



## **CHANGING RELIGIOUS PATTERN IN THE CARPATHO-PANNONIAN AREA**

**Károly Kocsis**

Geographical Research Institute, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest

### **Abstract**

The Carpatho-Pannonian area<sup>1</sup>, from both the religious and ethnic standpoint, is the most diverse region of contemporary Europe. In this area, Roman Catholicism, Protestantism and Orthodoxy intermix inextricably and both Jewish and Islamic culture have been present for more than a thousand years.

The spatial structure of confessions, in line with the natural and social environment, the ethnic structure in particular, and the traditional life style of the population, which may be said together to comprise the 'soul' of the population, have, over the past five hundred years, been changed radically several times. The spatial structure of confessions, in line with the natural and social environment, the ethnic structure in particular, and the traditional life style of the population, which may be said together to comprise the 'soul' of the population, have, over the past five hundred years, been changed radically several times.

This paper attempts to outline the main changes and the present state of the religious structure on the basis of estimates (before 1790) and census data (since that date) over the past five hundred years.

**Key words:** Carpatho-Pannonian area, religious geography, Reformation, re-Catholicization, secularization, religious pluralization

### **Introduction**

The Carpatho-Pannonian area is, in both religious and ethnic terms, the most diverse region of contemporary Europe. Roman Catholicism, Protestantism and Orthodoxy here intermingle and Jewish and Islamic both have roots going back over more than 1,000 years.

The spatial structure of confessions, in line with the natural and social environment, the ethnic structure in particular, and the traditional life style of the population, which may be said together to comprise the 'soul' of the population, have, over the past five hundred years, been changed radically several times. This paper attempts to outline the main changes and the present state of the religious structure on the basis of estimates (before 1790) and census data (since that date) over the past five hundred years.

## Change in the Religious Structure of the Carpatho-Pannonian Area (1495 – 1989)

According to tax-records, the population of the Kingdom of Hungary in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (about 3.1 million) was made up of 89.5 % Catholics, (Hungarians Croats, Germans, Slovaks), 10.1% Orthodox (Romanians, Serbs, Ruthenes) and 0.4% Jews <sup>2</sup>.

This confessional structure was fundamentally transformed by the rapid spread of the Reformation during the early, politically and ideologically chaotic decades of the Ottoman occupation and by the increasing Orthodox (Serbs, Rumanians, Ruthenes) immigration and an influx of Muslims (Bosnians, Turks). By the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, 80% of the total population of the Kingdom of Hungary (now torn into three parts) counted as Protestant.<sup>3</sup> The Germans and Slovaks had followed the Luther's teachings almost completely, while 90 % of the Hungarians adhered to the Helvetic Confession (eg. Zwingli, Bullunger, Calvin).

The Unitarian (Antitrinitarian) Church was also particularly important among the Transylvanian Hungarians during the second half of the 16th century. Only the Croats and small numbers of Hungarians (around Pozsony-Bratislava, Nagyszombat-Trnava, Győr, in the north-eastern Szeklerland and in Moldavia) remained steadfast in their Catholicism. In the same period, Slavonia, southeastern Transdanubia, the Bačka, the Banat, the Apueni Mountains, the southern and northeastern Carpathians, became predominantly Orthodox territories due to a gradual immigration of Serbs, Rumanians and Ruthenes.

