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Photographs / Images: fig 32: communion table from the Bethlehem Presbyterian Church, South Omaha; fig 33: František Totušek marker in the Zion Czech Presbyterian Cemetery, Clarkson; fig 34: Protestant Postilla, a book of scripture and theological discourse, published in Czech in 1542 and brought to Pawnee County in 1893 by Josef Štěpán; fig 35: family burial plot in the Czech Presbyterian Cemetery, Wahoo; fig 36: the Rev. Jan Pípal; fig 37: Bohemian crystal communion service and embroidered altar cloth brought to Colfax County for the Zion congregation by the Rev. František Kún; fig 38: Evangelical Bohemian-Moravian Brethren Congregation's church (later the Zion Presbyterian Church) and cemetery, Clarkson; fig 39: Czech Presbyterian Church, Prague, built in 1898; fig 40: second New Zion Czech Presbyterian Church building, Clarkson, dedicated in 1923; fig 41: the Rev. Bohdan A Filipi

Czech-American Protestants:

A MINORITY WITHIN A MINORITY

By Bruce M. Garver¹

During the years 1870 to 1920, Czech-American Protestants differentiated themselves from Czech-American freethinkers and Catholics and thought of themselves as a minority not only within the Czech ethnic minority but within the American Protestant majority.² In 1910 freethinkers, including socialists, constituted slightly over half of the Czech-speaking American population of 531,193, Catholics at least forty percent, and Protestants no more than five percent.³ The variety of Czech-American opinions on religion and politics continues to fascinate scholars, but complicates their efforts to make generalizations that apply to all Czech-Americans.⁴

Given the few Czech-American Protestants in 1920 in proportion to all Czech-Americans (at least 23,000 or 3.7 percent of 623,000) or to all American Protestants (no more than one in 2,000), their history has received little attention. That history is nonetheless interesting, in part because the study of any "minority within a minority" will shed some light on the larger minority, as in the case of the Czech Hussite and Czech Protestant traditions' having conditioned the development of Czech freethought and Czech Catholicism (fig. 1).⁵ Moreover, the experience of Czech-American Protestants differs enough from that of most Protestant immigrants that it is worth examining for its exceptional features. Besides the Slovaks, the Czechs were the only Slavic immigrants among whom were Protestants. And, Czechs were the only European Protestant immigrants who organized a majority of their churches and obtained most of their ministers with extensive help from mainline American Protestant denominations.

Few scholarly surveys of American religious or immigration history mention Czech Protestants, probably be-

cause their numbers were so small and because most archival and published information about them is written in Czech.⁶ The best general histories of Czechs in the United States briefly discuss some Czech Protestant institutions and leaders.⁷ More explicit information on the same subjects may be found in memoirs by Czech-American Protestants and freethinkers.⁸ Histories of Czech Catholic parishes or religious orders in the United States seldom discuss Czech-American Protestants, probably because so little fraternization or conflict occurred between adherents of the two faiths (fig. 33).⁹ The few histories of Czech-speaking Protestants in the United States have emphasized the development of individual congregations, like the pamphlet on Czech Protestant churches in Nebraska by Dr. Jaroslav Mrázek, pastor of Omaha's Bohemian Brethren Presbyterian Church from 1965 to 1969.¹⁰ The same is true of published studies on Czech-Americans in particular cities or states.¹¹ Most discussion of Czech-American Protestantism in the above publications is to some degree based upon the pioneering turn of the century work, *Památník českých evangelických církví ve Spojených státech* (A Memorial Account of Czech Protestant Churches in the United States), by Vilém Šiller, Václav Průcha, and R. M. DeCastello.¹²

This article will discuss the development of Czech-American Protestantism from 1865 to the present and is divided

into four parts. The first briefly describes five distinct types of Czech Protestantism in the United States. The second discusses characteristics common to Czech-American Protestants during the era of mass immigration from 1865 to 1914. The third examines the organization, programs, and denominational affiliation of Czech-American Protestant churches during the same period, with some emphasis upon those in Nebraska. The fourth part treats developments, including rapid acculturation, from 1920 to the present.

At least five distinct groups of Czech Protestant churches have developed in the United States. First is the Moravian church, the direct institutional and doctrinal successor to the Unity of Brethren (*Jednota bratrská*) established in the fifteenth century in the Czech lands by Petr Chelčický and his followers. During and after the Thirty Years War, these Brethren were forced into exile by the Counter-Reformation, and most settled in Protestant German principalities. Therefore the Moravian Brethren were fairly well Germanized by the eighteenth century when many of them settled in Pennsylvania and North Carolina. By the time mass Czech emigration began to the United States after the Civil War, the Moravian church was a well-established and closely-knit American sect. Though aware of its Czech heritage, it had long ceased to be Czech in language or culture, and given its sectarian outlook and limited resources, had neither the desire nor the means to seek recruits among Czech or German immigrants.¹³

The second group comprised the twenty-four independent congregations established between 1864 and 1916 by Protestant Czech immigrants in the state of Texas. These congregations formed an "Independence Unity" in 1903 and sixteen years later organized themselves in a congregational polity as the wholly independent Evangelical

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Unity of the Czech Moravian Brethren.

Why did the Unity's 1,523 adult members choose to do this? First, only in Texas were Czech-speaking Protestants numerous and concentrated enough to consider going it alone: they numbered at least one-sixth of all Czech-American Protestants and constituted over seven percent of the Czech-speaking population of Texas, by far the highest proportion in any state. Second, most had come from Moravia with such a strong sense of regional identity that they continued to distinguish themselves from Bohemian Czechs. Finally, and most important, the Brethren were more sectarian and doctrinally conservative than most Czech-American Protestants and were more inclined to employ lay leaders in lieu of college-educated clergymen. Relations between the Unity and the few Texas Czech Presbyterians were characterized more often by cooperation than by conflict. Not until 1945 did the Unity join the Federal Council of Churches; and it chose to affiliate with the National Council of Churches only from 1956 to 1964. In 1959 the Evangelical Unity changed its name to "the Unity of the Brethren in Texas," thus reflecting a typical 1950s American desire to downplay ethnicity. As late as 1965 the Unity, despite its distant historical ties to the Moravian church, emphatically rejected a proposal for merger.¹⁴

The third group of Czech-speaking Protestant congregations were those established with denominational ties during the later nineteenth century, primarily outside of Texas. By 1916, they numbered 122 congregations, 118 of which were affiliated with mainline American Protestant denominations. They still conducted religious services in Czech and claimed 7,583 adult members and more than that number of Sunday school pupils. Of these adults, 3,647 were Presbyterians, 1,799 Baptists, 973 Congregationalists, 689

Methodists, 325 Disciples of Christ, 150 members of the Reformed church, and 796 members of the four congregations without denominational ties.¹⁵ These Czech Protestants often worked together to produce Czech-language publications and to promote mission work. They lived primarily on farms or in small towns in Nebraska, Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, South Dakota, and Kansas, and in eight cities: Chicago, New York, Cleveland, Omaha, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Cedar Rapids, and Baltimore.¹⁶

A fourth—and today the largest—group of American Protestants of Czech ancestry are those who belong to mainline or evangelical American denominations whose congregations have no association with any Czech tradition. These Protestants are more likely to be descended from former freethinkers or Catholics than from the original members of Czech-speaking Protestant churches. They are the most difficult Czech-American Protestants to identify, past or present, because they are well acculturated and have individually joined established denominations for many reasons. Very frequently, marriage with Americans of other than Czech background determined Czech-Americans' religious preference.

The fifth and smallest group of Czech-American Protestants are those members of the two American congregations affiliated with the Czechoslovak church. This church is episcopal in organization, unitarian in theology, and similar to Serbian Orthodoxy in its liturgy. It was established in Czechoslovakia in 1919-20 by patriotic and liberal Czech Catholic priests and laity who led more than half a million Czechs out of the Roman Catholic church during the early 1920s. Its tradition emphasizes Saints Cyril and Methodius and the Hussites much more than the Protestant Reformation.¹⁷

In numbers of Czech-speaking Protestant congregations, Texas ranked first

and Nebraska second in 1900 and again in 1917.¹⁸ In those states with more than one hundred members of Czech-speaking congregations in 1900, Texas ranked first and was followed by Illinois, Nebraska, Iowa, New York, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin, Maryland, South Dakota, and Kansas.¹⁹ In the proportion of these church members to all Czech-speaking inhabitants from 1910 through 1916, Texas was ahead of Maryland, Iowa, Nebraska, Minnesota, South Dakota, and New York.²⁰ Within each state, Czech-speaking Protestants tended to be concentrated in particular areas, like southeast central Texas, central eastern Iowa, southeastern Minnesota, and southern Wisconsin. By 1900 in Nebraska, roughly two-thirds lived in Saunders County or northern Colfax County. About one-sixth lived in Omaha and an equal number elsewhere in the state, mostly in Thurston, Fillmore, Richardson, and Pawnee counties.²¹

