



FACT SHEETS ON HUNGARY

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF HUNGARY – www.kum.hu

Churches since the Establishment of the Hungarian Kingdom up to Modern Times

Established by Saint Stephen I in the Carpathian Basin in 1000 A.D., the Christian Hungarian Kingdom covered a territory where the Western, i.e. Roman or Latin, and the Eastern, i.e. Byzantine or Greek, branches of Christianity were geographically contiguous to one another. The Latin and Greek missions had therefore been co-existing and had initially made joint efforts in the development of the Church in the Hungarian State founded before the great schism, i.e. the split between the Western and Eastern Christian Churches. Saint Stephen, living on the fringes between East and West, applied to the Pope for a royal crown, which he was granted. By sending the crown to the Hungarians, Pope Sylvester II and the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Otto III, admitted the fledgling Hungarian State to the Western or Latin family of Christianity, i.e. the 'Respublica Christiana'. The ecclesiastic hierarchy that was beginning to take shape, with the Archbishop of Esztergom at its head, went on to become an integral part of the universal Catholic Church.

Making use of the Papal authority, King Stephen laid the foundations of the Hungarian Catholic Church simultaneously with the establishment of the state itself. Major supporters of these kingly endeavours were the Benedictine monks, who had constructed their first monastery on the Hill of St. Martin, now known as Pannonhalma. The monks of Saint Benedict familiarized Hungarians, who had newly been converted to Christianity, with how to cultivate the lands, and by bringing Christian culture and its way of life closer, helped them to integrate into the European feudal model of society and state.

Saint Stephen set about organizing ten Bishoprics broken down into two archbishopric domains, i.e. Metropolises. The King had granted the Church huge landed estates, and with their benefices the bishops became highly important figures with their exercise of mediaeval state power. It was the right of the Archbishops of Esztergom to crown the Hungarian kings in the ancient coronation town of Székesfehérvár.

The Archbishop of Esztergom, as the Primate of Hungary, the head of the Hungarian Church and the second highest dignitary of the land after the ruler, was at the same time the Royal Chancellor.

As the largest realm in its region, the mediaeval Hungarian Kingdom was ranked among the 'Great Powers' of the day and thus as a European power. The strong Hungarian Church was able to assist the country efficiently to maintain its independence both from the German Empire on the one hand



Gyula Benczúr: *The christening of Vajk (detail)*

and the Byzantine Empire on the other, without becoming a Papal fiefdom. The kings of the House of Árpád as well as rulers from other royal houses continued to pursue policies to increase and enrich both the State and the Church. After the arrival of the Benedictines in Hungary a number of other religious orders were established in the country, among which were the Cistercians and the Canonical Order of Premonstratensians, who were relatively quickly followed by Mendicant Orders such as the Franciscans and Dominicans. The most popular religious order in the Hungary in the Middle Ages was that of the Hermits of Saint Paul, an order established in Hungary, which developed from its humble beginnings as an order of hermits into a very widespread religious order that devoted itself to pastoral education and training.

The mediaeval Hungarian Church nurtured fruitful relations with the centre of the universal Church, the Holy See residing in Rome. Literate intellectuals sprang from the ranks of the clergy. The Church was the main disseminator and carrier of material culture and at the same time preserved public and social order in its capacity as guardian of the Christian faith. It was indicative of the strength of Hungarian Christianity that the Hungarians of the Middle Ages and their Church contributed a series of well-known saints to the world.

From the 15th century on the Christian Hungarian State was forced to engage in defensive warfare against the Osmanli Turkish, whose conquest was penetrating into Europe. Bishops at the head of the Hungarian Catholic Church also took an active part as soldiers in the war waged against the Islamic intruders, or 'pagans' as they were regarded. In 1526 when the Hungarian armies sustained a crushing defeat at Mohács, which led to the total collapse of the mediaeval Hungarian State, most of the troops were slaughtered.

Following the battle of Mohács, which was to be regarded evermore as a disaster, the country was torn into three parts: Royal Hungary, which fell into the hands of the Catholic House of the Hapsburgs; the formally Turkish vassal Principality of

Transylvania, which was essentially an independent state; and finally the central territory, which fell under complete Turkish occupation. The process of disintegration of the mediaeval Hungarian realm coincided in time with the evolution and the rapid spread of the Reformation in the Carpathian Basin. In the wake of the Reformation a significant majority of the population of the country first converted to the Lutheran (Evangelic) and

by a long period of religious tolerance on the whole. As the first in its kind in Europe, the National Assembly was convoked in 1557 to Torda (a settlement in Transylvania) and passed an act on the freedom of religion, by virtue of which the four 'legally established denominations' (recepta religio), i.e. Lutheran, Calvinist, Unitarian or Antitrinitarian and Catholic, were given equal rights by the State to confess their respective faiths



The Benedictine Abbey in Pannonhalma is one of the birthplaces of Hungarian culture

then the Calvinistic (Reformed) faiths. In the Hungarian Kingdom, situated on the north-western part of the former Hungarian realm, the Catholic faith had been and remained the only established state religion. Restrictions were imposed on the freedom of religion, and inhabitants still confessing their Protestant faith were allowed, after a series of desperate struggles for freedom, to practise their religion as members of a denomination, albeit only on sufferance. The Protestants did not enjoy equal rights with the Catholics in their religious life, and were also politically restricted from a number of public functions on account of their religious faith.