The Habsburg Empire, as the most important secular support of the Catholic Church, responded to the diminution of European Catholicism with the ever more violent Counter-Reformation, thus stimulating a Catholic renewal over the 17th and 18th centuries. While initially, the majority of the aristocratic Protestant social élite were forced to re-Catholicize, later their subjects and serfs were also compelled, under the principle '*cuius regio, eius religio*' (he who rules determine the religion). The Union of Ruthenes (Ungvár-Ugorod, 1646) with the Catholic Church was also an important success for the Counter-Reformation. The focus of the re-Catholicizing drive, led by the Jesuits and supported by the state, moved in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries to the territories of Hungary from which the Turks had recently been driven. A considerable proportion of the Orthodox Rumanians,<sup>4</sup> desiring national and social emancipation, as well as political advantage, converted to the 'Catholic faith of Byzantine rite' (i.e. Uniate) in 1698/99. In addition to by conversion, the position of Catholicism was further reinforced through the state-sponsored colonization by Roman Catholics (mostly German) of the newly liberated territories, particularly the more southerly Slavonia, Bačka and Banat) which was particularly pronounced in the middle decades of the 18th century. As a result of the Counter-Reformation, the ratio of Protestants fell from 80% (late 16th century) to 23% by 1790. At the latter date, the proportion of Catholics had reached 55.1%<sup>5</sup>. The majority of the Hungarians, Slovaks and Germans became Roman Catholic due to the re-Catholicization and the 'Swabian' immigration from the German lands. By the end of the 18th century, a confessional spatial structure was in place that would remain basically unchanged until 1945.

The increasing conversion of Orthodox believers to Greek Catholicism resulted in certain modifications to the religious structure during the first half of the 19th century.<sup>6</sup> There was an increase in the percentage of Greek Catholics among the Rumanians of the Grand Duchy of Transylvania, from 16.6 % to 50.1% between 1761 and 1850.<sup>7</sup> The confessional structure was subject, besides conversion, to alteration through the effects of differing demographic behavior within the various religious groups, to the advantage of Catholics and the disadvantage of Protestants.<sup>8</sup> The number of Jews in the area of the study increased from 88,000 to 932,000 between 1790 and 1910) due to large waves of Jewish immigration waves connected with anti-Semitic persecutions and pogroms in Russia, and encouraged by liberal Hungarian laws.<sup>9</sup> The Jewish

population engaged mostly in commerce and trade, and significant numbers settled in Budapest, but also in the north-eastern territories<sup>10</sup> and in other important towns.<sup>11</sup> According to the last Austro-Hungarian census (1910) 52.1 % of the 20.9 million total population of the area under examination declared themselves as Roman Catholics. 9.7% registered as Greek Catholics, 14.3% as Orthodox, 12.6 % as Reformed Calvinists, 6.4% as Lutherans and 4.5 % as Jews.

The partitioning of Hungary in 1920 did not bring about major changes in the religious structure of the territories allocated to the successor-states in the interwar period. The percentage of Orthodox believers did, however, slightly increase and those of the Roman Catholics and Protestants correspondingly decreased in both in Vojvodina and Transylvania, as a result of a growing Serb and Romanian immigration and the flight, emigration and repatriation of hundreds of thousands of Hungarians and Germans.

The Czechoslovak government intensively supported the development of the Russian identity of the Ruthenes, who had been viewed as a 'magyarophil' ethnic group, and accordingly, their conversion from Greek Catholic to Orthodox was forced. As a result of Czech propaganda in favour of Orthodoxy, the percentage of Orthodox rose from 0.04 % to 15.3 % in Transcarpathia between 1910 and 1930, parallel to the decrease of the Greek Catholics from 64.1 % to 49.1 %. During World War II, as a result of Hungarian territorial revisionist successes, 82 % (725,000 persons) of the region's Jews became Hungarian citizens.

Between 1941 and 1944, 681,000 of the 825,000 persons in the enlarged territory of Hungary classified as of Jewish ethnic origin, while mostly of Hungarian mother tongue and citizenship, were deported and many killed. There were a total of 260,500 Jews (119,000 in Budapest) who had either survived the Holocaust at home or survived deportation and were able to return in the territory of enlarged Hungary at the end of 1945.<sup>12</sup> 71,000 of 87,000 Jews were deported in Slovakia between 1942 and 1944. During the same period, the Rumanian authorities did not deport or liquidate the 45,000 Jews of southern Transylvania and the Banat, in contrast to Transnistria, Bessarabia and Moldova. The migration (evacuation, flight, expulsion, deportation, voluntary repatriation and immigration etc.) of many millions of persons during the period 1944 – 1950, and the widespread anti-clerical measures of that period caused significant changes to the religious structure of our region. The extreme decrease in the percentage of Jews brought about by the Holocaust was exacerbated by an exodus of surviving Jews to Israel.<sup>13</sup> The number of Lutherans also dropped strikingly as a result of the flight and deportation of Germans, and the voluntary emigration of 10,000 Slovaks. They were reduced by 104,000 in Transylvania, by 52,000 in Hungary and by 44,000 in Vojvodina between 1930 and 1948/1953.

