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## The Czechoslovak Hussite Church in Social and Political Reality

### Abstract

The Czechoslovak Hussite Church was founded in 1920 as a fulfillment of the efforts of the reformist efforts of the Czech Catholic clergy. Its establishment was one of the consequences of the emergence of the independent Czechoslovak state in 1918. In addition to its missionary work, it was involved in various other activities that were in demand in the new state: social work, cultural work, publishing and educational activities, and last but not least work with children and young people. Through her charity work, the church made it clear that the Gospel must not only be proclaimed but also put into practice in life. Social unions were established, health stations, and day-care services. It also educated the younger generation, free citizens, and Christians for a democratic state. The church had its own children's home. In the sense of active and socially engaged Christianity, it also acted internationally in participating in the pre-war efforts that led to the founding of the World Council of Churches (Oxford Conference 1937). Distinctive personalities were the biblical scholar professor František Kovář and sociologist František M. Hník. During the German occupation (1939–1945) its public service was outstanding, secretly organizing aid to Jews and all the persecuted. The brief period of democratic development after the war was replaced by a post Communist coup in 1948 by a dictatorship. The Church was forced to collaborate as state church laws in 1949 deprived it of the opportunity to operate in the public sphere (youth education, social work, publishing) and subjected it (and all other churches) to harsh economic and ideological control. The church survived the period 1948–1989 with considerable losses. Gradually, today it is restoring social work, and is also working in the army, hospitals, and prisons. It prepares workers professionally (far from being only clerics) at the Hussite Theological Faculty of Charles University, where in addition to theology, a number of other disciplines are taught such as social and charity work and pedagogy.

**Keywords:** Czechoslovak Hussite Church, Czech history, modernism, Christianity, social work, charity work.

## Czechosłowacki Kościół Husycki w rzeczywistości społecznej i politycznej

### Abstrakt

Czechosłowacki Kościół Husycki został założony w 1920 r. jako zwieńczenie reformatorskich wysiłków czeskiego duchowieństwa katolickiego. Jego powstanie było jedną z konsekwencji powstania niepodległego państwa czechosłowackiego w 1918 r. Oprócz pracy misyjnej, Kościół był zaangażowany w różne inne działania, które były niezbędne w nowym państwie: pra-

cę społeczną, pracę kulturalną, działalność wydawniczą i edukacyjną, a także pracę z dziećmi i młodzieżą. Poprzez swoją działalność charytatywną Kościół dał jasno do zrozumienia, że Ewangelię należy nie tylko głosić, ale także wcielać w życie. Powstały związki społeczne, stacje zdrowia i usługi opieki dziennej. Kościół kształcił również młode pokolenie, wolnych obywateli i chrześcijan dla demokratycznego państwa. Kościół prowadził własny dom dziecka. W sensie aktywnego i społecznie zaangażowanego chrześcijaństwa działał również na arenie międzynarodowej, uczestnicząc w przedwojennych wysiłkach, które doprowadziły do powstania Światowej Rady Kościołów (Konferencja Oksfordzka, 1937). Wyróżniającymi się osobistościami byli prof. František Kovář, biblista, i František M. Hník, socjolog. W czasie okupacji niemieckiej (1939–1945) jego służba publiczna była wyjątkowo aktywna, potajemnie organizując pomoc dla Żydów i wszystkich prześladowanych. Krótki okres demokratycznego rozwoju po wojnie został zastąpiony przez postkomunistyczny zamach stanu w 1948 r. i dyktaturę. Kościół został zmuszony do współpracy, ponieważ państwowe ustawy kościelne w 1949 r. pozbawiły go możliwości działania w sferze publicznej (edukacja młodzieży, praca społeczna, działalność wydawnicza) i poddały go (oraz wszystkie inne Kościoły) surowej kontroli ekonomicznej i ideologicznej. Kościół przetrwał okres 1948–1989 ze znacznymi stratami. Stopniowo przywraca dziś pracę społeczną, a także działa w wojsku, szpitalach i więzieniach. Przygotowuje profesjonalnych pracowników (nie tylko duchownych) na Husyckim Wydziale Teologicznym Uniwersytetu Karola, gdzie oprócz teologii naucza się innych dyscyplin, takich jak: praca społeczna i charytatywna oraz pedagogika.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Czechosłowacki Kościół Husycki, historia Czech, modernizm, chrześcijaństwo, praca socjalna, praca charytatywna.

