

SLOVAK CHURCHES AND EDUCATION AFTER THE FALL OF COMMUNISM

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Summary: The author of the study focuses on the complexity of the education provided by churches in Slovakia. At first, she analyses the most important factors that have been influencing the present situation in this area (the historical, legal and educational background as well as the religious structure of the population). Then she presents the main residuals from the past that need to be sorted out with the help of the churches, including the progressive education of the younger generation. Some statistical information about church schools in Slovakia is provided. Special attention is paid to the evangelical churches and their Department of Evangelical Theology and Mission that serves also for training the evangelical teachers. The last part describes the present model of religious education in state schools in Slovakia.

THE CONTEXT OF CHURCH EDUCATION IN SLOVAKIA

As many research findings indicate¹, there is a whole complex of factors determining the present shape of church education and Christian religious education in the Slovak state schools. It is important to mention the historical and political background; the legal background, specifically the close alliance between state and church; the religious background and the existing religious landscape; the influence of belief/ideology and the role of churches in the society; theological developments in the area; educational developments and the system of schooling in the country.

For the purpose of presenting a systematic approach to church schooling in Slovakia, it will be necessary to provide a brief description of the most important factors.

Historical and Political Context

Much could be said which reveals the impact of history upon the formation of church schooling in the Slovak territory. Let me simply name the three most influential recent political events affecting the region of Slovakia:

¹ These have been carried out by several R.E. experts, e. g. by Múnster Institute in Germany (In Schreiner, P. (ed.) *Religious Education in Europe*. Múnster : Comenius Institute, ICCS, 2000, p. 8.

November 1989 – the *Velvet Revolution* in Czechoslovakia. Supported by the broader context of political changes in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries in Europe, massive demonstrations of citizens in the Czech and Slovak cities resulted in the end of the 40-year long Communist regime. A non-Communist government took office. The new political leaders began the difficult process of abolishing Marxist ideology, transforming the political system, recreating a market economy, and reorienting foreign policy. The country's first multiparty elections were held in June 1990.

September 1992 - *The Velvet Divorce*: During the early 1990s, Czech and Slovak political leaders within the government began to disagree on economic and political issues. Later that year, the leaders of the two republics decided to split the federation into two independent states. A new constitution for Slovakia, adopted on September 1, 1992, went into effect with independence in January 1993. It declared Slovakia to be a parliamentary democracy. The first parliamentary elections of independent Slovakia were held in 1994.

May 2004: The Slovak Republic (SR) was accepted as one of the new members of the EU.

It can take one's breath away, but in reality, as M. LiVecche² describes it, until recently there were still a few Slovaks who remembered living in the same village under the dominion first, of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy till the end of the first great war, then the first Czechoslovak Republic or the inter-war years, the puppet state of the Slovak Republic during WWII, the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic from the end of the war to 1989, and the Czecho-Slovak Federal Republic until the Velvet Divorce of 1993, when the SR finally came into its present existence. What they experienced represents six different states governing their lives without them ever having moved house. And the saddest thing influencing the self-awareness and the whole attitude of Slovaks towards public issues, especially on education, is the fact that until 1993 the Slovaks had never in their history been in real political control of their own world.

Interestingly enough, the Slovak Constitution itself – though claiming Slovakia to be an ideologically neutral state – confirms the continuity of the new state with its historical Christian roots. As the Preamble³ states, we - the citizens of the Slovak Republic - are a nation “mindful of the political and cultural heritage of our forebears,

² LiVecche, M. *Every Knee Shall Bow: An Inquiry into What Masters Us*. Bratislava: CityGate, 2004,, p. 6 – 7.

³ *Constitution of the Slovak Republic : Introduction*, Bratislava: TASR, 1993.

and of the centuries of experience from the struggle for national existence and our own statehood, **in the sense of the spiritual heritage of Cyril and Methodius⁴** and the historical legacy of the Great Moravian Empire... , seeking the application of a democratic form of government and the guarantees of a free life and **the development of spiritual culture** and economic prosperity.” This is one reason why the churches in Slovakia have been developing their own schools – so that they could utilize this opportunity available to them to help the spiritual (not just cognitive) development of young people and to present to them the Christian pillars of their country.

Legal Context: Relationship Between State and Church

According to the Constitution,⁵ the Slovak Republic is a sovereign, democratic state governed by law. It is not linked to any ideology or religious belief. Basic rights and liberties on its territory are guaranteed to everyone regardless of sex, race, colour of skin, language, creed and religion, political or other beliefs, national or social origin, affiliation to a nation or ethnic group, property, descent, or another status. No one must be harmed, preferred, or discriminated against on these grounds.

