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## Katolícka jednota Magazine as an Intellectual Source of Catholic Women

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### Abstract

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The present study deals with the founding of *Katolícka jednota žien* and the association's magazine, *Katolícka jednota*, which was created as a response to the rise of socialism and the spread of secular and feminist ideas in Slovakia in the early 1920s. The magazine was intended to serve as an intellectual resource for Catholic women, representing an alternative to secular feminism. Catholic women faced societal prejudices that led to an impression of them as easily influenced by priests, an idea that served as justification for their exclusion from political life, ostensibly to protect secular politics from religious influence. The magazine's editors aimed to counter these stereotypes by highlighting the capacity of Catholic women to engage with social issues and propose solutions. Those who identified with the image of loyal, rational Catholics were actively involved in public life, but their participation was always aligned with Church teachings on gender roles. Activism centred on protecting family, morality, and religion while rejecting socialist and secular feminist ideas, which they believed threatened traditional gender roles and Catholic values. *Katolícka jednota* thus provided women with a platform for social and intellectual self-expression while simultaneously stressing the importance of preserving the traditional social order, supporting their role within the Christian family model, and providing the right education for responsible citizenship.

The present study focuses on the first four volumes of the magazine *Katolícka jednota* (KJ, the Catholic Unity) (1920–1923), editions which were deliberately chosen to examine the magazine's ideological direction immediately after the founding of *Katolícka jednota žien* (KJŽ, the Catholic Women's Unity). The magazine was published from 1920 until 1948, when the organisation was absorbed into the Slovak Women's Union, ceasing to exist as an independent Catholic women's organisation.<sup>1</sup>

KJ editorial board consisted exclusively of women, except for their spiritual leaders, Priests Eugen Filkorn and Ambróz Lazík.<sup>2</sup> Editors' names were generally not disclosed unless the contributors were external, typically Catholic clergy. Therefore, this study uses

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- 1 Slovenský národný archív, Fond Policajné riaditeľstvo v Bratislave, box 14, no. 283–290. Správa Výboru pre vnútorné záležitosti z 22. decembra 1948.
- 2 Eugen Filkorn (1881–1974) was a priest, a papal prelate, and a member of Hlinkova slovenská ľudová strana (HSLĽS, Hlinka's Slovak People's Party). In 1947, he was succeeded by Priest Ambróz Lazík (1897–1969), who remained the spiritual leader of the organization until its dissolution in 1948.

the terms “editor” or “editors” when referring to the magazine’s authors. This anonymity reflected both the collective editorial effort and the subordination of individual identity to the mission of KJŽ.

This study aims to contribute to current scholarship by offering a nuanced perspective on how Catholic women in interwar Slovakia engaged with and responded to the dominant gender and religious discourses. By analysing the first four volumes of KJ, the study reveals how Catholic women navigated the intersection of religious and political identity, creating space for intellectual and public engagement while also reinforcing traditional gender roles. The analysis also shows that their voices were not merely defensive reactions to secular feminism, but proactive efforts to shape and redefine Catholic womanhood in a rapidly changing society. The present study aims to address a few key questions: How did the editors of KJ confront prejudice against Catholic women? How did they portray the ideal Catholic woman as both informed and faithful? How did secular feminist ideas, spread through socialist and later communist parties, affect their views? Did the editors eventually adopt any secular feminist ideas, particularly regarding public participation?

This study draws on Pierre Bourdieu’s theories, which argue that institutions like the state and the Catholic Church uphold male dominance by framing social structures—such as gender roles<sup>3</sup>—as eternal and natural.<sup>4</sup> Such views were also reflected by the editorial staff of KJ. According to Bourdieu, such beliefs, or *doxai*, are internalized and accepted without question, making them difficult to challenge.<sup>5</sup> Although these norms seem natural, they were socially constructed by institutions.<sup>6</sup> As secular feminist theories began questioning gender roles, Catholic women were compelled to defend the “traditional” division, presenting it as beneficial to women and encouraging their continued loyalty to the Church. However, this does not mean Catholic women lacked agency, they could also adapt, reinterpret, and navigate these structures on their own.