However, things took another course of development on the territory of the Principality of Transylvania. Although the majority of the Princes themselves were of the Protestant faith, their reign was marked

and exercise their religious lives in freedom. The legal status of an 'established denomination' involved the fundamental freedom of these churches to set up their own self-governments as religious autonomies independent of the State, regulating not only their organizational structures but financial, educational and cultural matters, too.

The legal regulation of the matters of faith in Transylvania had resulted in another unique outcome, namely the establishment of Catholic autonomy, totally unknown within the universal Church, by the Transylvanian Bishopric, which continued functioning well until the middle of the 20th century under the name of 'Transylvanian Roman Catholic Status'. However, freedom of religion did not cover all segments of the population even in Transylvania; inhabitants of Rumanian nationality whose numbers

were increasing dramatically at the time, kept their Eastern Orthodox faith, as did the relatively small number of those adhering to the Jewish faith, who were also tolerated albeit on sufferance.

The Counter Reformation or 'Catholic Reform' was a flourishing movement in Hungary during the 17th century, and thus took place in parallel with the gradual driving out of the Turks. The Order of Jesuits that flourished within the territory controlled by the Hapsburg kings served as the underlying basis and the prime mover of change. Their highly educated and spirited friars were very successful in reconvertng the ruling elite and those in politics, who had previously been won over by the Protestants, before turning their attention to the masses. The most distinguished figure of Baroque Catholicism was a Jesuit who first became a Bishop then the Archbishop of Esztergom, Péter Pázmány. By the end of the century the clear majority of the population had reconverted to Catholicism, and the Catholic Church was reinstated into its privileged position as the established church of the state.

The 18th century and the first half of the 19th century, when the state drew churches under its almost complete control, is known as the era of 'enlightened absolutism' in the Hapsburg Empire, which included Hungary. The system reached perfection under the reign of Maria Theresa (1740 to 1780) and Joseph II (1780 to 1790). Joseph II intended to fully absorb Hungary into his centralised empire, and one of the means he used to attain this purpose was Germanisation, while another was the abolishment of the historic Hungarian feudal privileges. As another step taken towards modernization, he re-regulated the position of Jews, granting them the right to hold religious services. At the same time he prohibited several religious orders and monasteries from functioning, and utilised their assets in a foundation established to serve both religious and educational purposes. The Edict of Tolerance issued by the king in 1781 granted the free exercise of the Protestant and Orthodox faiths, granting those Churches the freedom to build churches and employ



M. S. master's picture titled Visitation is an outstanding work of medieval Hungarian art

churchmen, moreover, his reforms allowed non-Catholics to hold any kind of state office.

The bourgeois revolution of 1848 brought about a qualitative change in the relation between State and Church. The liberal spirit of the new laws facilitated the freedom of religion to be widely expanded and granted equal rights to various denominations within the framework of a constitutional bourgeois state. One such new law was Act 20 of 1848, which provided a legislative base for religious and ecclesiastic issues. According to the provisions of the Act, the Catholic Church ceased to exist as the Established State Church, and its former status was replaced by the principle of total equality without distinction and reciprocity between the legally established denominations (Catholic Churches with Latin, Greek and Armenian rites, the Reformed Church, the

Lutheran Church, the Unitarian Church and the Orthodox or Eastern Church). In legal terminology, this meant that these denominations and Churches became freely 'interchangeable' for their congregations, and equal in regard to their civil and political rights.

Without any doubt the Revolution and War of Independence of 1848/49 laid down the early foundations of some sort of relationship between the State and the Jewish communities through the codification of an Act providing full equality for the Jews alongside any other citizen before the law in 1849. Unfortunately, the struggle for freedom was quashed, leaving no time for Act to come into effect.

Decades of neo-absolutism (1849 to 1867) following the failure of the War of Independence in 1849/49 could not permanently impair the equality of religious

rights that had by then become consolidated. In strengthening the unity of his empire, emperor Francis Joseph relied primarily on backing from the Catholic Church and the Holy See. During the period of 'government by decrees' Vienna granted various privileges to the national Churches of the nationalities living in Hungary by way of compensation for the united front they had presented against the Hungarians' struggle for freedom.

But the Austrian Empire gradually reached a crisis point from the middle of the

consisting of Unitarians and other small Christian denominations (or sects as everyday language has it in Hungary).

The Hungary of this time was a multinational state formation of the region, although it was also marked with a denominational diversity.

Religions and the awareness of belonging to one or another national Church were crucial factors in the turning of these national minorities into genuine nations in pre-1918 Hungary. While lacking both political and

It may be said with good reason that the ecclesiastical policy of the dualistic era (1867 to 1918) was a liberal policy, since the legal framework for the freedom of religion as well as that for a free denominational life were all provided for, even though the total separation, or rather segregation of the State from the Churches did not take place at this point in time. Ecclesiastical policy struggles fought at or around the turn of the century aimed to curtail the many surviving privileges of the Catholic Church, and to oust it from the positions it held. In 1894 and 1895 a set of laws were passed enforcing compulsory civil marriage, the civil registration of births and the religion of children born from mixed marriages. The compulsory civil marriage and registration replaced 4 or 5 marriage laws that had been in effect until then in order to consolidate the security based on civil law. Children born from mixed marriages had to follow their parents' faith according to their sex (a boy had to follow the faith of his father, while a girl had to follow her mother's). Rendering the Jewish denomination an 'established' religion by law accomplished the full emancipation of the Hungarian Jews, endowing them with equal rights to compare with any Christian religious denomination. This also made it possible to contract mixed, i.e. Jewish-Christian marriages without any restriction.

