

---

# History of the faculty

---

The history of the Hussite Theological Faculty of Charles University starts in the early nineteen twenties and lasts to the present. It can be divided into a number of stages. Although it is predominately linked to the history of the Czechoslovak Hussite Church (hereinafter ČČSH), it has always evolved in a wider ecumenical framework which we can mention here only briefly.

## **Hussite Czechoslovak Protestant Theological Faculty 1921–1932**

After its establishment the Czechoslovak Church needed a place to educate future priests. Setting up a new faculty was out of the question. However, there was the possibility of sending theologians to the protestant Hussite Faculty which had been established shortly before.

The first student from the Czechoslovak Church enrolled at the Hussite Faculty in the academic year 1921/22. The number of students soon increased. The first professor representing the Czechoslovak Church was Karel Statečný who died in 1927.

The theologians of the Czechoslovak Church studying at the Hussite Faculty attended confessionally based lectures at the theological dormitory. These lectures were organized by the later professor of biblical theology, the patriarch František Kovář.

Due to apparent confessional differences between the Czechoslovak Church and the protestant church, the Czechoslovak Church made efforts to establish its own theological faculty, or rather a Theological College. This idea was put into practise in 1932 but only lasted two years.

## **The Theological College of the Czechoslovak Church 1932-1934**

Eighty-six full-time and six part-time students enrolled into the summer semester of 1932/33. Some of the Church representatives gave lectures at this independent college, including Alois Spisar, the patriarch Procházka, the bishop Rostislav J. Stejskal. As the institution was private, it faced significant financial and organisational difficulties. Therefore it was decided that the students of Czechoslovak faith would return to the Hussite Faculty.

## **Hussite Czechoslovak Protestant Theological Faculty 1934–1939. From 1935 the Czechoslovak Church Section**

In 1935 the Czechoslovak government issued a regulation changing the statute of the Hussite Faculty, in which the Czechoslovak Church had already run four departments.

A pedagogical department of the Czechoslovak Church was also established. Alois Spisar (theology, ethics) was elected the first full-time professor, who was succeeded by František Kovář (biblical studies, religious studies). A few years later F. M. Hník became an associate professor in Christian sociology. In the late thirties there were 130 candidates involved in Theological studies. The promising development was, however, interrupted by the Nazi German occupation which led to the closure of all Czech universities in November 1939.

## **The Czechoslovak Church Section at the Hussite Czechoslovak Protestant Theological Faculty (1945-1950)**

The Hussite Czechoslovak Protestant Theological Faculty (HČEFB) was opened in June 1945 according to the governmental decree No. 9/1945 Coll. dated 25 May 1945. The Faculty continued their activities according to its legal status dated 29 September 1938.

There were some changes in the pedagogical department of the Czechoslovak Church Section. The two full-time professors were A. Spisar a F. Kovář. F. M. Hník became a professor after his return from exile in London; O. Rutrle became a substitute teacher of practical theology and M. Novák a substitute teacher of the Old Testament. The historian M. Kaňák left to study in the USA immediately after he obtained a fellowship. F. M. Hník was elected the Dean of the Faculty for the year 1946/47. F. M. Hník, supported in his deanery by the president E. Beneš, was in 1947/48 replaced by the Professor J. L. Hromádka, who returned home from the USA in 1947. The latter, however, was a Protestant.

## Hussite Czechoslovak Theological Faculty 1950 – 1990

At the beginning of the existence of the Hussite Czechoslovak Protestant Theological Faculty in 1950 there were 223 students attending the Faculty and 14 professors giving lectures. The Hussite Faculty as well as other theological faculties in the former Czechoslovak Republic was newly reorganized. The Hussite Faculty was divided according to faith into two separate faculties: the Hussite Czechoslovak Theological Faculty in Prague for the Czechoslovak Church, and the Protestant Theological Faculty in Prague for the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren and some smaller protestant churches in Prague. Even though the reorganisation was made by the State, it was agreeable to all parties.

The situation was radically solved by the governmental decree No. 112/1950 Coll. on Theological Faculties dated 14 July 1950.

The Hussite Czechoslovak Theological Faculty was opened on 6 October 1950 by a constitutional meeting of the Faculty Board. The first Dean was Professor F. M. Hník. The Faculty became publicly known due to the academic celebration which took place in Karolinum on 16 October 1950. Seven main department professors, four minor department professors, two associate professors and five assistants were appointed. The Systematic Theology Department was led by Zdeněk Trtík, the Biblical Theology Department was, in 1950-51, led by the patriarch Kovář, after which it was taken over by Jindřich Mánek. Miroslav Novák was giving the Old Testament lectures in 1950-51. In 1950-1960 the talented Stanislav Heřmanský worked there as an assistant. The Practical Theology Department was headed by professor Otto Rutle (1950-61). The administrator of the Catechetics Department was Rudolf Horský, The Canon Law Department was led by the Head of the Central Board of CČSH Veleoslav Růžička. The Theory of Religion and Philosophy Department was newly reorganized and led by Jaroslav Světlý (1950-53). Jaroslav Kučera worked as an assistant in the period of 1950-60. The Social Sciences Department was shortly led by the Deputy Minister of Finance Bedřich Spáčil (1950-51). The lectures were led by Karel Rataj (1950-51), and Professors Karel Hlaváček (1951-52) and Josef Polák (1952-68).

The atheistic state made attempts to suppress the scientific and research activities organized by the Faculty and turn the Faculty into a purpose-built vocational school for practical ecclesiastical administration. The attempt was never successful and despite the risk, the Faculty stayed in touch with the representatives of liberal art both abroad and at home. In the years that followed, former students who were awarded the degree of associate professor took over the posts of their teachers. These were: Anežka Ebertová, Vladimír Kubáč, Jiřina Kubíková, Zdeněk Kučera, Milan Salajka a Zdeněk Sázava. The collaboration with the new postgraduate students was partially successful. However, the Faculty was not legally equal to other universities in the totalitarian regime. Both the teachers and the students found this very restrictive. Other Faculties had the same problem.

The democratic spirit of the Faculty was apparent in particular during the events connected with the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the origins of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1988 both at home and abroad, and due to the students' and teachers' activities during the events which culminated on 17 November 1989.

## The Hussite Theological Faculty of the Charles University

At the peak of the Velvet Revolution, on 1 December 1989, the prefect of the Hussite Czechoslovak Theological Faculty Jan Schwarz submitted an application to the academician Zdeněk Češka, the rector of the Charles University, in which he applied for incorporation of the Hussite Faculty into Charles University. This started negotiations which ended up with the formation of Act No. 163/1990 Coll. according to which the Catholic, Protestant and Hussite Theological Faculties were incorporated to Charles University. Struggling for the freedom of nation, church and science was how the Hussite Theological Faculty of the Charles University was established. Professor Zdeněk Kučera (born in 1930) was elected the dean of the Faculty. He also introduced a new form of studies with other disciplines being taught at the Faculty along with theology. In this way the Faculty prepared not only clergyman, but also other specialists (religionists, philosophers and ethicists, social and charity workers). The Faculty also started to teach programmes focused on Eastern Christianity and Judaism, and separate Old Catholic and Orthodox Theology programmes.