

## THE CHURCH POLICY OF THE COMMUNIST REGIME IN SLOVAKIA 1948 – 1968

As an introduction, I would like to mention the church policy situation in Czechoslovakia and especially in Slovakia during the so-called people's democratic system, which preceded the Communist regime. It existed from May 1945 to February 1948, when there was a pluralist political system with limited and regulated democracy and a coalition government called the government of the National Front of the Czechs and Slovaks<sup>1</sup>. For power-political and tactical reasons, the Communist Party as one of the parties in the government was not interested in worsening relations with the churches. It did not talk about atheist education. It emphasized the principle of religious freedom and cooperation with democratic figures in the churches.

However, there was already disturbing elements in relations between the new regime and the Catholic Church. In the past, the Catholic Church had been closely connected with Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (HSĽS), which became the state party after the origin of the wartime Slovak State of 1939-1945. It installed an authoritarian state and its radical wing applied a Nazi ideology. The state was headed by the Catholic priest Jozef Tiso<sup>2</sup>. During the Slovak National Uprising of autumn 1944 the HSĽS was dissolved, and after the war church schools and student hostels were nationalized and the church press was limited. The Catholic Church paid a price for the clericalism of the political party. Conflict increased between the new regime and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, when the bishops protested against the nationalization of church schools and called for a moderate sentence for the former president of Slovakia J. Tiso or requested clemency for him. The Communists especially resented the appeal of the Catholic Church before the May 1946 parliamentary elections, that the faithful should give their votes to parties, which respected Christian and Catholic values. Land reform was a second source of dispute between the churches and the political representatives, especially the Communists. The churches resisted the distribution of church land, because it would take away their economic basis. In spite of the fact that the conditions for the activity of the churches were not optimal, the two sides, that is the state and the churches, basically respected each other and endeavoured to solve disputes by mutual agreement or compromise. A basic change in the church policy of the state came after the establishment of the Communist monopoly of power in February 1948.

Slovak society was deeply religious, but divided by confession. In the past, the churches not only played an important role in the cultural and spiritual sphere, but also in political life. According to the March 1950 census, the confessional division of the population was as follows: 76.2% Roman Catholic, 6.42% Greek Catholic, 12.88% Evangelicals of the Augsburg Confession (Lutherans), 3.2% Calvinists mostly of Hungarian nationality. The remainder belonged to other religious groups. Only 9,679 persons, that is 0.28% of the population were without religion<sup>3</sup>. Therefore the church policy of the state concerned almost the whole population. The conflict between the ruling Communist Party and the churches was objectively unavoidable because of the differences or opposition of their ideological orientations and the efforts of the Communists to force their ideology on the whole of society including the spiritual sphere. This effort inevitably encountered opposition from the churches, which refused to submit to the ideological dominance of the Communist regime. They claimed the

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<sup>1</sup> Four political parties existed in Slovakia in the period 1945-1948: the Democratic Party (DS), Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS), Labour Party (SP) and Freedom Party (SSI). In the parliamentary elections of May 1946 they gained the following percentages of the vote: DS 62%, KSS 30.4%, SP 3.1%, SSI 3.7%. The Czech Lands also had four political parties: the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Czechoslovak Social Democracy, Czechoslovak National Socialist Party, Czechoslovak People's Party. The Communists won the elections with 40.2% of the votes. All the parties belonged to the government, opposition did not exist and the Communists held key posts.

<sup>2</sup> J. Tiso was president of the Slovak Republic and chairman of Hlinka's Slovak People's Party. In 1942, he officially received the title „Vodca“ (Leader – Führer). He belonged to the moderate conservative-clerical wing of his party.

