

Trust in the Church Hierarchy among the Underground Church Community in Post-1968 Slovakia

Agáta Šústová Drelová

Abstract

ŠÚSTOVÁ DRELOVÁ, Agáta. Trust in the Church Hierarchy among the Underground Church Community in Post-1968 Slovakia

In the post-1968 era, trust in the official hierarchy among the catholic faithful was far from guaranteed. With the church hierarchy under tight state control and effectively existing on two levels—officially and “underground”—the levels of trust fluctuated and its character changed. Trust was constructed, challenged and negotiated. Drawing on an analysis of the catholic discourse in late socialism, I argue that the character and level of trust in the local catholic hierarchy changed dynamically according to the current hierarchy’s relationship to the communist party-state, the hierarchy’s relationship with the Vatican and the level and quality of the hierarchy’s relationship with the underground community itself.

Keywords: trust, Czechoslovakia, underground church, hierarchy, late socialism

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31577/forhist.2021.15.2.8>

František Mikloško, one of the leading members of the underground community of (Roman) Catholic activists—the Underground Church—recently defined the arrangement as “encompassing everything from the life of the Church which was forbidden under the threat of persecution by the state.”¹ Defining the underground Church specifically in relation to the official Church was no new exercise for Mikloško. Ever since the advent of the underground community in the late 1940s—by-and-large in reaction to the significant and harsh curtailment of religious life by the party-state ruled by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and its Church law churches—the underground Church found itself in a precarious position; constantly challenged by both official authorities and the official church which, for the most part, sought to follow the state rulings. (Self)defining was a way of coping with this situation, both institutionally and mentally. What most resulting definitions shared was an emphasis on the underground community’s unity with the hierarchy, both at its national and supranational levels. This was in part a reaction to two reoccurring challenges to the status and definition of the Underground Church: first, pre-1989, systematic denigration by the repressive apparatus intended to (out)cast these activists as not belonging to the church proper and, second, to post-1989 uncertainty about the community’s

The research used in this study was carried out in the scope of the grant VEGA 2/0140/18 “Trust and distrust in political environment of the Cold War Europe”.

1 VYBÍRALOVÁ, Eva. Tajná církev v Česlovensku byla prorockým hlasem, Rozhovor s Františkem Mikloškem o skryté církvi. In *Paměť a dějiny*, 2020, Vol. 14, No. 4, p. 72. https://www.ustrcr.cz/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/PD_4_20_s72-85.pdf

standing in relation to the present-day current hierarchy.² This study dives deeper into these processes of self-definition as it developed during the late socialist period leading up to 1989, focusing in particular on the construction and dynamics of trust vis-a-vis the Church hierarchy, especially the Bishops and Ordinaries.

What role did trust play for the underground Church members? The above, self-definition implies trust in the hierarchy to be central, and at the same time, stable and given. However, such assumptions overshadow the tensions and distrust that were part-and-parcel of the relationship with the hierarchy. Indeed, as is maintained throughout this study, a distinction must be made between the underground church's vision and its everyday reality, between assuming and implying trust and its everyday construction, or better—reconstruction. This article seeks to shed light on the development of the relationship between underground Church members and the official hierarchy, including those members of the Church who were part of the priest association Združenie katolíckych duchovných Pacem in terris (The Association of Catholic Clergy Pacem in Terris, ZKD-PIT), which was loyal to the regime and whose members typically worked as regime aides within the Church.

I argue that the construction of trust was a dynamic process relative to the hierarchy's present relationship to the Communist party-state and its right-hand in the church, the ZKD-PIT,³ dependent on the hierarchy's relationship to the Vatican and, last but not least, the underground community itself. The focus is on the late socialist era, the era of normalisation and power consolidation that followed in the wake of the Prague Spring suppression in 1968.

A History of Trust and Mistrust within the Church

The origins of the underground Church date back to the late 1940s and 1950s, to the period when the Catholic Church in Slovakia was facing the harshest persecution by the communist state. At the time, the ruling party had incarcerated most members of the Czechoslovak episcopate and so the Vatican decided to ordain underground Bishops to ensure that the Church in Czechoslovakia would not be left without a functional hierarchy. The underground Church of the 1940s and 1950s was led by secretly ordained Bishops and clergy,⁴ with the laity also playing an important role, especially those who had been active in the pre-communist Catholic Action and the Rodina community established by the Croatian anti-fascist priest, Tomislav Poglajen Kolakovič.⁵ The communist state banned Catholic associations but many lay men and women continued to meet in secret. Most of the leaders of these lay groups were eventually detained and sentenced to long-term imprisonment. During the 1960s, these Catholics were released and helped to launch Church reform in

2 In its most recent metamorphosis, the Secret Church is being portrayed as never divided from the official Church. In part, this emphasis on unity is a response to attempts emerging within the Catholic milieu to cast (out) the underground community as a Czechoslovak-ist or laicist aberration from the official hierarchy. This was part of a broader campaign to strengthen the legitimacy of the hierarchy in defiance of the increasing questioning it has faced in the aftermath of the dubious suspension of Archbishop Róbert Bezák. Likewise, nationalist historiographies of the late socialist period tend to portray the underground Church as a “Czechoslovak-ist” interest group maintaining shaky relations with the Church hierarchy.

3 The Association of Catholic Clergy Pacem in Terris, was a regime-sponsored organisation of Catholic clergy in Communist Czechoslovakia between 1971 and 1989. Its name was taken from the well-known encyclical *Pacem in Terris* of the reform Pope John XXIII.

4 MIKLOŠKO, František. *Nebudete ich môcť rozvrátiť. Z osudov katolíckej cirkvi na Slovensku v rokoch 1943 – 89*. Bratislava : Archa, 1991, pp. 62–67.

5 MIKLOŠKO 1991, pp. 159–161.

the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, a second ecumenical council which addressed the relationship between the Catholic Church and the modern world. Central to this reform was the Project of Council Renewal (Dielo koncilovej obnovy) (DKO). The priority of Czech and Slovak Catholics at the time was a de-politicisation and de-coupling of the Church and state.

The DKO was central to rebuilding the lines of trust between the public church and the underground Church, which had been severed with the existence and persecution of people Catholicism. At the DKO meetings (the central one took place in Velehrad in May 1968), the laity met with the hierarchy to discuss the future of the church. In particular, the hierarchy sought to assert itself, arguing against the hitherto very limited and limiting definition of religious freedom. In the words of Bishop of Nitra diocese Eduard Nécsey:

Religious freedom is a broader term. Alongside the full freedom of conducting rituals, it also demands the Church to have the freedom to manage its matters in accord with the laws of the Church, the right to educate future priests, to have [religious] orders and to religious instruction etc. This necessitates proper media and the right to use radio and television, since these belong also to the religious citizens.⁶

This and other similar pronouncements were crucial, not only for containing the state's influence in the Church, but also in presenting the hierarchy as trustworthy for the Catholic faithful and especially the former members of the underground Church.

The 1970s – The Low Point of Trust

The early 1970s saw several developments in terms of local and transnational Church organisation as well as in structure and ideology, which dealt a serious blow to the Catholic activists' trust in the local hierarchy as well as in the Vatican. With the end of the Prague Spring, these Catholics were forced back to the “underground”, not so much forcefully but certainly so in the institutional subjugation of the Church to the state. The beginning of the 1970s in particular deeply challenged the rudimentary trust that was being built along the common lines created during the Prague Spring.

The process of normalisation in religious life involved renewed state control of the Catholic hierarchy, the revival of the pro-state “patriotic” clergy movement within the Church and the suppression of re-emerging and re-assertive Catholic societies and orders, as well as the issue of religious instruction at schools.⁷ The Church was re-established as a “patriotic Church” and was not allowed to function independent of the Communist state. The Project of Council Renewal was abolished and the project's leaders, who by that time had assumed positions in bishoprics, were replaced with patriotic priests.⁸ In 1971, a new association of clergy loyal to the Socialist state, the ZKD-PIT, was established and immediately assumed full control of the Church and the decimated hierarchy. In addition to its original “patriotic” mission, the pro-Communist priests made support for peace—in its

6 *Katolícke noviny*, 19 May 1968, Quoted in: VNUK, František. Dielo koncilovej obnovy (K 50. Výročiu jeho vzniku a zániku. In *Aliancia za nedeľu*, 8 May 2018. <http://alianciazanedelu.sk/archiv/1648>

7 PEŠEK, Jan – BARNOVSKÝ, Michal. *V zovretí normalizácie. Cirkvi na Slovensku 1969 – 1980*. Bratislava : VEDA, 2016, pp. 24–25.