The freedoms of thought, conscience, religion, and faith are guaranteed. This right also includes the possibility of changing one's religious belief or faith. Everyone has the right to be without religious belief. Everyone has the right to publicly express his opinion. Everyone has the right to freely express his religion or faith on his own or together with others, privately or publicly, by means of divine and religious services, by observing religious rites, or by participating in the teaching of religion.

In contrast to the previous socialist era, churches and religious communities have finally received the right to administer their own affairs. In particular, they constitute their own bodies, inaugurate their clergymen, organize the teaching of religion, and establish religious orders and other church institutions independently of state bodies.

In other words, there is no state church in Slovakia. It is an ideologically neutral state though the majority of the population are Roman Catholic. On the other hand,

⁴ In the year 861 the Slav King Rastislav sent a letter to Rome and later to Byzantium, expressing the need for missionaries to the Slovak territory, using the following words: “...*We, the Slavs, a simple people, have no-one to teach us the truth ...*” As answer, two missionaries, Cyril and Methodius, were sent to the Slavs in 861 by the Byzantine Emperor Michael III. They established the language of the Slavs as the liturgical language (867).

⁵ *Constitution of the Slovak Republic*, Article 1, 12/2, 24/1, 2, 3.

there is no strict separation of churches from the state. They get a stable support from the state. The state cares - to a certain limit – for the salaries of priests, pastors, religious education teachers, missionaries, youth workers, diaconesses; it pays for the utilities of primary and secondary church schools. Each citizen can give 2% of taxes to churches and their organizations.

Religious Context: The Present Religious Landscape

The territory of Slovakia has always had a multicultural, multiethnic character. The acceptance of Christianity in the 9th century helped the territory of Slovakia to enter the European context. On the other hand, the confessional tensions between Christian churches often blocked the development of the territory. So the periods of positive Christian influence alternated with times of severe religious conflicts. The quite strong dualistic religious atmosphere has been present since the 17th century (Catholics and Protestants, the latter mainly Lutherans (citizens of Slovak nationality) or Reformed (citizens of Hungarian nationality)).

What is the present religious landscape? Let us compare two recent censuses. According to the census in 1991, 73% of the inhabitants were believers/religious; 10% of the inhabitants were without religious confession, and 17% gave no response. It is very interesting to compare this data with the census ten years later, in 2001 when the number of those claiming to be believers/religious rose to 84% of the population; 13% were without religious confession and 3% gave no response.

According to this last census of 2001, 69% of the population were Roman Catholics, 7% Lutherans, 4% Greek Catholics, 2% Reformed, 1% Russian Orthodox Believers, 0.4% Jehovah Witnesses, 0.04% Jews, 0.5% Evangelicals and a very small number from other religions.

So with 84% of the population claiming a church affiliation, Slovakia can claim to be one of Europe's most Christianized countries. On the other hand, its closest neighbour and former federation partner – the Czech Republic with 32% Christians (27% Roman Catholics) – on the same basis is considered to be Europe's most secularized country. Yet both of the republics have approximately the same rates of divorce, corruption, criminality or of addictions. This shows that Slovakia has a Christian veneer that Czech society has simply shrugged off. Essentially there is not

that much difference, though gradually, traditional Christianity is being replaced by a non-Christian spirituality. In Slovak society, though almost without any immigrants, Eastern religions and philosophies are expressed by Yoga classes, Transcendental Meditation, Hare Krishna and Hinduism. Some people (especially the Humanists) have publicly questioned the positive contribution of Christian roots toward forming our civilization.

The System of Schooling

Let us briefly describe the system of schooling in Slovakia: education is compulsory for all children between the ages of 6 and 16. From the age of five it is recommended that children attend kindergarten. The primary school is structured in two stages: primary stage (years 1 – 4, ages 6 - 10) and an upper stage (years 5 – 9, ages 10 - 15). At the end of either 9 years or 4 years of primary school it is possible to choose one of the three following types of schools: grammar schools, specialized (vocational) secondary schools or vocational training school (for ages 15-19).

Since 1993, there have been quite a few legal changes introduced into the Slovak educational system, such as:

- Abolition of the aims and content influenced by the ideology of the previous era.
- Legalized possibility to found private and denominational schools.
- Support for the humanising of schools.
- Better educational opportunities for pupils aged 14 – 18.
- Decentralization of power of the decision makers to schools and regions.

To put these changes into practice in everyday school-life, however, is a long process. So there are still a lot of people who criticize it, to judge from internet blogs. For example, they describe Slovak education as one with a long tradition of centralized education that has started to be decentralized and pluralistic. Some probably necessary reforms of the system are still delayed. Pluralism has not grown as fast as in the surrounding countries.

The present vision of how the state sees the role of education is as follows:

- To educate children for independence, responsibility, and creativity with respect to national and civic values.
- To make school a cultural, sport and social centre of the regional community.