Act 43 of 1895 on the Free Exercise of Religion, the basic principles of which have been incorporated into the present Constitution of the Republic of Hungary, had crucial long-ranging effects. According to the contemporaneous legislators, "*every-one shall be free in confessing and following his/her faith or religion, and... shall have the right to openly evince and exercise his/her religious beliefs. No one may be impeded in the exercise of religious ceremonies that are not contrary to the law or public morals, nor be forced to perform religious acts that do not correspond to his/her faith.*" Article 2 of the Act, codifying the freedom of religion in a modern way, provided the following: "*the ability to exercise one's civil and political rights shall be totally unrelated to one's faith.*" What



1860s, and in the end was in desperate need of support from the part of its empire populated by Hungarians. Finally, reconciliation took place as a result of a modus vivendi imbued with mutual concessions through the Compromise of 1867. This created a bicentral state, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, which guaranteed the territorial integrity of the Hungarian Kingdom, i.e. historic Hungary within its borders. According to a census taken in 1900, the Hungarian ethnic group constituted the clear majority of the population living in the territory of the Hungarian Kingdom at the turn of the century, while the rest was broken down into Rumanians, Germans, Slovaks, Ruthens, Serbs and Croats. As far as the denominational breakdown of the population was concerned, a round 60% confessed themselves to be Catholic, 14.5% to be of the Reformed Church, 13% the Orthodox or Eastern Church, 7.5% the Lutheran Church, while 5% professed the Jewish faith, with the remaining part

territorial autonomies, these nationalities could rely only on the autonomous governments of their respective national Churches with a strong commitment to not only fostering their own languages and cultures within their activities related to religious life but also to the maintenance of nationality schools, institutions and associations. It could well be said of these peoples that they had become nations within church-like frameworks. The same held true of the Jews living in Hungary, who had a double identity in their hearts, and who were able to become emancipated and accommodate themselves to Hungarian society with an unbroken adherence to their faith.

Simultaneously with the sweeping development of capitalism and the rapid bourgeois transformation of society, numerous legislative instruments were passed to regulate, at a European level, relations between the State and Churches, in order to comply with modern requirements.

Article 3 provided for as follows: “No religious faith or ecclesiastical rules may release anyone from any of his/her legal obligations” was enacted to ensure equality before the State and equality of civil rights. Article 5 of the Act on Religions allowed everyone to leave a denomination without being legally forced to enter another; i.e. it legalized the status of no religious affiliation.

Creation of the co-ordinated three-phase system of denominations in Hungary was a ‘middle-of-the-road solution’ halfway from the elimination of the State Church towards the bringing about of segregation. Since the Holy See had never entered into a concordat with Hungary, it ensured co-ordination by other diplomatic means, i.e. via sending out a Papal nuncio and receiving the envoy of the Monarchy, at a later stage, of Hungary.

Within the three-phase system of denominations, the first category included the ‘established’ denominations enjoying full state support and subsidies to function in complete freedom and autonomy. Namely, they were the Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran, Unitarian and Orthodox Christian

Churches and, from 1895 onward, the denomination of the Jewish faith. High dignitaries of these ‘established’ denominations were ex officio members of the Second Chamber of Parliament, the Upper House. The second category covered denominations recognized by the State, which also were given the right to function in freedom, but which were not entitled to state subsidies. Only two such denominations existed in Hungary during those years, namely the Baptists and the Muslims. The third category included all other denominations either not recognized or tacitly tolerated by the State, which were allowed to function according to the current rights of association and assembly. Their functioning was subject to prohibition only where it was contrary to effective legal regulations (for example, the Universal and Compulsory Military Service Act because of the refusal to take up arms for conscientious reasons).

According to the last Census of the dualistic era taken in 1910 the various faiths could be broken down thus:

Catholic	12,913,646
Orthodox (Greek or Eastern)	2,987,163
Reformed	2,621,329
Lutheran	1,340,143
Jewish	932,458
Other (Unitarian, other)	91,748
Total population	20,886,487
<i>(not including Croatia)</i>	

The nationality and denominational adherences of the population of Hungary also radically changed due to the Peace Treaty of Trianon (in 1920). The Peace Treaty allowed Hungary to keep only one fourth of its former territories, and one third of its former population. Following Trianon one third of the inhabitants of Hungarian nationality, i.e. 3.5 million people, became citizens of the successor states. It can well be said that Hungary turned into a homogeneously Hungarian country for want of other nationalities, with the only exception being the Germans who amounted to 6 or 7% of the population. Nationalities, i.e. Rumanians, Slovaks, Serbs and Croats ended up en masse on the other side of the new national state boundaries with merely fractions of their numbers, i.e. some tens of thousands, being left on the new Hungarian side. The radical change in the nationality composition of the population significantly modified the denominational proportions. In 1920 66% of the country’s inhabitants declared themselves to be Catholics, 21% to be Reformed, 6% to be Lutherans, and 5.9% to be Jews. The proportion of the followers of the Orthodox Church diminished to just 0.6%, while the number of the Unitarians became negligible on account of the separation of Transylvania from Hungary.