The Czechoslovak Hussite Church (CHC) was established on 8 January 1920 as a result of the reformist movement amongst the Czech Catholic clergy.<sup>1</sup>

The establishment of the Church was also made possible by the fact that following the establishment of the independent Czechoslovak Republic in 1918, there were legal possibilities for it to be established and for it to receive state recognition. This was achieved soon after its establishment (1921). The history of its creation has been extensively documented in literature. The Church has engaged in numerous instances of self-reflection, with the most significant contributions emerging from the work of Alois Spisar,<sup>2</sup> particularly in the context of its early history. In more recent times, notable examples include the publication of *90 Years of the Czechoslovak Hussite Church* (2010).<sup>3</sup> The most significant of these publications are the books by Rudolf Urban,<sup>4</sup> Ulrich Daske,<sup>5</sup> and the Czech sociologist Zdeněk R. Nešpor.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kamila Veverková. 2010. *Osvícenství a modernismus*. In *90 let Církve československé husitské*, 9–16. Praha: Církev československá husitská Praha 6 ve spolupráci s Náboženskou obcí ČČSH v Praze 1-Staré Město.

<sup>2</sup> Alois Spisar. 1936. *Ideový vývoj Církve československé*. Praha: ÚR ČČS.

<sup>3</sup> Církev československá husitská. 2010. *90 let Církve československé husitské*.

<sup>4</sup> Rudolf Urban. 1973. *Die Tschechoslowakische Hussitische Kirche*. Marburg: J. G. Herder Institut.

<sup>5</sup> Ulrich Daske. 1987. *Die Tschechoslowakische Hussitische Kirche: In der deutschen theologischen Literatur und in Selbstzeugnissen*. Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang.

<sup>6</sup> Zdeněk R. Nešpor et al. 2022. *Encyclopedia of the Czechoslovak Hussite Church*. Praha: Karolinum. Zdeněk R. Nešpor. 2024. *Století národní církve: Duchovní hledání Církve československé (husitské)*. Praha: Karolinum.

The present paper will not address the complex ideological conflicts that accompanied the emergence and subsequent development of the Church. It is important to note that the Church has played a significant role in social work throughout its history, both within the Church itself and in its ecumenical relations. This will be the primary focus of this paper. However, it is also necessary to mention some key facts at the outset.

The Church was established as a fulfilment of aspirations that had been emerging within Czech Christianity over several decades prior to its inception. Firstly, it was necessary for the Church to determine which stream of Christianity it would join. From 1920 to 1924, the Church attempted to engage in dialogue with the Orthodox Church, specifically the Serbian Orthodox Church. Following a period of considerable difficulty, it became evident that pursuing this course of action was untenable. The dialogue, which aimed to obtain apostolic succession, ultimately proved to be a futile exercise for all parties involved.<sup>7</sup>

The Church espoused the principle of freedom of conscience and was unwilling to be constrained by the obligations that would result from a connection with the Orthodox Church. Furthermore, the Serbian Orthodox Church was constrained by the unbreakable boundaries of its canons. The protagonists of both directions – including Dr. Karel Farský (the liberal direction, later Patriarch of the Czechoslovak Church until his death in 1927) and Matěj Pavlík (later Orthodox Bishop Gorazd) – found themselves in a situation where their cooperation was no longer possible. In the summer of 1924, Gorazd (Pavlík) renounced his affiliation with the Czechoslovak Church and assumed leadership of the autocephalous Orthodox Church.<sup>8</sup> A review of their surviving correspondence reveals that they parted ways in a highly sophisticated manner. At its 1924 assembly, the Czechoslovak Hussite Church resolved to establish its own priesthood which would not depend on the historical apostolic succession. The first priests and bishops of the new church were ordained in early 1925.<sup>9</sup>