<sup>3</sup> PEŠEK, J. – BARNOVSKÝ, M.: *Štátna moc a cirkvi na Slovensku 1948-1953 (The Regime and the Churches in Slovakia 1948-1953)*, Bratislava, Veda 1997, p. 277-278. Religious confession was not recorded in further census up to the fall of Communism. According to the 1991 census, the population of Slovakia was 60.43% Roman Catholic, 3.38% Greek Catholic, 6.18% Evangelical or Lutheran, 1.56% Reformed or Calvinist, 9.77% without religion and 17.40% did not give their religion. Comparison of the data about religious allegiance in 1950 and 1991 documents the degree of secularization of society and decline of religious and church life during the Communist era.



right to influence the spiritual life of society and were convinced of the irreplaceability of their social mission. However, various internal and external factors determined the specific course and form of this conflict. The dispute sharpened especially with the Catholic Church as the most numerous church and because of its connection with the Vatican. The other churches stood aside at first or each defended itself. Functioning ecumenism was absent. This division suited the Communist regime, which deliberately supported it. The regime endeavoured to isolate the Catholic Church from the other churches.

The Communist leadership perceived the Catholic Church not as an ideological, cultural and charitable institution, but as an opposition political force. It was regarded as the last and an especially dangerous enemy. In Slovakia, the hostile attitude was strengthened by the Church's former links with the regime of the wartime Slovak state. The long-term aim of the Communist regime in this struggle was to create a national Catholic Church independent of the Vatican. To dominate the Catholic Church and neutralize its political influence was the first step on the road to achieving this aim. The atmosphere of the Cold War significantly influenced the relations between the Communist regime and the Catholic Church. The bi-polar division of the world was reflected in the orientation of the activity of the two sides. Czechoslovakia was part of the Soviet Bloc with its specific totalitarian policies, according to which the Vatican was a foreign power and „dangerous instrument of imperialism“. Every activity of the Catholic Church connected with the Vatican became suspect or hostile, and led to accusations of espionage and treason. On the other hand, the Vatican influenced the political positions of the Catholic Church. It started from ideas about the unstable and temporary nature of the Communist regimes in Central and south-eastern Europe. Pope Pius XII took a firm and uncompromising position towards them, as atheist and anti-religious regimes.

The first area of friction between the Communist regime and the churches arose immediately after the February coup d'état of 1948. The Communist leadership demanded that the churches express a positive attitude towards the recent events. The Conference of Catholic Bishops at Brno on 4<sup>th</sup> March 1948 rejected this demand with the argument „that the Church is not bound to any political or state form.“ It also confirmed its earlier decision banning priests from being candidates for political office<sup>4</sup>. The Catholic Church expressed respect for the head of state during the election of Klement Gottwald as president on 14<sup>th</sup> June 1948. Josef Beran Archbishop of Prague celebrated Mass in St. Vitus Cathedral Prague and church bells were rung, but the archbishop immediately declared that the solemn Mass did not express political support for a movement opposed to the world view of the Church. Priests, who accepted functions in state bodies, were suspended (Josef Plojhar in Prague, Alexander Horák and Jozef Lukačovič in Slovakia). A memorandum of the Czech and Slovak bishops approved at a conference in Nitra on 16<sup>th</sup> August 1948, sent to the government and read in churches, led to a further worsening of relations. The bishops accused the government of breaking promises, and protested against the abolition of church schools, limitation of freedom, the church press and religious expressions, and against verbal attacks on the Pope.

The leading Communist functionaries realized the inevitability of conflict with the Catholic Church, but they endeavoured to delay it until a politically advantageous time. At first, they were interested in talks. They attempted to subordinate the Catholic Church by agreement with the bishops or at least with some of them. Talks started in March 1948, but were often interrupted and definitively ended in spring 1949 with no results. The Catholic hierarchy did not trust the Communist regime and was not willing to publicly proclaim its allegiance to the regime. It wanted to talk about some areas, but feared an agreement, which would define the relationship between the state and the Church and commit the Church to loyalty<sup>5</sup>. It would be the first representative of the Catholic Church to conclude an agreement with a Communist regime. There were open fears that Catholic circles in the West and the East would condemn such a step. The regime issued an ultimatum: either complete loyalty to the regime and conclusion of an agreement on its platform without regard for the attitude of the Pope, or a struggle, which the Catholic Church could not win.