With these changes the Catholic Church grew in proportion and the Reformed Church, among the Protestants denominations, also gained some strength. The ratio of the Protestants within the elite in power and in intellectual circles also increased; the head of state, Governor Miklós Horthy was of the Reformed faith. At the same time, however, the Catholic Church played an increasing role in public life, partly because of the revival of its religious orders. Diplomatic relations rose to the highest level



Ecumenical ceremony at the St. Stephen Basilica in Budapest, with the participation of Gusztáv Bölcskei, head of the Reformed Church, Péter Erdő, head of the Roman Catholic, and Imre Szevik, head of the Lutheran Church

between the Hungarian Kingdom and the Holy See in 1920, i.e. a Papal nuncio was sent to Budapest and a Hungarian envoy to the Vatican. In those years the so-called Catholic Renaissance established even closer links between the State and the Churches in comparison with those in the liberal dualistic era. The State delegated a number of its functions, e.g. public education, social care etc., either partly or wholly to the Churches and their institutions.

The canonistic structure that had evolved by the end of the 19th century underwent no significant legal changes in the Horthy era. However, a striking difference in the practical ecclesiastical policy and State-Church relations was that the former liberal state was replaced by a basically conservative and autocratic regime identified as being Christian and nationalist, where the role played by the Christian Churches, primarily the Catholic Church, increased significantly. The interpenetration of 'Throne' and 'Altar' became closer again. In this respect, matters about the Jewish faith were becoming more and more thorny. Although no restrictions were put on Jewish religious life or activities, the Act on the regulation of matriculation passed in 1920, yielding to the pressure of the growing general anti-Semitic feeling, provided for restricted admission ('*numerus clausus*') for the Jews, limiting their proportion in universities to 6%. Through this the equality of civic rights was impaired, restricting a group of the citizens who belonged to a particular denomination, namely that of the Jews, in their fundamental human freedoms. (This particular restriction was lifted in 1928.)

The collective deprivation borne by the citizens belonging to the Jewish faith of their civil rights was provided for in legislation known as the series of anti-Jewish laws passed from 1938 onwards. There were more and more restrictions imposed on the Jews in the free exercise of their civil rights until they were finally deprived of all of them in the fields of the economy, social affairs and culture. The Jews were being driven into an impossible situation, and finally, as the question of race



The Great Calvinist Church in Debrecen was the scene of several important events in Hungarian history

came to prominence, their very lives were under threat. Even converts were not exempted from the scope of the laws. All this culminated in forced labour, deportation and genocide in the war-years.

As a direct consequence of the deprivation of Jewish people from their political rights, restrictions were applied in religious life shortly after. In 1942 an act was passed to the effect that the Jewish denomination ceased to exist as an 'established' one, and was re-included among the 'recognized' ones. Finally, these restrictions and deprivation of rights were conducive to the mass murder of the majority of Hungarian Jews, during the Holocaust in 1944.

Non-recognized denominations or sects were also worse off in the Horthy era than before. Some of them, such as the Nazarenes or Jehovah's Witnesses, were judged as destructive in their beliefs and activities and,

with reference to the National Defence Act 2 of 1939, were mostly suppressed as denominations posing particular risks to state interests and welfare. In 1944 some of the members of these 'sects' were also deported.

Survival of the Hungarian minorities living in the surrounding countries as well as preserving their minority rights and Hungarian identity are issues, which were and have remained strongly dependent upon their Churches, just as it was for the nationalities in the former Hungarian Kingdom. Churches, priests or ministers provided the cementing force for the Hungarian speaking population living in blocks or mere clusters in the neighbouring countries, assisting them in not only keeping their forefathers' faith but also fostering and promoting their national culture. In a church, people could always pray in Hungarian, listen to Hungarian sermons and sing



The Reformed Church in Csaroda

Hungarian psalms, while communication could take place in the mother tongue in the ecclesiastical self-governments. The ecclesiastical autonomy of the Churches and the various associations functioning on ethical-religious grounds were shelters for the minorities.

The period following 1945 can be broken down into several phases in terms of ecclesiastical history. From the end of the World War II until the consolidation of the one-party dictatorship, democratic reforms designed to assign the new position of the Churches as well as anti-religious and anti-clerical ambitions mainly on the part of the communist and social-democrat left, portending as early as the later sovietization, were all present. The land reform of 1945 and the consequent seizure of lands and their hand-over into state ownership in fact created the economic equality of all the Churches,

equally depriving them of their financial bases, which were then replaced by subsidies granted from the state budget and donations by their congregations. The former were subject to political conditions, and the latter to the financial circumstances and the generosity of those attending church.