### **The Founding of *Katolícka jednota žien* and *Katolícka jednota Magazine***

On 28 October 1918, the National Committee officially took control as the governing body of the newly formed Czechoslovak Republic. Just two weeks later, leaders introduced a provisional constitution. Although it did not yet guarantee full equality regardless of gender, origin, or profession, women were already taking part in both the National Committee and the Revolutionary National Assembly. The assembly met in November 1918, just a day after the provisional constitution was adopted which effectively granted women both the

3 The traditional division of gender roles emphasized keeping women at home while positioning men as the primary providers for the family. The authors of the articles wrote about the importance of women as mothers and homemakers, while paid work for women was seen as necessary only if the man’s salary was insufficient to cover living expenses.

4 BOURDIEU, Pierre. *Nadvláda mužů*. Praha : Karolinum, 2000, p. 76.

5 BOURDIEU, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 168–169.

6 BOURDIEU, Pierre – EAGLETON, Terry. *Doxa and common life*. In *New Left Review*, 1992, vol. 1, no. 191, pp. 111–118.

right to vote and the right to run for office. One of the Revolutionary National Assembly's main tasks was to draft a permanent constitution. Unlike the provisional version, the final constitution, adopted on 29 February 1920, explicitly guaranteed gender equality, ensuring equal rights for all citizens, including full voting rights for women.<sup>7</sup>

The elections in April 1920 were won by Česko-slovenská sociálně-demokratická strana robotnícka (ČSSD, the Czech-Slovak Social Democratic Workers' Party), and Česko-slovenská strana ľudová (the Czech-Slovak People's Party) and Slovenská ľudová strana (SLS, the Slovak People's Party)<sup>8</sup> was second. Shortly after that, KJŽ association was founded, and in September 1920, the premier edition of the magazine KJ was published.<sup>9</sup> In that first issue, the editors expressed their reason for the creation of the association KJŽ and the magazine, namely to unite Catholic women in the fight for Catholic interests at a time when "the dark clouds of irreligion appeared over the clear horizon of Slovakia."<sup>10</sup> In the first years after the elections, the magazine and the association were directed against ČSSD and the dissuasion of Catholics from their influence:

Our poor brothers and sisters allowed themselves to be confused so far that they did not look at anything when such a far-reaching and decisive step in the destiny of their lives they did. Many have already sobered up but are still undecided. However, this hurts us the most and worries us the most when Catholics cannot completely and decisively break free from the influence of characterless *mamluks*. That is why all our Catholic organisations must wage the fight, the sharpest possible fight, against the godless and blasphemous social democracy, just as before, even sharper. Our Katolícka jednota žien is aware of its duty and, both in action and in writing (press), leads the fight against freemasons, progressives, communists, and Jews, all of whom are recruited from social democracy.<sup>11</sup>

KJŽ was founded at the initiative of Priest Eugen Filkorn, who asked Anna Babíková to unite Catholic women and become president of the association.<sup>12</sup>

7 Ústavní listina Československé republiky, [https://www.psp.cz/docs/texts/constitution\\_1920.html](https://www.psp.cz/docs/texts/constitution_1920.html). [last viewed on 19 March 2025]. The right to vote was also granted to all men, as voting rights in Hungary were previously limited. In 1901, only 9.1% of Slovak men could vote, as eligibility was restricted by property requirements. A reform in 1913 aimed to expand suffrage, but due to the First World War, no further elections were held in Hungary. POTEKRA, Michal. Uhorské volebné právo a voľby na Slovensku v rokoch 1901–1914. In *Historický časopis*, 1975, vol. 23, no. 2, pp. 202–207.

8 SLS, later named HSLS, was a far-right, and later clerico-fascist political party with a robust Catholic fundamentalist and authoritarian ideology. The party was founded by Priest Andrej Hlinka in 1906 and reestablished after the First World War. It was known for advocating Slovak autonomy within Czechoslovakia, while combining nationalist and religious principles with contemporary social demands. This combination made it the most influential political force in Slovakia. KAMENEC, Ivan. *Dr. Jozef Tiso 1887–1947. Tragédia politika, kňaza a človeka*. Bratislava : Archa, 1998, p. 34.