After the discovery of listening devices at the Bishops' Conference in Nový Smokovec on 22<sup>nd</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1949, the talks between representatives of the state and the Catholic Church were

<sup>4</sup> KAPLAN, K.: *Stát a církev v Československu 1948-1953* (State and Church in Czechoslovakia 1948-1953). Brno, publisher Doplněk 1993, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23-72.



interrupted and the opponents of agreement gained dominance on both sides. In April 1949, the Communist Party came to the conclusion that the time for talks was over and struggle began. The Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia approved a new line on church policy on 25<sup>th</sup> April 1949<sup>6</sup>. It decided to organize a so-called renewal movement of „progressive“ Catholic priests and lay people loyal to the regime. It would break up the Catholic Church from within. The idea was to cultivate the Cyrillo-Methodian cult as the „original Christianity“, introduce the Czech and Slovak languages in services instead of Latin and struggle against the Vatican. The ultimate aim was to create a national Catholic Church. The Party also decided to adopt administrative measures to exclude the influence of the Church on civil life, limit its activity to religious ceremonies in churches and extend state supervision over the churches. Implementation of these measures began immediately. Organization of a „renewal movement of Catholics“, which received the name Catholic Action, began according to the party and state line<sup>7</sup>. Its founding assembly, held in Prague on 10<sup>th</sup> June, elected the Central Committee of Catholic Action and adopted a Declaration. A Central Committee of Catholic Action for Slovakia was established on 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1949. In Slovakia, the Declaration was signed by 214 priests, that is about 10% of the total number of Catholic clergy. The bishops and the Holy See reacted radically to the state organized Catholic Action. On 15<sup>th</sup> June 1950, the Czech and Slovak bishops held a secret meeting, at which they adopted a pastoral letter: *Declaration of the Czechoslovak Bishops and Ordinaries in the Hour of a Great Test*. They declared that Catholic Action was a schismatic movement and every participant would suffer ecclesiastical penalties. On 20<sup>th</sup> June, the Holy See condemned Catholic Action, and on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1949, it published a decree on the excommunication of Communists in the official gazette *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*. All those who knowingly and voluntarily supported and propagated Communist teaching had to be regarded as apostates and schismatics from the Catholic Church, and as such they were subject to excommunication and lost their claim to access to the sacraments.

The regime endeavoured to prevent the reading of the pastoral letter in churches. Its spreading was designated as fulfillment of the substance of a criminal act. In connection with Catholic Action, the faithful in many villages began to guard the priests, to protect them from arrest. Disturbances occurred in 60 Slovak villages, and acquired the character of revolt in 34 villages. The security service estimated that 22 – 25 thousand people participated<sup>8</sup>. As a result, the collection of signatures of the Declaration of Catholic Action was stopped by the end of June. The majority of the priests, who originally signed the Declaration, withdrew their signatures as a result of fear of excommunication. Catholic Action actually collapsed and did not fulfill the expectations of the Communist regime. The regime reacted to this failure with increased persecution. The campaign against the churches continued. In June 1949, state representatives were placed in the bishops' offices. In October 1949, the National Assembly approved proposed church laws changing the legal position of the churches<sup>9</sup>. They lost the character of subjects of public law and were given the nature of organizations legally subordinated to the state. The State Office for Ecclesiastical Affairs and the Slovak Office for Ecclesiastical Affairs were established to direct and supervise the activity of the churches. Ecclesiastical secretaries were appointed at regional and district councils. Priests became state employees. Ecclesiastical institutions lost any possibility to influence pay. State authorization was required for performance of the priestly vocation. Priests and ordinaries had to take an oath of allegiance to the republic. The state provided for supervision of all church property. These laws applied with insignificant changes through the whole period of existence of the Communist regime.

<sup>6</sup> Církevní komise ÚV KSČ 1949-1951. Edice \*dokumenty. I. Církevní komise ÚV KSČ („církevní šestka“) duben 1949 – březen 1950. (The Church Commission of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia 1949-1951. Edition of Documents. I. The Church Commission of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (The Church Six) April 1949 – March 1950.) Ed.: M. Bulínová, M. Janišová and K. Kaplan. Prague – Brno: Doplňek 1994, p. 78-89.

