

## **RENASCENCE OF RELIGION IN SLOVAKIA** **(Contemporary situation of religion in Slovakia)<sup>1</sup>**

**Viera Vlčková**

**Alžbeta Ivaničková**

### **Abstrakt**

Odrodzenie religijne na Słowacji.

Celem naszego referatu jest ukazanie zmian w strukturze religijnej mieszkańców Słowacji po roku 1989. Na początku trzeciego tysiąclecia jesteśmy świadkami szerokiego odrodzenia religijności. Z punktu widzenia zmian w obszarze religii na Słowacji, w okresie po II Wojnie światowej, możemy wyróżnić następujące okresy: Okres po roku 1948 – upadek kościoła katolickiego; wzrost znaczenia idei marksistowsko-leninowskich i ich wpływu na społeczeństwo; Rok 1985 – odrodzenie się religii za sprawą przemian określanych mianem „perestrojka”; Okres po listopadzie 1989 - definitywna zmiana nastawienia państwa w stosunku do struktur religijnych (w odniesieniu do ludności, organizacji i instytucji religijnych w tym związanych z edukacją) .

W referacie zaprezentowano obecną sytuację struktur religijnych; ich układ regionalny oraz zachowania ludności w badanym okresie.

The development of religious structure of the population in Slovakia was affected by several factors, such as, demographic, political, and social, as well as by educational influence of the church and of atheistic propaganda.

Our contribution was prepared on the basis of the census data before the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, and after “the velvet revolution” in the years 1991 and 2001.

---

<sup>1</sup> This contribution was prepared within the scientific project no. 101/2003, which was awarded a financial contribution by the grant agency VEGA.

## The view of the religious structure of population between the Wars

1930 census examined religious faith with regard to the relevant churches. When taking national structure into consideration, then it was possible to observe that there was certain correlation between the religious and national facility of the population.

In 1930 there was prevalence of the members of the Roman-Catholic religion in Slovakia (71.6 %). They are dispersed all over Slovakia, but a dominant concentration exists mainly in northwest and western Slovakia, namely in the district of Čadca, Prievidza, Nitra, and Žilina. The population of Ruthenian, Russian, and Ukrainian nationality created as much as 91.7 % of those who claimed to be of Greek-Catholic religion; they were concentrated in Eastern Slovakia, particularly in the districts of Svidník and Humenné. The population of Evangelic Augsburg faith was grouped in several regions. It was partly continuation of the regions populated by Germans. A high ratio of Evangelic Augsburg population was in such districts as Martin, Liptovský Mikuláš, Rožňava, and Zvolen (22 % of all Evangelic Augsburg confessors). A part of the population with German origin that lived in the Spiš region created a concentration of population with the Roman-Catholic faith<sup>2</sup>.

The highest concentration of this faith was in the area around the town Poprad. A further large group was represented by the population belonging to the Israeli religion (6.4 %). The spread of the Israeli religion is connected with the allocation of Jews. Their migration waves had impact particularly in eastern Slovakia, or in larger towns. The largest representation was in Košice and Bratislava; a significant part existed also in the districts of Bardejov, Humenné, Michalovce, and Trebišov. There was a remarkable difference between the number of Jews and number of citizens who claimed the Israeli faith. In 1930 there were 72,678 inhabitants of Jewish nationality but 136,737 persons claimed to be of Israeli religion; besides Jews (53.1 %) there were 32 % of Slovaks, 7.3 % of Germans, and 7.1 % of Hungarians. From the point of view religion, Gypsies were an interesting group. Gypsy population accommodated their religiousness to the environment they lived in.

The view of the allocation of the particular religions in 1930 according to the districts is seen in the map no. 1



A. Population by size in thousand.

B. Religious community: 1-Roman-catholic, 2-Greek catholic, 3-Orthodox,

4-Evangelic Augsburg, 5-Evangelic reformed, 6- Jewish religious, 7- non-defined.

According by: Očovský, Š. (1993).

The changes in the religious structure of population were affected, to a great deal, by the existence of the Slovak republic (1939-1945). The expatriation of Czechs lowered the number of several members of protestant churches as well as of undenominational persons. The consequences of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War caused some transfer of population, e.g. the exchange of persons between Slovakia and Hungary in 1946-1947, which lowered the number of the members of the Evangelic Reformed church; or e.g. deportation of Jews during the war lowered the number of population with Israeli religion.

