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**Review of Dirksen's "Religionsfreiheit in Ungarn.
Verfassungspolitik und -wirklichkeit am Beispiel Kleiner
Religionsgemeinschaften in Ungarn 1845–1945 Unter Besonderer
Berücksichtigung der Horthy-Zeit" [Freedom of Religion in
Hungary: Constitutional Politics and Reality for Small Churches in
Hungary between 1845-1945, with Special Focus on the Horthy
Era]**

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BOOK REVIEWS

Dirksen, Annegret. *Religionsfreiheit in Ungarn. Verfassungspolitik und -wirklichkeit am Beispiel Kleiner Religionsgemeinschaften in Ungarn 1845–1945 Unter Besonderer Berücksichtigung der Horthy-Zeit.* [Freedom of Religion in Hungary: Constitutional Politics and Reality for Small Churches in Hungary between 1845-1945, with Special Focus on the Horthy Era]. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2016. 690pp.

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Annegret Dirksen's massive volume, *Religionsfreiheit in Ungarn* [Freedom of Religion in Hungary], encompasses 100 years, from 1845 to 1945. In this book, she analyzes the constitutional policy of Hungary during this period, choosing to focus on the smaller religious communities (called "free churches" in Hungary). Out of these 100 years, the last 25 years are particularly emphasized. Remarkably, during Miklós Horthy's regency, not only Jews, but other religious minorities were also subjected to increasingly strong discrimination. After the treaty of Trianon (which Hungarians consider a national tragedy), a new approach to minority groups was bolstered by the Hungarian government, which had a significant impact on religious policies, in addition to the cultural and economic life. After the First World War, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was dismembered by the victorious countries, reducing the former territory of Hungary to one-third of its former size. This national tragedy impacted religious policy, as building a new nation became the primary task.

In the first chapter of the book (pp. 21-35), Dirksen reviews the most important stages of religious legislation in Hungary from the foundation of the state to the period under consideration. She touches upon Transylvania, which was a part of Hungary, but since 1920, has belonged to Romania. Transylvania has particular importance in the history of religious tolerance because the first order to achieve inter-religious peace (*Receptae Religiones Torda* 1542-45) in the world was given here, which declared that everyone has the right to follow their own religion. In the second chapter (pp. 35-58), the author presents the religious laws of

the Reform era, which were born in an intellectual atmosphere of liberal thinking about religion, favoring the smaller religious communities.

In the third chapter (pp. 58-80), the author describes the use of liberal religious laws, analyzing the status of the Seventh-day Adventists, Baptists, and Nazarenes. In the short fourth chapter (pp. 80-88), the era of the First World War is studied, during which Jehovah's Witnesses had a serious legal conflict because of their refusal to use weapons.

According to the size of the book, we can consider these chapters to be legal-historical antecedents. After these, the author moves on to her primary subject—a profound analysis of the period between the two World Wars.

In the fifth chapter (pp. 88-364), spanning over 250 pages, the religious policy of the period between the two World Wars is examined, concerning all of the small but also major religious communities. Then, in the sixth chapter (pp. 364-579), the author focuses on the years of the Second World War, which could be considered another major section of her work.

The seventh and eighth chapters (pp. 579-651) contain a kind of outlook and summary. Some pages describe the era of communism (from 1950 to 1990) and the period after 1990. In the final chapter, the in-depth analyses are summarized perceptively, so she is able to present trends which have obvious relevance for today.

The thoroughness of the volume and its author is represented by the imposing list of sources and bibliography (pp. 656-690). For Dirksen, the knowledge of the Hungarian language provided a unique opportunity for the exploration of sources, as well as for the secondary analysis of the works published in the Hungarian language by those who research this era.

Dirksen notes that the 1930s are characterized by the growing state control, and the political emphasis on national unity, and as the consequence of these, increasingly radical

processes were imposed on the smaller religious communities. Some ‘killer phrases’ are incorporated into the public discourse, such as “maintenance of religious peace” or “security of public life.” These ideas legitimized the restrictions of religious freedom.

The restrictions were carried out by the police, for which various regulations were given to track and prevent the freedom of assembly and the publishing activities of non-registered religious communities (called sects). Special attention was paid to Nazarenes and Jehovah’s Witnesses, who were already considered to be enemies of national unity and security due to their refusal to serve in armed military service for reasons of faith. As the Second World War and military preparations for it were getting closer, the internal regulations of military and home affair ministries were proliferating, including a call to ban those communities that refuse military service. The equality and justice themes in the teachings of the Jehovah’s Witnesses and other millenarian churches were classified as communist propaganda. The laws against Jews fit in this trend of radicalization, which, besides supporting the so called “traditional churches,” also legalized the restrictions on non-traditional religious groups. In the 1930s, the Hungarian circumstances were very similar to the conditions of Hitler’s Germany.

The smaller religious communities reacted to the legal and regulatory restrictions during the war years in different ways. The Adventists founded a community under a new name, which allowed military services and strove to prove its patriotism in every way possible. The Pentecostal community united with the Methodists. The Nazarenes tried to prove by petitions that there was a need for alternative services during wars, in which they would participate without any hesitation. The Jehovah’s Witnesses went underground and continued their activities.

Despite the restrictive measures, the authorities were astonished and annoyed that the activity of “sects” did not abate, especially the activity of the Jehovah’s Witnesses and

Nazarenes. The authorities responded with administrative proceedings, violence, and imprisonment, as well as by the exile of members of these groups to the labor camp of Bor in Serbia.

After the Second World War (1945-1948), the new government lifted the previously-passed laws and regulations related to the smaller religious communities. The short transitional period ended with the communist takeover. Due to the takeover, the religious policy changed from complete freedom of religion granted after the war to the complete intolerance of religion.

Beginning in 1989 with the collapse of communism and regime change, Hungary engaged in a complete revision of the constitution, of which one important element is separation of state and church, as well as the guarantee of the freedom of religion, with a specific law on the freedom of conscience and religion.

The latest development is from 2011, when the right-wing oriented government passed a new law on religion, which regards 14 religious communities as recognized religious communities, while the rest are considered to be religious associations. Although the Orbán government is not directly challenging the repeal of the communist laws related to religion, the logic of the government still reminds one of the logic of the Kádár regime and the Horthy system, which classified the religious communities according to the perceived extent and clarity of their loyalty to the policies of the government.

In conclusion, the author has accomplished very diligent and careful work in the archival and scholarly exploration of the discussed topic, doing a great service for those who are interested in the history of Hungary's smaller churches and are able to read German. In a wider context, it contributes to a deeper understanding of the historical background of the contemporary religious and church policy in Hungary.