<sup>7</sup> Catholic Action was founded in December 1922 by Pope Pius XI as an international movement to include lay people in Church life and help the Church fulfill its mission. The Communists deliberately used this name when organizing the so-called renewal movement of Catholics.

<sup>8</sup> LETZ, R.: *Prenasledovanie kresťanov na Slovensku v rokoch 1948 – 1989* (The Persecution of Christians in Slovakia, 1948 – 1989). In: *Zločiny komunizmu na Slovensku 1948 – 1989*. I. Prešov, published by M. \*Vaška 2001, p. 100.

<sup>9</sup> Act no.217/1949 Zb. on the establishment of the State Office for Ecclesiastical Affairs. Act no.218/1949 Zb. on economic provision for the churches and religious organizations. Five government decrees added details to the provisions of these acts.



The regime also adopted further measures to limit the activities of the churches in the life of society. From 1<sup>st</sup> January 1950, registers of births, marriages and deaths were not kept by parish priests, but by the state authorities. According to a decree of the Ministry of the Interior, missions and pilgrimages could be held only with the permission of the state authorities. From the beginning of the school year 1952/1953, the system for giving children religious education in schools of the first and secondary levels was changed. Until then religion was part of education unless parents withdrew their children from religious education lessons, but it now became an „optional“ subject. Parents could send their children to religious education lessons, but they had to apply before the beginning of the school year. At the same time, various administrative limitations were applied. Schools were evaluated according to how many children participated in religious education lessons. If fewer pupils applied for religious education, the school was considered „more progressive“. In 1954, the government officially abolished the official recording of citizens according to religious confession.

The state also applied various types of repression and persecution against the churches. The Greek Catholic Church was liquidated in April 1950<sup>10</sup>. A „Church Synod“ of the Greek Catholics was staged with the help of the leadership of the Orthodox Church. On 28<sup>th</sup> April 1950, it declared the dissolution of the Užhorod Union of 1646 and return to the „great-grandfather“ Orthodox Church. The Greek Catholic Church had already been liquidated in a similar way in Ukraine and Rumania in the preceding years<sup>11</sup>. The male monasteries were liquidated in June 1950 and the monks were interned. The female monasteries were also gradually liquidated. Priests and laymen, who violated the anti-church laws and decrees, were prosecuted. Various bishops and other ecclesiastical figures were convicted in staged political trials, which pursued a clear political aim: to discredit the Catholic hierarchy, break its resistance and intimidate other priests. In January 1951, the trial of three Slovak bishops – Ján Vojtaššák, Michal Buzalka and Pavol Gojdič, ended with long prison sentences<sup>12</sup>.

The ruling structures used power-political and administrative means to subjugate the churches, break the resistance of the Catholic hierarchy, isolate it and prevent any contacts with the Vatican. The bravest bishops were arrested and put on trial, the rest were interned or isolated, while the more compliant and loyal were allowed to take the oath of allegiance under strict conditions. Important posts in bishops' offices were occupied by so-called patriotic priests. The regime paralysed the Catholic Church by repression and persecution, broke up its structures, decimated and dominated it, but it did not gain the active support of the majority of the clergy and faithful. By 1952, the Communist leaders were convinced that the church problem was solved, that the regime was no longer threatened from that direction<sup>13</sup>. However, they had not achieved their original aim – the creation of a national church, and it gradually retreated from this aim. As a result of these facts, the position of the Catholic Church in Slovakia and Czechoslovakia was worse than in Poland and Hungary, where the state concluded agreements with representatives of the Catholic Church in 1950. Although these agreements brought significant limitations, they allowed the Catholic Church to survive the most difficult period with smaller losses<sup>14</sup>.