Similar demographic losses were observed among the Roman Catholic believers of Transylvania (-100,000) and of Vojvodina (-200,000) because of the German and Hungarian casualties and emigration. The Ruthene and Rumanian Greek Catholic Uniate churches both fell victim to measures claiming the realization of national (Ukrainian, Rumanian) and religious (Orthodox) unity between 1949 and 1950, and were liquidated.<sup>14</sup> As a result of these acts, 1.6 million Transylvanian, 450,000 Transcarpathian and 225,000 Slovakian Greek Catholic believers were forcibly declared to be Orthodox. Transcarpathia and Vojvodina had, by 1950, become provinces inhabited predominantly by an Orthodox population due to these conversions and also to mass immigration by Russians, Ukrainians and Serbs.

In conjunction with these events, the establishing of one-party-states, disestablishing the churches and stripping them of their financial base and independence were all proceeding apace in the newly Communist countries of the region. Subsequently, secularization accelerated, indifference towards religion intensified and the number of agnostics and atheists generation by generation, particularly in urban areas due to atheist and anti-clerical ideological education. The proportion of agnostics and

atheists in 1988 has been estimated at 15.9 % in Hungary and Rumania, at 16.7 % in Yugoslavia and at 20.1 % in Czechoslovakia.<sup>15</sup>

### **Religious structure of the Carpatho – Pannonian Area since 1989**

In the wake of the collapse of Communism and Marxist ideology it seems that the population of the region has tired of global ideological organizations and their demands on traditional moral standards, while interest in smaller organizations, and in local or regional identities has increased. This has resulted in not only a 'religious renaissance' in the majority of the former Communist countries, but in a strengthening of smaller churches and religious communities and hence in an increasing confessional fragmentation.<sup>16</sup>

Data from the cycle of censuses around 1990, supplemented where necessary by estimates, indicate that out a total population of 30.6 million in the Carpatho – Pannonian area, only 13.6 million (44.5 %) declared themselves as Roman Catholics and one million (3.3 %) Greek Catholics. There were more than 7.7 million Orthodox believers thanks in part to a retention of 50-90 % of the Greek Catholics of Transcarpathia and Transylvania who had been forcibly converted in 1948-50. The number and share of the Lutherans had contracted sharply, having been affected by a considerable emigration of Transylvanian Saxons to Germany. There remained less than one million (3 %) in the region. The increase in atheists, nonreligious persons and those with unknown religious affiliation due to the mentioned ideological reasons, was most noticeable in Slovakia, Hungary and Vojvodina. In Transylvania, meanwhile, their proportion in the aftermath of the collapse of the Ceausescu-dictatorship did not exceed 0.4 %. The free churches, small religious communities and sects were particularly boosted, mainly at the expense of the larger, historical churches and they increased their congregations from 144,000 to 627,000 (2 %) between 1930 and 1990. Among these communities the Pentecostals (170,000), Baptists (130,000) and Adventists (45,000) achieved the most remarkable enlargements, principally in Transylvania.<sup>17</sup>

Nearly one half of believers (13.6 million, 44.5%) of area of the investigation declared themselves as Roman Catholic, representing the absolute majority in Burgenland (82 %), in Croatia (76,6 %), in Prekmurje (73,6 %), in Slovakia (60,4 %) and in Hungary (57,8 %). They are the dominant denomination in Hungary west of the Tisza River, and in all of Slovakia except the eastern periphery and patches around the country's centre. Catholics also predominate in the middle of Romani (in the northeastern part of the Szeklerland), and in the northeastern Yugoslav Ba ka. Their most populous communities outside the Roman Catholic countries are in Subotica (62,000), Timi oara – (43,000), Miercurea Ciuc (35,000), Oradea (30,000), Arad (28,000) and Satu Mare (27,000).

