians felt a need to create a new translation of the Bible under different circumstances. The translation effort was led by a dominantly Protestant group and after 1950, there was one significant aspect related to it – a purely practical point of view. In the non-Catholic milieu, the urgent need to translate the Bible into modern Czech had been present for years. In the Czech Lands, we can observe a vast and continuous tradition of biblical translations (beginning in the Middle Ages) which had its own style and directly influenced the formation of the Czech Language.<sup>20</sup> (Influences of biblical translations on languages are also known from other cultures, for example the influential Reformation translations by Martin Luther from 1534 for the German milieu or the *King James Version* from 1611 for the English milieu).

In the early modern era, however, the Bible and its translations (as well as catechisms,<sup>21</sup> liturgical handbooks,<sup>22</sup> devout literature, letters, and other sources<sup>23</sup>) became part of confessional conflicts. On the one hand, these documents and work on them contributed to mutual demarcation and estrangement. On the other hand, they were expected to lead to the deepening of knowledge about a particular tradition and to spiritual stimuli and consolation. Before the creation of confessionally grounded translations, the Czech

<sup>19</sup> Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1996), cap. IV, C, art. 4.

<sup>20</sup> For the history of the Czech biblical translation until the publication of St. Wenceslas Bible see Vladimír Kyas, *Česká bible v dějinách národního písemnictví* (Praha, Řím: Vyšehrad, Křesťanská akademie, 1997).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Tomáš Petráček, *Adaptace, rezistence, rezignace. Církev, společnost a změna v novověkých dějinách* (Ostrava: Moravapress, 2013), 34–46.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Michal Sklenář, “Vznik žánru české laické katolické liturgiky jako součást procesu katolické konfesionalizace,” *Historie – Otázky – Problémy* 14:2 (2002), 9–25.

<sup>23</sup> See Radmila Prchal Pavláčková et al., *Vytváření konvertní. Jazyková a vizuální reprezentace konverze v raném novověku* (Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2021).

Catholics and non-Catholics (with some exceptions) used Melantrich's Bible, repeatedly published between 1549–1613. Utraquist modernization trends later met with a reaction from the Unity of the Brethren who created a translation known as the Bible of Kralice (1579–1593). The St. Wenceslas Bible, created by Catholics, interconnected a translation of the New Testament (1677) with two volumes of the Old Testament (1712, 1715).

Thus, in the course of the 18th and 19th century there existed two confessionally separated translation trends side by side: the Catholic one following on the St. Wenceslas Bible and subsequently the St. John Bible from 1888–1889 and the non-Catholic one following on the Bible of Kralice.<sup>24</sup> Whereas the series of the Catholic translations of the New Testament continued in the 20th century,<sup>25</sup> non-Catholic Christians still employed the Bible of Kralice, first in the form of reprints of the text from 1613, then (from 1887) in the form of a critical reprint containing slight modifications made by the future Protestant parish priest Jan Karafiát.<sup>26</sup> The first significant change in the non-Catholic milieu only came when a translation of the New Testament by the Protestant scholar František Žilka was published in 1933.<sup>27</sup>

The more years had elapsed since the publication of the Bible of Kralice, the more difficult it was naturally becoming to make sense of the distant, even archaic translation. For that reason, non-Catholics from individual denominations, despite their reverence for the Bible of Kralice, were in agreement that it was necessary to create a new and comprehensible translation corresponding to modern Czech. The mental readiness of the non-Catholic milieu, stemming from the need for a new translation, thus became interconnected with the openness of the Catholic milieu, stemming from the changes brought about by Vatican II, by the contemporary experience of religiousness being marginalized, and likewise by the need for a new translation.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Josef Bartoň, "Století moderního českého biblického překladu (1909–2009)," *Listy filologické* 133:1–2 (2010), 53–77, here 57–58.

<sup>25</sup> See Josef Bartoň, *Moderní český novozákoní překlad. Nové zákony dvacátého století před Českým ekumenickým překladem* (Praha: Česká biblická společnost, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Robert Dittmann, *Dynamika textu Kralické bible v české překladatelské tradici* (Olomouc: Refugium, 2021), 310–359; Vladimír Čapek, "Kralická 1613 a Jan Karafiát," *Český bratr* 39:10 (1963), 145–147.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Bartoň, *Moderní český novozákoní překlad*, 103–140.

## The second context of Czech church history: the Genesis of the Czech Ecumenical Translation; the Roman Catholic liturgical translation

The initiative to create a Czech Ecumenical Translation (CET) emerged from the Protestant milieu. In 1961, the first meeting of a group of translators of the Old Testament took place, initiated by the Protestant theologian and biblical scholar Miloš Bič and attended by eight Protestant clergymen. In the same year, a group of translators of the New Testament commenced their work, led by the Protestant theologian and biblical scholar Josef B. Souček; it was made up of seven members of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren and one “invited expert”, a member of the Czechoslovak Church. Both groups endeavored, apart from the translation work, to keep the believers informed about the effort and they published drafts of their translations in periodicals. In 1964, the New Testament group gained an ecumenical character (which was subsequently extended) by inviting Catholic Christians and by allowing the hitherto “invited expert” to become a regular member.<sup>28</sup>