8 PEŠEK – BARNOVSKÝ 2016, pp. 21, 24–25.

Communist interpretation—their main task.⁹ Indeed, the official name bore the title of the papal encyclical *Pacem in Terris*; calling for peace.

The Vatican played crucial role in the reconstruction and legitimisation of the patriotic Church after the Prague Spring. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Vatican acknowledged communist governments as legitimate¹⁰ and seemed to have come very close to accepting the Church as imagined by the Communists. First, the Holy See agreed to name three new bishops, Ján Pásztor, Jozef Feranec, Július Gábriš, who were known for their support of the Communist Party. These three Bishops endorsed the post-Prague Spring regime and supported current political leadership. On a rhetorical level, the Church hierarchy in Slovakia regularly declared its “socialist patriotism” and Church leadership publicly reiterated its attachment to “the socialist homeland, a commitment to the revolutionary transformation of society [and] the cause of communism.”¹¹ The Bishops were also ready to reject any attempts to question the socialist state’s legitimacy, policies or rhetoric. In 1977, when the human rights movement Charter 77 demanded that the Czechoslovak state observe its own obligations to the Helsinki Final Act, the Bishops condemned the initiative as an unfair and unpatriotic attack on the socialist state.¹² The Czechoslovak hierarchy did not see these issues as problematic and continued to express their support for the “peace” efforts of the state.¹³ Second, the Vatican agreed to reduce support for Slovak Catholic émigrés in Rome, especially those who were counted amongst the most consistent critics of the “patriotic” Church. Finally, the Vatican agreed to circumscribe the role of the secretly ordained bishops and clergy.

The Vatican weakened its contacts with the best-known representatives of both groups, namely Bishop Pavol Hnilica, who had been active in the Rome emigration but was ordered to be silent on the situation of the church in Czechoslovakia, whilst the secretly ordained Bishop Ján Korec was ordered to stop underground ordinations.¹⁴

The Church being nearly fully absorbed by the state was, however, challenged by the Vatican itself after the election of Pope John Paul II in 1978. Let us first explore how the underground Church responded to this fundamental challenge to its connection with Rome, i.e., its institutional lifeline.

Towards the end of the 1970s, the underground Church began to catch a second wind, focusing now on expanding its reach among the Catholic laity.¹⁵ Silvester Krčméry and Vladimír Jukl, the lay leaders of the underground community, did this primarily through

9 See e.g.: HOCHMANN, František. *Ve službách dobra a pokoje. Sborník druhého celostátního sjezdu Sdružení katolických duchovních Pacem in terris, ČSSR roku 1980*. Praha : Ústřední církevní nakladatelství, 1981.

10 LUXMOORE, Jonathan – BABIUCH, Jolanta. *The Vatican and the Red Flag. The Struggle for the Soul of Eastern Europe*. New York : Geoffrey Chapman, 1999, pp. 110–153.

11 WHITE, Stephen. *Russia's new politics: The management of a Postcommunist Society*. 4th ed. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2004 (1st edition 1999), p. 182.

12 PEŠEK – BARNOVSKÝ 2016, pp. 86–87.

13 Every issue of *Duchovní pastier*, the weekly controlled by Pacem in Terris, included reports documenting the various ways in which the Church expressed its support for the state. See e.g. Zo života Pacem in terris. In *Duchovní pastier*, 10 December 1973, p. 443; *Společně za mír a život, proti jaderné válce*. Praha : Svoboda, 1983.

14 HALAS, X. František. *Fenomén Vatikán. Idea, dějiny a současnost papežství – Diplomacie Svatého stolce – České země a Vatikán*. Brno : Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2004, pp. 611–623; HRABOVEC, Emília. *Slovensko a Svätá stolica v kontexte vatikánskej východnej politiky (1962–1989)*. Bratislava : Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave, 2016, pp. 158–159.

15 Interview with Vladimír Jukl [in Slovak], interviewer Agáta Šústová Drellová, from 7 January 2010; Interview with František Mikloško [in Slovak], interviewer Agáta Šústová Drellová, from 13 July 2010; Interview with Ján Carnogurský [in Slovak], interviewer Agáta Šústová Drellová, from 11 November 2011.

forging personal relationships with students studying in Bratislava who had returned to their hometowns and built up new communities. The entire mobilisation happened clandestinely, outside of the official Church. The Slovak underground Church developed a structure with many different branches or movements that offered Slovak Catholics of all ages and needs a range of activities and programs for the kind of spiritual development they were unable to pursue in the official Catholic Church, or in the public sphere more generally.¹⁶ This community included the Lay Apostolate, the Fatima Movement, the Movement of Christian Families, the Focolare Movement, the Movement of Christian Youth Associations, as well as clandestinely organised communities of male religious orders (Salesians, Franciscans, Jesuits, etc.) and female religious orders. The leaders of these organisations estimated membership in the 1970s at around 2000, though by the 1980s, this number had grown to 5000 making the underground Church the largest non-communist independent association in the country.¹⁷ By the mid-1970s, the growing underground Church organised meetings nationwide and its leaders began to think about the public engagement of these communities.¹⁸ After “minor work” in secret in the 1970s, the goal of the underground Church in the 1980s, according to Jukl, became to “appeal to the masses.”¹⁹

Catholic activists focused on work outside of the traditional spaces of the church and accordingly, their first initiatives were attempted without the official Church structures. Towards the end of the 1970s, as Catholic Churches in the wider region—particularly in Poland—were increasingly involved with their nations and began to make contacts with independent associations, it was clear to the underground Catholics in Slovakia that the Czechoslovak state was not going to allow the emergence of alternative public structures. Also, the Slovak Church hierarchy was not going to abandon support for the state in this regard,²⁰ which became very clear after the emergence of Charter 77 in 1977. Encouraged by the fact that the Czechoslovak government had signed the Helsinki Accords (the final act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe), which specified, among other things, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and belief, the Charter 77 movement began to monitor observance of these rights by the Czechoslovak state and criticise any shortcomings.²¹

The underground Slovak Catholics, now inspired by the emergence of Charter 77, attempted the first grassroots mobilisation of Catholics, focusing on religious rights. The lay leaders of underground Church communities, Jukl and Krčméry, composed a “memorandum” criticising the current situation of the churches, especially the strict official control of their public actions and suppression of any activities which were not allowed by the state.²² In the late 1970s, they began to gather signatures in support of the memo-

16 For Rodinné spoločenstvo (Family Fellowship) see: HROMNÍK, Milan. Hnutie kresťanských rodín na Slovensku. In *Viera a Život*, 1991, Vol. 1, No. 3, pp. 208–210.

17 Interview with Vladimír Jukl [in Slovak], interviewer Agáta Šústová Drelová, from 7 January 2010; Interview with František Mikloško [in Slovak], interviewer Agáta Šústová Drelová, from 13 July 2010; Interview with Ján Čarnogurský [in Slovak], interviewer Agáta Šústová Drelová, from 11 November 2011.

18 Interview with Vladimír Jukl, from 7 January 2010.

19 Interview with Vladimír Jukl, from 7 January 2010.

20 See e.g.: BLAŽEK, Petr (ed.) *Opozice a odpor proti komunistickému režimu v Československu, 1968 – 1989*. Praha : Dokořán, 2005.

21 For full text of the Final Accords see <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/osce/basics/finalact75.htm> [last viewed 5 September 2015].