- To put into practice the right of choice of educational career – to find employment in the European labour market.
- To ensure higher societal recognition of the teaching staff.
- To support the equality of all types of schools founded.
- To help with drug prevention.

These aims must be followed not only by the state, but also by private schools (including church schools).

THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION AND THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

Regarding Central and Eastern Europe, Thomas Sowell⁶ said, “Few regions of the world had such fragmented peoples and cultures or such intractable conflicts.”

This applies to the former Czechoslovakia to a high degree. “In former Czechoslovakia the communist persecution of religion was more severe than in surrounding countries such as Poland, Eastern Germany or even Hungary. In the 1950s the plan was to eliminate religion from the life of people completely, whilst in the 1970s to allow religious institutions to exist publicly, but to divide, corrupt and control them from within.”⁷ So in spite of the fact that such a high proportion of the Slovak population claims to be Christians, the position of Christian religion and churches in the Slovak society has been directly influenced by recent communist history. Many aspects of it seem to be quite obscure. Those hard times in the past have resulted in many untreated wounds and sad memories of the believers who experienced them. One may ask: difficult memories of what? Let us just mention a few:

- The previous attitudes to ideology and government.
- The ethics of compromise (only criticised privately so far), such as changing places of worship often enough to avoid persecution, hiding the act of going to church behind the expression “going to visit friends”; the ethics of having informers and spies.

⁶ Sowell, T. *Conquests and Culture : An International History*. New York : Basic Books, 1998, p. 187. Quoted in: LiVecche, M. *Every Knee Shall Bow*, p. 6.

⁷ A thorough study on difficult memories of the past was presented by a Czech educational expert I. Noble during the conference of ICCS in Otepää, Estonia, in 2006. In Noble, I. Churches in the Post-Communist Countries and Democratic Citizenship, in *Europe, Democratic Citizenship and Education*. Otepää: ICCS, 2006. 14p.

- Withdrawal from public life as much as possible, no social involvement (“prayer for collectivisation”).
- Schizophrenia from the division between public/private life (lack of integrity).
- Strong hierarchy imposed by the state that gave institutional authority to some church leaders.
- State educated, licensed, and paid clergy (conflicts with the choice of parishes, very low salaries) – so substantial control of the state over clergy, religious education, preaching and proselytization.
- In the 1950s some 6000 people were imprisoned, Greek Catholics were very much repressed (in favour of Russian Orthodox), in the 1980s, 400 Roman Catholic priests were prohibited from serving.
- Existence of an underground church, and dissemination of *samizdat* materials.

CityGate Slovakia, a Christian organization based in Bratislava, is one of the very few organizations that exists to strengthen the church by helping people to bridge the gap between the reality of Christ and everyday life, including the memories of the past. In his “Inquiry into What Masters Us”, M. LiVecche⁸ investigated the residuals of Marxist ideology and its impact on the present status of religion in Slovak society. He characterized Sloval society today with the following features:

- Chronic suspicion of ideology and fear of manipulation, deep resentment of institutional authority (including church).
- Avoiding being involved in civil society.
- Low value of the individual felt (compared to collective), effort to over-emphasise personal uniqueness.
- Reason-faith relationship still a frosty one.
- Still struggling with the dichotomy between the physical and spiritual.
- Search for a guru.
- More national pride (High Tatras, sports – Ice Hockey Team).
- Longings of young people for community, acceptance, tolerance, security, fellowship, intimacy, being known and knowing others, „positive authority“ (that which helps me feel good about being me and who accept me as I am), relationships.

⁸ LiVecche, M. *Every Knee Shall Bow*, 2004.

- Disdain for street evangelism.

So what are the prevailing needs of the “older” generation - of those who most probably are the “owners” of one or more of the scars mentioned above, that still influence their attitude towards religion, education and community?

Evident from their responses is that they are still struggling against the tabuisation of the past.⁹ For this reason a new Institute of National Memory was recently founded in Slovakia, which has been revealing the names of secret agents – unfortunately, many times in a very unfair and painful way, relying on the reports of the previous communist secret police. So many people are still preoccupied with unspoken memories and suspicions. There is a need for discernment, forgiveness and inner healing. They suffer the sentiments of a victim (“A victim once – a victim for ever.”) with a passive attitude toward society (somebody else is responsible for the negative and the community means only an abstract body to them).

Since we want to describe the present educational situation in Slovakia, let us now turn to the views of young people about religious matters. All of those under 18 years old were born in democracy after the fall of communism though they were brought up by parents and teachers that were directly influenced by the regime. D. Jaura¹⁰, an evangelical pastor and teacher at one church school, presented the results of his research among this new generation in the following way:

- They do believe in high moral values (inner voice – not due to obedience to a higher authority).
- They experience a dilemma: a philosophy of success based on positive thinking (“God helps those who help themselves.”) against inner uncertainty and anxiety.
- They show a growing interest in spiritual matters (gods, spirits, paranormal, mysteries, e.g. in movies).