An analogical process occurred in the Old Testament group, as recalled by Miloš Bič: “The censorship pressure eased off, the administration took a rather favorable stand towards the work of churches, and we ventured to apply for permission to print our commentary on Genesis (the First Book of Moses) in 1966. We had been working on this first biblical book for five years. It was a time of training when a group originally consisting of eight Brethren preachers expanded to become an ecumenical fellowship with representatives of six churches. [...] There [at meetings where discussions took place], people collectively made decisions on the final form of both the translation and the interpretation. There was a crucial principle: controversial issues will not be dealt with by voting, for even a minority may be right. We observed this principle although our ranks soon increased into an ecumenical

<sup>28</sup> See Josef Bartoň, *Pět českých novozákonních překladů. Nové zákony od Českého ekumenického překladu do roku 1989* (Praha: Česká biblická společnost, 2013), 58–61, 69–104. See also Michael Pfann, *K svobodě je dlouhé putování. Život Českobratrské církve evangelické v letech 1968–1989* (Praha: Karolinum, 2024), 48–49.

empire of 27 members of six churches and discussions often took a great deal of time before reaching unanimity.”<sup>29</sup>

First, the commissions produced, step by step, a 16-volume Bible published in 1968–1984. In 1979 – the anniversary of the Bible of Kralice – a one-volume Bible was published that corresponded to the Protestant canon without the deuterocanonical books of the Old Testament. Further publications followed and the Bible including deuterocanonical books was published in 1987. This final edition gained the Roman Catholic Church’s official approval.<sup>30</sup> However, its text did not spread into the Catholic liturgy. That brings us to a fundamental limit of the CET which was initially meant to serve as a common text read (sung) in church services in the Czech Lands.

The Roman Catholic Church uses the translation prepared by the Roman Catholic priest and biblical scholar Václav Bogner, specifically the parts of the Bible presented in the liturgy and inserted in a lectionary. Bogner’s translation includes the entire New Testament and selected Old Testament pericopes (those in use). Catholic Christians accepted, without any difficulty, the new translations from the first half of the 20th century and there was no cleaving to a specific wording of biblical passages. Up to Vatican II, there was no need for an official liturgical translation into Czech, as it was Latin that was preserved as the liturgical language. Starting in 1920, the clergy were allowed to read the epistles and gospels in Czech (after reading in Latin) even outside of preaching.

The liturgical translation by Václav Bogner was created within the great wave of translations of liturgical texts stemming from the reforms of Vatican II that made it possible for vernacular languages to enter dynamically into the liturgy of the Western Church. On the basis of Cardinal František Tomášek’s authorization, Bogner was the head of a group preparing the Czech lectionary. The organization which implemented changes related to Vatican II in the Czech Lands was called the Czech Liturgical Committee (in relation to this paper, the Translation Group and the Secretariat were its most relevant parts). As late as in 1965, there occurred a debate about biblical texts appropriate for the newly implemented liturgy of the word and

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Miloš Bič, “Jak jsme překládali Starý zákon,” *Česká biblická společnost*. Source: <http://www.dumbible.cz/web/cs/vydavatelstvi/cesky-ekumenicky-preklad/jak-jsme-prekladali-stary-zakon> (accessed 18. 11. 2025).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Bartoň, *Pět českých novozákonních překladů*, 58.

the members of the committee opted for a solution proposed by the priest Josef Bradáč, that is, not to produce a new lectionary and use all translations approved by the church, which Cardinal František Tomášek agreed with (he supported ecumenical activities, but within limited options<sup>31</sup>). The matter of the lectionary then returned repeatedly and there was controversy over the translation of the psalter; the organization could not reach an agreement in other matters either. The records of the committee from the late 1960s / early 1970s show that the work on the lectionary progressed. First, it was published in the form of a notebook, later as a book (one volume in 1973).<sup>32</sup>

The translation of the New Testament passages was closer to the CET than Bogner officially admitted. The New Testament Committee was surprised by his approach, which led to tensions. In any case, the New Testament parts in the later edition of the lectionary differ greatly from CET and Bogner's style of translation is much more evident here. There was a turn in 1974 when it became evident that the CET did not have sufficient support among the key representatives of the Catholic Church, so that it could not be accepted as a liturgical text. The reasons for that remain unknown.<sup>33</sup> It was probably Václav Bogner himself and internal processes under his influence that were the most responsible for the outcome; contemporaries' memories rule out any external intervention.<sup>34</sup>

### **The third context of Czech church history: church policy, ecumenical cooperation**

Since the Reformation, relations and potential cooperation between Christians in Europe have been burdened and complicated not only by theological differences, but also by historical events. Specifically, there are differences in the understanding and interpretation of church history, inter-confessional

