

Research subject in the project are the relations of John Paul II with the representatives of Czechoslovak Catholic Church up to 1992. The contacts of Karol Wojtyła with the Czechoslovak Church before his pontificate and later, after the Czechoslovak “velvet divorce,” with the Czech Church also remain in the area of interest.

The main goal of the project is to investigate, on the base of archival sources, reports of witnesses and expert opinions, whether the choice of Karol Wojtyła for the Pope and his later activity influenced the religious, social and political situation of Czechoslovakia (up to 1992) and the Czech Republic (after 1992). This entails another important question about formation of Czech memory, if it existed and still exists, of John Paul II.

The analysis of Czech sources along with their confrontation with existing research should deliver additional knowledge about the Pope’s role and influence on the fall of communism, and help to complete the materials concerning his project of European “Community of the Spirit.”

Planned research is to answer the question of whether the attitude and teaching of John Paul II affected key personalities of the Czechoslovak Church (hierarchs, clergy and theologians). Another issue refers to the way in which laity related to the Pope, also in the context of a contemporary assessment of activity undertaken by John Paul II. The project includes a test of the Pope’s reception in Czech Christian (above all Protestant) and non-Christian (Jewish and non-clerical) communities.

The presented issues will be explored on various levels and at different angles on the basis of interviews, conversations, memoirs and journalistic writing. Research material will be also delivered by archives, papal writings and studies on the topic discussed.

Conducting interviews will be one of the most important research tasks. Its goal is to get to as many people as possible in order to include their different experiences, views, background and age: all those factors are to render a full and detailed picture related with the Pope’s presence. The respondents will be experts who mostly conducted participant observation, and also witnesses to the pontificate of John Paul II. The task of experts is to assess meaning of historical events in order to present them in a broader context, while witnesses will share their experience to judge it after years. For the project, it is essential to gain a picture of this period not only from the Catholic community’s perspective, but also from the external viewpoints.

The project is to offer a new holistic view of the relationships of Karol Wojtyła (John Paul II) with the Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia from the 1970s of the 20th century including their today’s evaluation. Presented issues are the context for research on Czech culture along with its social relations in the last quarter of the 20th century and first decades of the 21st century. Their intention is to bridge the gap in the scope of works concerning the history of the Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia, and it will also become a contribution to completing and broadening the biography of John Paul II.

Currently, there is no comprehensive approach of the relations of Karol Wojtyła with the Czech Catholic Church; only some aspects of the papal activity have been examined. The project is to complete the data on the subject of the relationships of the papacy with the local Churches and their reception, and also the contacts between local Churches during the communist period. The examination will include the sociological reflection on the influence of the pontificate of Wojtyła on the Czechoslovak social relations in the external context (Catholics vs. Christian and non-Christian communities), as well as in the internal one (relations between Catholics).

The undertaken project is to verify a conviction of the Czech Catholicism’s (non-)presence in the social life during the communist period and after the transformation. It is a contribution to the study of sociology of religion, history of the Church, cultural studies, as well as to Czech studies and history of Czech society in the last quarter of the 20th century.

Recipients of the project may be also interested in the presentation of the Czech Catholicism and its role in important historical moments: many times in history, the Czech Republic functioned as a laboratory of philosophical, religious and even pedagogical phenomena which subsequently were spreading throughout Europe.

I will use both existing sources (archives, papal writings, memories, memoirs, interviews, conversations, photographs) and developed during the field research (conversations, interviews). In the part of the project describing the relationships of John Paul II with the Czech Catholic Church, I will also make use of archival sources obtained during queries and available studies of the examined period. The collected materials will be applied to critical analysis of sources and to presentation of the Pope’s contacts with the Czechs.