⁹ Though this observation may be less strong, it is similar to a very surprising fact revealed recently by the Czech Christian university teacher I. Noble. She was struck by the fact that in Romania only very recently and only very few people wrote about the possibly worst side of the brutality of Communist oppression in Romania, about the so called re-education camps. She thinks that too many people of the former Czechoslovakia are still “engaged in those difficult memories that have their anamnestic power – evoked by all sorts of different ghosts, by different anxieties or angers...” In *Churches in the Post-communist Countries*, p. 3.

¹⁰ Jaura, D. *Young People in Postmodern Society: A Survey of Spirituality of the Coming Generation in Post-communist Europe*. Bratislava: CityGate, 1997, p. 30 – 35.

- Hot topics are: life and death, value orientation, self-discipline, living in this chaotic world.
- They think that the solution cannot be provided by traditional church thinking or membership.

The shift in attitudes to religion can be seen as presented in Jaura's chart:

Before 1989:	In the 1990s:
Officially „atheistic society“	Officially „Christian society“
Religion – commitment	Religion – fulfilment of psychological need, talisman
Faith and religion – publicly implausible private matters	Religious approach in public sphere – ethical values, faith more private (alternatives)
Churches – surviving	Churches more self-confident
Prevailing materialism	Prevailing religious worldview
Church attendance low	Church attendance higher
Only alternative –Christianity	Religious pluralism

Focusing on the needs of young post-modern Christians, their strongest desire is for relationships, according to Jaura's findings.¹¹ "The teenager growing up in a church environment, along with his/her peers outside the churches, is sensitive to whether adults accept him/her as an individual, or whether they try to mould him/her according to their own views." They express a very sensitive perception of the tension between Christianity and culture; a desire for authenticity (sincerity, openness) and right distinction (without building cultural barriers between them and the world).

Is there anything that the churches could do to help deal with the past and to lead the young generation towards a "better" future?

Based on the principles of the Christian Gospel, the churches should realize that they "own the instrument" which can deal with the past and put new hope into any human's heart.¹² As I. Noble¹³ puts it,

¹¹ Jaura, p. 36 - 39.

¹² For example, Luke 4, 18: "The Spirit of the Lord has anointed me (Jesus) to preach the Gospel to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favourable year of the Lord."

¹³ Noble quoting a very appropriate statement by J. B. Metz: "These dangerous memories, like the dangerous memories of the Crucified, hide not only the potential for destruction, but also a potential for redemption, for the genuinely new life. And as such, they belong to the in depth structures of truths of Christian faith." Metz, J. B. *Anamnetic Reason : A Theologian's Remark on the Crisis in the Geisteswissenschaften*. In Honeth, A., McCarthy, T. et al. *Cultural/Political Interventions in the Unfinished*

“these difficult memories would be included with what the Holy Spirit brings into life – as the Spirit of Truth, but also as a Healer and a Comforter. However, the churches seem to be caught in chaos, in the space inhabited by the different spirits, and they face the need for discernment, for opening themselves to the life-giving Spirit, and in His light to allow the memories of the past to be named and shared, to be included in who we are and where we move from and to.”

So we agree with I. Noble in the following statements: The task of the churches is to preach the Gospel and so to help people to deal with difficult memories and not to present their lives as victims (though many of them actually had been). This should be applied even in the context of really small churches, such as various evangelical Protestant churches forming less than 0.2% of the Slovak population. Facing the challenges with such small representation, it is only logical that evangelical Christians developed a minority syndrome but it is not an appropriate attitude for evangelical Christians either. They should start to view themselves as free and equal participants in society. The churches should try harder to be transparent, to be open and to deal with the extremely high expectations of them since 1993, and deal with their own failures and weaknesses. They should humbly submit to the idea of coming out of ghettos, to redefine their roles, to deal wisely with the effects of restitutions, to show a willingness to forgive and to ask forgiveness, and to take on responsibility for public affairs.

The last requirement includes the necessity of **fulfilling the educational role of churches**.¹⁴ According to the constitution (1992) and the subsequent legal enactments (the Accord on Catholic Education with the Vatican, signed in 2003 and the Agreement of all registered churches with the state, signed in 2004), the churches can:

- educate the whole range of generations (both youth and adults) via church education in church parishes;

Project of Enlightenment. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 189 – 194 (Quoted in Noble, I. *Churches in the Post-communist Countries*, p. 3.