The Czechoslovak Church met with a considerable degree of success following its establishment. According to the 1921 census,<sup>10</sup> over half a million individuals subscribed to it. Following the Second World War, the number of mem-

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<sup>7</sup> Pavel Marek. 2015. *Česká reformace 20. století?: k zápasu Církve československé (husitské) o vizi moderního českého křesťanství v letech 1920–1924*. Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci; Pavel Marek, Jurij Vasyľovič Danylec. 2024. *Pravoslavní v první Československé republice 1918–1938*. Praha: Academia, 11–42.

<sup>8</sup> Nešpor. 2024. *Století národní církve: Duchovní hledání Církve československé (husitské)*, 100.

<sup>9</sup> Nešpor. 2024. *Století národní církve: Duchovní hledání Církve československé (husitské)*, 106.

<sup>10</sup> Bohdan Kaňák, Vladimír Červený. 2010. Zápas o ideovou orientaci (1920–1924). In *90 let Církve československé husitské*, 31.

bers reached almost one million. The new Church represented a robust movement that was bolstered by the dedicated efforts of the laity who joined it. Despite the political climate in the nascent state being favourable and tolerant, the social circumstances were less favourable. Despite the church receiving assurances of assistance from the state to construct new places of worship, the support provided was wholly inadequate. Nevertheless, through the voluntary contributions of its members, the new Church was able to construct numerous buildings between 1926 and 1940. These included churches and other places of worship as well as multifunctional congregational houses. Many of these structures remain a prominent feature and distinctive element of the buildings in Czech and Moravian towns to this day.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to its missionary activities, the CHC engaged in a range of other activities that were deemed necessary at the time. It is accurate to note that a considerable number of these activities were conducted on a federal level. However, they were as closely aligned with the Church as possible. Such activities included social work,<sup>12</sup> publishing, cultural work, and work with children and young people.

With regard to publishing, the Blahoslav printing and publishing cooperative was established with its own printing house, which also published “secular” scholar works.<sup>13</sup> However, the primary function of the Blahoslav cooperative was to publish both professional and popular academic literature which the Church required with great urgency. Subsequently, the works of notable professors from the Church were also published here. The authors in question are Alois Spisar, František Kovář, and František M. Hník. The activities of the publishing cooperative were conducted in a manner that fully capitalised on the religious and press freedoms that were hallmarks of the entirety of the First Czechoslovak Republic. It is worth noting that the freedom of the press being revoked resulted in the dissolution of the cooperative shortly after the February 1948 coup and the confiscation of the printing house on Krakovská Street in Prague by the state.

Nevertheless, social and charitable work was among the most significant activities undertaken by the ČČS from its inception.<sup>14</sup> This reflected the fact that

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<sup>11</sup> Bohdan Kaňák. 2010. Budování církve (1924–1937). In *90 let Církve československé husitské*, 47. František Gabriel. 2010. Sbory Církve československé husitské. W *90 let Církve československé husitské*, 203–208. *Sbory Církve československé husitské – architektonické dědictví našich regionů*. 2018. Praha: České vysoké učení technické v Praze, Fakulta stavební ČVUT.

<sup>12</sup> Olga Libalová, Hedvika Zimmermannová. 2010. Historie sociální práce v ČČS(H). In *90 let Církve československé husitské*, 231–234.

<sup>13</sup> Martin Jindra. 2010. Církev československá (husitská) v období komunistické totality. In *90 let Církve československé husitské*, 99.