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Aleš Opatrný, *Kardinál Tomášek a pokoncilní proměna pražské arcidiecéze* (Kostelní Vydří: Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 2002), 64–68.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Pavel Kopeček, *Liturgické hnuty v českých zemích a pokoncilní reforma* (Brno: Centrum pro stadium demokracie a kultury, 2016), 288–296; Bartoň, *Pět českých novozákonních překladů*, 63. See also Vojtěch Novotný, *Běda církvi: Bonaventura Bouše burcující* (Praha: Karolinum, 2012), 89 and following pages; Rupert Berger, "Knihy liturgické," in Rupert Berger, *Liturgický slovník* (Praha: Vyšehrad, 2008), 195–200.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Bartoň, *Pět českých novozákonních překladů*, 63–66.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Ibid, 64, footnote n. 47.

conditions, and confessional law. They bring about cold distance, in the past also animosity and open hatred. In the 20th century, such tensions weakened greatly, even though difficulties and dissimilar expectations still remain. At the Second Vatican Council, Catholicism took a step towards a dialogue. In 1965, pope Paul VI and Constantinople patriarch Athenagoras brought the long-lasting mutual excommunication of Catholic and Orthodox Christians to an end. Near the jubilee year of 2000, pope John Paul II called upon reconciliation (in the Czech milieu especially the 1999 apology for John Hus' death resonated, with the acknowledgement that he had been a reformer).<sup>35</sup> The transformation of the official attitudes became interconnected with the shared experience of Christians who, regardless of the confession, had faced persecution and injustices from the state's side for religious reasons.<sup>36</sup>

The agents of the church policy in the Czechoslovak (Socialist) Republic systematically made use of controversies and antagonisms between Christians after 1948. In contrast to Moravia and even more Slovakia, it was possible for these agents to follow on latent anticlericalism in Bohemia.<sup>37</sup> Ecumenical cooperation was perceived from a purely ideological and political point of view as an undoubtedly hostile activity and the state meant to fore-stall its development.<sup>38</sup> This matter became once again topical during the era

35 Cf. Ioannes Paulus II., "Tertio milenio adveniente," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (1995), 5–41, art. 33–35.

36 See e.g. Marek Šmid, "The Catholic Church in the Czech Lands during the Nazi Occupation in 1939–1945 and after," *Studia Humanitatis Journal* 1:1 (2021), 192–208; Martin Schulze-Wessel and Martin Zückert (eds.), *Handbuch der Religions- und Kirchengeschichte der böhmischen Länder und Tschechiens im 20. Jahrhundert* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 2009); Leonid Luks (ed.), *Das Christentum und die totalitären Herausforderungen des 20. Jahrhunderts. Russland, Deutschland, Italien und Polen im Vergleich* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2002); Martina Fiamová and Pavol Jakubčin (eds.), *Prenasledovanie cirkví v komunistických štátach strednej a východnej Európy. Zborník z medzinárodnej vedeckej konferencie, Bratislava 30. September – 2. október 2009*. [Persecution of Churches in the Communist Countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Anthology of the International Conference, Bratislava September 30 – October 2, 2009] (Bratislava: Ústav pamäti národa, 2010).

37 Cf. Stanislav Balík et al., *Der tschechische Antiklerikalismus. Quellen, Themen und Gestalt des tschechischen Antiklerikalismus in den Jahren 1848–1938* (Wien: Lit, 2016). See also Marek Šmid, *Mission. Apostolic Nuncio in Prague. Czechoslovakian-Vatican diplomatic relations between 1920 and 1950* (Prague: Karolinum Press, 2020).

38 Cf. Marie Bulínová, Milena Janišová and Karel Kaplan (eds.), *Církevní komise ÚV KSC 1949–1951 I. Církevní komise ÚV KSC ("církevní šestka"). Duben 1949 – březen 1950* (Brno: Doplněk, 1994), 21, 333; Jaroslav Cuhrad, *Církevní politika KSC a státu v letech 1969–1972* (Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1999), 12, 46–48.

of normalization when the security forces monitored a process of converging between the Roman Catholic and non-Catholic (mostly evangelical) milieus.<sup>39</sup> The paradigmatic shift of Vatican II as described above found its way also into the ideologically distorted language of the State Security, as illustrated by these words: "The clergy and laymen are expected to, in accordance with instructions from abroad, to observe the principles of the so-called 'sincere ecumenism', that is, in accordance with the documents of Vatican II, and to unify all Christian churches against the common enemy – communism."<sup>40</sup>

It was the diverse approach of the communist state towards the individual religious institutions that strengthened the historical barriers of a dialogue between Christians. This feature of church policy strengthened the mutual mistrust and stereotypes, deeply embedded in the collective memory of the communities. Similarly to other countries, the greatest attention and scope of persecution was aimed at the nominally strongest institution, which, in the case of Czechoslovakia, was the Roman Catholic Church. Particularly in eastern Slovakia, the decision to unify forcibly the Uniates (Greek Catholics) with Orthodoxy had a great impact (the union lasted from 1950 to 1968). In the non-Catholic milieu, we can see a wide range of stances, from a declared pro-regime engagement of the Czechoslovak Church (Czechoslovak Hussite Church since 1971),<sup>41</sup> through the ambivalence and searching in the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren,<sup>42</sup> to the prohibition of the Seventh-day Adventist Church between 1952–1956.<sup>43</sup>

The eighteen years of working on the CET was marked by a number of distinct attitudes in the area of church policy. The 1960s are viewed positively, owing to political, cultural, and social thaw; however, changes in church

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Archiv bezpečnostních složek (ABS), f. A 34 Správa kontrarozvědky I. díl (1947) 1954–1990, inv. j. 3212, 3214, 3215.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, inv. j. 3215, a report on the activity of hostile church headquarters 1971.