### **Religious life and changes in religious structure in Slovakia within the years 1945-1989**

Restoration of the Czechoslovak republic in 1945 brought about a number of significant changes in the lives of Christian churches and in the religiousness structure. It was caused by the fact that Czechoslovakia did not restore its former borders, as they existed before war. Ruthenia with its Greek Catholic and Orthodox Ruthenian population became a part of the Soviet Union. There was evacuation of Germans from the Czech border area (Sudety) as well as from the areas with the German population in Slovakia. Germans from Sudety represented the core of the Catholic element in Bohemia and their evacuation lowered the Catholic

---

was a concentration of the population with the Roman-Catholic faith reaching as much a 70 %.

confessors, as well as Evangelic Augsburg confessors. The reciprocal exchange of the part of Hungarian population for the Slovak population (app. 70,000 persons) supported slightly the Slovak Evangelic population because of denomination structure of the Slovak population repatriated from Hungary. The Catholic Church was tightly bound with the existence of the independent Slovak Republic itself (1939-1945).

Between 1945-1989 there was only one census in 1950 targeted at detecting the religious faith of the population. The census resulted in the following changes:

- the most remarkable change, in comparison with 1930, was with the Israeli religion, where the numbers fell by nearly 94 %;
- the decline in the members of the Evangelic Reformed religion;
- a slight growth in the number of the Evangelic confessors and Roman-Catholic ones.

The mentioned census was the last to detect religious orientation before 1991.

The February events in 1948, when the Communist party took over the state authority, brought about a new basis for the relationship between the state and the Church. The total religious structure of population in Slovakia has changed significantly. The aim of the new political structure was to negate the influence of church on population by enforcing atheist education. This new social situation was changing lifestyles and limiting the educational influence of church.

This period witnessed the nationalization of the church property, abolishment of clerical schools, canceling of all clerical magazines and publishing houses. The clergymen promised their faithfulness to the state. The state abolished most of the theologic faculties, or closed any activities of the holy order (since 1950). The Church and religious communities fell completely under the state control – The State Body for Clerical Affairs. The activity of churches had been hampered throughout the period of socialism; all churches were impaired. The confessors changed into the citizens of lower category. The ideology of Marxism-Leninism became the ruling principle in all spheres of life.

The relationship between Christian churches and socialist state (1948-1989) were unequal and discriminative. All churches were dependent on the state. The population was gradually deprived of all Christian traditions; there was a strong enforcement of atheist principles. This resulted in sharp social changes (urbanization), that caused the growth of the number of people without any religious faith, or without definite attitude towards religion. Due to the authority of approval of clergymen's activities, the state kept limiting the number of clergymen in all churches. Many confessors stopped to confess their faith or to bring up their children in faith, just because they feared the state.

The Greek Catholic church was in an extremely difficult situation. The state had abolished this church and its confessors were forced to be members of the Orthodox Church instead. This church was restored again in 1968 but its churches and other property, which was shared with the Orthodox Church, were not given back to the original owner. Such trend was partly stopped, starting in 1985 by the revival of religious life, caused by the so-called “perestrojka”.

The final change in the situation of the Church occurred after November 1989. Since then the new process of restoration of churches and their activities in the society has started. It was the period of strong social changes that included also issues of religion. Many people started to revive their relation to the relevant church or religious community. Along with the general revival of religion, besides traditional churches, also various sects were established. It is significant that all those processes are complicated and ambiguous. This fact is essential for further determination of the religious structure of the Slovak republic population.

### **Religious structure of the Slovak republic population – result of the 1991 & 2001 census**

In the 1991 census (including the number of houses and flats), the citizens could freely decide either for the relevant religious faith, or to express their atheist attitude. Parents could decide for their children under the age of 15. Thus, the significance of the review of the Slovak population religious structure gained strong significance. In the mentioned census, the religious competence was considered as the participation of citizens in the religious life of certain church, certain religious community, or the citizen’s attitude towards church or some religious community. The list of the religions was not defined in advance and there was not any prohibition of any religions or sects, as it was before 1989. Those religions that were registered in the Home office were valid officially. The results of the census show that in Slovakia, there are small Churches or religious communities which are not or were not registered; there is a rising trend from the point of view of either their development or their number. 72.5 % of inhabitants in Slovakia (in 1991) endorsed their obedience to concrete churches or religious communities, i.e. 3.8 million inhabitants. In 2001 the figure rose to 82.1 %, which is 4.5 million inhabitants. The number of those who claimed atheist attitude was 9.8 % in 1991; in 2001 this figure went up to 13 %. It is a significant growth in comparison with the situation in 1950. In the 1991 census there was still quite a great group of people who did not state any religious orientation (917, 835 inhabitants, i.e. 17.5 %). It is not clear why such a high number of inhabitants did not claim their attitude. There are several guesses and opinions, e.g. fear from the possible return of the former political system. In the 2001 census