The Paris Peace Treaty of 1947 restored the boundaries of 1937 i.e. those designated in Trianon, which caused the ecclesiastical governmental units to be re-arranged. Concerning the constitutional status of the Churches, Act 23 of 1947s abolished the three-phase breakdown of denominations. The legal statuses of 'established', with all its vested privileges, and 'tolerated' denominations were statutorily extinguished, and instead two terms, i.e. 'recognized by law' and 'non-recognized by law' were introduced. Recognized denominations were accorded equal rights by law.

One of the most striking examples of anti-clericalism was the liquidation of associations and movements functioning on ethical-religious grounds in the summer of 1946. In addition the Catholic Church made a grievance of the discontinuance of diplomatic relations with the Holy See (the nuncio was expelled from Budapest in early April 1945). Prominent ecclesiastical leaders heading the Protestant Churches during the preceding years were removed from their positions and replaced by those who were willing to collaborate with the new regime. However, the Catholic prelacy was subordinated only to the Holy See, therefore its resistance proved to be more efficient. Cardinal Prince Primate József Mindszenty, who headed the Hungarian Catholic Church from the autumn of 1945, fought a desperate battle for the freedom of his Church and the preservation of its rights. The establishment of the state monopoly on education and schools in the summer of 1948 was a serious blow to the positions of the Churches taken until then in public education, destroying at the same time those invaluable assets of national culture that had accumulated in schools maintained in the past by Catholic religious orders and the Protestant Churches. Instead of ensuring ideological indifference or pluralism in public education, the Left肘bowed the Christian and national scale of values off, which was rightfully found prejudicial by the Churches. The introduction of religious instruction as an optional subject instead of compulsory religious instruction from the autumn of 1949 was a seemingly democratic measure but the principle of voluntary choice could not really come through since the real aim of the totalitarian regime was to eliminate ethical-religious tuition from public education.

From the spring of 1945 onwards one administrative action was taken after the other against prominent ecclesiastical figures declared to be reactionary. Bishop Zoltán Túróczy, the head of the Lutheran Church in the district of Tisza, was the first, in 1945, to be brought to trial. Next were the clergymen who had assumed various political functions in the Horthy era, and then priests, friars and pastors at the head of former youth

movements followed one after the other. Prominent leaders of the Protestant Churches, such as the Lutheran Bishop Sándor Raffay and the Reformed Bishop László Ravasz, the Chairman of the Synod and Convent, resigned 'voluntarily'. For his refusal to resign, the Lutheran Bishop Lajos Ordass was brought before a court and sentenced to two years imprisonment under a false pretext in the autumn of 1948.

It was also in the autumn of 1948 that representatives of the Protestant Churches and the Jewish denomination were forced, through the use of coercive means, to conclude 20 year agreements that placed these denominations in a position subordinated to and supervised by the State thus rendering their autonomous governments mere formalities. Due to its internal ecclesiastic rules, the Catholic Church was somewhat protected from pressures of this kind since only the Holy See was in a position to enter into such agreements. The Catholic Church was finally brought to heel by brute force and political manipulation. Arrested in the Christmas of 1948, Cardinal Mindszenty was sentenced to life imprisonment in February 1949 after a spectacular show trial. His imprisonment was followed by a series of other show trials against Catholic and Protestant figures, which 'resulted' in vacant important ecclesiastic offices and 'congregations without their pastors'.

How great a power did the Churches, considered by the party state dictatorship to be the number one enemy, really represent? According to the first Census after World War II, taken early in 1949, the population fell into the following denominational breakdown:

Catholic	6,488,782
Reformed	2,014,707
Lutheran	482,152
Jewish	133,862
Other and of no religious affiliation	49,286
Total population	9,204,799

The Catholics and the Reformed populations continued to grow proportionately, while the number of Lutherans and

Jews decreased. The reason for declining numbers among the Lutherans can partly be attributed to the enforced translocation of a high proportion of the Hungarian German-speaking population to West Germany, and

period can be considered as an integral whole, in which the party state's primary aim was to ensure its ideological monopoly. This was conducive to a hostile state attitude to all religions and religious ideologies, as well



Initiation of Clergymen in the Lutheran Church in Sopron

partly to the exchange of the Hungarian Slovaks for Slovakian Magyars. As for the Jews, hundreds of thousands had been murdered in the holocaust.

The Constitution of the Hungarian People's Republic, promulgated on 20th August 1949, provided for the separation of the State from the Church and declared religion to be a private matter: "In order to ensure the freedom of conscience, the Hungarian People's Republic separates the Church from the State." Thus separation took place in Hungary in an anti-religious and anti-clerical form.

In the 'socialist era' of 1949 to 1989, some well-marked internal caesuras were drawn in the position of the Churches and the ecclesiastical policy of the state, though this

as to the gradual ousting of the media thereof, i.e. the Churches. The road of 'decay' was planned by the communists to lead, in a historic perspective, to the clergy's collaboration with the central power.

Manifesting itself in undisguised ecclesiastic and religious persecution, the ecclesiastical state policy, hallmarked by the name of Mátyás Rákosi, contemplated the liquidation or 'dying away' of the Churches in the foreseeable future, i.e. in about two decades. The party state's primary aim was to bring the Catholic Church, which relied on the faith of its millions of adherents and on international support, to its knees. That was why the Catholic movement of the 'Priests of Peace' was brought into being in 1950 with its unstated aim to make the lower ranks

of priests turn against the 'reactionary' episcopacy. This political manipulation, evocating the risk of a new 'schism' was accompanied by the liquidation of the religious orders. Initially some 2,500 friars and 9,000 nuns were prevented from practising their vocation, before being separated and finally driven into internment, which paralysed the most dynamic and devoted sectors of the Church.