22 LETZ, Róbert. Prenasledovanie Kresťanov na Slovensku. In MIKLOŠKO, František – SMOLÍK, Peter – SMOLÍK-OVÁ, Gabriela (eds.) *Zločiny Komunizmu na Slovensku 1948 – 1989, Vol. 1*. Prešov : Vydavateľstvo Michala Vaška, 2001, pp. 267–335.

randum²³ though it eventually failed, as some underground Church members rejected it as an “unnecessary provocation.”²⁴

Jukl and Krčméry understood this rejection as a signal that the underground Church was not strong enough to mobilise on its own in public.²⁵ Not only was the hierarchy unsupportive of independent Catholic organisation, but the underground Catholic leaders did not seem to have enough support within their own communities. However, at about the same time, another event took place that would greatly impact Catholics in Czechoslovakia and elsewhere: Karol Józef Wojtyła was elected pope, taking the name John Paul II. This appointment was crucial in encouraging wider segments of the underground Church to become involved in the public life of the official Church. There were also attempts to encourage the leaders of the official Church to weaken their ties with the state and support grassroots Catholic mobilisation.

Rebuilding Trust in 1980 – Within the Hierarchy and Against *Pacem in Terris*

Shortly after taking office, John Paul II presented a programme that would become one of the central planes for rebuilding the underground Church’s trust in the papacy and in the local hierarchy. The pope called on individual Churches to engage in what was effectively a cultural nationalist project, aimed “to regenerate the true character of the nation, which is to be manifested in its culture, that is, in its art, thought, and a way of life.”²⁶ Considered together with the papal documents on human rights and social justice, this call compelled Catholics to what James R. Felak coined “a Wojtyła paradigm”—a combination of “patriotism with openness to reconciliation, bridge-building, and cooperation, all concerns fostered by the Catholic Church at least since the Second Vatican Council.”²⁷ In Eastern Europe, this cultural nationalism was part of a broader programme of public engagement in “moral resistance”, which per the pope, ought to address two main objectives: the re-awakening of each nation’s Christian spirit through culture, and a historical awareness and identification of the values and ideas which Christians and non-believers hold in common.²⁸

He used anniversaries to promote this agenda and present the Catholic Church as an integral part of the individual nations of Central and Eastern Europe and their national histories. In 1984, Pope John Paul II announced the start of the Methodian Year, commemorating the 1100th anniversary of the death of St. Methodius. Although this anniversary was intended by to be a common celebration for all Slavic nations, the pope focused especially on Czechoslovakia. He planned to pay an official visit to the country to celebrate the famous ninth-century mission as a “Christianising mission.”²⁹ Two years later, John Paul II announced the Church-wide celebration of a special “Marian year”, which was to be

23 Interview with Vladimír Jukl, from 7 January 2010.

24 Interview with Vladimír Jukl, from 7 January 2010.

25 ŠIMULČÍK, Ján. *Zápas o nádej. Kroniky tajných kňazov 1969 – 1989*. Prešov : Vydavateľstvo Michala Vaška, 2002, pp. 76–77.

26 See e.g.: HUTCHINSON, John. Cultural nationalism. In BREUILLY, John (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism. Oxford handbooks in history*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 75–96.

27 FELAK, James. *A Wojtyła Paradigm for Addressing Historically*. (Unpublished manuscript, University of Washington, 2014).

28 LUXMOORE – BABIUCH 1999, p. 181.

29 HALKO, Jozef. „Nemohol som k vám prísť...“ (O pokusoch pozvať pápeža Jána Pavla II. do komunistického Československa). In *Pamäť národa*, 2011, Vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 44–49.

commemorated on 7 June 1987 and completed on 15 August 1988.³⁰ It would be devoted to Mary, “Mother of God and Mother of the Church”, and would mark the 2000th anniversary of the birth of Mary. Similar to the Methodian year, the Marian year was intended to be preparation for the 2000th anniversary of the birth of Christ. In accounts written by underground Catholics, the Marian year is portrayed as the “resurrection of the Church” and at the same time, the culmination of the “national awakening” of Catholics encouraged by John Paul II.³¹

The new pope did not completely abandon the conciliatory approach maintained by the two previous popes, continuing to acknowledge the communist governments as legal representatives of the socialist states, and so diplomatic negotiations with the Czechoslovak state went on as before. However, he no longer saw these governments as the sole representatives of their nations and began to talk about groups of Catholics excluded from the socialist patriotic project as the “true representatives of the nation.” As he told Vatican-accredited diplomats shortly after his election, the Church “remained open to every country and regime in keeping with proven means of diplomacy and negotiation.” However, he suggested that these terms were not exclusive and furthermore, not the “authentic representatives of nations.” At a meeting with diplomats, the pope mentioned spokesmen for “governments, regimes, and political structures”, but also talked about “authentic representatives of peoples and nations”.³² Who these authentic representatives were became clear in his new approach to émigrés and underground communities, especially in how he actively sought to involve these groups into public and private religious life.

John Paul II made gestures of trust towards Catholic activists who were challenged during the previous pontificate. He supported lay movements, especially those which were known for their loyalty to the papacy, as was the case of the leading lay Catholic movement, Slovakia’s Lay Apostolate. In fact, this pope was crucial for the emergence of the Slovak underground Church.³³ A trip by the Slovak Catholic laity to the pope’s visit to Poland in 1983, which was vital for the confidence of the underground Church, did not happen solely on their own initiative. During the visit to Poland, John Paul II “invited” Jukl and Krčméry to visit.³⁴ Later, in 1987, these laymen would be invited to the Synod of Bishops held in Rome as representatives of the Slovak laity.³⁵ The pope not only encouraged Catholics to become involved in the creation of nationalised culture, but he himself personally engaged in creating this culture, in a sense showing these actors how to do it.

Last but not least, the papacy played an important role in the underground Church’s reconstruction of trust in the hierarchy. The main impulse was papal support for the Catholic hierarchy (exemplified especially in *Quidam Episcopi* and letters to the local hierarchy), as central leaders of the Church on one hand, and rejection of the current leading role of the ZKD-PIT on the other. In the early 1980s, underground Church leaders sent a letter to members of the ZKD-PIT and the Slovak episcopate (undated), in which they protested against the ZKD-PIT, complaining that the current level and form of involve-

30 WEIGEL, George. *Witness to Hope. The Biography of Pope John Paul II*. New York : Cliff Street Books, 1999, p. 527.

31 MIKLOŠKO 1991, p. 138.

32 *L’Osservatore Romano*, 19 October and 15 December, quoted in: LUXMOORE – BABIUCH 1999, p. 208.

33 JUKL, Vladimír. Gabriel. In ŠIMULČÍK, Ján (ed.) *Zápas o nádej*. Bratislava : Vydavateľstvo Michala Vaška, 2000, pp. 55–56.

34 MIKLOŠKO 1991, p. 126.

35 PEŠEK – BARNOVSKÝ 2016, p. 180.

ment of the Catholic Church in public life in Czechoslovakia was not satisfactory. They condemned the fact that the laity was not allowed to play any role in the public engagement of the Church.³⁶

Clearly influenced by the pope and his understanding of national history, these laity groups thought that since priests had been connected “with their nations and their histories, with the society in which they live...It is therefore legitimate to ask whether their [public] work...addresses the real problems of society in which we live and reflects the responsibility we as Catholics have for its present and future.”³⁷ They did not protest the ZKD-PIT’s engagement for “peace”, or for that matter, the “building of the socialist system”, but the way this was done, especially the fact that its public involvement reflected the ideology of the ruling Communist Party rather than the current teachings of the Catholic Church.³⁸ Peace, they felt, could not be separated from justice—a respect for human rights—and it was “fair”, according to these Catholics, that in public life, the Church should be free from the state. They also believed that not only the ZKD-PIT, but also other segments of the Church should be involved in this public life and accordingly, in the creation of a nationalised culture. They felt that the current level of public engagement of the Catholic hierarchy and the ZKD-PIT did not sufficiently reflect “the needs of the faithful” and more broadly, the nation. The Church, in their view, was supposed to “bring the Christian spirit into societal thought, morals, laws, and the structure of society.”³⁹ The papal appeal for mobilisation of the Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia during the Methodian year was seen by many of these underground Catholics as a call to engage in the life of the nation and in the creation of a nationalised culture in more active ways.