¹⁴ This requirement, of course, is not a product of the new era of democracy in Slovakia. Church schools have a centuries long tradition. It is also important to mention that during the history of education in the region of the former Czechoslovakia there were such extraordinary Christian educational experts as a) the famous Christian Czech educator J. A. Comenius – “Father” of modern education and Matthias Bel – *Magnum decus Hungariae*. The former considered RE in the school to be the heart of all pedagogy. The latter, who was very active in pedagogy, philosophy, philology, history, and theoretical theology, proclaimed that the first aim of all education should be *cultura animi* (spiritual development – Christian virtues). Interestingly enough, one public (state) university in Slovakia now bears the name of this famous evangelical pastor and scholar, Matej Bel.

- establish their own schools (so called church/church/denominational schools) – this right includes all levels of education from kindergarten to primary, secondary, and even tertiary;
- teach RE (religious education) to all children, that are registered for this subject by their parents, in state schools;
- influence the young generation via leisure and out of school activities.¹⁵

Recently several thorough studies¹⁶ have been published on the distinguishing aspects of church education in Slovakia. Though written by authors from various church backgrounds, all of them share similar methodological starting points and present a high standard of compatibility with the general educational and psychological sciences.

In the second part of our contribution we are going to introduce two ways of fulfilling the educational role of churches in Slovakia: the church schools (a case study with a focus on the evangelical churches) and the present state of RE in state schools.

CHURCH SCHOOLS IN SLOVAKIA

Though the officially named “church schools” are maintained by the specific churches/church denominations, on the other hand – as the previous analysis has shown, they are in fact maintained by the churches with the help of the state. According to the legal accords noted above, these schools receive a similar budget subsidy to that of the public (state) schools. Sometimes they do charge parents an additional fee because they usually do not have such a good “heritage” of school equipment/buildings/gym etc. as the older public schools may have.

All schools are governed by a school board that consists of the representatives from the school staff, the parents and other experts from the region. The money for the

¹⁵ For more details about a special aspect of this education: Pribula, M. *Teoreticke vychodiska pre vyuzivanie medii vo volnocasovych aktivitach deti a mladeze (Theoretical methodology outcomes of using media in children's and youth' leisure activities)*, In *Katechetika, historie, teologie III*. Ostrava : Universitas Ostraviensis, PF OU, 2006, p. 72 – 79.

¹⁶ See Peres, I. *Aspekty výchovy a vzdelavania (Aspects of education)*, Bratislava: Adademia Christiana, 2001. A systematic approach to education in evangelical churches is presented in Ligus, J. *Uvod do katechetiky a metodologie naboženskej výchovy (Introduction into Catechetics and Methodology of RE)*, Banská Bystrica: PF UMB, 2003. Prochazka, P. *Teologické princípy v cirkevnej edukácii (Theological Principles of Church Education)*, Banská Bystrica: PF UMB, 2002. It focuses on a wide range of important issues: the relationships between evangelical theology and education, between faith and education, on the components of the educational process in evangelical churches and on the church education curriculum.

specific schools comes from the state budget via the regional municipal offices in the individual communities.

General Information about Church Schools

As follows from the religious structure above, the majority of Slovak church schools belong to the Roman Catholic church. In the next chart are statistics presenting the numbers of Roman Catholic schools on 31.12.2005:

Catholic Schools	Kinder gartens	Primary schools	Grammar schools	Mixed primary & secondary schools	Secondary Vocational Schools	Apprentice Training	Special Need Schools	Music schools	Totals
Schools	31	102	44	8	8	4	5	8	210
Pupils	1319	19591	12028	1905	2350	822	259	2601	40875
Teachers	119	6267	985	183	204	97	43	103	8001
Other school employ	485	564	2315	51	75	25	16	18	1029

The second biggest church in Slovakia, the Lutheran church, has also founded its own church schools. In 2006 their number was as follows:

Lutheran schools:	Sum
Kindergartens	3
Primary schools	3
Grammar schools	5
Other schools (mixed, secondary)	3
Total	14

It is also important to mention The Association of C. S. Lewis Schools that includes three schools:

- Church Primary school Narnia - Bratislava
- Church Primary school Narnia – Banska Bystrica
- C. S. Lewis Bilingual High School

All these schools are maintained by the Free Evangelical Church (original name Cirkev bratska), so they are based on Christian principles. The religious education that is part of their curriculum is pursued in an ecumenical way, honouring and respecting the worldviews of all their students. The schools are governed by a school board and a parents board, including parents and various educational experts and school managers.

The teaching of religion in the church schools is different from RE in public schools. Religion is one of the compulsory subjects there. It is graded just like other subjects. In the secondary church schools RE can be a subject in final exams (at the age of 19). The curriculum requires two lessons of RE per week whereas only one is required in state schools.

Concerning the tertiary level of education, there are two church (not state) universities: the Catholic university in Ruzomberok and the University of Cyril and Methodius in Trnava. Besides them there are theological faculties and some university departments that are included in the state universities, so they are financially maintained by the state but at the same time the churches have the main impact on the curricula of their study programmes (though they can exist only if they prove capable according to the State accreditation board).