Continuous persecution impelled the episcopate to accept on 30 August 1950 an agreement with the Government that conferred the right upon the State to exercise total control over the Church. The Government assigned an executive responsible for church affairs to the administrative body of each county, and delegated a ministerial commissioner to each Episcopal Aula to maintain an on-site check on ordinaries' work. Prelates, still not in prison, were placed under house arrest or kept under strict supervision by the State Security Authorities (ÁVH). A wide net of informers was established to procure first-hand information on what had been delivered from the pulpits, or even sometimes heard in the confessionals.

The Rákosi regime licensed a total of four religious orders (the Benedictines, the Piarists, the Franciscans and the Poor School for Nuns) to work in two secondary schools they were each given back. The Protestant Churches were forced to give up their remaining secondary schools one after the other, with the exception of the school operating within the framework of the Reformed Boarding School of Debrecen, which was the only school to survive the dictatorship of Rákosi. The Catholic Church in Hungary was hermetically cut off from the Universal Church and its head, the Vatican in Rome. Along with this the Protestant Churches were forced to interrupt, ad interim, relations maintained with their international centres. The State Office for Church Affairs, set up by Act 1 of 1951, was the executive authority for the ecclesiastical policy conducted by the state party dictatorship. A territorial reorganization of church districts also took place in the socialist era.

During the Revolution of 1956 Bishop Mindszenty was discharged from prison, and then after the suppression of the uprising, he took refuge in the American Embassy in Budapest where he remained right until 1971. The newly set up Kádár regime first had recourse to the means of drastic reprisal to intimidate church leaders, priests, ministers and Christians alike. Many prominent church personalities were sent into internment, while others were deprived of their offices. Mostly under cover, show trials were organized in succession mainly against monks as well as all those who had not been willing to drop the idea of providing youth with ethical-religious instruction, even under illegal conditions.

A series of relevant legislation in the socialist era, primarily law-decrees and orders by the State Office for Church Affairs were all designed to deprive the Churches of their roles played in public life and, in addition, to make, taking a long hand in their organizational and operational matters, the interests of the central power generally prevailing.

Consolidated and stabilized by the mid-60s, the Kádár regime felt strong enough to gradually make a distinction between the battle against religious ideologies and the co-existence then co-operation with the Churches and their adherents. A wider play was given to the Churches' existence, though at the cost of their closer collaboration with the state power and more enthusiastic backing of the 'building of socialism', to provide legitimacy for the regime. In autumn 1964 this process reached a milestone, creating a stir on an international scale as well, when a partial agreement was entered into by and between the Hungarian People's Republic and the Holy Apostolic See. Though the instrument was rendered secret for 99 years, the main point of it has already filtered out: the Hungarian State waived the right to assign the dignitaries of the Church, recognizing it to be the sole right of the Pope in Rome. In return, the Holy See undertook not to appoint anyone to the position of bishop without the prior approval of Budapest. In this way, the State Office for Church Affairs acquired a right of veto. By virtue of

another agreement, Cardinal Mindszenty was allowed to leave the country in 1971, and the Pope deprived him of his archiepiscopal see in Esztergom in 1974. Following Mindszenty's death, in 1976 Pope Paul VI denominated a new Archbishop of Esztergom who trod the path towards closer co-operation with the central power, a pursuit to become known as the 'policy of small steps'.

Through those small steps taken during the years of the 'soft dictatorship', late in the 1970s and in the 1980s, the impression was gained in both Hungary and foreign countries that the ecclesiastical policy of the Kádár regime might well become a model for the Churches existing in other socialist countries. Visits by an increasing number of Protestant and Catholic dignitaries to Hungary also pointed towards this. World centres of various Churches and the Vatican itself considered the State Office for Church Affairs and its head, Undersecretary of State Imre Miklós, to be a partner. This easing in the Hungarian ecclesiastical policy came to fruition when Pope Paul VI gave an audience to the communist party leader János Kádár in 1977.

However, complete freedom of religion and free functioning of the Churches required a total change of regime.

Consequent separation of State and Church, perfection of the self-governments of the Churches, the free exercise of religion and the complete freedom of the Churches to work and function could be and have been realized only in the Republic of Hungary, the country being a multiparty, constitutional and parliamentary democracy. In the process of the change in the system, relations between the State and the Churches were settled in an up-to-date manner, following the principles of the religious indifference of the State, the separation of State and Church and the freedom of religion, which is to be understood as a private right. In order to achieve this, numerous tasks had to be accomplished, i.e. the legal restrictions imposed by the former party state era had to be eliminated, the new regulation providing for the freedom of religion within the framework of the

democratic system of institutions had to be adopted, the corresponding administrative and political institutions had to be set up, and last but not least, financial conditions ensuring equal opportunities for the Churches in their activities had to be found. Legal regulations that set limits on the performance of the core Church functions were repealed as one of the first measures. Law-decree 14 of 1989 passed by the Presidential Council on 30th June 1989 abolished the State Office for Church Affairs without legal successor. State tasks related to the Churches were first co-ordinated by the Ministry of Culture, then were reassigned to an office, set up at the Prime Minister's Office, and headed by a deputy state secretary. Censorship of religious publications and books was halted in the summer of 1989. The Catholic movement of the Priests of Peace that had already faded away by then was formally stopped.