<sup>14</sup> Nešpor. 2024. *Století národní církve: Duchovní hledání Církve československé (husitské)*, 160–163.

the majority of the new church's members belonged to the most vulnerable social classes. Consequently, the church sought to emphasise that proclaiming the gospel was insufficient; it was also necessary to put it into practice.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, at one of its inaugural congresses in 1921, the Church had already established a department to address social and charitable concerns. It was on the initiative of this working committee that the Sisterhood of Women was established, which was tasked with coordinating social work across various religious communities.<sup>16</sup> In a considerable number of religious communities within the Church, this resulted in the formation of social departments. The social work of the Church was also addressed at both sessions of the First Church Council in 1924<sup>17</sup> and 1931. Further developments were also of interest from an organisational perspective. In 1933, the Centre for Social Work was established as an independent association, functioning as the ideological centre for the social work unions within the individual religious communities.<sup>18</sup> From an organisational perspective, social work associations were established in each diocese with the objective of assuming leadership of the social work departments within the respective religious communities. From an ideological standpoint, the Centre for Social Work represented a unifying force. The Centre was led until her death in 1936 by Aurelie Procházková, wife of Patriarch Gustav Adolf Procházka, and subsequently by Berta Mildová-Bílková, daughter of the renowned sculptor František Bílek.<sup>19</sup> In order to provide an indication of the scale of these activities, we present the following facts, which are drawn from the relevant literature. The scope of the activity was considerable, encompassing diaconal work aimed at assisting the impoverished and disadvantaged. The state endeavoured to provide assistance, but its institutions, which were still under construction, were not yet able to meet the demand. The global economic downturn had a profound impact on the entirety of Czechoslovak society, creating a significant opportunity for the CHC to make a substantial social impact. The Church's social service provision was not confined to local charitable assistance; it sought to extend its reach into other domains. Furthermore, the Church was able to establish and operate a children's home for orphaned children. Furthermore, the Social Work Centre played a sig-

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<sup>15</sup> Líbalová, Zimmermannová. 2010. Historie sociální práce v ČČS(H). In *90 let Církve československé husitské*, 231.

<sup>16</sup> Líbalová, Zimmermannová. 2010. Historie sociální práce v ČČS(H). In *90 let Církve československé husitské*, 231.

<sup>17</sup> Líbalová, Zimmermannová. 2010. Historie sociální práce v ČČS(H). In *90 let Církve československé husitské*, 231.

<sup>18</sup> Líbalová, Zimmermannová. 2010. Historie sociální práce v ČČS(H). In *90 let Církve československé husitské*, 232.

<sup>19</sup> Líbalová, Zimmermannová. 2010. Historie sociální práce v ČČS(H). In *90 let Církve československé husitské*, 232; Nešpor. 2024. *Století národní církve: Duchovní hledání Církve československé (husitské)*, 161.

nificant role in assisting refugees from the occupied Czechoslovak territories in the Sudetenland or from Carpatho-Ukraine in 1938.<sup>20</sup>

The Church has historically demonstrated an awareness of the significance of social and charitable work as a core aspect of its activities. This was also reflected in its ecumenical endeavours. Furthermore, the Church joined the World Alliance of Christianity and participated in international conferences addressing the Church's ministry in a world threatened by fascism. One such conference was a gathering held by the Faith and Order Movement in 1937 in Oxford. This movement was one of the sources from which the World Council of Churches was subsequently established in 1948. At these ecumenical conferences, the CHC was primarily represented by the sociologist and theologian František M. Hník (1905–1962),<sup>21</sup> who subsequently became a prominent figure within the church and its theology. He was awarded habilitation status in the fields of sociology and Christian social ethics. Hník provided a comprehensive account of social and charitable work in his time, as well as a detailed historical analysis of this phenomenon. In doing so, he drew upon his considerable sociological expertise. Hník undertook his studies at Masaryk University in Brno, where he was awarded a PhD in 1927, and at the Meadville Theological School in the USA, where he gained an MA in 1931. He also published an important book, entitled *The Motives of Charity in Christianity: An Analysis of the Relation between Theology and Social Service* (1935),<sup>22</sup> which contains valuable insights that remain relevant today, particularly in its historical sections. At the time, Hník's theoretical work in the field of social work was aligned with the political efforts of democratic forces to promote peace and counter the rising tide of fascism. He considered social and charitable work to be amongst the most significant activities of the Church in a context of increasing secularisation. It would be inaccurate to describe him as merely a theorist. Additionally, he had served as a practical parish priest for several years, thereby gaining insight into the reception of charitable work within individual parishes.<sup>23</sup>

It would be remiss not to mention one further activity, which also falls at least marginally within the remit of social work, and in which the Czechoslovak Husite Church has performed a significant role. This is the work with young people.