The pupils and students at church schools should attain the same level of results as the students of the public schools. With the exception of those two above-mentioned universities, the teachers for church schools are normally trained at the same pedagogical institutes as their colleagues for public schools (there are exceptions – teachers studying abroad at Christian teacher training institutions etc).

The Department of Evangelical Theology and Mission (DETM)

One of the special institutions in Slovakia where new Christian teachers of mathematics, Slovak language, music, physical education, ethics and religious education can be trained, is the Department of Evangelical Theology and Mission – a school that is included among the departments of the Faculty of Teacher Training (Pedagogická fakulta). It is accredited and financially sponsored by the public University of Matej Bel, but theologically supervised by the Association of Evangelical Churches.

It is the only Slovak evangelical interdenominational theological school offering Bachelor and Master programmes in mission, teacher training and evangelical theology (as well as the Doctor of Ministry). It was founded in 1993 by four evangelical churches (Baptists, Free Reformed, Methodists, Pentecostals) and the New Eastern Europe for Christ/AD 2000 Mission. All of these recognize the Confession of the Evangelical Alliance.

Mission Statement and Core Values of DETM

DETM exists for the purpose of cooperatively meeting the needs of evangelical churches in Slovakia, and in other countries, through theological and mission preparation of pastors, teachers and missionaries, provision of means and material for lay leadership training, and development of resources for direction and growth of evangelical churches through research and scholarly production.

The education at DETM covers three main dimensions: cognition (acquiring of new knowledge and development of thinking processes), ministry skills (variety of them) and development of Christian character and professionalism.

DETM values the functional cooperation in the Body of Christ; the recognized state educational structure and the freedom to function in it; the injunction in the Scriptures to prepare men and women for ministry; an understanding of the church and its mission in the context of our own culture; the development of Christian scholars and their contribution to the church; educational materials and training for lay people.

Short History of DETM

The establishment of an evangelical theological school was a long-standing desire of a large number of Christians from revivalist churches. For many years they were praying for it and they shared this vision with one another. The previous political system inhibited any initiatives in the area of Christian education. In addition, evangelical churches were lacking in educated workers because the Lutheran and the Catholic theological faculties were under state pressure to reduce the number of students.

After January 1993, when Czechoslovakia split into two independent republics, the newly formed undergraduate schools maintained by the evangelical churches stayed in the Czech Republic. Therefore Slovak representatives of the four evangelical churches (Brethren Church, Baptists, Methodists, Pentecostals) and the mission AD 2000 met in December 1992 in Banska Bystrica. It was a celebration of unity among brethren who were of a common mind about their need for professional education of workers for the church, mission and schools. Dr. Crane from the USA, who was present at the meeting and who founded 20 biblical schools all around the world, said: "The Holy Spirit is working here because the brethren are united. This school will rise upon this foundation

and will be a blessing. The only way to spoil it is if the spirit of unity and love will cease to rule among you!”

There was a need to create a board that would manage the new school. So at the close of that meeting, the Association of Evangelical Churches in Slovakia (ZEC) originated. It was registered with the County Court in Bratislava in January, 1993.

The next step was negotiation with the Ministry of Education. The minister recommended to the church representatives that they become part of Matej Bel University (UMB) in Banska Bystrica. The dean of the Faculty of Education showed willingness to accept the new Department of Evangelical Theology and Mission as part of the school on May 21, 1993. The first academic year opened on September 1, 1993, at the campus of the Faculty of Education of UMB.

All DETM students are registered with the Faculty of Education of Matej Bel University and are bound by the regulations of the University. Today DETM has more than 260 graduates about half of whom are in full-time ministry in primary and secondary schools, churches and para-church organizations.

Academic Programs at DETM

All academic programs offered by DETM are fully accredited. They have been validated (in 1995, 2000, 2004) by the supreme Accreditation Board for universities in the Slovak Republic. DETM, being a member of European Evangelical Accrediting Association (EEAA), has also been in the process of acquiring the EEAA international accreditation since 2004.

DETM programs have been designed for those who want to become professional missionaries, pastors and Christian teachers for churches, evangelism projects in homelands and abroad, in prison ministries, in mass-media activities, in Christian publishing, etc. The graduates can serve in schools and in all spheres of theological work and the practical activities of these organisations, in their pastoral ministry, preaching and teaching in churches and schools, leading worship, church organization and management, ecumenical endeavors, international networks of teachers and missionaries, in remedial and preventive centres for addicted people, etc.