Hungary was proclaimed a republic with its new Constitution promulgated on the 23rd of October 1989. The Constitution of the Republic of Hungary codified relations between the State and Churches to be an underlying principle of the freedoms of thought, conscience and religion, declaring the Churches to be functioning bodies separate from the State. This separation is not anti-clerical or anti-religious because the full freedom of religion should imply not only the separation of the State from the Churches but also the recognition of the necessity to have them co-operate out of social and public interest and via a common sense of responsibility.

The legal foundations for the freedoms with regard to religion, as well as of the relations between State and Church were laid down by Act 4 of 1990, passed by the last state party Parliament on 4th January 1990 and still in effect. The ideological neutrality of the State was able to become a reality through the consequent separation of the State from the Churches, which does not, however, mean indifference on either part. It is the responsibility of the State to provide the conditions for the freedom of religion, and to protect them.

As a next step, agreements concluded in

1948 and 1950 were mutually denounced, and the partial agreement with the Apostolic See (1964) repealed, with an agreed intention, in the spring of 1990. This latter meant that the Hungarian State waived the right of preliminary approval concerning designations to vacant high ecclesiastic posts subject to the Holy See.

Religious orders that had been scattered in 1950 were restored to their right to work and function, and upon termination of the state monopoly of schools, the Churches were allowed to resume their educational and training work in the institutions and schools claimed and received back again. The Catholic Church maintains most of the educational institutions. In 2003 the Catholic Church had 55 nurseries, 96 primary schools, 55 secondary schools, 22 specialized technical institutes and 51 boarding schools. Also, diocesan seminaries as well as theological colleges and noviciates maintained by major religious orders, altogether 10 religious institutions of higher education were reopened. The Péter Pázmány Catholic University was founded with three faculties, i.e. Theology, Arts and Law. The Reformed Church has 18 nurseries, 43 primary schools, 23 secondary schools and 24 boarding schools. Theological Academies in Pápa and Sárospatak have reopened to resume their invaluable teaching and educational activities. In 1993 the University of the Reformed Church was established under the name 'Gáspár Károli'. Though in lesser dimensions, religious educational nets, including teachers' training schools, have been developed by other major denominations, too. In addition the Theological University of the Evangelic Church opened. Allowed to educate throughout the previous period, the National Rabbinical Training School was transformed, adding a new non-theological department, into the Jewish University.

The new Act on Religious Affairs made it much easier to recognize the Churches and denominations by the State, as well as to establish and operate such. According to the regulation still in effect, 100 persons, confessing identical articles of faith, may

establish a new Church, to be registered by the court in order to become a legal establishment. This very liberal regulation does not provide for a compulsory description and demonstration of the articles of faith, and does not require functioning parochial congregations, nor religious communities, etc., and is not inquisitive about operating rules. In this way almost any group of 100 persons may put up for state recognition as a Church, even without being organized on the basis of religious principles or dogmas. Recognized Churches, denominations and communities said to be religious ones amounted to 37 in 1991, 77 in 1997 and 136 in 2002.

Following the first free elections in 1990, the newly established Government with József Antall at its head fully restored, through one of its first decisions, diplomatic relations with the Holy Apostolic See. Pope John Paul II visited Hungary on 16 to 20 August 1991. His pilgrimage confirmed millions of Catholic believers in their faith, and was at the same time a recognition and encouragement addressed to the leaders of the Republic for their work performed in order to extend democratic freedoms. Early in



The building of the Dohány Street Synagogue in Budapest

September 1996 Pope John Paul II called on the Hungarian Catholic Church again, visiting the ancient Benedictine Monastery of Pannonhalma on the occasion of the 1100th anniversary, the Millecentenary, of the Conquest of Hungary. Papal visits placed emphasis on the millennial relations between Hungarians and Europe, and expressed a strong interdependence.

Conflicts in state ecclesiastical policy of the decade and a half following the change of regime have centred on issues related with the funding of the Churches. After decades of the party state regime, Hungary was lacking the institutional, material and financial conditions for the free exercise of religion and activities of the Churches. Not having their own estates nor financial assets, the Churches have to maintain themselves using partly their 'own incomes', i.e. donations of and services provided by the congregation, and partly budgeted state subsidies (provided for under the heading 'Operation of educational, training, social, health care, sports, child-care and youth protection institutions maintained by the Churches' and 'Assistance for other activities of the Churches'). Within the framework of

the state compensation procedure, the Churches have been able to claim and receive back their former estates, which had also been used for ecclesiastical, educational, social or cultural purposes before 1948. (2011 is set as a deadline for giving back all of them.) The Churches were not entitled to their former landed properties, nor has compensation been paid for them.