<sup>41</sup> See Zdeněk R. Nešpor et al., *Encyklopédie Čírkev československé husitské* (Praha: Karolinum, 2022). See also Jan Randák, *V září rudého kalicha. Politika dějin a husitská tradice v Československu 1948–1956* (Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy v Praze, 2015).

<sup>42</sup> See Peter C. A. Morée and Jiří Piškula, *Nejpokrovější církevní pracovník: Protestantské církve a Josef Lukl Hromádka v letech 1945–1969* (Benešov: Eman, 2015); Pfann, *K svobodě*, passim.

<sup>43</sup> See Michal Balcar, "Sobota jako znamení věrnosti Bohu. Adventisté sedmého dne ve střetu s totalitními režimy 20. století v Československu," *Teologická reflexe* 29:2 (2023), 174–188.

policy occurred belatedly and slowly.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, the Prague Spring meant a great activation for Christians and the formulation of demands for religious freedom and return to the public space (such requirements had been unheard of for two decades);<sup>45</sup> furthermore, there was a connection with the generally enthusiastic reception of Vatican II. A renewal of religious orders was being considered and an intellectual debate known as the Marx-ist-Christian dialogue had already been taking place for some time.<sup>46</sup>

At the time of the publication of CET, the state was employing more subtle tools in relation to churches and believers than in the early communist era. The general framework was still determined by the so-called church laws and the new adjustment of confessional law from 1949 and other interventions, such as the prohibition of activities of religious orders, remained in force. Nevertheless, the massive antichurch campaign, fabricated trials, and extreme violence were replaced with emphasis on the omnipresent atheization of society. In the era of normalization the number of ideology-related civil ceremonies that accompanied significant life events corresponding to anthropological constants and liturgy increased. However, the raising of a “new socialist human” anticipated that the religious frameworks of life would be abandoned, or not acquainted with.<sup>47</sup>

## The fourth context of Czech church history: the state's intervention?

Although there was ecumenical activity *par excellence*, the state and its security forces applied the *laissez faire* approach: according to the available

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Vojtěch Vlček, “Církevní procesy konce padesátých let a začátku šedesátých let aneb ‘zlatá šedesátá’,” in Markéta Doležalová (ed.), *Církev za totality – lidé a místa. Sborník k životnímu jubileu opata Heřmana Josefa Tyla* (Praha: Ústav pro stadium totalitních režimů, 2016), 247–268.

<sup>45</sup> See Tomáš Petráček, “Das Jahr 1968 in der Tschechoslowakei – ein europäischer Sonderfall in Politik, Gesellschaft und Kirche,” in Sebastian Holzbrecher, Julia Knop, Benedikt Kranemann and Jörg Seiler (eds.), *Revolte in der Kirche? Das Jahr 1968 und seine Folgen* (Freiburg: Herder, 2018), 296–308.

<sup>46</sup> See Ivan Landa et al., *Proměny marxisticko-křesťanského dialogu v Československu* (Praha: Filosofa, 2017).

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Jaroslav Cuhra, “Ateizace a výchova k vědeckému světovému názoru,” in Jaroslav Cuhra et al. *Pojetí a prosazování komunistické výchovy v Československu 1948–1989* (Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 2020), 31–56.

data, the state organs, State Security, and apparatus of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia did not actively forestall the creation of the CET. Surviving archives and published memories show that the regime merely monitored the process, causing sometimes minor complications, but there was no systematic activity or harsh intervention. That does not mean that the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic embraced and supported the project of the CET; nevertheless, it did not take any steps against the preparation and finalization of it.

The church policy of the state was effectively conducted by the Secretariat for Church Affairs, a part of the Ministry of Culture. The state's records give evidence of technical matters and procedures, Cardinal František Tomášek's personal effort in favor of the translation, contemporary ecumenical activities, and the celebrations of the 400th anniversary of the Bible of Kralice.<sup>48</sup> A separate agenda was formed by the import of Bibles from abroad, financial gifts from abroad, and the related matter of the publication of CET for the Roman Catholic Church's needs in 1988.<sup>49</sup> It is possible to attest a certain degree of disinclination in negotiations,<sup>50</sup> in the case of the 1988 publication for Catholics there was also a conflict over the high price of the book.<sup>51</sup> The records also prove that the state organs were worried about the activization potential of Vatican II.<sup>52</sup>

Materials created by security forces give clear evidence of general tendencies such as the effort to weaken ecumenical activity. In contrast, there is no information about the persecution of translators in clear connection with the CET – surely, some of them were being monitored, hindered, and prosecuted, but this was not happening on the basis of their translation work, but rather on that of other activities and contacts taking place in a different context. The security forces were informed about the work on the CET (also labelled

<sup>48</sup> See Národní archiv, fond NAD 995 Ministerstvo kultury ČSR/ČR, Praha (1945) 1967–1992 (2005) [Ministry of Culture Czech Socialist Republic/Czech Republic, Prague], Sekretariát pro věci církevní [Secretariat for Church Affairs], kart. 105, 106, 145.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Eva Richtrová, "Zahraniční dary pro římskokatolickou církev v ČSR v letech 1986–1988," – the paper is being peer-reviewed.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Ibid. See also Morée, "The Making," 154–155.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Richtrová, "Zahraniční dary."