9 In the newly formed Czechoslovakia, various associations and organizations began to emerge, which brought people together within the framework of religion, political orientation or volunteer activities. Religious women's associations also existed within Austria-Hungary, but they could not develop public activities and engage politically. The establishment of KJ of Women represented the first organized attempt by Slovak Catholic women to influence the public. DUDEKOVÁ, Gabriela. *Dobrovoľné združovanie na Slovensku v minulosti*. Bratislava : SPACE, 1998, p. 31.

10 Čo chceme? In *Katolícka jednota*, 1920, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 1.

11 Boj proti sociáldemokracii. In *Katolícka jednota*, 1923, vol. 4, no. 6, pp. 14–15.

12 No information was found on the chairwoman, Anna Babíková, except that in 1935, she received an award from the Pope for her long-standing service to the Church, as reported by KJ magazine. See: Katolícka Jednota–Svätým Ocom vyznamenaná. In *Katolícka jednota*, 1935, vol. 16, no. 3, p. 3. Even Eugen Filkorn did not mention her in his memoir, where he wrote about KJŽ.

Babíková first activated women from around Trnava, where the association had its headquarters, subsequently expanding to include other branches throughout Slovakia. The association of Catholic women grew rapidly and in the first year, already counted 1 500 members.<sup>13</sup> For comparison, in 1930, the association had 66 000 female members and before its dissolution in 1948, the association had grown to around 300 000 female members.<sup>14</sup> Members met in monthly meetings and organised a variety of lectures, fundraisers or spiritual renewals, and religious pilgrimages. The association published the magazine KJ, and also *Nová žena* (the New Woman)<sup>15</sup> and *Listy rodičom* (the Letters to Parents), as well as annual calendars.<sup>16</sup>

The establishment of KJŽ followed Catholic Action, the mobilization of Catholic lay people in a variety of areas of social life to defend Catholic values in society.<sup>17</sup> The expansion of women's rights led to an increased interest in political parties for women in countries where women had gained the right to vote. Women suddenly represented half of the electorate whose votes political parties could win in elections, mainly because participation in elections was a civic duty, and failure to do so was punishable by a fine. The renewed SLS, led by Priest Andrej Hlinka, tried to gain the support of Slovak priests who had replaced Hungarian priests in parishes after the creation of Czechoslovakia, and also became interested in women's voices.<sup>18</sup> In Slovakia at that time, 77% of residents were Catholics, for whom SLS promised victory in the elections.<sup>19</sup> The priests were expected to promote SLS among parishioners, ensuring the party's pre-election propaganda. Even before the first elections, the press criti-

13 FILKORN, Eugen. *Verný svojmu svedomiu*. Martin : Vydavateľstvo Matice Slovenskej, 2004, p. 287.

14 KOPECKÁ, Anna. Z minulosti Katolíckej Jednoty na Slovensku. In *Pútnik Svätovojtešský. Kalendár na rok 1992*. Trnava : SSV, 1992, pp. 47–48.

15 The magazine *Nová žena* was intended to be for “intelligent women.” Although the KJ magazine was an educational magazine, the new *Nová žena* was intended to discuss topics in more depth. FILKORN 2004, p. 295 and ZAVACKÁ, Marína. *Nová žena v útoku a obrane. Druhá svetová vojna v časopise Katolíckej jednoty žien*. In *Forum Historiae*, 2009, vol. 3, no. 1, p. 66.

16 KJŽ first published its magazines under the publishing house “Lev,” but since 1925 they have had their own publishing house “Únia.” FILKORN 2004, p. 295.

17 KJŽ was probably inspired by the Czech and Moravian Catholic women's associations, which were established at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and were also active during the interwar period. These associations were united under the Union of Catholic Women's Associations, later called the Union of Catholic Women and Girls of the Czechoslovak Republic. HAVELKA, Jiří. *Katolícké političky?* Praha : Nakladatelství lidové noviny, 2018, p. 150. Before 1920, there was no Catholic women's organization in Slovakia. However, a Hungarian organization called *Jednota katolíckeho ľudu* (the Catholic People's Unity), based in Budapest, was active in the region and published a magazine of the same name in Slovak language. Some issues from 1909 were obtained for this study, and thematically, it was a political magazine, likely affiliated with *Néppárt* (the Hungarian People's Party). The articles were strongly anti-socialist, using rhetoric and arguments similar to those found in KJ magazine. Some articles specifically addressed women, such as a section titled *Ženám, o ženách* (For Women, About Women) (In *Jednota katolíckeho ľudu*, 1909, vol. 11, no. 6, pp. 172–176) which discussed the importance of mothers in the family and their ability to maintain the household. The magazine's cover and overall design were similar to the editions of KJ magazine. However, no direct connection between the publication of this Hungarian magazine in Slovakia and the later publication of KJ magazine could be found.