DETM offers the following study programs:

1. Full-time study programmes for daily students:

1. Bachelor in Evangelical Theology and Mission (180 credits, 3-4 years)

2. Master in Evangelical Theology (120 credits, 2 years)
 3. Bachelor and Master in Educational Studies¹⁷: Teacher of Religious Education in combination with Maths/Slovak/Physical Education (300 credits: pre-graduate + graduate study, 4-6 years)
2. Part-time study programmes for extension students:
- a) Bachelor in Evangelical Theology and Mission (180 credits, 3-4 years)
 - b) Master in Evangelical Theology (120 credits, 2 years, only distance form in English)
 - c) Master in Educational studies (120 credits, 2 years)

According to the Bologna process and the ECTS (European Credit Transfer System), credits awarded at DETM are transferable, equivalent to credits in other European universities.

TEACHING RELIGION IN SLOVAK PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Religious education (RE) in Slovakia has always been confessional. It has been focused primarily on teaching a specific religious confession. Until recently, teaching about other religions had a very small place in the RE syllabus. Major religions are taught to a limited extent within other secular subjects in the curriculum, such as citizenship or history.

During the era of socialism RE ceased to exist as a compulsory subject, but it was never officially banned in Slovak schools. RE became a voluntary subject. Parents who

¹⁷ The official name of this teacher training specialization is "Catechetics (theory and practice of church education) of the evangelical churches". It belongs to the Protestant theology that concentrates on the authority of the Holy Scriptures and on soteriology, personal experience of salvation and active life of faith (In Hanes, P. Charakteristika studia, in *Informacny bulletin KETM*, 2000, p. 5.). Specific accents of evangelical catechesis taught at DETM are presented in the Proceedings from DETM conference in 2005 called *Theological foundations of evangelical catechesis*, (In *Teologické východiska evanjelikalnej katechezy*. Banská Bystrica : KETM PF UMB, 2005) namely the foundations of the following theological disciplines in catechesis: the Old Testament (Hanes, P. *Vyučovanie Starej zmluvy v kresťanskej katecheze*, p. 5 – 17); dogmatics (Ligus, J. *Teologické východiska evanjelikalnej katechezy*, p. 18 – 30); ecclesiology (Procházka, P. *Ekleziologické východiska súčasnej evanjelikalnej katechezy*, p. 31 – 41); history of church education (Madar, J. *Katecheza v dejinách*, p. 42 – 52); pastoral theology (Bradnanská, N. *Pastorálne aspekty katechezy*, p. 69 – 93) and inter-cultural communication in church education of Roma children (Soltesová, V. *Medzikultúrna komunikácia v katecheze romských detí*, p. 116 – 126); as well as of evangelical "diacony" and of homiletics – the proclaiming of the Gospel by evangelicals (in a different Proceedings: *Transformácia Kristovej moci na človeka a spoločnosť*. Banská Bystrica : KETM PF UMB, 2005) by: Krupa, S. *Evanjelium a sociálna práca*, p. 96 -101; Masarik, A. *Funkčná kristocentricita v evanjelikalnom zvestovaní*, p. 58 – 66.

wanted their children to attend RE lesson in schools had to register their children for these classes. There was a certain kind of persecution for doing so. After the political changes in 1989 the question of how to teach religion at schools and under what conditions arose.

The Slovak Ministry of Education decided that there should be two parallel alternatives for all children in state schools: RE and Ethics. At the upper stage of primary schools (age 10 - 15) and the first two years of the secondary school (age 15 - 17) families had to choose one of these two alternative subjects for their children. Both RE and Ethics were electives in the early primary years (age 6-10) and in the final years at the secondary school (age 17 - 19). According to the Accords of 2004, compulsory choice between RE and Ethics applies already at the primary level (age 6-10). In the last two years at the secondary level, RE lessons are still voluntary.

In the school year 2004/2005 in state schools three times as many first year pupils chose RE than chose Ethics. In church schools almost 100% of pupils chose RE, whereas in private schools just the opposite occurred – only 4% of families chose RE.

Across all primary school years, there were about twice as many pupils opting for RE rather than Ethics in state schools. In private schools these figures are reversed. Almost all pupils from the church schools chose RE.

Characteristics of Religious Education in State Schools

RE and ethics are called 'compulsory optional' subjects, which means that all parents have to make a choice between RE and ethics in state schools. Though RE and ethics should both be part of the school timetable, RE is often placed either very early in the morning or late in the afternoon, which is not a good time. This is because of the variety of RE and the fact that most of the RE teachers are not on the regular staff and come into schools as external teachers.

The aims of the RE, the contents of the RE syllabus and the books for teaching RE are, basically, the responsibility of the specific denominations. According to the Concord and the Agreement, the state promised to help subsidize the production of new textbooks. There are several churches that have already published whole sets of textbooks (Catholics, Lutherans, Orthodox, and recently even the Adventists).