the figure was more than 160,598, which represents 3 %. In each of the registered Churches there is a growth of confessors. The number of inhabitants rose from 1950 to 2001 by 1 mill. 938 thousand (i.e. 56 %), but the number of confessors rose only by 32 % within the same period. The Roman-Catholic religion had the highest gain in the number of members, but there was loss of persons in the Protestant religions.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1996 The National Council of the Slovak Republic adopted the law No. 221/ 1996 about the new territorial and administrative structure of the Slovak republic. There was a change in comparison with the former three higher administrative territories (western, mid-, and eastern Slovak territories) as the Government and Parliament of the Slovak republic chose to organize the state administration in 8 higher administrative units (regions). The centers of those regions became Bratislava, Trnava, Trenčín, Nitra, Žilina, Banská Bystrica, Prešov, and Košice. In comparison with the former 38 districts, which were valid by 1996, the law establishes 79 districts. The districts were specified according to the criteria of territorial and administrative division of the SR, established by the resolution of the Government of the SR No. 497/1995 which must be respected with further steps in the reform of local and state administration. These are, especially, criteria of relative stability, possibility, historical, cultural, and ethnic identity, as well as of functional capacity and of the size of the territorial units and their centers.

With respect to the above-mentioned changes in the territorial and administrative structure of the SR, it is possible to observe certain changes in the arrangement of religiousness in different territorial units.

The territorial structural differentiation of religiousness can be seen not only between regions but also between districts. Bratislava region (25 %) and Banská Bystrica region (16.7 %) are the regions with the highest number of population without any religious orientation. There are 62 district (out of 79 districts) where the religiousness exceeds 4/5 of inhabitants. There is no such district where the number of people with some religious orientation falls below the half of the inhabitants of the relevant region. The highest figures concerning religiousness are in eastern districts (Sabinov, Snina, Bardejov, Stará Ľubovňa), then in Orava region (Námestovo, Tvrdošín), and in Kysuce region (Čadca).

The districts with the lowest religiousness are those where the proportion of persons without any religious orientation exceeds 15 %. This group covers 17 Slovak districts in western and central Slovakia. These districts are typical for the lower proportion of religiousness (Bratislava, Rožňava, Banská Bystrica, Revúca, Martin).

The Roman-Catholic Church has the highest proportion of confessors among other Churches and religious communities. In 1991 it had 60.3 % of confessors and in 2001 the figure was 69.2 % from the total population. The proportion of the Roman-Catholic orientation out of the total number of people with some religious orientation is more than 85 %. The highest proportion of the Roman-Catholic orientation occurs in Trnava region (78.2 %). Out of districts, the highest proportion is in Zlaté Moravce (90 %), Bytča (92.5 %), Čadca (95 %), Kysucké Nové Mesto (90.5 %), Tvrdošín (95 %). The lowest proportion is in the Košice region (59.5 % and in the Medzilaborce district (8.2 %), Rožňava district (35.9 %), and Svidník (31.9 %).

In the 1991 census 3.41 % chose the Greek Catholic religion and in 2001 census the figure was 4 % out of the total population in Slovakia. The highest proportion of inhabitants with the above-mentioned religious orientation occurs in Košice region, where the figure is 11.1 %. The significant proportion of Greek Catholics occurs on the district Medzilaborce (55.4 %), Stropkov (40.8 %), Michalovce (20 %), Svidník (36.5 %), and Stará Ľubovňa (31.0 %).

Besides the non-Catholic Churches the most numerous is the Evangelic Augsburg Church. In 1991 the figure 6.2 % represented the citizens with this orientation. In 2002 their proportion rose to 6.9 % of the total population. The highest number of inhabitants with the Evangelic Augsburg orientation is in central Slovakia – as high as 8.7 %. The highest proportion of inhabitants with the above-mentioned denomination occurs in Banská Bystrica region (13 %). Historically determined concentration of inhabitants with this religious orientation can be proved by the data from Myjava district (37.0 % of the population), Martin (26.0 % of the population), Liptovský Mikuláš (37.0 % of the population). Further concentration of people with this orientation occurs in the southern districts of Slovakia, in Rožňava (22.3 %), in Veľký Krtíš (15,8 %), and in Rimavská Sobota (12.8 %).