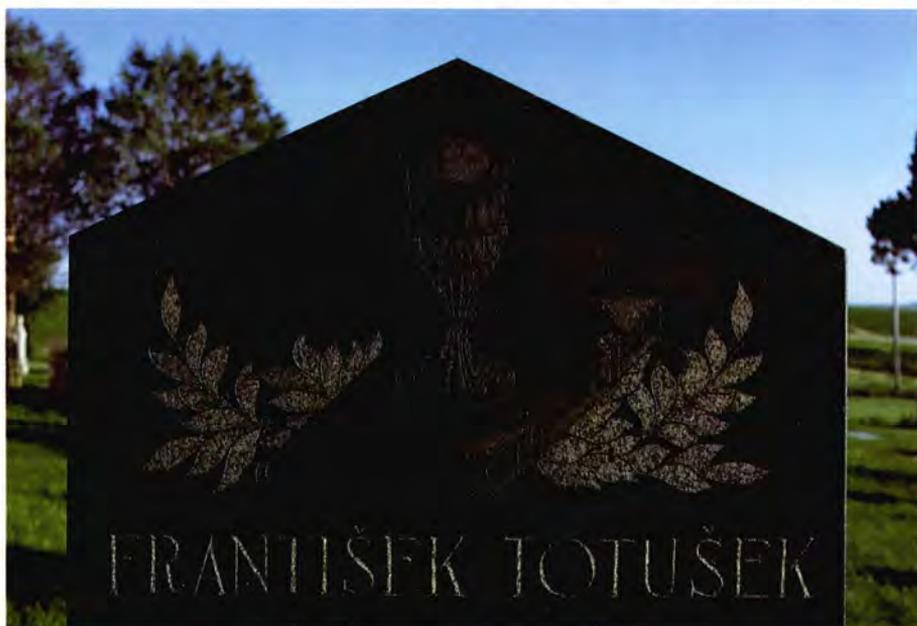
Czech Protestant immigrants from 1865 to 1914 had much in common. All had been conscious in Austria-Hungary of having belonged to an often despised minority within a minority. Few were converts from Roman Catholicism or freethought, most having come from underground congregations resurrected after Joseph II's Edict of Toleration in 1781. All knew about the proscription of Protestantism during the "period of darkness" (*Doba temna*) from 1621 to 1781 and about the civil disabilities suffered by Protestants until 1860, when the Habsburgs extended full equality before the law to Protestants, Eastern Christians, and Jews (figs. 32, 33, 34). Even after that date, some had experienced harassment by Catholics or Habsburg officials.²²

Czech Protestant immigrants received virtually no assistance from Czech Protestants in Bohemia and Moravia. The latter did not exceed 120,000 in number, had the mentality of beleaguered survivors, possessed



Fig.32. Communion table from the Bethlehem Presbyterian Church in South Omaha, made by George Podek of Phyllips, Wisconsin, 1928. The verse is Luke 22:19. (Courtesy Wilber (Nebraska) Czech Museum, NSHS C998.1-616)

Fig.33. Symbols of Old World conflicts survived the immigration. The chalice-and-bible motif combines two powerful symbols of Czech religious reform. Jan Hus and the Hussites in the fifteenth century gave communion in both kinds to the laity, symbolized by the Hussite chalice, as did the Protestants throughout Europe a century later. Czech Protestants also presented the Bible to lay worshipers in their own language. The engraved monument is in the Zion Czech Presbyterian Cemetery near Clarkson, Nebraska. (D. Murphy)



little capital, and were divided between Calvinist, Lutheran, and old Unity of Brethren congregations. Because no Protestant theological seminary existed in the Czech lands from 1621 to 1919, there were few Czech-speaking Protestant ministers, and most of these had been divinity students at the universities of Vienna, Halle, or Edinburgh.²³

These 120,000 Czech Protestants comprised slightly more than two percent of the Czech population in Bohemia and Moravia according to the censuses of 1900 and 1910. In the United States from 1900 through 1920, Protestants comprised almost four percent of the total Czech-speaking population. This difference in percentages may be accounted for by a high rate of Protestant emigration and the conversion of a few freethinkers and Catholics to Protestantism.

The high incidence of Czech Protestant emigration from Bohemia and Moravia was probably due less to religious discrimination than to the fact that most Czech Protestants were peasants who lived in isolated regions of agricultural overpopulation and little or no manufacturing. Czech Protestant

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immigrants typically came to the United States in clusters of families from the same or nearby congregations in the only three areas of Bohemia and Moravia well populated by Protestants: the Bohemian Moravian Highlands, the adjacent Čáslav region of Bohemia, and the Valašsko region of east central Moravia.²⁴ Emigrants from the latter area predominated among Czech Protestants in Texas; those from the first two regions predominated in Nebraska and other northern prairie states.²⁵

Roughly four out of five Czech Protestant immigrants attended Protestant services or prayer meetings in their mother tongue. The approximately one in five who embraced freethought

contrasted markedly to the roughly one in every two nominally Czech Catholic immigrants who did so. This relatively stronger commitment by Protestant Czech immigrants to their faith may be explained in part by their having long suffered persecution on account of it. Moreover, in Bohemia and Moravia they had been accustomed to raising all of the funds needed to maintain their congregations, whereas Czech Catholics had become accustomed to a state-subsidized church. Thus, Czech Protestant immigrants—like Irish Catholic immigrants—expected to have to build and support churches in the United States, whereas some Czech Catholic immigrants found this to be an

unprecedented and unwanted burden.

Most Czech Protestant immigrants banded together upon arrival to conduct Bible study or prayer meetings in the absence of any ordained Czech-speaking ministers. Sometimes, as in Silver Lake, Minnesota, and Tyndall, South Dakota, they established congregations and cemeteries while seeking to obtain part-time or full-time clergymen (fig. 35). Because they wished to worship in Czech, they usually did not join nearby Protestant churches, though some supplemented Czech-language prayer meetings by occasionally attending Protestant services in German or English. Going to mass at a Czech-speaking Catholic parish was out of the question.



Fig.34. Rare Protestant Postilla, a book of scripture and theological discourse, published in the Czech language in 1542 and brought to Pawnee County, Nebraska, in 1893 by Josef Štěpán. According to family tradition, the book was once baked inside a loaf of bread to save it from confiscation by Catholic Habsburg authorities, who sought to suppress Hussite and Protestant writings in the Czech language. (Courtesy descendants of the Štěpán family, NSHS C998.1-601)

Czech Protestant immigrants seldom associated with the only other Slavic-speaking immigrant Protestants, the Slovak Lutherans, despite their mutually intelligible languages. This occurred primarily because Czechs wished to have Czech-language services and a congregational or presbyterian polity and because outside of Chicago and Cleveland, Czechs and Slovaks seldom settled in the same areas. With the exception of their cooperation during the two world wars and the cold war in working for Czechoslovak independence, Czech-American and Slovak-American Protestants usually preferred to go their separate ways.²⁶

Furthermore, they were grateful that the American Protestant establishment was eager to help them develop Czech-language publications and a learned Czech-speaking clergy.

The only Czech-speaking clergyman before 1887 to visit the scattered rural Czech Protestant communities in Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Nebraska, and the Dakotas was František Kún from the Ely, Iowa, congregation near Cedar Rapids (fig. 37). He received most of his circuit-riding expenses from the Czech religious associations for whom he conducted worship services. His periodic presence encouraged these associations to persevere in acquiring members and in raising funds to estab-

lish a Czech-speaking Protestant church in the United States and the first outside of Texas.²⁸ His knowledge of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew enabled him to teach part-time as professor of classical literature at Western College in nearby Western, Iowa. He continued to serve the Ely parish until his death on January 6, 1894.²⁹

With the exception of the Unity of Czech Brethren in Texas, almost all Czech-American Protestants received the assistance of mainline American Protestant denominations in establishing congregations, building meeting houses, and obtaining ordained Czech-speaking ministers. They welcomed this aid because they were too poor, too few in number, and, outside of Texas, too scattered geographically to accomplish these tasks on their own. Moreover, virtually all Czech Protestants except those in Texas were ecumenical in outlook. So long as they could conduct religious services in Czech and manage their own community churches, they affiliated with mainline denominations.

The leaders of mainline American Protestant denominations recognized by the 1880s that Czech immigrants constituted a particularly fertile ground for missionary endeavor, given the presence of a small but devout Protestant minority, the strength of Hussite and Protestant traditions in the Czech past, and because so many ostensibly Catholic Czechs were embracing free-thought. Furthermore, as the number of all immigrants swelled from 2,812,191 in the 1870s to 5,246,613 during the 1880s and as more and more of them came from eastern and southern Europe, many American Protestants expressed concern lest their faith lose its ascendancy.³⁰ One response was a growing demand, ultimately legislated by Congress in the 1920s, to restrict immigration in favor of northern and western Europeans. A second response was positive and aimed to win converts



Fig.35. A family burial plot in the Czech Presbyterian Cemetery near Wahoo, Nebraska. (D. Murphy, NSHS H673.2-9007/48:5)

Czech Protestant immigrants experienced an immediate improvement in their outlook and expectations upon arriving in the United States. Though they still constituted a tiny minority within the Czech-American ethnic minority, they were pleased to discover that they now also belonged to the very large American Protestant majority.

lish churches. Born in Moravia in 1825, Kún came to Iowa in 1856 determined to spread the gospel among his fellow countrymen on the western frontier, despite his having been warned that America offered "no promising opportunities whatsoever for a Czech preacher."²⁷ In 1867 he helped found at Ely, Iowa, the second perma-

to Protestant denominations among those “new immigrants” most susceptible to proselytization by educated clergymen who could speak their languages. Earlier, German Methodism and, to a lesser extent, German Congregationalism had been among the most successful ventures of this sort, as the former attracted 63,439 members by 1898 and the latter 6,069 by 1900.³¹

In mission work with Czech Protestant immigrants, the Presbyterians took the lead, followed by Congregationalists, American Baptists, Methodists, and Disciples of Christ. Presbyterianism became the denominational choice of at least one-third of all Czech Protestant immigrants and of ninety percent of those in Nebraska. Methodists established large Czech-language congregations in Chicago, Cleveland, and Baltimore, while the American Baptists concentrated their efforts in Chicago, where they worked successfully among Slovak and Polish as well as Czech immigrants.³²

Why did Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and American Baptists take the lead in organizing Czech-speaking congregations as denominational affiliates when there had been so little Calvinist influence in Czech history since 1621? This initiative may be partly attributed to learned Czechophiles in high church offices and to each denomination’s recognition that if Czech-speaking congregations were to grow, it would have to provide Czech-speaking clergymen. Toward this end, denominational officers underwrote the recruitment of divinity students from the Czech lands to study either at Union Theological Seminary in New York or at the Slavic Department established in 1885 at the Oberlin Theological Seminary.³³ They also insisted on sending talented students to these or other fine American Protestant seminaries, clearly understanding the great extent to which a minister’s quality of mind and personality contributed to a

congregation’s growth, charitable work, and public service.