This anniversary was, of course, especially pertinent to Czechoslovakia, though not only because Cyril and Methodius began their Christian mission in its territory in Great Moravia.⁴⁰ The pope held up Methodius, the first Archbishop of Pannonia, as a role model for the Episcopate and, more broadly, Church leaders in Czechoslovakia. At various occasions in the run up to and during the anniversary year, John Paul II emphasized Methodius’ assertive Church leadership and “willingness to suffer for the Church”, as well as preservation of the local Church’s unity with Rome.⁴¹

In sum, the pope used his power to begin rebuilding trust and provided symbolic language—a return to Christian roots and cultural forms, like rituals and pilgrimages—to forge this trust.

The Communist state pushed back, widely engaging the ZKD-PIT in a campaign against the papal programme, but some members of the hierarchy, including one Bishop, dissented, opening a new space for building a mutual trust with underground Church community, which had in the meantime, emerged as a powerful presence at traditional pilgrimages.

36 ŠIMULČÍK, Ján (ed.) *Združenie katolíckych duchovných Pacem in terris. Výber zo samizdatových dokumentov 1969 – 1989*. Prešov : Vydavateľstvo Michala Vaška, 2002, No. 6, pp. 93–102.

37 ŠIMULČÍK 2002, *Združenie*, No. 6, p. 94.

38 ŠIMULČÍK 2002, *Združenie*, No. 6, p. 102.

39 MIKLOŠKO 1991, p. 131.

40 CASAROLI, Agostino. *Trýzeň Trpělivosti. Svätý stolec a komunistické země (1963 – 1989)*. Praha : Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 2001, pp. 180–183.

41 Kázeň sv. Otca Jána Pavla II.: „Otcovia viery a učítelia kultúry“, ktorú predniesol 14. februára 1985 v bazilike Sv. Klimenta v Ríme. In HNILICA, Ján. *Svätí Cyril a Metod. Horliví hlásatelia Božieho Slova a verní pastieri cirkvi*. Bratislava : Alfa, 1990, p. 182.

Bishop Gábriš of the Trnava diocese planned to use the Methodian year as preparation for the consecration to Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows. The act of consecration would be done on the feast of Cyril and Methodius in July 1985. On 16 September 1984, Gábriš addressed a congregation of more than 50 000 mostly young people, describing as he saw it, the “vital” role of Marian devotion in the past, present and future of the Slovak nation.⁴² According to the bishop “Christianity gave birth to our nation...[and] the Marian Cult allowed for happy historical evolution.” Therefore, he told the audience “We are a Marian nation!”⁴³ He then went on to describe the fate of the Slovak Republic as closely interrelated with the fate of the Catholic Church.

In some respects, the bishop followed the papal call for hierarchies to engage in the public revival of nationalised culture, but in several important respects, he did not follow the papal interpretation of national histories. For example, Gábriš did not provide any special role for the Vatican in this narrative, as had been emphasized by John Paul II. Nor did he place the Slovak nation within the broader programme of European unification, the key motivation behind the papal interpretation. The sermon was nonetheless popular, even among underground Catholics, who strongly pushed for loyalty to the papacy in the Church.⁴⁴ This sermon was embraced by these Slovak Catholics as the authentic history of the Slovak nation and became central to their understanding of the current standing of the Slovak Church, for their construction of a national Catholic narrative, and ultimately for their creation of a nationalised public Catholic culture. For underground Catholics, this was the first time the Church had been positioned in the broader narrative of Slovak history and from this point on, these Catholics began to reciprocate this national Catholic narrative as an important part of their involvement with the official national identity.⁴⁵ This recognition of underground Catholics as part of the Catholic Church with the Slovak nation through suffering was unwittingly supported by the official authorities.

Pilgrimages as Spaces of Trust

The opening event of the Marian year, a pilgrimage to Šaštín on the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows in September 1987, helped to form the still rather diverse underground community into a unified public community. According to *samizdat*⁴⁶ reports, the event was attended by over 2000 young people who travelled to Šaštín from around Slovakia, also organising an all-night programme in the basilica.⁴⁷ At the pilgrimage, the leaders around Jukl, Mikloško and Krčméry organised the first nation-wide meeting of the various groups that constituted the underground Church, similar to meeting that took place in Levoča in

42 Šaštínsky príhovor otca biskupa Gábriša. In *Náboženstvo a súčasnosť*, 1984, No. 5, p. 8.

43 Šaštínsky príhovor 1984, p. 8.

44 Interview with Július Brocka [in Slovak], interviewer Agáta Šústová Drelová, from 13 July 2010; Interview with Vladimír Jukl, from 7 January 2010; Interview with František Mikloško [in Slovak], interviewer Agáta Šústová Drelová, from 13 July 2010; Interview with Pavol Abrhan [in Slovak], interviewer Agáta Šústová Drelová, from 23 July 2010.

45 KOREC, Ján Ch.. “Slovensko čo robíš”. In *Náboženstvo a súčasnosť*, 1983, No. 3, pp. 2–3; Mária v dejinách spásy. In *Rodinné spoločenstvo*, 1985, No. 4, pp. 2–6; Cesta národa s jeho Patrónkou. In *Náboženstvo a súčasnosť*, 1985, No. 3, p. 2; Sedembolestná. In *Náboženstvo a súčasnosť*, 1984, No. 3, pp. 2–3; Zsväcujúca modlitba slovenského národa Sedembolestnej Panne Márii. In *Náboženstvo a súčasnosť*, 1985, No. 1, p. 9; Mariánska tradícia v našom národe. In *Pokoj a dobro*, 1985, p. 10.

46 The term, Russian for self-publishing, was used across Central Eastern Europe, especially during the Communist era, to refer to both the dissident practice of clandestine makeshift publishing of censored materials (original production as well as copies of officially blacklisted texts) and to the products of this practice.

47 Šaštín – September 1987. In *Náboženstvo a súčasnosť*, 1987, No. 5, p. 11; See also HLINKA, Anton. *Sila slabých a slabosť silných. Cirkev na Slovensku v rokoch 1945 – 89*. Bratislava : Tatran, 1990, p. 305.

July 1987. At the event, leaders openly presented themselves to the community. The clerical leader of the underground community, Bishop Korec, joined the underground Catholics for the first time. The lay leaders, Jukl, Krčméry, Mikloško and Čarnogurský, also spoke during the all-night programme. Korec was present for the first time as a priest within the public space of the official Church—despite the fact that the official Church had not recognised him as a legitimate leader.

The Marian year of 1987 saw, according to both underground and official sources, unprecedentedly high numbers of pilgrims.⁴⁸ According to a samizdat author, the celebrations of the Marian year in Levoča with more than 200 000 pilgrims amply illustrate the increase;⁴⁹ 40 000 attended the national pilgrimage to Šaštín and 100 000 attended the event in Gaboltov, Eastern Slovakia.⁵⁰

Lay groups were also encouraged by leading members of the official church. The apostolic administrator Štefan Garaj delivered a sermon on the occasion of the Marian year, in which he told the congregation of more than 140 000 that “the love and loyalty of the Slovak nation for the Virgin Mary and her Son is a guarantee of the bright future of our people.”⁵¹ These words, published in samizdat, were praised as clear gestures of the administrator’s fidelity to the pope and therefore a demonstration of his trustworthiness. A samizdat report approvingly quoted Garaj, administrator of the Spiš Diocese, who said that the high number of attendees was also a clear sign of the “fidelity of the Slovak nation to our Heavenly Mother and her Son.”⁵² The growing numbers at pilgrimages were seen by the underground Church as a sign of the re-emerging Catholic character of the Slovak nation and the self-assertion of the Church. Pilgrimages organised during the Marian year served to increase the self-confidence of the underground community. However, by the end of that year, the underground Church would not be the only force using pilgrimages as tools for nation-wide mobilisation.