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Petr Slouk, "Státní orgány a koncil," in Aleš Opatrný (ed.), *Kardinál Tomášek a koncil. Sborník ze sympozia k 10. výročí úmrtí kardinála Tomáška a ke 40. výročí zahájení 2. vatikánského koncilu* (Praha: Pastorační středisko při Arcibiskupství pražském, 2002), 31–42.

as “the ecumenical translation of the Bible of Kralice” or otherwise) and this issue could find its way into inquiries,<sup>53</sup> but there was no intervention against the creators. The security forces concentrated on penalizing illegal activities related to the religious practice, that is, the crime of “thwarting the supervision of churches and religious denominations” (work with the young and children was monitored meticulously), the illegal import and distribution of religious literature and samizdat newspapers, secret admissions to orders or congregations, and public criticism of the domestic church policy. The specific matter of the Bible and its dissemination is more commonly found in the prohibited organization of Jehovah’s Witnesses (also labelled as “Bible Scholars”)<sup>54</sup> or in the imported and prohibited “Yugoslavian Bibles.”<sup>55</sup> These were illustrated Bibles for the young, published in Zagreb in 1982 and printed in Banská Bystrica.<sup>56</sup>

What reasons may have led to the exceptional inactivity of actors who were normally so agile when it came to an antichurch and antireligious agenda? It is possible to consider the following influences. 1) An independent and also harmless activity at first sight. Concerning practical church policy, ideological work, and atheization, the translation appeared to be a distinct course of religious activity that could not be easily assigned to other illegal activities, so that it was effectively a legal process, 2) The scope of the activity. It was a leisure activity of a very limited group of people – they were educated not only in theology, but they were also experts in the Bible and biblical translations from the original languages. The state probably perceived the translation as a scholarly output, not as citizens’

<sup>53</sup> On 6 August 1986, members of the State Security paid a visit to Antonín Liška in Poříčí nad Sázavou. One of the matters discussed was “the course of action during the ecumenical translation of the Bible. The administrator Liška said briefly that the ecumenical translation of the Bible was basically finished and only seminars of some kind are irregularly taking place in which potential ambiguities are being clarified.” ABS, f. XV., sig. KR-805686 MV, fol. 97.

<sup>54</sup> Here, we find a testimony about contemporaries’ contacts with Jehovah’s witnesses, conversions, formation meetings, statements of personal attitudes (albeit formulated in the language and style of the security forces), and attempts to obtain prints of the Bible or other literature.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. ABS, f. AKR 36 Správa kontrarozvědky pro boj proti vnitřnímu nepříteli, X. správa, inv. j. 1841, 46, Stanovisko k dovozu a distribuci “Ilustrované bible” v ČSSR [Opinion on import and distribution of the “Illustrated Bible” in Czechoslovakia].

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Martin Piętak, “Otazníky kolem dětských biblí,” in Józef Szymeczek (ed.), *Katechetika – historie – teologie – 2002* (Ostrava: Pedagogická fakulta Ostravské university, 2003), 236–248, here 239–240.

initiative. Here, we could speculate that the potential of the translation in relation to the otherwise rejected ecumenism was underestimated to a certain extent. Indeed, many from the translation group had been closely monitored by the State Security for years due to, for instance, their academic work, so they were hardly unknown persons, 3) The nature of the activity. On the outside, especially for less interested observers, it appeared to be a non-Catholic activity; after all, the foreword to the first edition (quoted above) explicitly acknowledged the Czech tradition of biblical translations and in 1979, four centuries had elapsed since the publication of the Bible of Kralice. This rather Protestant course, claiming allegiance to the Czech non-Catholic tradition, may have become a certain protection of a more varied and collective work.

These phenomena could have influenced the subsequent result in which the communist organs perceived the CET, to a large extent, as a matter of specialists and of an intra-church nature, thus not directly taking action against it. One needs to be rather careful here: on the one hand, the state interfered in internal matters of religious organizations on a daily basis and rather substantially; on the other hand, it did not disrupt activities taking place within the walls of a church (congregation, house of prayer) provided they did not radiate into the public space or did not undermine the hegemonic position of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and its ideology in any other way. Interestingly, that was not the only case of this kind.