The church policy of the state in the period 1948-1953 also affected the other churches, but to a smaller extent, either because they expressed their loyalty to the regime or offered less resistance to Communist rule, or because they did not have foreign headquarters comparable to the Holy See. The regime even supported and preferred two churches: the Czechoslovak Church and the Orthodox

<sup>10</sup> BARNOVSKÝ, M.: *Likvidácia gréckokatolíckej cirkvi v Československu roku 1950 (The Liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia in 1950)*. In: *Soudobé dejiny*, VIII, 2001, nos. 2-3, p. 312-331.

<sup>11</sup> The Greek Catholic Church in Western Ukraine was liquidated in March 1946 at a „Church Synod“ in Lvov, which dissolved the Union of Brest of 1596. In Rumania (Transylvania), the Greek Catholic Church merged with the Orthodox Church in October 1948. In Zakarpatská Ukraine, the Užhorod Union of 1646 was dissolved in August 1949.

<sup>12</sup> J. Vojtaššák was sentenced to 24 years in prison. M. Buzalka and P. Gojdič were given life sentences.

<sup>13</sup> KAPLAN, K.: *op.cit.*, p. 163-165.

<sup>14</sup> An agreement was signed between the Polish state and the Polish Catholic Church on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1950. Although it brought some limitations, it enabled preservation of the Catholic University at Lublin and the activity of the religious orders, but limited church education and a significant proportion of periodicals. An agreement was signed between the Hungarian state and the Catholic Church on 29<sup>th</sup> August 1950. The Church committed itself to „contribute to the peaceful development of the homeland“ and the state committed itself to respecting some church institutions. Eight church secondary schools, 8 houses of religious orders, 3 theology colleges of religious orders and after 1952 also 5 diocesan theology colleges were preserved.



Church. The first was seen as the possible beginning of a future national Catholic Church and the second was useful for liquidating the Greek Catholic Church.

The state's church policy entered a second period from about 1953. The administrative and power-political pressure on the churches continued, but now a struggle for the faithful or with „religious survivals“ began. It was found that attacking the churches, especially the Catholic Church, as institutions did not cast doubt on the faith and thinking of the faithful. Church attendance did not significantly decline and the numbers of baptisms and church weddings did not fall. The struggle for the faithful with an emphasis on their ideological re-education created a new situation. The regime openly presented itself as atheist, it proclaimed a struggle against religion as a worldview, and so made it clear to the churches that there was no place for them in the future society. The leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia demanded that its functionaries and later all its members free themselves from religious „obscurantism“ and leave the churches, because membership of a church was incompatible with membership of the Communist Party. The 1960 Constitution declared freedom of religion and the possibility to carry out „religious acts, if they are not in conflict with the law“, but article 16 also stated: „The whole cultural policy in Czechoslovakia, the development of education and instruction is carried on in the spirit of the scientific world view of Marxism-Leninism and in close connection with the life and work of the people“<sup>15</sup>.

The ideological struggle against religion was accompanied by administrative and discriminatory measures. The question of „dealing with“ religion became part of the cadre policy and one of the conditions of career and social advancement for party, state and public functionaries. Especially strong pressure was applied to teachers to free themselves from „religious burdens“. If they did not they were reassigned, persecuted or in many cases dismissed from the school system. The new line in the church policy of the state was directed against all the churches as bearers of faith. It was in conflict with their most vital interests and stimulated them to resistance. The division of the churches into Catholic as the chief opponent and the others as neutral or producing less opposition or even explicitly pro-regime gradually lost its importance. This created a basis for a joint defence of the churches. However, it was necessary to overcome historically rooted confessional divisions and hostilities.