The Orthodox population (7.7 million) form an absolute majority in Transylvania (69.4 %), in Vojvodina (58.1%) and in Transcarpathia (56.2%), mainly in the Rumanian, Serbian, Russian, Ukrainian and Ruthene ethnic area. The Orthodox were mostly driven out of Croatia (Krajina, West Slavonia) due to the expulsion and flight of the majority of the Serbs between 1991 and 1995. The most important Orthodox communities of the Carpatho – Pannonian Area, beyond the borders of Orthodox countries - at the beginning of 1991 - lived in Zagreb (39,000), Rijeka (18,000), Osijek (14,000), Vukovar (13,000), Sisak (9,000), Budapest (7 ,000) and Petrinja (7,000).

The strongest Protestant church of the Carpatho–Pannonian Area is the Reformed (Calvinist) with 3 million believers (9.8 % of the total population), who represent the dominant denomination of the Hungarians living between the Tisza River and the Harghita Mountains. In Transylvania half, in Hungary one-fifth, in Slovakia one-tenth of Hungarians belong to the Reformed Church. The homes of the largest Reformed communities are today Budapest, Debrecen, Tîrgu Mure , Cluj – Napoca, Oradea, Miskolc, Hódmez vasárhely and Satu Mare. The Greek Catholic faith (one million

adherents) today forms an absolute majority only among the population of the peripheral, former ethnic Ruthene regions of eastern Slovakia, the boundary region of Hajdu and Szabolcs in Hungary and western Transcarpathia. This denomination could recover only one-seventh of the former Uniate congregation from the Orthodox church in the Rumanian ethnic area. Their most important urban communities are based in Uhorod, Mukačevo, Budapest, Cluj – Napoca, Satu Mare, Košice, Debrecen and Nyíregyháza.

Half of the Lutherans of the studied area (900,000 believers) live in Hungary, one-third in Slovakia. They are concentrated mostly in Budapest, Békéscsaba, Szarvas, Bratislava, Orosháza, Nyíregyháza and Banská Bystrica. Adherents of the Pentecostal denomination (170,000 persons) - with the exception of seven Transylvanian villages - are everywhere in a minority and their most important communities (5,000-8,000) persons are to be found in Oradea, Cluj-Napoca, Timișoara and Arad. The Baptists (130,000) live also in diaspora, principally in Transylvania (eg. Arad, Oradea, Timișoara, Cluj-Napoca) and Hungary (eg. Budapest, Debrecen).

The Unitarian Church, with an aggregation of 88,000 believers, gathers its faithful mainly from a group of Székely-Hungarian villages in the neighbourhood of Odorheiu Secuiesc, from the south-west of Turda, and from some nodal centres of attraction (Odorheiu Secuiesc, Budapest, Tîrgu Mureș, Cluj – Napoca).

The region's Jewish population, as a result of the Holocaust and resultant emigration, fell to the level of 1790 (88,000 persons). 85 % of these (75,000 believers<sup>18</sup>) live in Budapest, where the majority of the local community were spared the deportations of 1944.<sup>19</sup> The Jews of provincial Hungary live mainly in Debrecen, Miskolc and Szeged.

## Notes

1. The Carpatho-Pannonian area comprises: Slovakia, Transcarpathia in Ukraine, Hungary, Transylvania in Romania, Vojvodina in Yugoslavia, Croatia (excluding Dalmatia, Adriatic Islands and Istria), Prekomurje in Slovenia, Burgenland in Austria

2. Our calculations are based mainly on the following publications:

**Kubinyi A.** *A Magyar Királyság népessége a 15. század végén (Population of the Kingdom of Hungary at the end of the 15th century)*, Történelmi Szemle XXXVIII. 1996. 2 – 3. pp.135 – 161.,

**Szabó I.** *A magyarság életrajza (The Biography of the Hungarians)*, 1941, Budapest, 51.p. The likely ethnic structure of the denominations mentioned (1495) was the following: **Catholics**:: 2,073,000 Hungarians; 340,000 Croats; 200,000 Germans; 170,000 Slovaks; **Orthodox**: 180,000 Rumanians; 100,000 Serbs; 35,000 Ruthenes and 11,000 Jews.