18 BARTLOVÁ, Alena. Česko-slovenský štát – katolícka cirkev – HSLS. In LETZ, Róbert – MULÍK, Peter – BARTLOVÁ, Alena (eds.) *Slovenská ľudová strana v dejinách 1905–1945*. Martin : Vydavateľstvo Matice slovenskej, 2006, pp. 130–131.

19 In 1921, there were 70.9% members of the Roman Catholic Church and 6.5% members of the Greek Catholic Church in Slovakia. ŠPROCHA, Branislav – TIŠLIAR, Pavol. Demogeografický profil náboženského vyznania obyvateľstva Slovenska za posledných 100 rokov. In TIŠLIAR, Pavol (ed.) *Populačné štúdie Slovenska 3*. Bratislava : Muzeológia a kultúrne dedičstvo, 2014, p. 123.



cized the priests' influence on women and claimed that Catholic women were irrational.<sup>20</sup> This stereotype also affected the priests, who believed they would be especially influential over women.<sup>21</sup> Women were considered more religious than men by Catholics and the public, and faith was relegated to the private sphere. When the Catholic Church felt threatened by the secularisation of society, it decided to use women's activities for defence. Seeing that the separate spheres of gender had been disrupted and many women had become a part of secular feminist movements, the Catholic Church began to legitimise women's activism in the Church's defence.<sup>22</sup>

## Image of a Pious Woman

The stereotype of women as passive, irrational, and obedient fuelled the opposition to women's suffrage before the 1920 elections, despite the Constitution guaranteeing equal rights.<sup>23</sup> A key argument against women's voting rights was the belief that women could be influenced by priests, thereby strengthening the platform of pro-clerical parties.<sup>24</sup>

The main reason for the electoral pliancy of women was supposed to be lack of education, but Catholic women were no different from the rest of the population in this regard. After the establishment of Czechoslovakia, women gained the right to vote, prompting many political parties and women's organizations to focus on educating women on politics, public affairs, and their newly acquired civic rights. This led to the development of magazines such as *Slovenská žena* (the Slovak Woman)<sup>25</sup> as well as women-focused columns in political party newspapers,<sup>26</sup> which aimed to guide women on how to make informed

20 SLS reported that members of the agrarian party were supposed to talk about women—that they are “immature, stupid, clerical who can only crumble a rosary.” See: Slovenky! In *Slovák*, 1920, vol. 2, no. 55, p. 1.

21 BUREŠOVÁ, Jana. Ženy v pojetí teorie a praxe politického katolicismu. In MAREK, Pavel (ed.) *Teorie a praxe politického katolicismu 1870–2007*. Brno : Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2008, p. 133.

22 MÍNGUEZ-BLASCO, Raúl. Between Virgins and Priests: The Feminisation of Catholicism and Priestly Masculinity in Nineteenth-Century Spain. In *Gender & History*, 2021, vol. 33, no. 1, p. 98.

23 Magali Della Sudda also writes that while women in secular organizations faced prejudice because of their gender, criticism towards Catholic women was even greater, as they were additionally reproached for their obedience to the Catholic Church. DELLA SUDDA, Magali. Politics despite themselves: Catholic women's political mobilization in France and Italy, 1900–1914. In *Revue française de science politique*, 2010, vol. 60, no. 1, p. 31. These beliefs were used to justify excluding women from politics to protect secularism from religious influence. SCOTT, Joan Wallach. *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man*. Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 103.

24 For example, members of Republikánska strana poľnohospodárskeho a maloroľníckeho ľudu (the Republican party of the agricultural and small farming people) published a letter from Ivan Markovič, a member of Revolučné národné zhromaždenie (the Revolutionary National Assembly) for Sociálno demokratická strana (the Social Democratic Party), in which he wrote that he was concerned about whether Slovak women were aware enough to vote. See: OSYKOVÁ, Linda. *Volebné kampane politických strán na Slovensku počas 1. ČSR*. Bratislava : VEDA, 2012, pp. 73–74.