By 1901 sixty percent of all Czech-speaking Protestant pastors in the United States had graduated either from Union or Oberlin, with the rest having come primarily from the universities of



Fig.36. Rev. Jan Pípal. (NSHS C998-131)

Vienna, Edinburgh, and Halle. As students at Union and Oberlin, most had spent summer “vacations” in the service of small Czech Protestant congregations in the upper Middle West and, after graduation, had frequently found employment with them. For example, from 1892 to 1895 Jan Pípal served as pastor of the Bohemian Brethren Presbyterian Church in Omaha and from 1896 to 1905 jointly ministered to two churches in Saunders County, Nebraska—the Czech Presbyterian Church near Wahoo and the Prague Presbyterian Church (fig. 36). The training of so many pioneering Czech-American Protestant pastors at Union and Oberlin helped account for the fairly liberal and ecumenical outlook of Czech-speaking congregations

in mainline Protestant denominations.

Prominent among Czechophile missionaries and scholars in the Presbyterian and Congregational churches were E. A. Adams, Henry Albert Schaffler, A. W. Clark, David S. Schaff, Will Monroe, and Gustav Alexy. Adams, born in Northboro, Massachusetts, in 1837, was the only one to achieve fluency in Czech, something he accomplished during his decade in Prague as a missionary and social worker from 1872 to 1882. In 1884 he pioneered in mission work among the Czechs of Chicago.³⁴ Schaffler was born in Istanbul in 1837 to American missionary parents. After spending several years in Prague with Adams, he returned to Cleveland to undertake mission work in that second largest of Czech-American communities. He proposed and helped establish the nearby Slavic Department of the Oberlin Theological Seminary.³⁵ A. W. Clark was his right hand man. David S. Schaff of the Western Theological Seminary wrote the first American biography of John Hus and lent his support to efforts by Presbyterians and Congregationalists to train Czech-speaking clergymen at Union and Oberlin.³⁶ Will Monroe did likewise. This noted American Slavophile, who wrote histories of the Bulgarians and the Czechs, became a friend and correspondent of T. G. Masaryk and other turn of the century Czech Protestant intellectuals.³⁷ Gustav Alexy, born in Hungary in 1832 and a refugee from the 1848-49 Revolution, began mission work in New York as a Presbyterian minister among Hungarian immigrants. After 1874 he served Czech immigrants as well, and recruited to Presbyterianism the most influential and learned of late nineteenth-century Czech clergymen, Rev. Vincenc Písek.³⁸

Písek was born in Malešov, Bohemia, in 1859, and had come to the United States with his parents and brothers and sisters in 1873. Ordained



Fig.37. Rev. František Kún brought the Bohemian crystal communion service and the embroidered altar cloth from Ely, Iowa to Colfax County, Nebraska, where it was used by both the Zion and New Zion congregations. (Courtesy New Zion Presbyterian Church, Clarkson, Nebraska; R. Bruhn, NSHS C998.1-673)

as a Presbyterian minister in 1883, the learned, eloquent, and handsome Písek soon won the confidence of the Presbyterian hierarchy, their homeland mission board, and wealthy American philanthropists. Within five years he helped organize and build a meeting house for the John Hus Presbyterian Church in New York. Thanks to donations of \$5,000 from William Vanderbilt, \$1,000 from Cornelius Vanderbilt, \$5,000 from Elliott Sheppard, and

\$20,000 from Mrs. F. Phelps Stokes, he was able to pay off the mortgage on that imposing church building within ten years of its dedication on May 6, 1888.³⁹ Like Adams and Schauffler, Písek regarded Czech immigrant communities as a fertile field for missionary endeavor. With the support of the Presbyterian Board of Homeland Missions, and in Kún's footsteps with Kún's blessing, in 1889 Písek visited the recently organized Czech Protestant

congregations of the northern trans-Mississippi West and encouraged them to establish permanent churches.

In 1887 Písek traveled to Bohemia, where he struck up a partnership with Rev. Č. Dušek, a Protestant minister in Kolín, to recruit graduates of Czech gymnasia or universities to go to the United States to study for the ministry at Union or Oberlin Theological Seminaries. The following year, three recent graduates of the Kolín

Gymnasium—Josef Břeň, Václav Losa, and František Pokorný—came to the United States to commence divinity studies and during summers to assist Czech Protestant settlers on the western prairies in establishing permanent churches. During the nineties, ten more graduates of Czech gymnasia or universities came to Union or Oberlin to study: B. A. Bárta, Jarsolav Dobiáš, Bohdan A. Filipi, F. Klapuš, O. E. Kocián, A. B. Koukol, J. Mikšovský, Jaroslav Smetánka, Vilém Šiller, and O. Utkal. The first three served churches in Nebraska but only the second worked there until retirement.⁴⁰ Four graduates of European divinity schools came during the same period and went promptly to work as pastors in the United States. V. Hlavatý, Jan Linka, and Jan Šiller came from Vienna and Edinburgh. Jan Pípal came from Vienna and served from 1892 to 1905 in Nebraska. Twelve young Czech-speaking ladies also graduated from the Slavic Department of the Oberlin Theological Seminary before dedicating themselves to doing missionary and social work among the Czech immigrants in town or country.⁴¹

Vicenc Písek continued to serve as a minister and national spokesman for Czech-American Protestantism. During World War One he went to Siberia as the American emissary to the Czechoslovak legions. After the war he performed pastoral duties at the John Hus Presbyterian Church until his death in 1930. He had remained a bachelor, but was renowned as “the marrying pastor” for the 11,582 marriages he performed in his lifetime.⁴²

From their inception, Czech-speaking Protestant congregations in the United States aimed to advance fellowship and charity in an ecumenical spirit, conduct Czech-language services and religious education, and to make some efforts to convert Czech freethinkers. A few ministers, like Jan Pípal of Omaha and Josef Křenek of Silver Lake, Minne-

sota, later returned to Bohemia and Moravia to serve fellow Protestants.⁴³

The development of Czech Protestant churches in the upper Middle West is typified by those in Nebraska. Of the fourteen Czech-speaking Protestant congregations or missions established in that state by 1924, ten survived until 1972, and five up to the present. Two of the latter are in Saunders County and have shared ministers since the arrival of Rev. Jan Pípal in 1896: the Presbyterian Church in Prague dates from 1879 and the Czech Presbyterian Church near Wahoo from 1887. The remaining three are New Zion Church at Clarkson in Colfax County, founded in 1888; the John Hus Church at Thurston, organized in 1909; and the Methodist Episcopal Church in Milligan. Only the latter was from its founding in 1924 a church with a mixed Czech and Anglo-American membership.

Eleven of the original fourteen churches had affiliated with the Presbyterian Church, North, the exceptions being the Methodist Church in Milligan and two jointly managed Congregational missions in predominately free-thinking Saline County. The combined membership of these missions in Wilber and Crete stood at nine in 1900 and never exceeded eleven before their demise in the early 1920s.

Two short-lived Presbyterian missions were located several counties distant from areas heavily inhabited by Czechs. The small mission south of Burwell at Sedlov was organized by the divinity student, Bohdan Filipi, during the summer of 1900 but never attracted enough members to build a church or hire a permanent minister. Its rural isolation, 110 miles from the nearest Czech-speaking congregation, prevented it from regularly obtaining visiting Czech-speaking ministers and undoubtedly hastened its demise by the early 1920s. Similar was the fate of the tiny Presbyterian mission that opened in Humboldt, Richardson County, in

1893 and moved seven miles west to Table Rock, Pawnee County, in 1900. Vilém Šiller reported “very few” members in that year; and by the late 1920s, the mission ceased regularly to employ visiting ministers and did not survive World War II.⁴⁴

The remaining five Czech Presbyterian churches survived into the decade 1973 to 1982. The Bethlehem Church, founded in South Omaha in 1893, existed as an independent unit until its “yoke-field” linkage with Park Forest Presbyterian Church in 1958 and its absorption by that church in 1973. The Bohemian Brethren Presbyterian Church in Omaha was established in 1889 and disbanded ninety-three years later.⁴⁵ The Weston Church in Saunders County was established in 1887 and endured until 1976. Two churches in Colfax County survived in partnership until their demise in 1973: Czech immigrants in the northern tier of townships founded the Zion Church in 1875; its affiliate in the Maple Creek District was organized from 1915 to 1921 and named for the Bethlehem Chapel, where John Hus had preached in Prague.⁴⁶

Both Zion and Weston churches and their respective rivals, New Zion in Clarkson and the Czech Presbyterian Church near Wahoo, originated in 1887 in disputes within parent congregations over the location of meeting houses. When Czech Protestants in central Saunders County could not agree on where to build their first meeting house, each of the two largest factions set up its own. Members of the first did so in the small town of Weston, where they bought an old school house and converted it into a church. Members of the other faction built their church on donated farmland four miles east of Weston and four miles southwest of Wahoo, the county seat.⁴⁷ A similar dispute occurred in the same year among Czech Protestant settlers in northern Colfax County. In 1887 two-

thirds of the members of Zion Church proposed to erect the meeting house on farmland within easy commuting distance by horse and buggy for a majority of members, which they commenced that same year (fig. 38). The other third contended that future growth could be assured only if the meeting house were to be built six miles distant in the thriving community of Clarkson. They organized themselves as New Zion Church in 1888. Each church dedicated its own meeting house in 1889.⁴⁸ Time proved the wisdom of the smaller group's decision. Since the 1920s New Zion Church (fig. 40) has been the largest Czech Protestant congregation in Nebraska, whereas Zion Church, after registering impressive growth during its first decade, gradually withered in rural isolation. These disputes, like a similar one among Czech Protestants in Silver Lake, Minnesota, led to the division of slender resources by no more than one hundred members. But the issue involved was not frivolous; many Czech Protestant immigrants undoubtedly remembered how in Bohemia or Moravia they had to walk great distances to church because the building of Protestant meeting houses had been circumscribed by law from 1781 to 1860.⁴⁹