3. **Gesztelyi T. (Ed.)** *Egyházak és vallások a mai Magyarországon (Churches and religions in contemporary Hungary)* Akadémiai Kiadó Budapest, 76.p.

4. The Catholic Church of Byzantine Rite became ever more popular among the Rumanians, especially in Maramures, Satu Mare and Salaj counties in northern and central Transylvania, and in the environments of Fogaras and Harghita following 1699.

5. **Wellman I.** *Magyarország népességének fejlődése a 18. században (Population Development of Hungary during the 18th century in: Ember Gy. – Heckenast G. (Ed.) Magyarország története (History of Hungary) 1686 – 1790, Akadémiai Kiadó Budapest, 69.p*

6. The percentage of Greek Catholics Uniates increased from 6.3% to 10.3%, while the ratio of the Orthodox declined from 20.9 % to 17.7 % between 1790 and 1840.
7. In this instance, we have identified the Rumanians of Transylvania as the collectivity of the Orthodox and Greek Catholics Source of data for **1761**: Ciobanu, V. 1926 Statistica românilor din Ardeal..., Cluj, for **1850**: Bielz, E.A. 1857 Handbuch der Landeskunde Siebenbürgens, Hermannstadt, 162.p.
8. The ratio of the Roman Catholics increased from 48.8 % to 51.5 %, in parallel with the decline in the Protestants from 23 % to 19.8 % between 1790 and 1900.
9. Eg. Act Nr. XVII (On the civil and political equality of the Jews before the law, 27.12.1867) and Act Nr. XLIII. (among others – on the listing of the Jewish denomination into the accepted churches in Hungary, 22.11.1895).
10. Eg. Kassa – Kosice, Ungvár-Uzhorod, Munkács-Mukaceve, Beregszász-Berehove, Huszt – Hust, Máramarossziget – Sighetu, Szatmárnémeti-Satu Mare.
11. Eg. Miskolc, Debrecen, Nagyvárad-Oradea, Arad, Temesvár-Timisoara, Újvidék-Novi Sad, Kolozsvár-Cluj, Marosvásárhely-Tîrgu Mure .
12. **Stark T.** 1989 *Magyarország második világháborús embervesztesége (Casualties of Hungary during the World War II)*, MTA Történettudományi Intézet Budapest, 26.p.
13. Between 1930 and 1948/51, the ratio of the Jews fell from 3.5 % to 1.7 % in Transylvania, from 5.1 % to 1.5 % in Hungary, from 14,1 % to 3.1 % in Transcarpathia and from 4.1 % to 0.2 % in Slovakia
14. The Greek Catholic Church in Transylvania was liquidated on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1948, on 29<sup>th</sup> August 1949 in Transcarpathia and in Slovakia on 28<sup>th</sup> April 1950 (Gesztelyi T./Ed./ 1991, ibid. 69.p.).
15. 1989. Britannica. Book of the Year-Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc, Chicago, 762-763.p.
16. **Andorka R.** *Vallásosság es Egyházak a 20. Században – főtrendenciák és nyitott problémák (Confession and Churches in the 20th Century – Main Tendencies and Problems Addressed)*, Info-Társadalomtudomány (MTA Budapest) Nr.17. (July 1991), 46.p.
17. Transylvania was home to 93 % of the Pentecostals, 73 % of the Baptists and 64 % of the Adventists of the Carpatho – Pannonian Area in 1992.
18. **Gesztelyi T.** /Ed./ 1991 ibid. 154.p. 19. **Stark T.** 1989 ibid. 26.p.