25 The introductory issue of *Slovenská žena* magazine with the subtitle *Časopis politicko-výchovný a vzdelávací* (the Political-educational and educational magazine) was published a month before the parliamentary elections, in March 1920. The chief editor was Terézia Vansová.

26 Newspapers such as *Slovenský denník* reported on courses being organized for women to educate them about politics, especially in the lead-up to elections. See: Slovenské ženy v Bratislave. In *Slovenský denník*, 1920, vol. 3, no. 53, p. 5. The first initiatives to educate women about politics emerged even before the establishment of Czechoslovakia, at a time when discussions in Austria-Hungary revolved around granting women the right to vote. This effort was particularly

decisions in elections.<sup>27</sup> Following the first parliamentary elections in which Catholic parties finished second while the socialist party emerged victorious, KJ magazine was founded. Like other educational publications for women, KJ sought to instruct women, but with a distinctly Catholic perspective. The magazine's editors aimed to offer an alternative to secular political education by framing civic engagement through the lens of Christian values.<sup>28</sup> In this way, the magazine positioned itself as an original contribution, blending political education with religious and moral guidance to shape the ideal Catholic woman in the modern political landscape.<sup>29</sup>

The female editors of the magazine openly distinguished between listening to priests and following the teachings of the Catholic Church. In one article, an editor from KJ described her own personal experience defending herself in front of a socialist who claimed that "women should not meddle in public affairs." To this, she responded:

Oh, stop talking nonsense! Every wise woman has more sense in her heels than all the socialists have in their heads, got it? A wise woman can manage everything. We stand by our faith and fight for our Catholic beliefs, not for priests' cassocks, as our enemies babble on about.<sup>30</sup>

In the article, she described how the man kept insisting that priests only mislead women and look after their own interests, to which she again replied that as a Catholic woman, she listens to the Church:

I don't care whether the priest is a saint or a sinner, I go to his feet to make my confession. He absolves me; he has done his duty, and I have fulfilled my Christian duty. I leave with a clear conscience and don't concern myself with the priest—there is another Lord for that.<sup>31</sup>

Here, it is important to note the author's reference to obedience to the Church, not to the priest, despite maintaining their respect for the holy leaders. These Catholic women saw priests as mediators of Catholic teachings, but

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supported by Social Democratic Party, which in Slovakia published the newspaper *Robotnícke noviny* (the Workers' News). In their push for women's suffrage, they sought to prepare women in advance for exercising their civic rights while also securing their support. For example, articles such as *Ženský obzor* (Women's View), see: In *Robotnícke noviny*, 1913, vol. 10, no. 15, p. 5; or *Ženská emancipácia* (Women's Emancipation), see: In *Robotnícke noviny*, 1913, vol. 10, no. 26, p. 1, addressed these issues. Support for women's suffrage before the establishment of Czechoslovakia was also included in the program of the Slovak National Party. See: Program Slovenskej národnej strany. In *Prúdy*, 1913, vol. 4, no. 10, p. 39.

27 In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, newspapers and magazines were the most effective means of disseminating information and ideas. DELAP, Lucy – RYAN, Leila – DICENZO, Maria. *Feminist media history: Suffrage, periodicals and the public sphere*. London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 3.

28 In the article *Náš časopis* (Our magazine), the female editors urged readers to read their educational magazine carefully, use it for self-education, and be able to argue against the opponents of the Church when needed. *Sošity naše*. In *Katolícka jednota*, 1920, vol. 1, no. 2, p. 1.

29 Similar magazines were also created in Bohemia and Moravia. Catholic women's associations were united under the organization Svaz katolíckých žien a dívek Republiky československé (the Union of Catholic Women and Girls of the Czechoslovak Republic) and in the interwar period they published the magazine *Eva*, which in structure and thematic terms was most similar to the Slovak magazine KJ and we can assume that it was an inspiration for the editors of KJ. Another magazine was *Československá žena* (the Czechoslovak Woman), which was later renamed *Katolícka žena* (the Catholic Woman). BERÁNKOVÁ, Milena – KŘIVÁNKOVÁ, Alena – RUTTKAY, Fraňo. *Dějiny československé žurnalistiky*. Praha : Novinář, 1988, pp. 142–144.