An analogical approach, which was effectively paradoxical / schizophrenic, can be illustrated well in the case of Roman Catholic sacred buildings and small-sized sacred monuments. On the one hand, there occurred ideologically legitimized devastation, dilapidation, and even deliberate destruction of the cultural heritage connected with the church.<sup>57</sup> It was nearly impossible to carry out new projects<sup>58</sup> and sacred art ended up on the periphery

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Kristina Uhlíková and Michal Sklenář, "In other words. To care for the heritage properties of part of our nation's socialist construction. State heritage care in the Czech lands from the early 1950s until the publication of the Cultural Heritage Properties Act in 1958," in Jakub Bachtík, Tereza Johanidesová and Kristina Uhlíková (eds.), *In the Name of Socialism, in the Shadow of the Monarchy. Post-War Monument Care in Central Europe* (Prague: Artefactum, 2022), 65–87.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Michal Sklenář, *Postaveny navzdory. Vznik nových římskokatolických sakrálních staveb v českých zemích v letech 1948–1989* (Praha, Brno: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů, Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2022).

of artistic activity.<sup>59</sup> On the other hand, the practical realization of the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council (reconstructions, radical changes of interiors, modifications of movables) occurred entirely under clerical supervision at the level of individual parishes,<sup>60</sup> even though the commencement of the reforms at the countrywide level was accompanied by complications caused by the state<sup>61</sup> and the very same state worried about the application of the Second Vatican Council's documents due to their activization potential.<sup>62</sup>

Certain elements can also be found in the Czech Protestant milieu in connection with the limited possibilities of sacred construction and art<sup>63</sup> or with youth work.<sup>64</sup> A similar reaction can be observed in the case of the CET: the translation as such – a matter available only to an educated, highly elite (that applied to all the confessions) and small group – was of little interest. However, when the process of the CET did reach the areas of print, distribution and sale, that is, when it had entered into the public space, trouble emerged, as restrictions against “religious print” were applied.

## The fifth context of Czech church history: historiography and collective memory

Czech church historiography, in concordance with contemporary witnesses, sees the CET as an extraordinary, favorably assessed and accepted work. In spite of unfavorable political conditions, the cooperation, finalization, and publication of the translation is perceived cross-confessionally in a positive

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Ivo Binder and Šárka Belšíková (eds.), *Posvátné umění v nesvaté době. České sakrální umění 1948–1989* (Olomouc, Praha: Muzeum umění Olomouc, Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů, 2022).

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Tomáš Řepa, “Počátky obnovy liturgie po II. vatikánském koncilu na příkladu umělecké komise brněnské diecéze,” *Zprávy památkové péče* 83:2 (2023), 103–112; Michal Sklenář, “Malé sošky z porculánu. Očista liturgického prostoru a počátky realizace liturgické reformy v královéhradecké diecézi na přelomu let 1966 a 1967,” *Studia theologica* 25:4 (2023), 99–118.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Kopeček, *Liturgické hnutí*, 265.

<sup>62</sup> See footnote n. 52.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Anna Boučková, *A ten chrám jste vy. Liturgický prostor ve stavbách Českobratrské církve evangelické* (Praha: Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy, 2023), 48–61.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Pfann, *K svobodě*, 52–54, *passim*.

manner, both in texts from that time<sup>65</sup> and in later reception;<sup>66</sup> participation in the translation also appears as an important piece of information in biographical profiles and extensive works about the individual participants.<sup>67</sup> For instance, the Protestant theologian Jan Heller labels the CET in his memories as “a great work” which he could be part of and he provides a description of the lengthy work: “Both committees [for the Old and New Testament] would gather once in two months for two days; for me this meant four days a month as I was in both. At first, we would meet only in Prague, then in other places as well. Even more time than for the meetings as such was needed for the preparation of the draft. Everyone was given a stint, typed it for the others and then it was thoroughly discussed in a general meeting, word by word.”<sup>68</sup> Heller was aware of the limits of the translation, but he defended it publicly.<sup>69</sup>

The Czech church historian Jiří Hanuš provides a wider framework and addresses four crucial areas connected with Vatican II: 1) the liturgical reform and vernacular languages in liturgy, 2) a different conception of religious freedom and freedom of conscience, 3) ecumenical cooperation, 4) inter-religious dialogue. In Czechoslovakia and other countries of the Eastern Bloc, general meetings were reduced and an open discussion was permitted just in 1968.<sup>70</sup> Despite that, “approximately three years of a more unrestricted environment enabled not only the application of the basic intensions of the council, but also (and primarily) the anchoring of certain reform-related ideas and, importantly, of inter-personal relations from the late 1960s that

65 Cf. e.g. Petr Pokorný, “Kralická bible. Její duchovní a teologické dědictví,” *Křesťanská revue* 47:5–6 (1980), 97–100.

66 Cf. e.g. Stanislav Balík and Jiří Hanuš, *Katolická církev v Československu 1945–1989* (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2007), 356; Tomáš Butta et al., *90 let Církve československé husitské* (Praha: Církev československá husitská Praha 6 ve spolupráci s Náboženskou obcí CČSH v Praze 1 – Starém Městě, 2010), 225, 265. See also Ladislav Tichý, “Který biblický překlad je nejlepší?” *Studia theologica* 19:4 (2017), 15–29.