By the turn of the century, pastors of Czech-speaking Protestant congregations had organized and developed one national and two regional organizations. Nationally in the mid-1890s, these pastors established the interdenominational Evangelical Union of Czech Presbyterian and Reformed Ministers. One of the regional associations, the independent Unity of Brethren, has been discussed above. The other regional association, the Central West Presbytery, was composed of all Czech Presbyterian churches in six states of the upper Middle West. Representatives to this Czech regional presbytery convened annually from 1910 until its dissolution in 1948 to

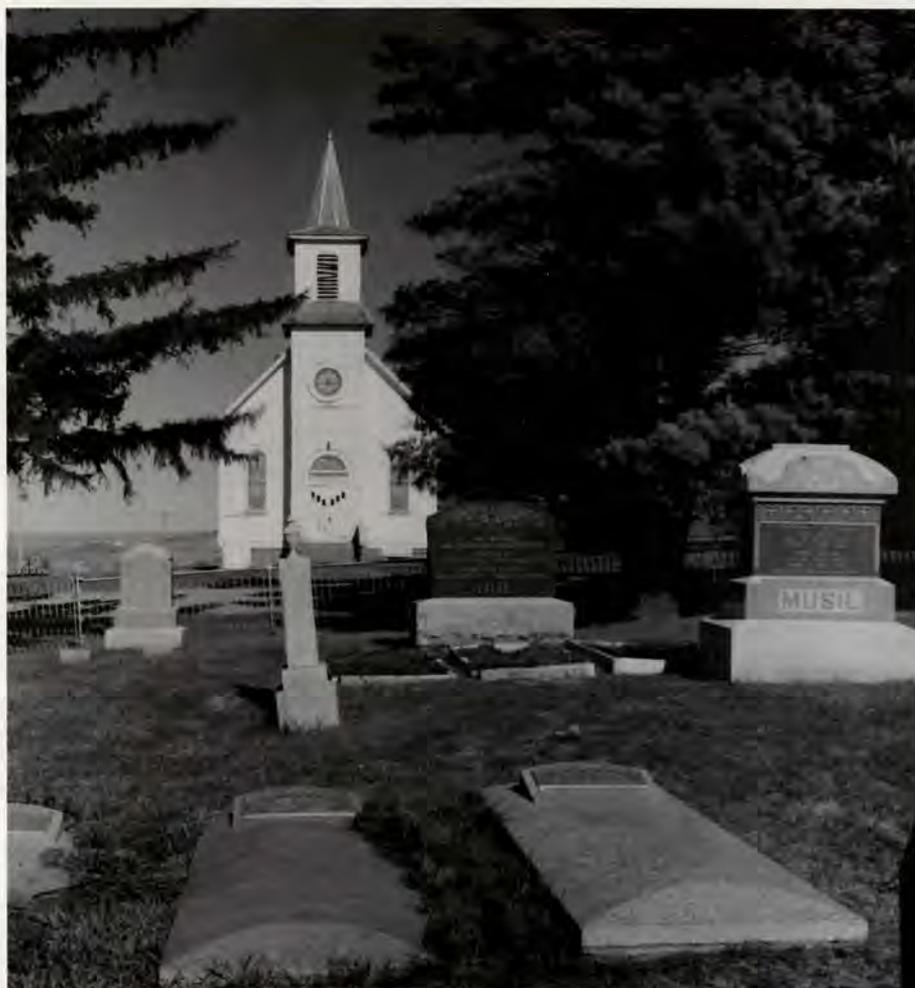


Fig.38. Organized as the Evangelical Bohemian-Moravian Brethren Congregation near Clarkson, Nebraska, Zion affiliated with the Presbyterian church in 1895. The cemetery was dedicated in 1875, and the church building was constructed in 1887. (D. Murphy)

discuss mutual goals and problems.⁵⁰

The First Congress of Czech Presbyterian and Reformed Ministers met in September 1893 in Racine, Wisconsin. The seventeen pastors and divinity students and other delegates in attendance elected Vincenc Písek as chairman. After hearing reports on the progress of Czech divinity students and on church and mission work, the delegates resolved to establish closer personal ties with a view to facilitating cooperation in carrying out tasks peculiar to Czech-speaking congregations.⁵¹

The Second Congress of September 1896, in Cedar Rapids, constituted itself as the Evangelical Union (*Evanjelická Jednota*) with three standing committees: an executive committee, a special committee to solicit funds and recruit new members, and an ecumenical committee to work with Czech-speaking ministers of other denominations to try to organize a conference of all Czech-speaking ministers in the United States.⁵²

Czech-American Protestants revealed great industry and audacity in

the number and variety of Czech-language publications they created. Their periodicals reached a peak in numbers in 1909 and in circulation in 1925.⁵³ The new Evangelical Union resolved to support the publication of two periodicals established during the preceding year. *Jednota* (Union), dating from January 1895, provided a fortnightly forum for discussing serious theological, social, and policy questions. *Besídka* (The Alcove), which first appeared in October 1895 in Baltimore, was an illustrated weekly for the religious instruction of Czech-speaking Protestant youth. The former survived only three years due to inadequate funding and few subscribers. *Besídka* also folded in 1898 but was revived two years later in New York by Vincenc Písek with subsidies from the Presbyterian Publishing Company.⁵⁴

To replace *Jednota*, Rev. Václav Losa, in his fifth year of service to New Zion Church in Clarkson, Nebraska, founded there in 1899 the monthly *Křesťanské listy* (The Christian Journal). As its editor and publisher, he moved to Pittsburgh in 1900, with funds from Presbyterian home missions, to make this magazine for sixty-six years the leading Czech-language Protestant publication in North America. Losa, born in 1867 in Nosislav, Moravia, had attended gymnasium in Brno and Kolín and had been ordained in June 1891 after graduating from Union Theological Seminary.⁵⁵ The above three periodicals had been preceded by the *Křesťanský posel* (Christian Messenger), a Methodist weekly “dedicated to the interests of spiritual and Czech national uplift” published in Cleveland from March 1891 through 1892 and then in Chicago by editor F. J. Hrejsa through 1913. In Texas the Evangelical Unity, predecessor of the Unity of Czech Moravian Brethren, began to publish the *Bratrské listy* (Fraternal Journal) in January 1902. Sixty years later, under the

editorship of Joseph Barton, it had a circulation of 1,830.⁵⁶ By that time, it was publishing more articles in English than in Czech, having introduced English as a second language as early as 1913.

Mainline Protestant denominations subsidized Czech-language devotional and Sunday school literature in addition to the above and other periodicals. A leading author of such materials was Jaroslav Dobiáš, editor of *Český svět* (The Czech World), founded in 1905 and succeeded after 1907 by *Českoslovanský svět* (Czecho-Slavonic World), a popular “Protestant illustrated magazine” published by the American Tract Society. Dobiáš, who eventually made a full-time career in religious journalism, was born in 1874 at Bukovec near Pardubice, Bohemia, and was, like Losa, a graduate of the High Gymnasium in Kolín and of Union Theological Seminary. After his ordination in 1896 he served three years as pastor of the Czech Presbyterian congregation of eighty members in Tábor, Minnesota, before becoming the minister of the Bohemian Brethren Presbyterian Church in Omaha. After serving the seventy to eighty members of that church for seven years, he resigned in 1906 to take over as editor of the successful *Český svět* in New York.⁵⁷

Dobiáš also helped edit three of the six short-lived Czech-Protestant journals founded in the first decade of the twentieth century, including after 1909 the long-lived *Radost* (Joy), “a magazine for children of the Protestant faith.” Another of these, *Buditel* (The Awakener), he edited with V. Cejnar of Georgetown, Texas, who from 1913 to 1926 became the successor once removed to Dobiáš as pastor of the Bohemian Brethren Presbyterian Church in Omaha. Born in 1862 at Svinary near Hradec Králové, Bohemia, Cejnar completed divinity studies at Neukirchen and Glasgow before com-

ing to the United States in 1905.⁵⁸ Three other Czech-language Protestant periodicals did not survive the first decade of the twentieth century.⁵⁹

In Czech-American communities from 1865 to 1914, conflict as well as cordiality characterized the relationship of Czech Protestants to the freethinking majority and to the large Catholic minority. For Czech Catholics, freethought remained the principal adversary.⁶⁰ Relations between Czech Protestant and Catholic immigrants were sometimes strained, given Protestant memories of persecution by Catholic Habsburgs and given continued doctrinal disagreement between Protestants and Catholics. Czech freethinkers as well as Catholics were somewhat concerned about growing cooperation between the majority of Czech-American Protestants and the American Protestant establishment and the extent to which this might facilitate their being assimilated by Anglo-American denominations. Most freethinkers regarded Czech Protestants at worst as credulous and at best as occasional allies in support of public education, separation of church and state, and a critical assessment of Catholicism, especially the policies of Pius IX and Pius X. Freethinkers, like Protestants, honored Hus and Komenský, but to the annoyance of Protestants, celebrated the two primarily as patriotic heroes rather than as religious reformers. Nonetheless, in interpreting the Czech past (notably in linking the Catholic church to Habsburg repression) and assessing contemporary political issues, Czech freethinkers and Protestants came closer to agreement than either group did with Czech Catholics.