According to the Communist theorists, religion and its institutional forms would completely disappear in the future, because Communism would remove its social roots. Church policy had to assist this process by using all resources for the desacralization of social life. The struggle against religion as the „opium of the people“ continued until the last days of the Communist regime. However, the internal and external conditions changed, and this also affected church policy. From 1953 to 1956, when the Communist regime was in crisis, not only in Czechoslovakia, but in almost all the countries of the Soviet Bloc, and the first wave of de-Stalinization was under way, the ruling circles moderated their pressure on the churches. However, the political softening did not last long. After the suppression of the anti-communist uprising in Hungary in November 1956, the firm course against the churches was renewed and it continued until the beginning of the sixties. It was accompanied by strengthened judicial persecution against priests and lay people. A period of liberalization began in 1963, in the course of which reformist forces developed within the party. Administrative pressure from the regime weakened, persecution moderated, the idea of replacing confrontation with dialogue Marxists and Christians spread among Communist intellectuals. Before this happened at least partially and briefly at the end of the sixties, both ideological currents had to overcome obstacles in their own ranks. The Communist regime made some concessions to the churches. In 1963, the president granted clemency to three imprisoned bishops Ján Vojtaššák, Stanislav \*Zelovi and Ladislav \*Hladovi. Archbishop Ján Beran and Bishop Karel Skoupy were released from internment at the same time. The Greek Catholic Bishop Vasil Hopko was conditionally released in the following year after intervention by the Vatican. In spring 1965, 44 imprisoned priests are freed on the basis of an amnesty<sup>16</sup>.

The liberalization included some degree of relaxation of the restrictions on travel to the West and the churches' official contacts with other countries were renewed. Czechoslovak – Vatican talks began in 1962. The results were insignificant, but the fact that they had begun to talk about solving

<sup>15</sup> Ústava Československej socialistickej republiky (Constitution of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic). In: Zbierka zákonov ČSSR 1960. Ústavný zákon č.100/1960, article 16 of the first chapter and article 32 of the second chapter.

<sup>16</sup> PEŠEK, J. – BARNOVSKÝ, M.: Pod kuratelou moci. Cirkvi na Slovensku v rokoch 1953 – 1970 (Under the Guardianship of the Regime. The Churches in Slovakia, 1953 – 1970. Bratislava, Veda 1999, p. 134.



problems was a step forward compared to the previous situation. The government allowed various Slovak and Czech bishops to participate in the Second Vatican Council. Many Catholic religious travelled to the Vatican and established contacts not only with official representatives, but also with religious exiles. Religious life became more active in almost all the churches during the 1960s. The number of school children applying for religious education moderately increased, and the number of participants in pilgrimages and other activities grew. There was also a clear growth in ecumenical tendencies and efforts at cooperation between Christian churches. The Second Vatican Council, which recognized a plurality of routes to God, greatly contributed to this. However, the regime did not give up supervision of the churches and administrative interventions even in this period. It endeavoured to weaken the activities of the churches, but sharp forms of persecution were used more rarely.

The political relaxation led to the attempt to reform society in 1968. The church policy of the state during the so-called Prague Spring was a result of two inter-connected factors: the effort of the reformist wing of the Communist Party to change the church policy in an effort to gain the support of the faithful, and pressure from the churches and the faithful as part of the reawakening of civil society. The new leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia headed by Alexander Dubček wanted to change a little and had to change more. They were forced to respect the situation, which arose as a result of the democratization process by pressure from below. The question of church policy became part of the programme for discussion by the Presidium of the Central Party of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1968. The leadership of the Communist Party decided that the administrative-bureaucratic methods of controlling the churches were unacceptable and unusable, and adopted a series of measures to solve the worst problems. All cases of imprisonment for activities motivated by religious convictions and past persecution of persons for this reason would be investigated, obstacles to normal religious life would be removed, decrees, which deformed the laws on the churches and enabled unjustified interventions in their activities, were abolished, the personnel of the state bodies directing church policy were changed and they were informed that democratization would also concern the church question. The view that „freedom of religion is rightly regarded as one of the basic human rights“ was expressed<sup>17</sup>.