The events to follow revealed that the current hierarchy had not yet espoused the broader definition of religious freedom advocated by Nécsey during the Prague Spring, which now became an important shared concept. In March 1988, the underground Catholics organised the first public Catholic demonstration for religious freedom, an occasion that would be the central event mobilising support for the creation of a nationalised public Catholic culture. Once again, transnational support was crucial. Encouraged by the apparently highly functional underground information channels and success of mass pilgrimages, in March 1988, underground community leaders organized the biggest public demonstration since the Prague Spring in Slovakia. Notably, Slovak emigrés played an important role during the initial stages of this initiative. The idea to organise a non-violent demonstration came from Marián Šťastný, hockey coach and vice-chairman of the Slovak World Congress. His original plan was to co-ordinate a demonstration in Bratislava with demonstrations in front of Czechoslovak embassies across Western Europe, however, it was eventually left unrealised. Nevertheless, an important role was played by Western broadcasting. Radio Free Europe

48 Levočská púť 1987. In *Náboženstvo a súčasnosť*, 1987, No. 4, pp. 5–7; Šaštín – September 1987, p. 11; Šaštín – 1988. In *Katolícky mesačník*, 1988, No. 5, p. 1; MARTIN, Peter. The Pilgrimage to Levoča. In *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, 14 July 1988, p. 19; Myšlienky z Levočskej púte. In *Náboženstvo a súčasnosť*, 1988, No. 3, p. 3.

49 Levočská púť 1987, pp. 5–7.

50 Levočská púť 1987, pp. 5–7; K Mariánskemu roku. In *Náboženstvo a súčasnosť*, 1987, No. 4, pp. 2–5.

51 Levočská púť 1987, p. 5.

52 Levočská púť 1987, p. 5.

(RFE) and the Voice of America (VOA) perceived the situation of the Catholic faithful as part of the broader assertion of civic society against “oppressive” communist states and fully supported the demonstration.⁵³ RFE and the VOA filled the airwaves with promotions within two days, while in Slovakia, announcements were posted on church notice boards instructing Catholics that “we will express our support for these demands by holding lit candles during the gathering.”⁵⁴ On 25 March 1988, more than ten thousand Catholics assembled in Hviezdoslav Square in downtown Bratislava in defiance of a police ban.⁵⁵ Crucially, for many of the Catholic participants, the demonstration fell on Good Friday, a major Catholic feast commemorating the crucifixion of Jesus. This silent demonstration would become known as the “Candle Demonstration.” The underground Church activists called on the state to not only “fill the vacant bishoprics in accordance with the decision of the Holy Father” and “grant greater religious freedom in Czechoslovakia”, but also to institute the “full observance of civil law in Czechoslovakia.”⁵⁶ The cultural nationalism of the underground Church had thus changed from narrowly focused on a national spiritual renewal to supporting the broader cause of respect for human rights. As one samizdat author claimed, “as believers we are also citizens and we should therefore express our demands for the [recognition of the] rights of the Church in a civic way, appealing to our laws.”⁵⁷ The demonstration itself was organised in a more “civic” space—a public square—however, reminiscent of the pilgrimages, they prayed and sang the papal anthem as well as national Marian songs.⁵⁸

The reaction of state authorities and the official Church in Czechoslovakia to the petition and the Candle Demonstration confirmed that the official authorities were not going to tolerate unsanctioned religious activities and that most official Church dignitaries, for whom trust of the official authorities continued to take priority over pastoral care, would fall into line. There were some notable exceptions, which will be elaborated on below. The petition landed Augustín Navrátil in a psychiatric ward and the official propaganda launched a counter-campaign.⁵⁹ At the Candle Demonstration, police moved in with clubs, dogs, a water cannon and tear gas, beating the demonstrators and arresting more than a hundred. Similarly, even though the petition was tolerated, several signature collectors were detained and beaten by the secret police, the infamous ŠtB-Štátna bezpečnosť (State Security).⁶⁰ The reaction of Catholic Bishops to the Candle Demonstration dealt a serious blow to a still rather shaky trust in the official hierarchy, which remained silent, or more precisely, enveloped by ZKD-PIT priests. This was especially the case of the newly appointed Bishop of Trnava, Ján Sokol, in whom the Catholic activists had had the highest expectations.

53 HALL, Trevor. *Pope John Paul II. A Man and His People*. Groversville : Bookthrift, 1985, pp. 27–56.

54 Verejné zhromaždenie. In *Bratislavské listy*, 1988, No. 1, p. 10.

55 According to Čarnogurský, the demonstration was an attempt to “meld the religious and the civic dissent.” While the crowd was overwhelmingly Catholic, there were a few civic activists such as Milan Šimečka or the environmental activist Marta Filková. Though for the presence of civic activists and calls for civic freedom, it would be far-fetched to see this event as a definite end of isolation for dissent and independent groups in Slovakia. KENNEY, Padraic. *The Carnival of Revolution. Central Europe in 1989*. Princeton : Princeton University Press, 2002, pp. 215–217.

56 The text of this letter was republished in samizdat: *Verejné zhromaždenie*, 1988, p. 10.

57 Bratislavský veľký piatok. In *Náboženstvo a súčasnosť*, 1988, No. 2, pp. 8–9; also see: PONICKÁ, Hana. Hodina Bratislavy, 25. 3. 1988. In *Hlas Slovenska*, 1988, No. 2, pp. 15–18.

58 Bratislavský veľký piatok 1988, pp. 8–9.

59 Bratislavský veľký piatok 1988, p. 37.

60 Petícia za náboženskú slobodu, In *Náboženstvo a súčasnosť*, 1988, No. 2, p. 8.

Trust and Involvement of the State

Moreover, the official authorities now attempted to take over the pilgrimages and turn them from spaces of trust to spaces of lay mobilisation in line with the Communist agenda. They intensified efforts to characterize the underground Church as equivalent to the wartime Slovak Republic (1939 – 1945), portraying any unauthorised collective religious activity in this way. This type of framing was also intended to isolate the underground Church from civic dissidents and from the Western human rights organisations, both of which were careful not to lend support to any fundamentalist—not to mention neo-fascist—groups.⁶¹ Shortly after the launch of the petition for religious freedom in January 1988, and before the demonstration was held, a series of articles published in *Pravda* (10 – 12 February 1988) identified Pavol Čarnogurský, father of activist Ján Čarnogurský and a deputy in the supposedly “reactionary” wartime Slovak Assembly, as the leader of the underground Church.⁶² This inaccuracy was reiterated in commentaries at the Candle Demonstration, which was described as the work of “Pavol Čarnogurský and his accomplices from the illegal church structures and emigration, working in the service of world reaction.”⁶³ The author of a *Smena* article saw the demonstration as a “return” to the era before February 1948 (date of the Communist takeover).⁶⁴ Čarnogurský was known to many members of the underground Church community and respected in a small circle around his son, Ján Čarnogurský, but he certainly was not any leader of the underground community.

By mid-1988, authorities at the Ministry of Culture’s Office for Religious Affairs started to portray religion as a positive force in society more actively. “It is absurd to claim”, maintained the newly appointed head of the office, Matej Lúčan, that “socialist society and the KSC⁶⁵ see believers as political enemies and would seek the suppression of religion and churches.” Although, as he maintained “our society derives its building of socialism from a scientific world view...our society is not an atheistic society.”⁶⁶ Although this may well have been—as was the case many times in the past—simply paying a lip service to hush critics abroad, this time the pronouncements were followed by concrete action. The official authorities returned to negotiations with the Vatican and began to re-establish the Catholic Church as a nationally functional institution. The first changes were of an administrative character. In 1988, the Vatican and Czechoslovak diplomats negotiated the appointment of two bishops, Sokol, Bishop of Trnava and František Tondra, Bishop of Spiš. Even more importantly, by 1989, Bishop Sokol was promoted to Archbishop of the Trnava Archdiocese. The independent ecclesiastical Slovak province, the highest administrative unit of the Church in Slovakia, now had its leader.⁶⁷ The official authorities had taken the first steps in this direction in 1973 when three bishops were named, and later in 1977, when the Church on current Slovak territory formed an independent ecclesiastical province. However, until 1989, the Church was not capable of functioning on a national scale. Without

61 Interview with František Mikloško [in Slovak], interviewer Agáta Šústová Drellová, from 13 July 2010; Interview with Ján Čarnogurský [in Slovak], interviewer Agáta Šústová Drellová, from 11 November 2011.