Czech-American Protestants were more troubled by the freethinkers’ materialism, Sabbath breaking, and high incidence of suicide than by their anti-trinitarian, agnostic, or atheistic views. For several decades a debate over the existence of God raged be-

tween Czech Protestant pastors and the militant atheist František B. Zdrůbek, co-founder and editor of the freethinking Chicago daily, *Svornost* (Concord). Before his "conversion" to freethought in the early 1870s, Zdrůbek was an ordained Protestant minister who had studied theology at a Catholic seminary (fig. 66).⁶¹ Better relations were evident in daily encounters between ordinary Protestants and the tolerant majority of freethinkers. In several communities, like Milligan, Nebraska, Czech Protestants were allowed to use the local ZČBJ hall for worship until they were able to construct a meeting house.⁶² And Czech Protestant ministers, unlike Czech Catholic priests before the 1930s, seldom discouraged parishioners from joining the Sokol or other freethinking fraternal associations. As a tiny minority, Czech Protestants could not, as did Czech Catholics, establish their own Sokols, musical and theatrical groups, and benevolent societies as an alternative to those dominated by Czech freethinkers.

In 1900 Rev. Vilém Šiller defined Czech-speaking American Protestants' main tasks to be

to preach the gospel to all who are prepared to listen, to uplift the Czech people, the majority of whom are mired down in materialism, and to redirect their thoughts to things more important and sublime. The Lord does not let those who do his work go unrewarded. However small such work may be, He still blesses it; even if one's progress be unimpeded, one still cannot disclaim it. We Czechs have always had difficulties and obstacles in abundance from within and from without. We must overcome a crude low-minded materialism, freethinking mendacity, religious formalism and indifference, worldliness, superstition, and lack of religious faith.⁶³

Czech Protestant pastors made little progress in fulfilling the tasks defined by Šiller as they soon discovered what Czech Catholic priests had begun to discern: Czech resistance to the gospel often increased in direct proportion to

the fervor or intolerance with which it was preached.⁶⁴ Setting a good example and taking more subtle and tactful approaches would also be required when dealing with freethinkers or Catholics. Protestant pastors who mastered this approach, as did Vincenc Písek in New York and Bohdan A. Filipi in Clarkson, usually won respect for themselves and their faith even when they did not win adherents.⁶⁵ Nonetheless, exhortations like Šiller's effectively inspired ministers and laypersons to persevere patiently in arduous assignments. This is well illustrated by Jaroslav Dobiáš's evaluation of the Czech community of Omaha in 1900 during his second year as pastor of the Bohemian Brethren Presbyterian Church:

Here the majority of Czechs are indifferent to religion or are nonbelievers. Above all, they believe in formal dancing, picnics, and inordinate drinking. Even the youngsters of such folk are being introduced to a life whose only pleasures are dancing and alcoholic beverages. We shall have to bear witness here a long time before our fellow countrymen learn that it is better to serve the Lord than indulge in worldly delights.⁶⁶

Czech-American freethinkers of the first and second generations who eventually joined churches seldom appear to have chosen established Czech-speaking Protestant congregations. Precisely how many embraced Roman Catholicism or joined Protestant denominations is not known, perhaps as many as twenty percent of all freethinkers in each instance.⁶⁷ In most towns and cities, no Czech-speaking Protestant church was at hand. And even where such churches did exist, as in Omaha and Chicago, freethinkers or their descendants usually preferred liberal Protestant churches. In Chicago, Cleveland, New York, and Omaha, Unitarianism was often the choice of the freethinking lawyers, intellectuals, and businessmen. Outstanding ex-

amples are Tomáš Čapek in New York and the Šerpán, Ptak, and Hruška families in Omaha. Of all Christian doctrines, Unitarianism was the most compatible with Czech freethought in its encouragement of individualism, dislike of doctrinal uniformity, and tolerance of agnostic or atheistic views. As in mainline Protestant denominations, membership also provided social respectability and facilitated contacts with the Anglo-American business and intellectual communities. Where no Unitarian Church was present, as in such freethinking strongholds as Wilber and Milligan, Nebraska, some offspring of freethinking immigrants, like those of the Sadflek family, affiliated with liberal Protestant denominations. Next to Unitarianism, freethinkers found Methodism offered the greatest latitude in matters of doctrine but not much flexibility in matters of department. Presbyterianism and Congregationalism were appealing given their democratic politics and record of supporting Czech-language publications.

Czech-American Protestantism reached its zenith during the years 1914 to 1929. Most Czech Protestant congregations promptly supported efforts by a majority of Czech-Americans to support Tomáš G. Masaryk and the Czechoslovak National Council abroad in the wartime struggle for Czechoslovak independence. Czech-American Protestants applauded the disintegration of the Habsburg Monarchy and the founding of a democratic Czechoslovak Republic, whose President-Liberator Masaryk was a Protestant. Protestantism thrived in the Czech lands and Slovakia for the first time since 1620, as the Slovak Lutheran church and the new Czechoslovak church and Czech Brethren church grew rapidly.⁶⁸

After World War I, accelerated acculturation and internal migration eventually reduced the membership of many Czech-speaking American Prot-

Garver - Czech-American Protestants

estant congregations and of many other American churches whose members sought to maintain a continental European language and style of life.

During the 1920s English swiftly made inroads into Czech-speaking Protestant congregations, Catholic parishes, and freethinking associations for the same reasons that it made headway against other foreign languages. Acculturation steadily accelerated as Congress began to restrict immigration and as Czech-Americans of the first and second American-born generations increasingly entered business or the professions. Decline of foreign language use was much less a consequence of the zealous Anglo-American advocacy of Americanization that followed U. S. entry into the First World War, a zeal reflected in legislation like the Siman language act of 1918 in Nebraska.⁶⁹ Even pride in the newly independent Czechoslovak Republic could not offset the irresistible attractions of what came to be called the American way of life. During the 1920s Czech-American Protestant congregations and Catholic parishes began to hold English- as well as Czech-language services. The Czech Presbyterian Church in Prague, Nebraska, initiated English-language services in addition to Czech in 1925 (fig. 39). New Zion Church in Clarkson, the Bohemian Brethren Presbyterian Church in Omaha, and the Bethlehem Church in South Omaha followed suit before the end of the decade.⁷⁰

The Great Depression took its toll on membership and contributions in many ethnic churches and associations. Their fortunes were more adversely affected by the Second World War, as extended military service increased the mobility of ethnic youth and familiarized them with mainstream American ways.

Though acculturation proved to be an inexorable process, the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia and the Second

World War rekindled some sense of common identity and purpose among Czech-American freethinking, Catholic, and Protestant intellectuals, as they sought from 1939 through 1941 to help friends and relatives under Nazi rule and thereafter wholeheartedly supported the American war effort. As individuals, Czech-American Protes-

minent anti-Nazi Czech Protestant refugees, most notably the historian Otakar Odložilík and the theologian and religious journalist J. L. Hromádka. In 1940 these refugees founded the National Union of Czechoslovak Protestants in the United States and Canada and began publication of an intellectual Protestant Czech-language monthly,



Fig.39. *The Czech Presbyterian Church in Prague, Nebraska. The congregation organized in 1877, and constructed the present building in 1898. (D. Murphy, NSHS H673.2-9003/3:11)*

tants joined other Czech-Americans in supporting the Czechoslovak National Council, the Czech National Alliance, and other organizations in denouncing Nazi barbarism, in extolling the virtues of the prewar Czechoslovak Republic, and in insisting upon its resurrection after the war.⁷¹

Czech-American Protestantism was also reinvigorated during the Second World War by the arrival of several

Husův lid (The People of Hus), to which they contributed articles, primarily on contemporary political and religious issues.⁷² Their having founded a new organization and a new monthly periodical is testimony that their interests and expectations differed markedly from the fairly well acculturated Czech-American Protestant congregations dating from the late 1900s. Because most refugees expected to

return to positions of leadership in postwar Czechoslovakia, their wartime concerns had more to do with European than American developments. *Husův lid* nonetheless acquired a small but loyal following among Czech-American Protestants, thanks primarily to its high intellectual calibre. This helped insure the postwar survival of *Husův lid* until the Communist coup of February 1948 in Czechoslovakia produced a new outpouring of intellectual exiles, including Protestants like Miloš Čapek and Erazim Kohák, and once again, Otakar Odložilík, who in the fifties became a tenured professor of history at the University of Pennsylvania. The upheavals of the 1940s also brought to the United States Protestant ministers who were destined to be among the last Czech-speaking pastors in a number of Presbyterian congregations, including Miloš Řepka of the Bohemian Brethren Presbyterian Church in Omaha. These pastors and many of their contemporaries subscribed to the *Husův lid* as well as to the venerable *Křesťanské listy*, both of which criticized the ideology and practice of the Czechoslovak Communist government. These two monthlies merged in 1958 as the *Křesťanské listy-Husův lid*, with roughly one thousand subscribers, thus gaining a new lease on life and staying in circulation until 1965.⁷³

The cold war and the Communist takeover of Czechoslovakia in February 1948 led to a growing estrangement between most Czech-Americans and their European homeland, as Czechoslovak Communists curtailed civil liberties, transformed the economy according to Soviet practice, and firmly subordinated church to state. Divisions within the Czech-American community were intensified by the cold war and directly affected Czech-American Protestants, especially in the celebrated case of Professor J. L. Hromádka. Czech-American Protestants were troubled by the decision of most lead-

ers of the Czechoslovak church and several leaders of the Protestant Czech Brethren church, including Professors Hromádka and J. B. Kozák, to cooperate with the Communist authorities in founding the Czechoslovak Christian Peace Conference and in denouncing American sponsorship of NATO and participation in the Korean War. Most Czech-American Protestants disavowed Hromádka. Many, but proportionately fewer, Anglo-American Protestants also did so.⁷⁴ Czechoslovak Communists curtailed the exchange of divinity students and ministers and thereby unintentionally furthered the already well advanced assimilation of Czech-American congregations into mainline American denominations. This exchange was temporarily resumed in 1968 and resurrected after 1989.⁷⁵