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<sup>20</sup> Líbalová, Zimmermannová. 2010. Historie sociální práce v ČČS(H). In *90 let Církve československé husitské*, 233.

<sup>21</sup> Nešpor. 2024. *Století národní církve: Duchovní hledání Církve československé (husitské)*, 159–160.

<sup>22</sup> František Maria Hník. 1935. *Pohnutky dobročinnosti v křesťanství. Rozbor vztažností mezi teorií a sociální službou*. Praha: ÚR ČČS. Additionally, the book was translated into English and published by Blackwell's Oxford Press in 1938.

<sup>23</sup> Nešpor. 2024. *Století národní církve: Duchovní hledání Církve československé (husitské)*, 163–168.

This was not merely a case of classical missionary activity, as is customary in individual churches. It is accurate to note that in the Czechoslovak Republic, there were already numerous organisations, the most prominent of which were the Sokol and the Skaut-Junák, which were engaged in work with youth. Additionally, there were denominationally distinct associations, such as the Catholic organisation *Orel* for physical education. However, these organisations were few in number and some were even markedly secularised. Furthermore, the Czechoslovak Church placed an emphasis on the education of youth, as well as providing assistance in the realm of social and ethical training. It is therefore unsurprising that local youth units were established from the outset of the Communist party's existence. In numerous instances, these groups were constituted as discussion forums or cultural circles, with the objective of imparting ethical and democratic principles to those who identified as Christian and were considered to be free citizens. It is straightforward to condemn this from the vantage point of the present day (what relevance did religion have?), but in the context of the time, it was a perfectly adequate approach. The free Church, which espoused the primacy of freedom of conscience, sought to educate free citizens and Christians for a democratic state. In 1929, the Central Association of the Youth Unions of the Church of Czechoslovakia was established, as were the Diocesan Association of Youth Unions. In 1931, a special magazine entitled *Rozsévač* was established for the benefit of the younger members of the Church. These youth units subsequently gave rise to an influential generation of thinkers and clergymen within the Church, including Jindřich Mánek, Miloslav Kaňák, Zdeněk Trtík, and Rudolf Horský.<sup>24</sup>

As previously stated, this analysis will not address the broader history of the CHC. Instead, it will focus on the specific aspects of the CHC's involvement in social work and the social and political context of the time. It is therefore pertinent to note that the initial challenging juncture for the CHC arose with the advent of German occupation in 1939. The Church was established and subsequently developed its organisational structure and activities within a democratic society. The internal regulations of the Church (i.e., its constitution) were structured in a manner that emulated the system of a democratic state. The political reality into which the Church was forced to operate following the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia by the German Reich on 15 March 1939 and the subsequent establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was characterised by significant hardship. Primarily, the Church was compelled to alter its designation

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<sup>24</sup> Martin Jindra, Marcel Sladkowski. Eds. 2020. *Biografický slovník Církve československé husitské*. Praha: Církev československá husitská; Kaňák. 2010. *Budování církve (1924–1937)*. In *90 let Církve československé husitské*, 53–54.

to the Church of Bohemia and Moravia. The Church's activities were prohibited in both the Hungarian-annexed Carpatho-Ukraine and Slovakia. In the Protectorate, the Church was compelled to persevere "in an environment inimical to its theology and democratically organised structures".<sup>25</sup> It is pertinent to note that 32 members of the clergy were imprisoned and seven were executed. The laity played an instrumental role in the resistance, both domestically and internationally.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, at this juncture, social work within religious communities operated at the local level to an unparalleled extent. Assistance was provided to the families of imprisoned members of the Church, to those who were underground, and to Jews. These activities were conducted clandestinely on a vast scale. The German occupation administration did not formally prohibit the activities of the Church; however, it sought to exert strict control over them and render them effectively impossible. Following the death of Patriarch Procházka in 1942, it was prohibited to convene an elective assembly. The dissemination of information by the Church was also curtailed; for instance, the *Náboženské revue* (Religious Review) was terminated in its entirety in 1944.