67 Cf. Pavel Filipi, *Malá encyklopédie evangelických církví* (Praha: Libri, 2008), 150, 152–155, 157.

68 Jan Heller, *Podvečerní děkování. Vzpomínky, texty a rozhovory* (Praha: Vyšehrad, 2005), 84.

69 Cf. *Ibid*, 86–87, 290.

70 Cf. Jiří Hanuš, “Koncilní změny v českém prostředí,” in Stanislav Balík, Jiří Hnauš et al. *Letnice dvacátého století. Druhý vatikánský koncil a české země* (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2012), 7–24, here 24. Translation of the book into German language: Stanislav Balík and Jiří Hanuš, *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil und die böhmischen Länder* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöning, 2014).

had a profound impact in the form of ecumenical cooperation (CET), underground cooperation (samizdat publications, non-public education), and a further search for the practical forms of Christian existence in the specific conditions of the normalization regime.<sup>71</sup>

For a variety of reasons, there could and still can – especially after 1989 – emerge alternative views on the translation of specific parts and on the issues of comprehensibility and the relation to the original text,<sup>72</sup> which can *de facto* be observed in the case of every translation into another language. Regarding Catholics, we can mention the prevalence of Protestant solutions as well as remarks and stylistic questions articulated in connection with another translation into Czech, the *Jerusalem Bible*.<sup>73</sup> Regarding Protestants with an attachment to the Bible of Kralice, we can mention the rejection of the new transcription of personal names, especially in the Old Testament.<sup>74</sup> Personal views or philological/scholarly debate, however, do not usually cast doubt upon the translation as a whole – they focus on partial problems and proposed solutions in a totally legitimate way (reservations on the evangelical side can be observed in the case of Milan Balabán, a member of the translation group and expert on the Old Testament<sup>75</sup>).

## Conclusion

The phrase “Czech Ecumenical Translation” denotes the result of activities taking place in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic from the early 1960s to the late 1970s. This project offers a number of impulses for a historical analysis. The initiative was born in the milieu of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren and the Protestant character was partly preserved in the final text. Nevertheless, the translation groups for the Old and New Testament provided a basis for actual ecumenical cooperation where there was a search not for the majority's point of view, but for a consensus between all the members.

71 Hanuš, “Koncilní změny,” 24.

72 Cf. e.g. Jakub S. Trojan, *Moc v dějinách* (Praha: OIKOYMEMNH, 1994), 49, 62, 83; Helena Kurzová, “K problémům biblické a křesťanské řečtiny,” in *Problemy křesťanství* (Praha: Kabinet pro studia řecká, římská a latinská ČSAV, 1986), 187–197, here 190–191.

73 Cf. František X. Halas, *Co je Jeruzalémská bible a proč by se měl vydat její překlad do češtiny* (Praha: Petrov, 1991), 31–37.

74 Cf. Ivan Lutterer, “K starožákoní antroponymii v ekumenickém překladu bible,” *Listy filologické* 115:2 (1992), 93–95, 94.

75 Cf. Milan Balabán, *Víra – nebo osud?* (Praha: OIKOYMEMNH, 1993), 11–12.

The preparation and finalization of CET was an exceptional process, taking place in communist Czechoslovakia.

Both the Catholic and non-Catholic milieu were prepared for a new translation of the Bible into the Czech language; in fact, they asked for it. Apart from the long-lasting tradition of translating the Bible or its parts into Czech, purely confessional stimuli found acceptance here. Concerning the Roman Catholic Church, it was the paradigmatic shift of Vatican II which brought a radical end to the previous and long Pian era, commenced a liturgical reform, introduced vernacular languages into the liturgy (and also the Bible in a much greater extent), and called upon an ecumenical dialogue. Although the Czech non-Catholic milieu acknowledged (and still acknowledges) the special position of the Bible of Kralice, its text was more and more incomprehensible for readers and listeners in the 20th century. Thus, ways to a new, acceptable translation were being searched for. It is clear that the Catholic and non-Catholic milieu went through certain preparatory stages that made participation in a common work easier; both milieus were also accepting contemporary impulses.

While it is true that inter-confessional cooperation on a biblical translation is also known from other countries (since the second half of the 20th century), a complete ecumenical translation created in a former Eastern Bloc country is rare. The Czechoslovak Socialist Republic did not support ecumenical activities; on the contrary, using the state, security, and the party's apparatus, it endeavored to forestall them. Here, the state could follow on the persisting Czech anticlericalism and anti-catholicism – albeit weakened by the experience of the Nazi occupation during the Protectorate and by religion related persecution – and make use of an ideologically distorted interpretation of the domestic non-Catholic traditions in order to cause division, employing deeply embedded prejudices and confessional hatred. Let us note that the church and religious history of the Czech Lands has been very unsettled.

The shared experience of persecution from the Nazi and communist side forms a contribution that cannot be omitted. For instance, Miloš Bič was kept in concentration camps in Buchenwald and Dachau and later he made use of his ecumenical contacts from abroad; for the Czech church history, ecumenical seminars and meetings in V Jirchářich street (Prague) have a significant status, owing to the philosopher and translator Jan Sokol. The CET is, among Christians in the Czech Lands regardless of the confession, usually

perceived in a highly positive manner due to its results and ecumenical character, even though there may exist alternative views on the translation of a specific formulation. Nevertheless, there are two paradoxes of Czech church history related to the CET: no implementation in the Roman Catholic liturgy and a basically undisturbed development.