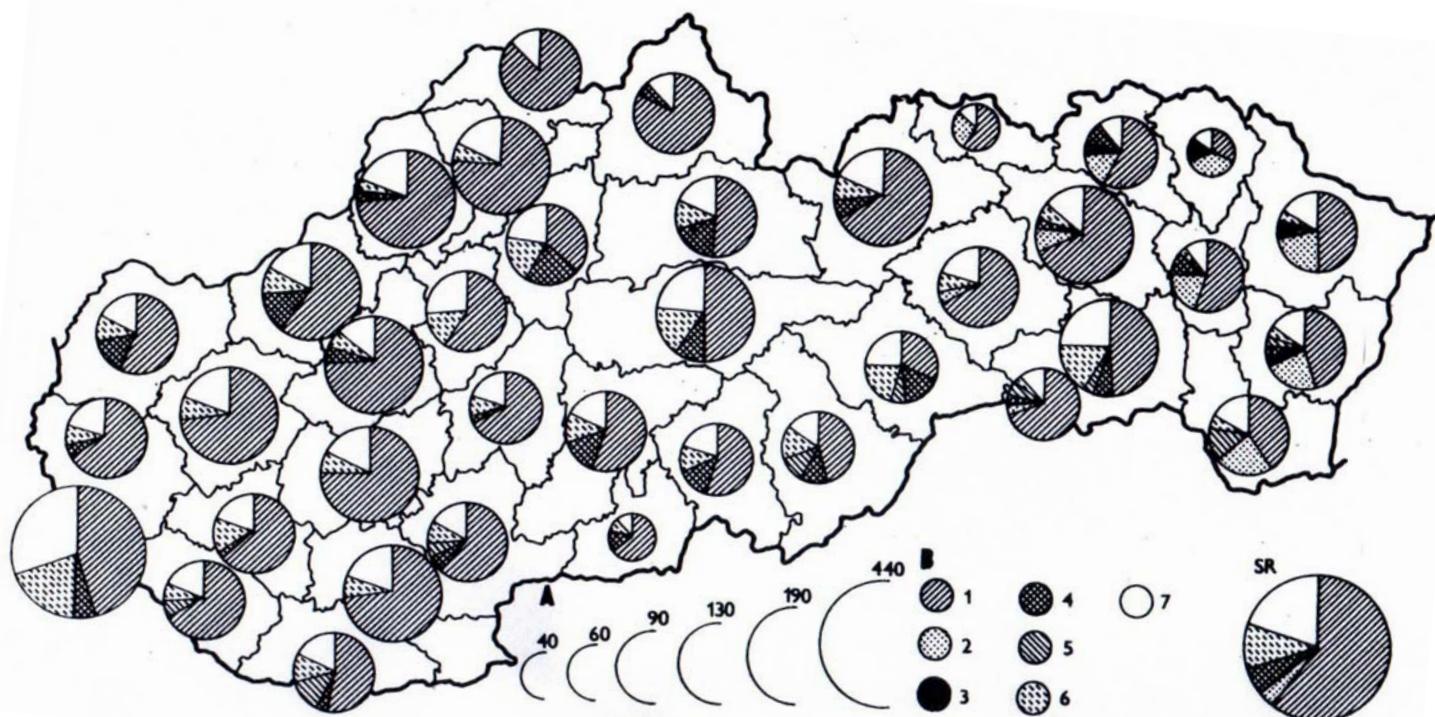
In comparison with the Slovak Evangelic religious orientation (6.9 % of inhabitants in Slovakia), the Reformed Evangelic orientation has higher representation (1.6 % of inhabitants in 1991 and 2 % in 2002). The main areas where the population inclines to this orientation can be found in the districts of Komárno and Dunajská Streda, with the proportion of 13.3 %, as well as in the district of Trebišov (13.7 %). From the nationality format of the inhabitants of the above-mentioned district follows that a prevalent part of the members of the Evangelic Reformed Church is of Hungarian nationality.