On 16<sup>th</sup> July 1968, the Communist leadership discussed a preliminary proposal for a new conception of relations with the churches. Meanwhile, the democratization process significantly progressed, the churches became more active and presented their demands. The Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia evaluated the church policy situation and stated that almost all the churches contained extremist groups with maximalist demands. It assessed the measures already adopted and considered a long term conception of church policy. It sought the optimal form of inclusion of the churches and their members in the system of „democratic socialism“<sup>18</sup>. The extraordinary 14<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia was expected to at least outline a new settlement of relations between the party, the state and the churches. The prepared materials, concepts and considerations show that the starting points would have been the following postulates: a) The party would remain Marxist and non-religious, but not anti-religious. It would respect the religious feelings of believers, religious freedom and support their group interests in the context of socialism. b) The attitude to the churches would be based on non-intervention in their internal life, but rejecting political clericalism, that is the ambition to achieve political power. c) The church policy of the state must be a result of cooperation and dialogue between the Communist conception of the state's church policy and the conceptions of the churches and religious societies. The state and its authorities did not have to be instruments of atheization. The provision of the 1960 Constitution about Marxism-Leninism as the official ideology of the state was also criticized in this context.

Since the democratization process was stopped by the intervention of the armies of five states of the Warsaw Pact and its results were annulled by „normalization“, it is difficult to say how far these intentions were seriously and sincerely meant, and to what degree they could have been implemented. Old attitudes to the churches still persisted in the party, and many functionaries did not

<sup>17</sup> Státní úřední archiv (SÚA) (State Central Archive) Prague, fond 02/1, svazek (vol.) 65, archivní jednotka (arch. J.) 73, session of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia 21.3.1968.

<sup>18</sup> SÚA Prague, fond 02/1 vol.76, arch j. 106, session of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia 16.7.1968.



understand the need for a new conception of church policy. The structures and mechanisms built up by the regime to supervise and control the churches began to disintegrate in 1968. The pro-regime organization of Catholic priests – the Peace Movement of the Catholic Clergy – broke up. The Work of Conciliar Renewal, a voluntary organization of Catholic citizens under the leadership of the council of bishops, was established. Personnel changes in various church posts were made under pressure from this organization. The movement to revive the Greek Catholic Church acquired a mass character, and the former members of religious orders demanded their rights. They began to solve many problems. Censorship of the church press and diocesan circulars was abolished, the output of the church press was increased, and the Greek Catholic Church was legalized<sup>19</sup>. From the beginning of the school year 1968-1969, teaching of religion was regulated in a new way, actually separated from the schools. Parish offices accepted applications for instruction, which was provided in church premises. The state representatives were removed from the bishops' offices. The activity of male and female religious orders was permitted again. In November 1968, the prosecution service came to the conclusion that the dissolution of the orders in 1950 had been done without a legal basis. The regulations about issuing state permission for the religious were changed, but the principle of state permission was not abolished. The process of rehabilitating persecuted priests started.

The church policy of the state acquired new features in 1968, it turned in the right direction and the restrictions on the churches and on religious freedom were relaxed. Many of the problems accumulated over the years began to be solved, but others awaited solution and new problems arose. The occupation of Czechoslovakia on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1968 prevented the continuation of this policy. After personnel changes in the Communist leadership and highest state bodies and after the party „purges“ of 1969-1970, there was also a basic change in church policy. Essentially, there was a return to the situation before 1968, although the state representatives in the bishops' offices were not restored and the Greek Catholic Church was allowed to continue. „Normalization“ of state – church relations fully started in spring 1970. In a relatively short time, the authorities succeeded in pacifying the churches and fully renewing state supervision of their activities. The Association of Catholic Clergy Pacem in Terris was formed under the patronage of the Communist leadership in the second half of 1971, to replace the Peace Association of Catholic Clergy from before 1968. In January 1973, the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia approved the definitive form of the conception of the church policy of the state under the title: The long-term approach to solving the relations of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and the socialist state towards the churches, the faithful and the religious ideology<sup>20</sup>. This document became a basic directive for state and party authorities, when implementing church policy until 1985, and in basic questions until the fall of the Communist regime at the end of 1989.

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<sup>19</sup> BARNOVSKÝ, M.: Legalizácia gréckokatolíckej cirkvi v Československu v roku 1968 (The Legalization of the Greek Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia in 1968). In: Historický časopis, 47, 1999, no.3, p. 447-465.

<sup>20</sup> SÚA Prague, fond 02/1, vol.66, arch j. 64, session of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia 5.1.1973.