Since property claimed back have been and are being returned to the Churches at a pace slower than expected, another solution had to be found. The first agreement, covering these issues, was made with the Catholic Church, representing the majority of the Hungarian population. The agreement on the funding of the activities of the Catholic Church performed as public services and religious activities was signed in the Vatican in June 1997, and ratified by the Parliament in 1999. Agreements with similar contents were soon entered into with the Protestant Churches, too. These agreements provide for the transformation of the value of the property, rightfully claimed back but not yet returned, into the financial source of a regular annuity payable to the Churches.

Act 126 of 1996 generated a significant

step ahead in the financing of the Churches, granting private individuals the right to instruct, on the tax return form, the Hungarian Tax and Financial Control Administration (APEH) to transfer 1% of their personal income tax to a registered beneficiary Church or religious sect as instructed. 1 percentage offered by a round 400,000 taxpayers to the Catholic Church amounted to HUF 1.8 billion, by 122,000 taxpayers to the Reformed Church to 600 million, by 36,000 taxpayers to the Lutheran Church to 200 million and by 7,000 taxpayers of the Jewish denomination to 67 million.

As a part of public education, religious educational institutions, either reopened from 1989 on or newly established, receive normative state subsidies identical with those received by non-ecclesiastical schools. Theological institutions of higher education and universities maintained by the Churches also receive state subsidies. (After the change of the system various former theological faculties were not reintegrated into the state universities but served as a basis for the organization of new church-maintained universities.) The facultative system of religious instruction in schools was confirmed by the new regulations, rendering the participation therein an issue of free choice.

The State ensures religion to be freely exercisable in special cases and circumstances, as well. Thus the free exercise of religion by sects is provided in hospitals, hospices and penal institutions. The army chaplain service has been organized anew in the Hungarian Army. Within this framework the Army Catholic Bishopric, Army Protestant Bishopric and Army Rabbinate was set up.

During the first years after the change of the system there was a significant increase in the number of those who practise their religion openly. According to representative sociological surveys, approximately one third, 33 to 36%, of the population is religious in a sense that they 'adjust themselves to their respective Churches'. About half of them unconditionally adhere to the tenets of the Church, regularly going to church. Another one third of the population declare



*Holocaust memorial
in the courtyard of the synagogue*



*The Budapest Holocaust Memorial Centre
opened in 2004*

themselves religious 'in their own way', belonging to one religious sect or another. Finally, the remaining third is irreligious, or of no religious affiliation, which doesn't necessarily mean a conscious materialistic or atheistic ideology on their part.

The organization and operation of the 'historic' Christian Churches in present day Hungary shows a sort of historic continuity, on the one part, and adaptive abilities to the new challenges and requirements of the 21st century, on the other. The governmental structure of the Catholic Church was radically transformed in 1993. The bishoprics of Győr and Székesfehérvár have remained within the Archbishopric of Esztergom-Budapest. The Holy See has raised the Bishopric of Veszprém to the

ever-increasing number, but with a stagnant membership. 21 male orders numbered 1,039 resident friars, while 47 female orders numbered 2,778 nuns in 1991. At the turn of the millennium 26 male orders had 998, while 62 various female orders had only 2,311 members.

The Reformed Church is divided into four church districts, with 27 dioceses and 1200 congregations altogether. Besides the northern and southern districts of the Lutheran Church, a third one, the Western-Transdanubian, was established early in 2001. The pastor of the congregation of Győr acts as the Bishop of the new district.

Two years after the change of the system, in 1991, the Jewish religious communities established the Association of Hungarian

Bulgarian Orthodox Church to the Bulgarian Eastern Christian (Orthodox) Churches.

Former sects, now called small or free churches, have increased in number to an extent that is very surprising indeed. Of them, Baptists, Adventists, Methodists, the Pentecostal Church of Charismatic Protestants, Nazarenes and Mormons, with inherent Christian roots and features play significant roles in Hungarian public life. Out of the charismatic Evangelical denominations, the Congregation of Faith is the most numerous with a membership of at least 30 thousand. Religious communities with non-Christian origins, which seem to be very exotic and interesting here in Hungary, such as various Buddhist schools, the community of the Krishna Minded as well



Evangelic children at a competition in religion



László Fehér's painting: In the Synagogue

rank of Archbishopric, subordinating the Bishopric of Szombathely and the newly established Bishopric of Kaposvár to Veszprém. Dioceses of Pécs and Szeged-Csanád have been subordinated to the Archbishopric of Kalocsa-Kecskemét. The Bishopric of Vác and the newly organized Bishopric of Debrecen-Nyíregyháza have been included in the ecclesiastical province of the Archbishopric of Eger. Former religious orders have revived since the change of the system, functioning in an

Jewish Religious Communities (MAZSIHISZ), which replaced their former organization, MIOK. At present MAZSIHISZ has 13 communities in Budapest and 30 in the countryside, divided into six districts.

The Orthodox denomination, with its relatively small number of believers, consists of four autocephalous patriarchates, i.e. the Hungarian Orthodox Church belongs to the Russian, the Serbian Orthodox Church of Buda to the Serbian, the Rumanian Orthodox Church of Hungary to the Rumanian and the

as Muslims, also started to develop after 1989.

The Republic of Hungary, which became a member of the European Union on 1st May 2004, enjoying equal rights with other EU members, has ensured and will continue to ensure the freedom of conscience and religion for all its citizens, as well as the freedom for their churches and denominations to function.

Jenő Gergely