The CET belongs to a period of intense internal processes in religious institutions. On the outside, these processes manifested themselves in the short period of the Prague Spring, but in the preceding and following years, they were much less evident. The Roman Catholic Church responded to the Second Vatican Council's decisions – limited primarily to the liturgical reforms in the Czech Lands – and a modification and publication of new liturgical books (starting in 1970) and the common hymnal (1973) occurred. However, the CET became part of the Catholic liturgy for merely a short time, for Václav Bogner's project was preferred. Although the CET was expected to become a common text of the Christian church service, this did not happen in the Roman Catholic Church. When it came to forming the identity, the translation played a greater role in the non-Catholic milieu, primarily in the case of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren. The publication of the CET and *The Evangelical Hymnbook* (1979) shows that this particular church was self-confident and vital, which was visible even in the public space.

Even though the CET was an ecumenical activity *par excellence*, the finalization of which took place during the normalization era, there occurred no major complications. The available sources and contemporaries' testimonies show that there was no systematic effort of the state and its organs to bring the project to an end and prosecute its agents. Some members of the translation groups were actually prosecuted and pestered due to religion, but not in a direct connection with the translation, as it was their public engagement that mattered. The Secretariat for Church Affairs and the Czechoslovak security forces knew about the process, monitored it, but never took action against it.

From the outside, the notion probably prevailed that CET was a religious activity, but of an intra-church nature and limited to a small group of experts. This ill-informed perception and probably also a certain underestimation of the potential of ecumenical cooperation stemmed from the fact that the translation was not related to the contemporary issues of church policy, or policy as such (activities corresponding to the crimes such as "thwarting the supervision of churches and religious denominations", contact with

abroad, distribution of religious literature, samizdat prints, in the case of Roman Catholics also secret admissions, cooperation with monastic orders and congregations etc.).

The state perceived CET as an internal matter of the church, more precisely of the Roman Catholic Church and non-Catholic denominations. It directly acknowledged the matter of the domestic non-Catholic traditions; certain protection was also enabled by the connection with the 400th anniversary of the Bible of Kralice. However, as soon as the translation or a specific translator crossed the limits of socialist legality, trouble and delays occurred. A typical example of this is the omission of Milan Balabán's name from the list of the translators due to him having signed Charter 77; there were also complications concerning the import of paper, print, and donations for the purpose of publication. This, however, was not a controlled operation. Rather, these were difficulties stemming from the non-functional planned economy and from unwillingness and also partial reactions to specific matters. Problems accompanying print and distribution can be, with respect to the general context, seen as marginal – they were hindering, but certainly not threatening for the activity as such.

CET is the most commonly used and most available translation of the Bible into Czech made in the 20th century. It was created thanks to a strenuous effort of two committees (for the Old and New Testament); the whole work took eighteen years and the formerly evangelical activity succeeded in accepting other non-Catholic and also Catholic Christians into its ranks. In spite of the rather Protestant nature of the translation, it is still true that after centuries of religious wars, enmity, and contempt, the Czech Christians managed to agree on the wording of the entire Bible (let us not forget that the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* contradicts the Catholic notion of the key term *revelatio*<sup>76</sup>). Oto Mádr, a Czech Catholic moral theologian

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<sup>76</sup> The official stance of Catholicism as expressed at Vatican II in decree on ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*: “A love and reverence of Sacred Scripture which might be described as devotion, leads our brethren to a constant meditative study of the sacred text. [...] But while the Christians who are separated from us hold the divine authority of the Sacred Books, they differ from ours – some in one way, some in another – regarding the relationship between Scripture and the Church. For, according to Catholic belief, the authentic teaching authority of the Church has a special place in the interpretation and preaching of the written word of God. But Sacred Scriptures provide for the work of dialogue an instrument of the highest value in the mighty hand of God for the attainment of that unity which the Saviour holds out to all.”

and political prisoner, belonged to a group of theologians who pondered the contemporary and quite dismal state of the church in the 1970s. Mádr saw the suppression of ecumenical activities by the state as one of the tools of religious oppression.<sup>77</sup> At the same time, however, he optimistically pointed to various ecumenical activities including translations.<sup>78</sup> The CET corresponds to Mádr's statement, held by many others: "Much has already happened that was previously unimaginable for us."

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<sup>77</sup> Cf. Oto Mádr, *Slovo o této době. Výbor z díla* (Praha: Zvon, 1992), 257. A complete translation of the essay "How the Church Doesn't Die" was published in German: Oto Mádr, *Wie Kirche nicht stirbt. Zeugnis aus bedrängten Zeiten der tschechischen Kirche* (Leipzig: Benno, 1993). See also Vojtěch Novotný, "České teologie umírající církve 70. let 20. století," *Teologické texty* 15:1 (2004), 7–13.

<sup>78</sup> Mádr, *Slovo*, 65.