It is evident that the Church survived during this period. However, it later became evident that the formation of two distinct opposition groups,<sup>27</sup> one radical and the other democratic, proved to be a significant challenge to the Protectorate regime. Following the liberation in 1945, the Church experienced a gradual recovery. A left-oriented National Administration assumed control of the CHC until the Second General Assembly, which convened in 1946 and continued in 1947. At the electoral session of this Congress, Prof. Dr. František Kovář was elected Patriarch. In a formal sense, the Church's activities resumed their usual pace, the National Administration ceased its operations, and the Central Council resumed its role as the Church's governing body.<sup>28</sup>

The left wing advocated for the adoption of the document *Úcta k životu a láska k člověku* (Respect for Life and Love for Man) at the congress, wherein the Church expressed its support for democratically oriented socialism. Nevertheless, many laymen and clergymen held opposing views. The Second Session of the Second Congress also adopted a leftist stance, with the Communist party declaring its support for the construction of a national society and endorsing the political programme of the National Front. The document is entitled *Církev čes-*

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<sup>25</sup> Jaroslav Hrdlička. 2010. CČSH v období protektorátu. In *90 let Církve československé husitské*, 78.

<sup>26</sup> These matters are discussed in greater detail in dedicated studies.

<sup>27</sup> Nešpor. 2024. *Století národní církve: Duchovní hledání Církve československé (husitské)*, 204.

<sup>28</sup> Jaroslav Hrdlička. 2007. *Život a dílo prof. Františka Kováře. Příběh patriarchy a učence*. Brno: L. Marek.

*koslovenská o výstavbě národní společnosti* (The Church of Czechoslovakia on the Construction of the National Society).<sup>29</sup>

With regard to social work, youth work and the activities of church-related associations, everything was restored to its pre-war form. However, there was a certain left-wing orientation in this regard as well. The CHC's activities in Slovakia had not yet been renewed, while a modest renewal did occur, however, in the 1980s.<sup>30</sup>

The entire perilous post-war era ultimately culminated in a tragic outcome for the CHC and the broader society. This was marked by the events of February 1948, where the communists revealed their true intentions, secured the appointment of ministers from other parties, and consequently consolidated their control over the government. In the summer of that year, President Edvard Beneš abdicated, and Klement Gottwald was elected in his place. It was evident that a significant shift in Church policy was imminent. A schism emerged between the Catholic Church and the other churches, which accepted the new regime with some trepidation. In regard to the churches and Christianity, the state was not reticent in taking radical measures that, for an extended period, shaped the trajectory of all churches in Czechoslovakia. Furthermore, the measures that accompanied this step were brutal. Act No. 217/49 Coll. established the State Office for Church Affairs, while Act No. 218/49 Coll. concerned the economic security of churches and religious societies by the state. Both measures signified the complete cessation of religious freedom as it had been previously understood by the democratic state. All churches were subjected to rigorous oversight, and the practice of the clerical profession was permitted only on the condition of obtaining state approval, which was granted exclusively to those who pledged allegiance to the "people's democratic" establishment. In particular, the CČS was subject to the provisions set forth in Government Decree No. 220/49 Coll.<sup>31</sup>

The aforementioned ecclesiastical legislation prohibited the Church from engaging in any economic, cultural, or educational activities. Furthermore, the legislation rendered it impossible for church publishing houses and societies to operate, let alone any kind of business. Those who swore an oath of allegiance to the state and received state approval were guaranteed a regular salary.