Analysis and comparison of the goals and content of the RE syllabi currently used in Slovak state schools reveal significant common ground:

a) Aims - all churches aim to lead the child:

- into a relationship with Jesus Christ and the explicit expression of this confession;
- to know the Trinitarian God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit);
- to spiritual development in Christ, towards spiritual maturity;
- toward a positive attitude to his/her own confession;
- so that he/she develops into an integrated personality, able to be active in the church and in secular society.

b) Content

The following topics appear in most syllabi: God, creation, fall, sin, Biblical stories, Jesus Christ – life and teaching, Church, Creed, ten commandments, love, prayer, fellowship.

c) Methodology

There has been an evident shift developing away from the traditional way of teaching towards the use of more productive teaching methods, based on experiential learning. There have been several experiments with the project method, heuristic methods and the application of critical thinking (according to Bloom's taxonomy).

It is necessary to say that at present almost all of the existing RE curricula are in the process of transformation. Also the evangelical churches are preparing their own curricula, based on needs analysis, theological starting points and pedagogical-psychological principles.¹⁸

RE Teachers

The state is legally obliged to provide a subsidy for RE teachers' salaries. So all the churches that have a syllabus authorized by the church authorities and the Ministry of Education also have the right to ask a headteacher of any school to provide an RE class focused on their own church/denomination and to name their own teachers. On the other hand, the choice might be limited in a certain way if the groups are too small (a desirable size of the group would be a minimum of 12 children). Naturally there would be a financial restriction if all denominations decided to teach their own RE in one school. That is why some minority churches are trying to agree on a mixed common

¹⁸ The whole procedure can be observed on the new web-page of DETM: www.detm.org (English version – Division of Christian Education).

group of children if they want to have a paid teacher. Other smaller denominations would still prefer to teach their own RE even as unpaid volunteers. A research report of the present status of evangelical RE teachers carried out by Bradnanska, Masarik and Hanesova¹⁹ analyses the factors that motivate/de-motivate these teachers to go on teaching. They show deep needs for more effective support from the parents and the churches.

The RE teachers should achieve the same level of professional training as the other teachers. The requirement is both the Bachelor and Master Degrees. For pragmatic reasons, the teachers are prepared for a combination of at least two school subjects (RE and maths; RE and Slovak; RE and music; etc.). This means that one third of their study is devoted to RE, one third to the other subject and the last block of their studies consists of psychological and pedagogical subjects. They can be either graduates of theological schools with the pedagogical and psychological supplemental studies or they may be graduates of theological departments at teacher training faculties (like DETM). After 1989 six new faculties and departments came into existence where among others also RE teachers can be trained and educated (two Catholic universities have already been mentioned).

CONCLUSION

We conclude with two additional comments. First, similarly to Kusnierik,²⁰ in our study we focused on Slovakia not only because this is the country where we live, but because Slovakia, with its specific geographical location in the centre of Central Europe, with its history and culture might serve as a representative model, a case study for further research of the Central and Eastern-Europe region (comparing it with its neighbours and other countries in Europe and in the world).

Secondly, one might wonder why we presented such a detailed description of the school maintained by the minority (evangelical) churches in Slovakia. There are several simple reasons for this: a) the author of the study comes from this institution and

¹⁹ More about this: Bradnanska, N., Hanesova, D., Masarik, A. *Motivacia a prekazky v sluzbe katechetu (Motivation and obstacles in the ministry of catechists)*, in *Katechetika, historie, teologie III*. Ostrava : Universitas Ostraviensis, PF OU, 2006, p. 9 – 33.

²⁰ Kusnierik, J. *Evangelicals in Central Europe: A Case Study from Slovakia*. Bratislava: CityGate, 1997. p. 2.

knows its situation better than other schools; b) the Department of Evangelical Theology and Mission is objectively a quite unique phenomenon as it is the only ecumenical church school in Slovakia. Not only are there four churches involved in its governance and management, but there is also a wide scope of churches from where the students come. (In some years there were students coming from 8 – 10 various churches, denominations and Christian fellowships from up to 3 – 4 countries).

We started our overview of the current educational role of the churches with a description of its broader systematic (historical, legal, educational) context. Special attention was paid to the influence of history because “an understanding of history is important to understanding the present situation”²¹. In our opinion, it is primarily the role of churches to help the people to get rid of the sad memories of the past and of the residuals of Marxism; and to lead them towards real freedom of spirit and mind. This can be done by various ways that are so immanent in Christ’s church, e. g. by prayer, confession of mistakes, proclaiming the Gospel and charity. Here we have focused on the educational role of the churches via their teaching not only in parishes, and in their own schools but also by teaching religion in the state schools, which can help to heal the difficult past of Slovak inhabitants and to give new hope, to influence their priorities and values and to help them to focus on ultimate issues.

²¹ Kusnierik, J. *Evangelicals in Central Europe*, p. 4.