62 DOBRÝ, Andrej (pseudonym). Kto je Pavol Čarnogurský, „Tajná cirkev“ v službách antikomunizmu. In *Pravda*, 11 February 1988, p. 4; Náš ľud rozpozná svetlo od tmy. In *Pravda*, 12 February 1988, p. 4.

63 Kto chce zneužiť veriach? In *Večerník*, 24 March 1988, p. 1; Kto stojí v pozadí? in *Večerník*, 25 March 1988, p. 1; Akcia nevyšla podľa scenára. In *Večerník*, 28 March 1988, p. 1.

64 In *Smena*, 24 March 1988, p. 1.

65 Komunistická strana Česko-Slovenska (The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia).

66 PEŠEK –BARNOVSKÝ 2016, p. 155.

67 PEŠEK –BARNOVSKÝ 2016, pp. 135–144.

an archbishop, the Church could be best described as an aggregate of more-or-less isolated dioceses. But now that the Church had its leader, it could begin to work as a nationally functional institution.

As far as Church administration was concerned, the current state began to resemble those in Poland, Hungary and Croatia in the 1960s, where the churches were institutionally reconstructed. Authorities also began to support the official Church with the organisation of pilgrimages.⁶⁸ For example, the official authorities helped individual parishes transport pilgrims to the sites and there the VB-Verejná bezpečnosť (Public Security) helped organise crowds.⁶⁹ There were, however, limits to these changes.

The official authorities did not intend these shifts to enable any greater autonomy of the Church from the state, as had been the case in Poland and as the underground communities had imagined since the 1960s. For reasons which will be explained, it is more probable that the official authorities were aiming to encourage the mobilisation of Catholics in close connection with the socialist state, a mobilisation which would involve a strengthening of the ZKD-PIT on the one hand, and the gradual edging out of the underground Catholic communities on the other.⁷⁰ Following the model of the Orthodox Church, the Communists in Czechoslovakia supported the local Church hierarchy but at the same time, sought to maintain a connection with the state directly but also via the politicised priests in the ZKD-PIT. The ZKD-PIT would remain in place to preserve the Church as related to state socialism.⁷¹

The official authorities used the Marian year to strengthen the hierarchy and allow greater space for Catholic mobilisation within official spaces and at the same time, to roll back the influence of the underground Church.⁷² The goal was to prevent the underground Church from “misusing” official Church events as displays of Catholic triumphalism and public chants of demands for the change of religious policies. As is explored below, this strategy was successful only to a point. Indeed, by November 1989, the Catholic Church in Slovakia looked rather different from what was intended. By this time, there was not only—as the official authorities planned—a more complete episcopate, but there was also a strong underground Church closely connected to civic opposition in Slovakia and in the Czech lands.

Trust Surpassing National and Institutional Boundaries

The underground Catholics’ trust in the Church hierarchy was shaken after underground Church. However, an important actor who had already been a great source of trust in the hierarchy, reappeared. His involvement showed, once again, that the reconstruction of trust surpassed the frontiers of individual national churches. Following the demonstration, the underground Catholics received unprecedented support from across Czechoslovakia, surrounding countries as well as the whole of Europe. The underground community was

68 PEŠEK – BARNOVSKÝ 2016, pp. 144–158.

69 PEŠEK – BARNOVSKÝ 2016, p. 156.

70 PEŠEK – BARNOVSKÝ 2016, p. 156.

71 Meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia from 13 May 1988. Letter from František Tomášek to the Government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic to the President Dr. Lubomír Štrougal. Quoted in: PEŠEK – BARNOVSKÝ 2016, p. 153.

72 Slovak National Archive (SNA), Bratislava, Slovakia, Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, fond (f) 794/11, Válek, Miroslav, Pre Informáciu, Informácia o priebehu púti na rok 1987 a návrh opatrení pre rok 1988, 16 Máj 1988.

openly supported by the most senior clergyman in Czechoslovakia, Cardinal František Tomášek. The Cardinal played a central role in maintaining a positive image of the underground Church. By this point, Tomášek used the official tolerance towards public Catholic worship but did not back down from his support of civic dissent. He supported the demonstration during the major Catholic feast of St. Vojtech at central Prague's Cathedral of St. Vitus, claiming that these Catholics acted "in unity with Christ", and hinting that, despite a lack of support from the Slovak hierarchy, this Catholic protest happened in unity with the Church.⁷³ Cardinal Tomášek would remain an important supporter of the underground community in Slovakia and an important source of the intra-church legitimacy of the community. Tomášek's support was vital, especially since the Holy See did not lend any clear support to the demonstration.

The papacy did not get directly involved though, following the demonstration, the pope publicly prayed for the "Church in Czechoslovakia."⁷⁴ It was rather vaguely phrased, however. In fact, it may have been the case that public support of the underground Church community as such was not among the Vatican's priorities, especially at this time when the Vatican was clearly careful not to disrupt contacts with the Czechoslovak state, with which it was seeking to reach an agreement on the central position of the Bishop of Trnava.⁷⁵

The underground community either read into the pope's symbolic gesture, seeing it as a clear sign of support, or overlooked its silence altogether. While it might have been a serious blow to the underground community's self-confidence several years ago, now they felt supported by the church thanks to Tomášek, but also by larger and larger segments of civic dissent. In other words, trust in and by the Catholic hierarchy continued to be crucial but was no longer a *conditio sine qua non* of the underground community's existence. Forthcoming events that lead to the abrupt end of the rule of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia further strengthened this self-understanding.

Culmination and Dwindling of Trust Amidst November Events

The first demonstrations began in Prague on 17 November, International Students' Day, which in 1989, was also the fiftieth anniversary of the Nazis' repression of Czech universities. On that day, a peaceful gathering organised by the Socialist Association of Youth turned into a demonstration for broader political change and was eventually violently suppressed by the police. In Bratislava, about 200 students demonstrated on Thursday 16 November, demanding a dialogue on problems in the educational system.⁷⁶ On 19 November, one day after individual groups of Slovak civic dissent and intellectuals had discussed the possibilities of civic mobilisation, about 500 people met and formed a broad civic movement VPN – Verejnosc' proti násiliu (Public Against Violence), which became the Slovak counterpart of the OF – Občianske fórum (Civic Forum), simultaneously established in

73 Ohlasy zahraničnej tlače na Bratislavský Veľký piatok. In *Hlas Ameriky*, 9 April 1988, quoted in: KOREC, Ján Chryzostom. *Bratislavský Veľký piatok 25. marec 1988*. Bratislava : Lúč, 2008, pp. 245.

74 Ohlasy zahraničnej tlače, pp. 243–246.

75 PEŠEK – BARNOVSKÝ 2016, pp. 136–139.

76 HENDERSON, Karen. *Slovakia. The Escape from Invisibility*. London; New York : Routledge, 2002, p. 29. See e. g. HOMZA, Martin – MIKOVÁ, Mária – NOVOTNÝ, Milan. *Študentský prológ k Nežnej revolúcii. Bratislava 16. november 1989*. Budmerice : Slovenské dejiny, o. z., 2019.

Prague.⁷⁷ By Monday, 20 November, the public protest had grown enormously, spilling into the Bratislava theatres where actors went on strike. Students were beginning to hold assemblies and by the next day, the unrest had spread all over Slovakia to Košice, Banská Bystrica, Žilina, Zvolen, Trnava and Martin.⁷⁸

Initially, Catholic activists did not join the civic activists. In the build-up to the November 1989 strikes, the Czech and Slovak hierarchy were in Rome with a large number of pilgrims celebrating the canonisation of St. Agnes of Bohemia. On the 17th of November, 1989, when the first student demonstrations in Prague began, hundreds of leading Czech and Slovak Catholics were at St. Peter's in Vatican square rather than in November squares in Czechoslovakia. Archbishop Sokol, the newly appointed leader of the Slovak ecclesiastical province, also attended the ceremony. Bishop Korec was also present, already wearing the insignia of a bishop. It was highly probable that his appointment to one of the dioceses in Slovakia—most likely Nitra—was approaching.