For the Catholic Church, these laws were a catastrophic setback. Within a year, all the ordinary bishops were placed in internment. In this unfortunate

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<sup>29</sup> Jindra. 2010 *Církev československá (husitská) v období komunistické totality*. In *90 let Církve československé husitské*, 95.

<sup>30</sup> Jan Hradil. 2010. *Církev československá husitská na Slovensku*. In *90 let Církve československé husitské*, 57–75.

<sup>31</sup> Jindra. 2010 *Církev československá (husitská) v období komunistické totality*. In *90 let Církve československé husitské*, 91–99.

turn of events, the Czechoslovak Church was fortunate to have Professor Kovář<sup>32</sup> at the helm. Nevertheless, this brutal persecution also had its full impact on the Church. All institutional church social and charitable work was abolished and assumed by the state. The Church youth organisations were either abolished or compelled to dissolve. The Association of Tábor Academics, for instance, was one such organisation that was forced to cease its activities. All church publishing houses were closed down, including the Blahoslav Press and Publishing Cooperative in our case. In the absence of any direct state control over these assets, the state proceeded to confiscate them.

In the late 1950s, the situation deteriorated further as the state authorities sought to promote atheism more deeply within society. For instance, while it was officially permitted to teach religion in schools, parents who allowed their children to participate in such instruction were subjected to considerable pressure. As a result, children were denied the opportunity to pursue further studies or to freely choose their future profession.<sup>33</sup>

The 1968 revival process or the so-called attempt at socialism with a “human face” was insufficiently prolonged to effect meaningful change.<sup>34</sup> It was only in 1968–1969 that the state exercised less control over the churches. Nevertheless, the 1949 legislation remained in force. The churches were compelled to operate within these altered circumstances for the subsequent four decades. The clergy were compelled to consider when it was essential to comply with the prevailing norms – particularly in order to maintain their core activities, namely the dissemination of the Gospel – and when such compliance was no longer feasible. The question thus arises as to where the line is drawn between loyalty and collaboration. Despite the challenging circumstances, individuals from various denominations demonstrated resilience and fortitude in the face of adversity. The 1971 *Fundamentals of Faith of the Church of Czechoslovakia*,<sup>35</sup> which was based on biblical principles, proved to be an obstacle to the fulfilment of many of the Church’s obligations. The Church was frequently accused of nationalism, a charge that accompanied its formation. In order to preclude any suggestion of nationalistic bias, the Church of Czechoslovakia adopted a new name in 1971, thereby aligning itself with the ideological heritage of the Czech Reformation: the Czechoslovak Hussite

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<sup>32</sup> Hrdlička. 2007. *Život a dílo prof. Františka Kováře*.

<sup>33</sup> Jindra. 2010. Církev československá (husitská) v období komunistické totality. In *90 let Církve československé husitské*, 99–103.

<sup>34</sup> Jindra. 2010. Církev československá (husitská) v období komunistické totality. In *90 let Církve československé husitské*, 106–114.

<sup>35</sup> Církev československá husitská. 2014. *Základy víry Církve československé husitské se stručným komentářem: přijaté na 1. zasedání VI. sněmu dne 17. října 1971 jako oficiální nauková norma ve znění*. Praha: Církev československá husitská.

Church.<sup>36</sup> In order to defend its social and ethical orientation, which is firmly rooted in biblical teachings, the Church of Czechoslovakia published the 1981 *Foundations of Social-Ethical Orientation*.<sup>37</sup> However, this document reflects certain aspects that are no longer relevant in the current context and require re-evaluation. The period between 1970 and 1989, which has been designated the “normalisation” phase, saw a further disintegration of Czech society. Furthermore, the phenomenon of secularisation was exacerbated as churches began to experience a decline in attendance. Entire generations of individuals were raised in households where baptism was no longer a common practice due to the pervasive influence of mass secularisation. The uniform, state-organised education of youth was in contradiction with Christian teachings. In the social and charitable sphere, the churches were afforded minimal scope for action. It is accurate to conclude that the state attempted to exert significant influence in this domain to preclude any calls for church involvement.<sup>38</sup>