The proportion of the inhabitants with the Orthodox Church is 0.9 % out of the total population and these people are concentrated in the districts of eastern Slovakia. The total

number of inhabitants in this area reached the figure of more than 34 thousand (0.6 % of the population in Slovakia). The highest representation of this Church is in the districts of Svidník (15.5 %), Humenné (9.6 %), Michalovce (4.4 %), Bardejov (3.8 %), and Stará Ľubovňa (1.7 %). Absolutely highest number of inhabitants with this denomination is in Humenné.

The Roman-Catholic, Greek Catholic, Evangelic Augsburg, Evangelic Reformed, Evangelic Methodist, and Orthodox Churches belong to the most significant Churches in Slovakia, from the point of view of the number of confessors or regarding their impact on the society.

The view of the allocation of the particular religions in 1991 according to the districts is seen in the map no. 2





A. Population by size in thousand.

B. Religious community: 1-Roman-catholic, 2-Greek catholic, 3-Orthodox,

4-Evangelic Augsburg, 5-Evangelic reformed, 6- Atheist attitude, 7- non-defined.

According by: Očovský, Š. (1993).

Since 1950 census, when the number of persons without any religious orientation was 0.3 %, the number of these persons has grown considerably; in 2002 there were registered 687,308 of such persons, which represents 13 % out of the total population in Slovakia. Mostly, it is the result of strong enforcement of atheism during socialism in the former Czechoslovakia, then the effort to secularize the society, as well as the consequence of violation of the traditional way of life (cultural and family traditions) of the substantial part of the society. This process was related to such government ideology as collectivization, industrialization, and migration of inhabitants from villages to towns, thus being torn from the traditional rural areas, etc.

The highest number of persons without any religious orientation is in Bratislava. It represents 20 % out of the total population of the capital. There are other districts with the high number of persons without any religious orientation: Rožňava (20.1 %), Martin (18.1 %), the town Košice (16.3 %), Banská Bystrica (15.4 %), and Rimavská Sobota (15.2 %). It is evident from the above-mentioned facts that the persons without religious orientation are concentrated in large cities, in industrial centers, and mining areas.

The analysis of the space occupancy of the population religiousness shows, that in Slovakia, too, there is a tendency towards lower religiousness from the east to the west, as well as from smaller towns to larger cities<sup>3</sup>.

Table No.1

Religious orientation of the SR population

	1991	Podiel 1991	2001	Podiel 2001
Roman-Catholic Church	<b>3 187 383</b>	<b>60,4</b>	<b>3 708 120</b>	<b>68,9</b>
Greek Catholic Church	<b>178 733</b>	<b>3,4</b>	<b>219 831</b>	<b>4</b>
Orthodox Church	<b>34 376</b>	<b>0,7</b>	<b>50 363</b>	<b>0,9</b>
Evangelic Augsburg Church	<b>326 397</b>	<b>6,2</b>	<b>372 858</b>	<b>6,9</b>

<sup>3</sup> The 2001 census confirms a generally known and traditionally higher religiousness in rural areas. The highest proportion of confessors is found in small villages with no more than 500 inhabitants. In contrast with this fact, in the villages with more than 20,000 inhabitants, the proportion of person without any religious orientation or those without identified orientation, tends to be higher.

Reformed Christian Church	82 545	1,6	109 735	2
Evangelic Methodist Church	4 359	0,08	7 047	0,13
Apostolic Church	1 116	0,02	3 905	0,07
Old Catholic Church	882	0,02	1 733	0,03
Fraternal unity of Baptists	2 465	0,05	3 562	0,07
Czechoslovak Hussite Church	652	0,01	1 696	0,03
Church of the 7 <sup>th</sup> Day Adventists, Slovak association	1 721	0,03	3 429	0,06
Fraternal Church	1 861	0,04	3 217	0,06
Christian Corps	700	0,01	6 519	0,12
Central Union of the Jewish religious community	912	0,02	2 310	0,04
Religious community of Jehovah witnesses	10 501	0,2	20 630	0,38
Other religious	6 373	0,1	6 294	0,12
Atheist attitude	515 551	9,8	697 308	13
Non-defined	917 835	17,4	160 598	3
Together	5 274 335		5 379 455	

Zdroj: spracované podľa Sčítanie obyvateľov r. 1991 a r. 2001, ŠÚ SR

The legal status and economic security of the state registered Churches and religious communities