Some of the Catholic activists who were not in Rome kept to church spaces. For instance, those from the Trnava pilgrimage in mid-November gathered at the traditional annual Trnava Novena, a local Marian feast, and prayed for the release of detained Catholic and civic activists.⁷⁹

Eventually, it was individuals from the hierarchy who had the greatest impact on encouraging the involvement of Catholics into the protest. The leading figure from the Catholic hierarchy was initially Cardinal Tomášek, who joined in the bottom-up mobilisation of support for radical change. On the day of his return from Rome, he published a declaration to “All people of Czechoslovakia”, encouraging Catholics not to stand aside during protest. “In this fateful hour of our history”, appealed Tomášek, none of you should stand aside. “Let's raise our voice again, in unity with other citizens of our country, Czechs and Slovaks and with members of minorities, believers and non-believers. The right to religious freedom cannot be severed from other democratic rights. Freedom is inseparable,”⁸⁰ he said. Tomášek also advocated for end of the one-party power monopoly. Archbishop Sokol, in contrast, was much more careful not to move away from the recently achieved co-operation with the socialist state too quickly.

Archbishop Sokol sent a letter to all ordinaries and bishops in Slovakia on the same day as Tomášek. In it, he announced that “since our Catholic Church is part of society, which is undergoing the process of democratisation, we have to take an official stance.” By this time, Sokol was already under pressure from inside the Church in Slovakia. A leading group of young seminarians (candidates for priesthood) joined the students in gathering at the statue of 18th century nationalist poet Ján Hollý and signing national songs.⁸¹

They were led by Alojz Martinec, one of the leading figures of the ZKD-PIT, a well-known nationalist historian who would later become one of the central advocates for placing

77 See e.g. ANTALOVÁ, Ingrid (ed.) *Verejnosť proti násiliu, 1989–1991, Svedectvá a dokumntety*. Bratislava : Nadácia Milana Šimečku, 1998; ANTALOVÁ, Ingrid (ed.) *Verejnosť proti násiliu, Občianske fórum, Svedectvá*. Bratislava : Nadácia Milana Šimečku, 1999.

78 *Smena*, 22 November 1989, p. 4.

79 Trnavská Novéna. In *Náboženstvo a súčasnosť*, 1989, No. 4, pp. 10–11.

80 Všetkému ľudu Československa, quoted in: ŠIMULČÍK, Ján (ed.) *Katolícka cirkev a nežná revolúcia 1989*. Prešov : Vydavateľstvo Michala Vaška, 1999, pp. 39–40.

81 Stanovisko študentov rímskokatolíckej cyrilometodskej bohosloveckej fakulty v Bratislave, Príloha A8, quoted in: ŠIMULČÍK 1999, pp. 50–51.

the Church at the centre of national history.⁸² On the next day, 22 November, Sokol issued a declaration that supported the call to respect human rights, but did not explicitly reject the Communist Party, “I join the people of Czechoslovakia and many leading functionaries in this country and the whole world, in protest against this brutal violence, trampling on human dignity and violation of basic human rights. I hope that there will be people democratically elected.” Importantly, however, Sokol did not call on Catholics to mobilise. Instead, he called on them to “pray so that violence would stop.”⁸³ It took almost another week for Sokol to call for grassroots Catholic organisation.

The very fact that these Bishops were appointed by John Paul II was already a good starting point as far as trust from Catholic activists was concerned. If they did not use this initial capital in support of the underground Church and the wake of its suppression, the demonstrations were their second chance.

Sokol’s reaction was vital to the reinforcement of this rudimentary trust. In the meantime, some Catholics had picked up where they left off during the Prague Spring in 1968. They again began to call for swift integration of the underground Church leaders into the structures of the official Church. Jukl returned to a strategy rehearsed in 1968 and called for removal of ZKD-PIT members from leadership positions in Church administration and an end to the ZKD-PIT influence in the *Katolícke noviny*.⁸⁴ This did not come as quickly as the underground Church had expected. These Catholics, who in the months preceding November 1989 struggled to understand the hierarchy’s lack of interest in the underground Church, were now happy to see Sokol’s support of the VPN. They probably saw it as an indication of broader support of bottom-up mobilisation by the Catholic Church hierarchy. As Jukl wrote for *Katolícky mesačník*, “We abound with gratitude and admiration for our university students and actors who triggered this chain reaction. But we are even more enthusiastic and proud of the reaction of our Church dignitaries who reacted promptly, courageously and wisely to the situation.”⁸⁵ Jukl’s demand for the removal of the ZKD-PIT functionaries was partially fulfilled in December at the first meeting at the Trnava Archbishopric Office.

In the meantime, members of the underground Church began to mobilise in support of the Czech and Slovak students. In over 14 declarations, the first of which appeared on 23 November 1989, groups that had previously mobilised within the underground Church began to demand changes,⁸⁶ including autonomy of the Church hierarchy and severing ties with the state. They supported the demands of the Czech and Slovak students and added some of their own.

Three themes were paramount. First, the activists repeated some of the demands voiced in 1988, including an end to “discrimination against believers at schools, cultural institutions,

82 Bohoslovci sa pridali k štrajkujúcim študentom 21. Novembra, SITA Slovenská tlačová agentúra (SITA Slovak news agency), 20 November 2013 <http://www.webnoviny.sk/ostatne/clanok/759196-bohoslovci-sa-pridali-k-strajkujucim-studentom-21-novembra/> (last accessed 11 September 2014).

83 Ľuďom dobrej vôle na Slovensku, quoted in: ŠIMULČÍK 1999, p. 24.

84 JUKL, Vladimír. Drahí čitatelia, bratia a sestry v Kristu. In *Katolícky mesačník*, 1989, Vol. 2, No. 12, p. 4.

85 JUKL 1989, p. 4.

86 My, veriace rodiny, Príloha A5, p. 46; Prehlásenie katolíckych laikov, Príloha A6, p. 47; Stanovisko študentov Rímskokatolíckej cyrilometodskej bohosloveckej fakulty v Bratislave, Príloha A8, pp. 50–51; Výzva Hnutia rodín na Slovensku, Príloha A9, p. 52; Milí priatelia, Príloha A11, p. 54–55; Vyhlásenie gréckokatolíckych duchovných, Príloha A12, p. 56; Slovo veriacich ku svojim kňazom, Príloha A13, p. 57; Stanovisko kňazov Nitrianskej diecézy, p. 59. All quoted in: ŠIMULČÍK 1999 (missing pagination).

in factories and scientific institutions”, allowing the establishment of an independent association of party members including as well those who do not belong to the party, an end to censorship and a greater allowance of religious publications.⁸⁷

Second, they repeated their demand for “moral renewal.” The Movement of Christian Families challenged the dominance of the “atheist worldview” in culture and demanded an “adequate” role for religions and the abolishment of, in their eyes, “demoralising and destructive sexual education.”⁸⁸ A group of seminarians condemned the current political system as totalitarian and “leading to the deformation of true values.”⁸⁹ Implicit in these demands was the basic claim that any genuinely “moral” system had to respect Catholic values. These Catholics, however, did not present the Catholic Church as a strong leader in the cause of this moral renewal. In fact, they saw the current state of the Church as a symptom of broader moral “decay.”⁹⁰

Therefore, the activists demanded an end to the close co-operation between Church and state. Emboldened by the society-wide mobilisation, Catholic campaigners criticised the Church’s involvement with the state. It may well be that the events of November 1989 allowed these Catholics to voice the criticism they did not dare to say publicly before November in fear of repression not only from the state, but also from the Church hierarchy. An activist priest, Anton Srholec, saw 1989 as the beginning of the Church’s internal renewal as well as a start to its work renewing society at large. The Church was, in his view “facing a difficult task; to genuinely atone, overcome fear, sympathise with the poor and un-free nation. We should become the conscience of the nation, spokesperson of her demands in...service, to make clear that we are not after money and prestige.”⁹¹ The Movement of Christian Families, which since 1985 had been the fastest growing group within the underground community, demanded that the leaders of the Church begin to “publicly defend the interests of believers and other citizens and not let them be abused by the authorities of the state.” They also rejected ZKD-PIT priests as “representatives of the Church.” In addition, they protested the official labelling of the underground Church as an heir to a “clerical-fascist” state.⁹² “We have our own views”, they asserted, which have “matured under the conditions of real socialism and we reject the view that they had been forced upon us by émigrés.” The Lay Apostolate around Mikloško and Jukl also criticised current Church policies, claiming that a “state that constantly interferes with the internal matters of the Church is not a democratic state.”⁹³ All these declarations demanded the separation of the Church from state control. It even seemed initially that some in the official hierarchy might eventually abandon support for the state and join in with society.