By 1945 in most Czech-American congregations, English had supplanted Czech as the language most often used in worship services and business meetings. Czech-language services ceased entirely in most of those congregations during the 1960s. The return of the highly Americanized youth who had fought in the Second World War or had worked away from home in war industries coincided with the passing of almost all remaining members of the European-born generations and their American-born but Czech-speaking contemporaries who had helped establish the Czech-speaking Protestant churches during the 1880s and 1890s.⁷⁶ For Czech Protestants in the upper Mississippi and Missouri valleys, 1948 was a landmark year that saw not only the Communist takeover of Czechoslovakia but the coincidental disbanding of the Central West Presbytery, which had for thirty-eight years so effectively fostered cooperation among the various Middle Western Czech Presbyterian churches. The 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s saw all such churches hire their first non-Czech-speaking ministers and discontinue Czech-

language services. For example, Rev. Donald Proett preached in English exclusively at Wahoo and Prague beginning in 1953; and Revs. Jaroslav Mrázek (1965-69) and Joseph Leffler (1969-70) were the last ministers to give Czech sermons at Bohemian Brethren Presbyterian in Omaha.⁷⁷

The rural isolation of most Czech-speaking Protestant churches in the upper Middle West may have helped their members maintain the Czech language and nineteenth century Old World Czech culture through the first five or six decades of the twentieth century. However, this isolation proved to be detrimental to Czech ethnic interests in the long run for the same reasons that it adversely affected all commercial and religious institutions in rural America from the Great Depression through the 1980s: youth moved away to find better opportunities elsewhere, in most cases in cities without any Czech-American Protestant congregations. Moreover, even in cities with such congregations, notably Chicago, Cleveland, New York, Omaha, Cedar Rapids, and Baltimore, all had become much less Czech through merger and by the deaths of older members. Even the biggest, like New York's John Hus Presbyterian Church, experienced a declining and aging membership and attracted fewer upwardly mobile Czech-American youth than larger mainline Protestant churches.

Declining membership forced closure of three of seven rural or small town Nebraska Czech Presbyterian congregations by the mid-1970s. Zion Church and its affiliate Bethlehem Chapel joined nearby Webster Church to form the "Church of the Second Mile" in 1953. That church became a lay mission in 1966 and disbanded in 1975. Weston Church began to employ supply pastors from the Grace Bible Institute of Omaha in 1952 and held its last service in 1976.



Fig.40. *The second New Zion Czech Presbyterian Church building in Clarkson, Nebraska, dedicated in 1923. (NSHS C998-185)*

Competition from larger suburban and downtown Protestant churches surely contributed to the decline and demise by 1982 of the two Czech-speaking Protestant congregations of Omaha. Located in the least Protestant part of Omaha, the Bethlehem Church in South Omaha declined steadily after reaching its greatest size in 1928 with 350 adults and children. In 1958 it entered a “yoke-field pastorate” with the Park Forest Presbyterian Church and closed its old meeting house after merging in 1973 with Park Forest. By 1971 Bethlehem’s membership had fallen to forty-eight and its operating budget to \$5,688. At the new Park Forest Church (seventy-five members and a budget of \$12,232 in 1978), some former members of Bethlehem occa-

sionally conversed in Czech at the monthly coffee hour.⁷⁸ Park Forest merged in September 1983 with the much larger Wheeler Memorial Presbyterian Church, where an annual Czech dinner is still served by one of Wheeler’s three Mariners Groups.⁷⁹

At Bohemian Brethren Presbyterian, continuation of Czech-speaking services through the 1960s was facilitated by one pastor born in the Czech lands, Rev. Miloš Řepka from 1958 to 1964 and by Rev. Jaroslav Mrázek from 1965 to 1969.⁸⁰ After the departure of their successor, Joseph Leffler, in 1970, Sunday services were conducted exclusively in English by three supply pastors, Ronald Hawkins to 1974, Howard Svoboda to 1980, and E. Lee Nelson to 1982. Already by 1957 membership

had declined to sixty-four, including forty-two women; with a budget of \$4,706 and no Sunday school, the future looked bleak.⁸¹ This, the last predominately Czech Protestant church in Omaha, closed its doors in 1982.⁸²

The John Hus Church at Thurston maintains worship and educational services with only slightly diminished membership. In 1991 it reported having sixty members and fourteen church school pupils, down from seventy and twenty respectively in 1978.⁸³ The Czech Presbyterian Church, four miles from the Saunders County courthouse in Wahoo, has continued to enjoy the support of families from nearby farms and towns. In 1900 it had 100 members and has kept a fairly stable membership during the past quarter century—131 in 1968, 138 in 1971, 133 in 1978, and 98 in 1991. Since 1953 Czech Presbyterian has shared ministers with the smaller Presbyterian Church in Prague, eighteen miles away. The latter, whose adult membership had been eighty in 1900, saw this membership and Sunday school enrollment decline respectively from fifty-seven and fourteen in 1978 to thirty-seven and five in 1991. In partnership, despite declining membership, the two Saunders County churches appear able to weather what will be difficult years ahead.⁸⁴

The largest Nebraska Czech Protestant church since 1910 has been New Zion Presbyterian Church in Clarkson, whose membership grew from 102 in 1900, to 359 in 1952, and a peak of 685 in 1968 (fig. 40). Thereafter membership has dropped at a steady rate from 651 in 1971, to 501 in 1978, and 312 in 1991. It has had no Czech-speaking ministers since the retirement of Rev. Bohdan A. Filipi in 1952; and the majority of parishioners of Czech origin has decreased. The beloved Reverend Filipi was the last pioneer Presbyterian pastor from Union Theological Seminary to serve in the state of

Nebraska (fig. 41). Born in the Czech lands in 1880, he came to America in 1899, graduated from Union in 1902, and served as pastor of the Bohemian Brethren Presbyterian Church in Omaha from 1906 to 1913 before ministering to New Zion for thirty-nine years. With an operating budget of \$80,247 and 92 students in church school in 1991 (as opposed to \$59,775 and 130 in 1978), New Zion seems better situated than most churches in small towns of less than a thousand inhabitants.⁸⁵

Czech-American Protestant immigrants and their descendants achieved many of their objectives. In the short run, through two to four generations, they accomplished evangelical and charitable work and perpetuated the use of Czech in church and at home. In the long run, Czech-American Protestants maintained a Christian fellowship and some understanding of their ethnic as well as their Hussite and sixteenth century Reformation traditions. Increasingly, descendants of freethinking Czechs became Protestants but much more often joined mainline as opposed to traditionally Czech-American congregations.

Recent scholarly studies reveal the importance of religious faith and fellowship in the lives of American immigrants.⁸⁶ Most Czech immigrants and their children strove to maintain an ethnic and religious heritage from which they derived a sense of self-confidence, self-worth, and continuity with the past. Churches, like fraternal benevolent organizations, also provided many opportunities to contribute to the welfare of family, community, and country. But, the sense of belonging to a distinct ethnic group declined with each generation's diminishing use of the Czech language. In these and other respects, the experience of Czech-American Protestants resembles that of other continental European immigrants.

The fragmentation and acculturation

of Czech-American families and communities has been accelerated by social mobility, widespread higher education, and the movement of youth from ethnic enclaves to areas of greater economic opportunity. Czech-American Protestant parents, who encouraged their



Fig. 41. Rev. Bohdan A. Filipi. (NSHS C998-37)

offspring to seek better education and employment away from home, undoubtedly facilitated this process.

The inexorable advance of acculturation has taken its toll of Czech-American Protestant congregations and of all foreign-language immigrant churches in the United States. Nevertheless, the spiritual and charitable work of these institutions and their successors has greatly enriched the larger worlds of American religious and cultural life.

Notes

¹ This article is dedicated to the memory of Metoděj Cyril Metelka (1906-93) of Prague-Vinohrady, and is a thorough revision of two papers, one of which I presented at the 1980 Missouri Valley History Conference. I thank Dr. Anne Diffendal, UNL Archivist Joseph Svoboda, and Prof. David S. Trask for their

critical evaluation of the conference paper. For information, I am much obliged to Mrs. Eleanor Bucknam, Ms. Ann Carpenter, Dr. Lorraine Duggin, Mrs. Dee Fields, Ms. Madelaine Hoover, Leonard Mrsny, Mrs. Marty Petersen, and Revs. Russell Palmer and Harold Svoboda.

² References abound to Czech Protestants as a "minority." One reported in the *Omaha World-Herald*, Dec. 16, 1979, is by then University of Nebraska Regent Robert Prokop: "(State Senator Ernest Chambers) has the right to say what he wants to, and I do, too. I also come from a minority. I'm a Protestant Bohemian."

³ On Czech-Americans and freethought generally, see Bruce Garver, "Czech-American Freethinkers on the Great Plains, 1871-1914," in Frederick Luebke, ed., *Ethnicity on the Great Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 147-69; Joseph Svoboda, "Czechs: The Love of Liberty," in Paul Olson, ed., *Broken Hoops and Plains People* (Lincoln: Nebraska Curriculum Development Center, 1976), 153-91; Karel Bicha, "Settling Accounts with an Old Adversary: The Decatholicization of Czech Immigrants in America," *Social History* 4 (Nov. 1972): 45-60.

⁴ Esther Jeřábek, *Czechs and Slovaks in North America: A Bibliography* (New York: SVU & CSA, 1976); and Karen Johnson Freeze's essay on Czechs in Stephan Thernstrom, ed., *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1980), 261-72.

⁵ The enormous scholarly literature on Hus, the Hussites, Chelčický, Comenius (Komenský), and the Unity of Brethren includes works in English by Otakar Odložilík, Frederick Heymann, Howard Kaminsky, Matthew Spinka, and S. Harrison Thomson.