In particular, social work within the CHC continued to persist in a clandestine manner. The sole permitted activity was the establishment of a social department within the councils of the elders of the increasingly diminishing religious communities. This department was tasked with the exclusive responsibility of conveying birthday greetings to the members of these communities.<sup>39</sup>

The year 1989 brought with it a new era for the CHC and other churches in the Czech Republic and presented both opportunities and challenges. Immediately following the collapse of the regime, state supervision was terminated, which of course constituted the initial prerequisite for transformation. It must be acknowledged, however, that the 40-year period was too lengthy for any direct continuity to be established with previous activities. The anticipated generational change has not occurred. In the present era, individuals who were not exposed to the Gospel message until adulthood are becoming part of the CHC.<sup>40</sup>

The CHC is confronted with a plethora of daunting challenges. It is not merely tasked with revitalising its social work endeavours; it is also obliged to reinvigorate the Church’s ministry in the public domain, including the

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<sup>36</sup> Jaroslav Hrdlička, Jan Blahoslav Lášek. 2010. CČSH mezi lety 1948–1989. In *90 let Církve československé husitské*, 129.

<sup>37</sup> Hrdlička, Lášek. 2010. CČSH mezi lety 1948–1989. In *90 let Církve československé husitské*, 130.

<sup>38</sup> Nešpor. 2024. *Století národní církve: Duchovní hledání Církve československé (husitské)*, 256–275.

<sup>39</sup> Líbalová, Zimmermannová. 2010. Historie sociální práce v CČS(H). In *90 let Církve československé husitské*, 233–234.

<sup>40</sup> Tomáš Butta. 2010. Rok 1989 v životě CČSH. In *90 let Církve československé husitské*, 135–138.

military, healthcare facilities, correctional institutions, and the broader fabric of society.<sup>41</sup> The most challenging issue is that of ensuring the organisation's financial viability. It is evident that state restitution alone is inadequate for this purpose.

Theological faculties have a significant responsibility in the process of societal transformation. In 1950,<sup>42</sup> the state established six theological faculties for different denominations (across the entirety of the then-Czechoslovakian state). Three were located in Slovakia (one Catholic, one Orthodox, and one Protestant), and three were situated in Bohemia (one Catholic, one Evangelical, and one for the Czechoslovak Church). These faculties were subject to strict state control and were largely isolated from the wider academic environment. The objective was to provide training for clergymen exclusively.

Following the political and economic changes that began in 1989, all theological faculties underwent a significant transformation.<sup>43</sup> They were incorporated into existing universities and began educating a new generation of students. They have introduced new academic fields of study that are in relatively high demand. In our case, the focus is on the teaching of religion, philosophy, and ethics, with a particular emphasis on social and charity work. It is noteworthy that there has also been a resurgence of interest in the study of theology. It is necessary to re-define the position of theology in the context of the sciences, as previous generations have consistently endeavoured to do. The open society provides a conducive environment for this task.

Theological institutions face novel challenges, and it remains their responsibility in determining how they will respond. It is evident that certain values remain constant even in the face of significant changes. In my view, the CHC is well-positioned to reinterpret its conceptual definition, which states that the Czechoslovak Hussite Church is comprised of Christians who strive to imbue contemporary moral and scientific pursuits with the Spirit of Christ, as preserved for us in Scripture and in the Old Christian tradition, and as exemplified by Hussite, Czech Brethren, and other Reformation movements.

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<sup>41</sup> David Tonzar. 2010. Církev československá husitská po roce 1989. In *90 let Církve československé husitské*, 148–152.

<sup>42</sup> Jindra. 2010. Církev československá (husitská) v období komunistické totality. In *90 let Církve československé husitské*, 100.

<sup>43</sup> Tonzar. 2010. Církev československá husitská po roce 1989. In *90 let Církve československé husitské*, 145–147.

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