Meanwhile, the head of Slovak Province, Archbishop Sokol, caught up with this bottom-up mobilisation. Following the first common negotiations between the state and members of Public Against Violence, Sokol, as the head of the Slovak province, publicly supported the VPN and called on all Catholics to join this movement.⁹⁴ By this time, the VPN had

87 My, veriace rodiny, p. 46.

88 Výzva Hnutia rodín, p. 52.

89 Stanovisko študentov, pp. 50–51.

90 Stanovisko študentov, pp. 50–51; Slovo veriacich, p. 57.

91 SRHOLEC, Anton. Radosť a nádej, Konkrétna situácia Cirkvi v Československu. In *Rodinné spoločenstvo*, 1989, No. 4, p. 10.

92 My, veriace rodiny, p. 46.

93 Prehlásenie katolíckych, p. 47.

94 Ludom dobrej vôle, p. 26.

been joined by Čarnogurský, however, the rest of the hierarchy did not follow Sokol's lead yet and did not show any signs of abandoning their recently inaugurated state-oriented cultural nationalism. At the end of November 1989, the Slovak hierarchy collectively published a letter to all believers in which it announced the beginning of the "Year of Faith", connecting it to the 370th anniversary of the death of three Catholic "martyrs of Košice" who died during the Reformation. According to the Slovak hierarchy, the message of the story of these martyrs for Catholics was to stay away from politics. As the hierarchy put it, the martyrs were "victims of the confrontation between different confessions, which were marked by different political interests."⁹⁵ Rather than encouraging societal engagement, they called on Catholics to focus on faith. Indeed, the only priest present on the main November stage at the Slovak National Uprising Square in Bratislava was Srholec, a man who after 1989 would be suspended from his service for unorthodox views. In the meantime, Čarnogurský came to the centre stage of the demonstrations. Imprisonment helped him gain the large following necessary for his long-term goal of establishing a Christian political movement. He was now a "martyr", a suitable leader for the Catholic nationalists but also more broadly, for Slovak society.

The fact that Sokol, the leading Church dignitary, supported democratic mobilisation did not mean that the hierarchy would embrace the underground Church wholeheartedly. Archbishop Sokol himself reacted to the public disclosure of secretly ordained priests with restraint.⁹⁶ Indeed, to the great disappointment of some former underground clergy, those loyal to the ZKD-PIT were handled with "kid gloves" while underground priests came under close scrutiny because of fear from "liberal" elements within the Church.⁹⁷ Curiously, this conservatism was directly supported from the Vatican, which sought to contain possible liberal influence from former underground churches. Moreover, the pope saw the issue of purges and debates about collaboration as highly divisive and was determined to prevent any separation by treading carefully with regard to ZKD-PIT members.⁹⁸

Certainly, representatives of the underground Church wanted something more radical. Jukl argued that "the nation is loyal to the Holy Father...[but ZKD-] PIT members are a disgrace to the Slovak nation."⁹⁹ Jukl's plea was based on the fact that even if the [ZKD-] PIT were officially abolished by the Vatican, its leading members would retain their positions.¹⁰⁰ Bishop Sokol answered by questioning Jukl's legitimacy as a priest—because of his secret ordination.¹⁰¹ On December 11, 1989, the communist-controlled ZKD-PIT was disbanded, alongside its counterparts in the region. Overall, the Catholic Church would come out of the November events as a symbol of change and a vehicle of post-socialist national identity.

95 Pastiersky List Zboru Ordinárov SSR z príležitosti roku viery, p. 1 (Personal archive of the author).

96 The Catholic hierarchy waited to be able to single out progressive elements within the underground Church community in Czechoslovakia. Given their shared ecclesiastical conservatism, most of the underground Church leaders in Slovakia accepted this new development.

97 Programové vyhlásenie kňazov Slovenska, quoted in: ŠIMULČÍK 1999, p. 28.

98 JORISSEN, Hans. Odmietnuté dedičstvo. Rímske „normy“ v zaobchádzaní so skrytou cirkvou. In KOLLER, Erwin – KÜNG, Hans – KRIŽAN, Peter (eds.) *Zradené proroctvo. Československá podzemná cirkev medzi Vatikánom a komunizmom*. Prešov : Vydavateľstvo Michala Vaška, 2011, pp. 137–147; KONZAL, Jan. *Duch a nevěsta. Z dějin církevního podzemí ve 2. polovině 20. století*. Brno : Centrum pro stadium demokracie a kultury, 2010, pp. 66–82.

99 MORAVČÍK, Karol. Zápis-infomácia o stretnutí kňazov v Trnave dňa 4. 12. 1989. Quoted in: ŠIMULČÍK 1999, p. 74.

100 MORAVČÍK, Zápis-infomácia, p. 74.

101 MORAVČÍK, Zápis-infomácia, p. 74.

Conclusion

In late socialist Czechoslovakia, trust in and by Catholic hierarchy was a crucial source of intra-ecclesial legitimacy, self-confidence and an important part of self-definition for the underground Catholic activists assembled in the underground Church. After the conclusion of the Prague Spring, which brought an end to the only public cooperation among the members of the underground and the official Church, the Project of Council Renewal, this trust was only very slowly being reconstructed. For most of the 1970s, the underground Church was suppressed and delegitimised, not only by the state—this was nothing new—but also devastatingly so by the Vatican, who ordered secretly ordained Bishops to cease their activities. The priority now, for both the Vatican and the Communist state, was rapprochement. The underground Church was perceived as a roadblock. This changed with the election of the Polish Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, who invited the underground Catholics back into the fold of officially recognised representatives of the Church in Slovakia. This gesture may not have been visible in the grand scheme of church politics, but it was crucial for the underground Catholics, delivering legitimacy and self-confidence. An important impetus was also the changed behaviour of some members of the hierarchy who espoused—at least partially—papal politics of memory and supported mobilisation around symbols (Our Lady of Seven Sorrows and Cyril and Methodius) and at spaces (pilgrimages) of national Catholicism. This did not translate directly into explicit support of the secret community. In other words, trust was one-sided matter only. Nevertheless, the underground Church continued to buttress its self-confidence with other sources, of both local and transnational origin. In the wake of the suppression of the underground Church, Czech Cardinal Tomášek, as well as civic dissent, figured as important sources of trust. Leading members of the Slovak hierarchy returned to the game during the events of November 1989 as the rule of the Communist party began crumbling. In particular, Archbishop Sokol lent his support to the demonstrators and worked to sever the ties of the Church with the Communist state. The ZKD-PIT lost its *raison d'être* shortly after the fall of the Communist Party, however, this severing of ties with the Communist state did not mean full trust in the underground Church. On the contrary, as it later became clear, for the hierarchy, the underground Church in its entirety had never played and would never play the same role as the hierarchy did for the underground Catholics. The hierarchy's subsequent dealings with the underground Church members—save the secretly ordained bishops and some clergy who joined the ranks of post-1989 hierarchy—revealed this to be a constant feature of intra-church life.

Cite:

ŠÚSTOVÁ DRELOVÁ, Agáta. Trust in the Church Hierarchy among the Underground Church Community in Post-1968 Slovakia. In *Forum Historiae*, 2021, Vol. 15, No. 2, pp. 104-122. ISSN 1337-6861. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31577/forhist.2021.15.2.8>

Agáta Šústová Drelová
Historický ústav SAV
P. O. Box 198, Klemensova 19
814 99 Bratislava
email: agata.sustova-drelova@savba.sk
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3593-4228>