⁶ Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972); Randall M. Miller and Thomas D. Marzik, eds., *Immigrants and Religion in Urban America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1977), especially Josef J. Barton, "Religion and Cultural Change in Czech Immigrant Communities, 1850-1920," 3-24, emphasizing Czech Catholics in Chicago. Fine comparative studies are Frederick C. Luebke's "Ethnic Group Settlement on the Great Plains," *Western Historical Quarterly*, 8 (Oct. 1977): 405-30; and his "Turnerism, Social History, and the Historiography of European Ethnic Groups in the United States" in *Germans in the New World*, ed. Frederick C. Luebke, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 138-56:

⁷ From a freethinking perspective, see Tomáš Čapek, *The Čechs (Bohemians) in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1920), and its more comprehensive Czech version, *Naše Amerika* (Our America) (Prague: Orbis, 1926). Catholic interpretations include Francis Dvorník, *Czech Contributions to the Growth of the United States* (Cleveland: Benedictine Press, 1957), and Jan Habenicht, *Dějiny Čechů amerických* (A History of American Czechs), (St. Louis, Hlas, 1910). Vlasta Vraz, ed., *Panorama: A Historical Review of Czechs and Slovaks in the United States of America* (Cicero, Ill.: CSA, 1970), does not explicitly discuss Czech Protestants.

⁸ A revealing memoir by a pioneer Czech-American Protestant minister is František Pokorný, "Naše Amerika," in *Husův lid* 18 (Feb. 1957): 24-28. The most penetrating memoir by a freethinker is Tomáš Čapek, *Moje Amerika: vzpomínky a úvahy (1861-1934)* (My America) (Prague: Fr. Borový, 1935).

⁹ In the introduction to this issue of *Nebraska History*, I discuss sources on Czech-American Catholic history.

¹⁰ Jaroslav Mrázek was pastor emeritus until his death in 1978. His eleven-page pamphlet, *Czech Protestants in Nebraska* (n.p., n.d.) appears updated in Vladimír Kučera and Alfréd Nováček, eds., *Czechs and Nebraska* (Ord, Nebr.: Quiz Graphic Arts, Inc., 1967), 174-84, and further revised in Vladimír Kučera, ed., *Czech Churches in Nebraska* (Lincoln: n.p., 1974), 145-75.

¹¹ Josef A. Dvořák, ed., *Dějiny Čechů v státu South Dakota*, (Tabor, S. Dak.: n.p. 1920); Rudolf Bubeníček, ed., *Dějiny Čechů v Chicago*, (Chicago: R. Bubeníček, 1939); Karel Bicha, *The Czechs in Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980); Růžena Rosická, *Dějiny Čechů v Nebrascce* (Omaha: Czech Historical Club of Neb., 1928), and its English version, *A History of the Czechs (Bohemians) in Nebraska* (Omaha: Czech Historical Society, 1929); and Robert I. Kutak, *The Story of a Bohemian-American Village* (Louisville, Ky.: The Standard Printing Co., 1933), on Milligan, Nebr.

¹² Vilém Šiller, Václav Průcha, and R. M. DeCastello, *Památník českých evangelických církví ve Spojených státech* (Chicago: Křesťanský posel, 1900).

¹³ The literature on the Moravian church is extensive. See Peter Brock, *The Political and Social Doctrines of the Unity of Czech Brethren in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries* (The Hague: Mouton, 1957); Beverly Smaby, *The Transformation of Moravian Bethlehem: From Communal*

Mission to Family Economy (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988); Allen Schattschneider, *Through Five Hundred Years* (Bethlehem, Pa.: Comenius Press, 1956).

¹⁴ On the Unity's early development, see Šiller & Průcha, *Památník*, 131-63. On its later growth, see Richard Machalek, "The Ambivalence of Ethnoreligion," in Clinton Machann, ed., *The Czechs in Texas: A Symposium* (College Station: Texas A&M University, 1979), 95-114; Clinton Machann and James W. Mendl, *Krásná Amerika: A Study of the Texas Czechs, 1851-1939* (Austin, Tex.: Eakin Press, 1983), 116-26; and Robert Skrbánek, *We're Czechs* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1988), 192-224.

¹⁵ Čapek, *Naše Amerika*, 441-42.

¹⁶ Data from Šiller and Průcha, *Památník*, passim. All are low estimates of adult membership.

¹⁷ On the Czechoslovak church, see Miloslav Kaňák, *Karel Farský* (Prague: Blahoslav, 1951); Miloslav Kaňák, ed., *Československá církev a Jednota bratrská* (The Czechoslovak Church and the Unity of Brethren) (Prague: Husova čs. fakulta bohoslovecká, 1967); and Frank M Hník et al., *The Czechoslovak Church* (Prague: Central Council, Czsl. Church, 1937). On that church's oldest American congregation, see Ludvík Fuček et al., *Program Book of the St. Cyril and Methodius Czechoslovak Church, Newark, New Jersey for the 45th Anniversary of Foundation* (Newark, N.J.: St. C. & M. Czsl. Church, 1969).

¹⁸ The total number of Czech-speaking Protestant congregations in 1917 is from *Sion: Národní Almanach za r. 1917*, 115-25; and Čapek, *Čechs*, 252-53: Tex., 43; Nebr., 14; Chicago, 12; Cleveland, 11; Iowa, 10; Minn., 10; Kans., 5; N.Y., 5; Wis., 5; S.Dak., 4; Okla., 3; Baltimore, 2; St. Louis, 2; Va., 2; Del., 1; Mich., 1; N.J., 1; Pa., 1; Tenn., 1.

¹⁹ For 1900 data on adult members of Czech-speaking Protestant congregations, see Šiller and Průcha, *Památník*, passim, with estimates indicated by "about" and reliable within ten percent: Tex., 1,500; Ill. (Chicago), about 600 to 700; Nebr., 581; Iowa, 376; N.Y., about 370; Minn., about 350; Ohio (Cleveland), 252 or more; Wis., 205 or more; S.Dak., at least 100; Kans., about 100. As many more children attended Sunday school.

²⁰ I have compared membership data to the total Czech-speaking population in each state according to the 1910 U.S. Census.

²¹ All above estimates do not include Czech Protestants who were members of non-

Czech Protestant churches. These members are extremely difficult to identify.

²² Before 1621 Protestantism had been the faith of a majority of Czechs. See Ferdinand Hrejsa, *Dějiny české evangelické církve v Praze a ve středních Čechách v posledních 250 letech* (A History of Czech Protestantism in Prague and Central Bohemia during the past 250 Years) (Prague: Českobratrská Evangelická Církev, 1927); and František Bednář, *Zápas Moravských evangeliků o náboženskou svobodu v letech 1777-1781* (The Struggle of Moravian Protestants for Religious Freedom, 1771-1781) (Prague: Král. Č. společnost nauk, 1931).

²³ Conversation with J. L. Hromádka in Prague, Aug. 1967. He studied at Edinburgh before 1914.

²⁴ Fr. Bednář, *Zápas o svobodu*, map, 224-25. This isolated and rugged country had facilitated the underground survival of a few Protestant congregations from 1621 to 1781.

²⁵ Margie Sobotka, *Nebraska, Kansas Czech Settlers, 1891-1895* (Evansville, Ind.: Unigraphic, 1980), translates Frank Mareš's survey of settlement by Czech immigrants in rural and urban ethnic communities. An example is Saunders County, 133-35, and its three Czech Protestant congregations, 134.

²⁶ The Lutheran minority of twenty percent of all Slovaks in Slovakia and in the U.S. generally supported Czechoslovak governments (1918-48) but established no institutional ties to Czech Protestants anywhere.

²⁷ Šiller and Průcha, *Památník*, 112: "ač tu nebyl žádných mnohoslibých vyhlídek pro českého kazatele."

²⁸ The first opened in Wesley, Texas, in 1864. The Ely church was dedicated in 1868 (Šiller and Průcha, *Památník*, 133-39), and is still active as First Presbyterian of Ely, with 230 members in 1991. *Minutes, 203rd General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (USA)* (Louisville, Ky.: Office of the General Assembly, 1992), pt. 2, 14.

²⁹ Šiller & Průcha, *Památník*, 111-18. Many of Kún's sermons were published as a memorial volume after his death: František Kún, *Ohlas z pouště* (Echoes From the Wilderness) (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Svit, 1897).

³⁰ Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, 749-62.

³¹ Paul F. Douglass, *The Story of German Methodism* (New York and Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1939), 221-24; the 63,439 members include no Methodists in Germany. George J. Eisenach, *A History of the German Congregational Churches in the United States* (Yankton, S.Dak.: Pioneer Press, 1938), 305.

³² Bubeněček, *Dějiny Čechů*, discusses Methodist and Congregationalist missionary work among Chicago Czechs. One surviving predominately Slovak church is New Covenant Baptist. See its "Sixtieth Anniversary Service" (Oct. 19, 1975), 1-4. The only Baptist venture among Nebraska Czechs was a briefly successful Sunday school program that began in the late 1920s. Kučera, *Czech Churches*, 174, prints without commentary a photo of its pupils. In Apr. 1978 Mrs. Grace Krajčůček told me what she remembered about it.

³³ L. F. Miškovský, "Slovanský seminář v Oberlině, Ohio," Šiller and Průcha, *Památník*, 190-95.

³⁴ Šiller and Průcha, *Památník*, 195-99.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 176-79.

³⁶ David S. Schaff, *John Huss: His Life, Teachings and Death after Five Hundred Years* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915).

³⁷ I have read the correspondence between T. G. Masaryk and Will Monroe in the archiv TGM at the Invalidovna in Prague-Karlín.

³⁸ Šiller and Průcha, *Památník*, 19-24.

³⁹ Čapek, *Moje Amerika*, 230-31.

⁴⁰ Šiller and Průcha, *Památník*, 26-27, on Kolín, and passim, on Czech recruits for divinity school.

⁴¹ On ladies in missionary work, see Šiller and Průcha, *Památník*, 188-90.

⁴² Edward Puletz, ed., *The Jan Hus Annual for 1930*, 6 (June 1930): 1-4.

⁴³ On Křenek, see Matthew Spinka, *Church in Communist Society: A Study in J. L. Hromádka's Theological Politics* (Hartford, Conn.: Hartford Seminary Foundation Bulletin, no. 17 (June 1954), 12, 34. On Pípal's return to Libenice near Kolín, see Rosická, *Dějiny Čechů*, 338. He died in 1932.

⁴⁴ Šiller and Průcha, *Památník*, 87-88; Rosická, *Dějiny*, 333-35. Dates on the founding or building of Nebraska Czech Protestant churches are from Šiller and Průcha unless otherwise noted.

⁴⁵ Data on churches before 1900 are from Šiller and Průcha, *Památník*. Data to 1968 are from Mrázek, *Czech Protestants*. Data for 1971 and 1978 are from *Minutes of the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, Seventh Series*, vol. 5 (1971), (Philadelphia: Office of the General Assembly, 1972); and *Minutes...., Seventh Series*, vol. 12, pt. 2: *The Statistical Table and Presbytery Rolls, Jan. 1- Dec. 31, 1978* (New York: Office of the General Assembly, 1979). Data for 1991 are from *Minutes, 203rd General Assembly*, pt. 2.

⁴⁶ Šiller and Průcha, *Památník*, 70-86; Mrázek, 1-11; Evelyn Krejčí, et al., *Schuyler Nebraska Centennial, 1870-1970* (Schuyler: n.p., 1970), 23.

⁴⁷ Šiller and Průcha, *Památník*, 78-79.

⁴⁸ Habenicht, *Dějiny Čechů*, 282.

⁴⁹ Short histories of eleven Nebraska congregations appear in Mrázek, *Czech Protestants*, 1-11, or its revision in Kučera, *Czech Churches*, 145-69.

⁵⁰ Kučera, *Czech Churches*, 174-75.

⁵¹ Šiller and Průcha, *Památník*, 17-18, photo and discussion of this Congress.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 19, on the Second Congress.

⁵³ By 1910 Czech-Americans had founded 326 newspapers and periodicals, of which 99 or 30.9 percent were then in print. Circulation peaked in 1924 at 589,178 for all issues before entering an irreversible decline. Tomáš Čapek, *Padesát let českého tisku v Americe* (Fifty Years of the Czech Press) (New York: Bank of Europe, 1911), 259-69; Stanislav Klíma, *Čechové a Slováci za hranicemi* (Czechs and Slovaks Abroad) (Prague: J. Otto, 1925), 226-27. On the Czech press in Bohemia and Moravia at that time, see Bruce Garver, *The Young Czech Party, 1874-1901, and the Emergence of a Multi-Party System* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 102-9.

⁵⁴ Čapek, *Padesát let*, 152-54; and František Štědrónský, *Zahraniční krajanské noviny časopisy a kalendáře do roku 1938* (Newspapers and Almanacs Published by Czechs Abroad to 1938) (Prague: Národní knihovna, 1958), 64, 83. *Jednota* should not be confused with the Catholic paper of the same name.

⁵⁵ Čapek, *Padesát let*, 162.

⁵⁶ Štědrónský, *Zahraniční noviny*, 66; Čapek, *Padesát let*, 166; V. N. Duben (V. Nevlud), *Czech and Slovak Periodical Press outside Czechoslovakia* (Washington, D.C.: SVU, 1962), 20.

⁵⁷ Čapek, *Padesát let*, 172, no. 432; Štědrónský, *Zahraniční noviny*, 13.

⁵⁸ Čapek, *Padesát let*, 180, 306, 257, 282; Štědrónský, *Zahraniční noviny*, 73, 108, 171.

⁵⁹ For four years V. Králíček published in Chicago *Český bratr*, a "Protestant quarterly for the cultivation of Christian knowledge and life." *Náš život* (Our Life), "a Protestant monthly for religious intelligentsia" appeared in South Omaha from Nov. 1907 to May 1909, edited by Rev. Václav Miniberger. Čapek, *Padesát let*, 176, 282; Štědrónský, *Zahraniční noviny*, 72.

⁶⁰ Scholars have thoroughly described that conflict elsewhere. Bruce Garver, "Czech-American Freethinkers," 147-69.

⁶¹ František B. Zdrůbek, *Kázání o svaté víře, čili výklady apoštolského vyznání víry* (Sermons on the Holy Faith, or Interpretations of the Apostolic Confession of Faith) (Chicago: Aug. Geringer, serially 1879-94), 391 pages.

⁶² Kutak, *Bohemian Village*, 47-48.

⁶³ My translation from Šiller and Průcha, *Památník*, 19.

⁶⁴ Kutak, *Bohemian Village*, 42-45.

⁶⁵ Čapek, *Moje Amerika*, 229-31 on Písek. Conversation with Leonard Mrsny, Jan. 1980, on B. Filipi.

⁶⁶ My translation from Šiller and Průcha, *Památník*, 85, also in Garver, "Czech-American Freethinkers," 164.

⁶⁷ This is a very difficult question to answer, in part because few people respond to questionnaires about their ancestors' religious beliefs.

⁶⁸ In this issue of *Nebraska History*, see Karel Pichlík's article on "Relationships between Czechs and Slovaks in the United States during the First World War." The following are indispensable: Karel Pichlík, *Zahraniční odboj, 1914-1918, bez legend* (The Resistance Movement Abroad, 1914-1918, Without Any Legends) (Prague: Svoboda, 1968); Victor S. Mamatey, *The United States and East Central Europe 1914-1918: A Study in Wilsonian Diplomacy and Propaganda* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957); Vojta Beneš, *Československá Amerika v období, vol. 1: Od června 1914 do srpna 1915* (Prague: "Pokrok," 1931) and *Vojáci zapomenuté fronty* (Prague: Památník odboje, 1923); and František Šindelář, *Z boje za svobodu otčiny* (Chicago: Nár. Svaz Č. Katolíků, 1924).

⁶⁹ Klíma, *Čechové a Slováci*, 214-21; Čapek, *Moje Amerika*, 246-53; Jack Rodgers, "The Foreign Language Issue in Nebraska, 1918-1923," *Nebraska History* 39 (March 1958): 1-22.

⁷⁰ *Clarkson Diamond Jubilee, 1886-1961: A History* (Wahoo, Nebr.: Ludi Printing Co., 1961), 61-63. Concurrently the ZČBJ authorized the formation of English-speaking lodges, with "Cedar Rapids" of Iowa and "Pathfinders" of Omaha becoming the first in 1923.

⁷¹ I address these developments in a forthcoming article: Bruce Garver, "Americans of Czech and Slovak Ancestry in the History of Czechoslovakia," *Czechoslovak and Central European Journal* 11 (Winter 1993):1-14, especially 5-7.

⁷² Collected articles from *Husův lid* appear in J. L. Hromádka and Otakar Odložilík, *S druhého břehu: Úvahy z amerického exilu, 1940-1945* (From the Other Shore: Essays from American Exile) (Prague: Jan Laichter, 1946).

⁷³ Miloš Řepka, "Oznámení a výzva čtenářům. . ." *Křesťanské Listy a Husův lid*, 62 (26) (August 1965): 113; Duben, *Czech and Slovak Periodical Press*, 23-24.

⁷⁴ The best informed account of this controversy is Spinka, *Church in a Communist Society*, especially 34-35, 43-48. See also L. Borin, *Communist Penetration Into Australian Churches!* (Melbourne: Victorian League of Rights, 1954), 1-27; and Charles West, *Communism and the Theologians* (New York: Macmillan, 1958).

⁷⁵ For example, Ludvík Fuček from the Czechoslovak Church in Prague-Vinohrady served in 1968-69 as pastor at the St. Cyril and Methodius Czechoslovak Church in Newark, N.J. See his "Vzpomínáme, děkujeme a doufáme," *Program Book, 1924-1969*, two pages.

⁷⁶ Rev. Jaroslav Mrázek of Bohemian Brethren Presbyterian in Omaha attributed the decline of bilingual congregations to the end of "widespread immigration" and the preference of new immigrants who knew English to live and work "in an English-speaking environment." *South Omaha Sun*, May 1, 1967, 46.

⁷⁷ Sources on recent developments here and below are Mrázek, *Czech Protestant Churches; Minutes of the General Assembly...United Presbyterian Church*, 7th ser., vol. 5 (1971) and vol. 12 (1978/9); and *203rd General Assembly*, pt. 2.

⁷⁸ Conversation with the supply pastor, Rev. Russell Palmer, in Feb. 1980.

⁷⁹ Conversation in June 1993 with Mrs. Dee Fields, Wheeler Memorial membership secretary.

⁸⁰ Membership was seventy-one in 1900, sixty-five in 1958, sixty-eight in 1965, and sixty-nine in both 1971 and 1978.

⁸¹ "Finanční zpráva Nár. Jednoty Československých Protestantů do 31. decembra 1956," *Husův lid*, 18 (February 1957): 31-32.

⁸² *History of the Bohemian Brethren Presbyterian Church, 1889-1982* (Omaha: n.p., 1982), a pamphlet of eight pages. Also my conversations with Rev. Harold Svoboda in Sept. 1980 and with Ms. Ann Carpenter of Omaha's Presbyterian Center, June 1993.

⁸³ Conversations with Mrs. Marty Petersen, Sept. 1980; *203rd General Assembly*, pt. 2, 154.

⁸⁴ *Diamond Jubilee of Prague, 1887-1962* (Prague: n.p., 1962), 19-21; *203rd General Assembly*, pt. 2 (1992), 153-54.

⁸⁵ *Minutes of the General Assembly... United Presbyterian Church*, 7th ser., vol. 12 (1978/9), 58; *203rd General Assembly*, pt. 2, 152; *Clarkson Diamond Jubilee, 1886-1901*.

⁸⁶ Illuminating are John Bodnar, "Materialism and Morality: Slavic Americans and Education," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* (1976); and Timothy L. Smith, "Religion and Ethnicity in America," *The American Historical Review*, 83 (Dec. 1978): 1155-85.