30 *Myšlienky zo skúseností*. In *Katolícka jednota*, 1921, vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 40–41.

31 *Myšlienky zo skúseností*. In *Katolícka jednota*, 1921, vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 40–41.

they relied on the very teachings of the Catholic Church, which they considered unquestionable.<sup>32</sup>

Catholic women, who sought to promote the image of the loyal and rational Catholic woman, challenged persistent views that depicted them as easily manipulated and dependent on priests.<sup>33</sup> To defend their competence, they faced the demand to adapt to the standards of behaviour expected of responsible citizens, “Well, didn’t our democracy give us the right to do that? Yes, our democracy gave us our women’s rights, and we, with united strength, silent love, work sensibly in our KJ.”<sup>34</sup> For this reason, they tried to be not only loyal but also logical. The magazine was intended to serve as an educational tool and intellectual resource for Catholic women,<sup>35</sup> and as such, female editors tried to contribute to topics in which they felt competent as women, mothers, Catholics, and citizens. The editors set themselves the goal of educating women so that they are not only obedient, but also reasonable and use their voice:

I only read books in which the Christian-Catholic truth is contained. And I believe in this and only this truth, and therefore, I give it to others. [...] Dear sisters, let’s be wise! Let’s act sensibly because the enemies are attacking us and our *Katolícka jednota* from all sides. That’s why we need to open our mouths and say what our *Katolícka jednota* žien is and who we women are. Sisters, just don’t be silent because he’s grinding his tongue, and you’re silent.<sup>36</sup>

At the same time, the editors were aware of the influence they had in the family as women and through it, in society. Women were supposed to be teachers and educators, not only at home but also in society.<sup>37</sup> They saw the mother’s position as the one which the whole family relies on, and the woman has influence over her:

A woman and mother can always preach, correct in the family, and her speech will always have a result. Today, the priest is not listened to, our press is thrown around, our schools are avoided, but everyone finds the family hearth, everyone comes to their mother.<sup>38</sup>

In the magazine, we find many references to the fact that women had great power through the family, and thus they felt responsible for the whole family, even society. The editors motivated women to serve the public, but not in such a way that would tear them away from their families. Domestic work always comes first, but next to this, circumstances so urgently demand that she use her

32 In articles in the magazine KJ, editors often quoted the Bible, referred to biblical stories, or wrote about saints, and also referred to papal encyclicals.

33 During the interwar period, many Catholic women achieved higher and university education, and therefore they themselves could perceive their Catholicity as an unfair social underestimation, especially in their professional field. ZAVACKÁ 2009, p. 66.

34 *Myšlienky zo skúseností*. In *Katolícka jednota*, 1921, vol. 2, no. 7, p. 103.

35 Women’s magazines with an all-female editorial team represent a source for research on women’s thinking. Women could publish their opinions in their magazine, as well as the feedback of their readers in various sections. BALLASTER, Ros. *Women’s Worlds. Ideology, Femininity and the Woman’s Magazine*. New York : New York University Press, 1992, pp. 1–2.

36 The author wrote these words at the end of the article, in which she summarized her encounter with the socialist man. The words “just don’t be silent because he’s grinding his tongue, and you’re silent,” referred to encouraging Catholic women to speak out more against socialists both within their families and in public. *Myšlienky zo skúseností*. In *Katolícka jednota*, 1921, vol. 2, no. 7, p. 106.

37 Although the magazine was intended for all “Slovak women,” it was focused on mothers and wives. The magazine does not contain articles about religious and monastic vocations for women.

38 *Z nášho života*. In *Katolícka jednota*, 1921, vol. 2, no. 3, p. 48.

voice in public, and that fearlessly, especially when the voice of conscience calls her to it.<sup>39</sup> Especially as time progresses, we can see more and more frequent calls for public involvement of Catholic women.<sup>40</sup>

## Socialism as the Enemy of Catholic Women

According to Bourdieu, changes in *doxa* can only occur when it becomes visible, which often happens during major social changes or events, such as the First World War, during which women began to be employed to a greater extent, even outside of jobs that would have been associated with her maternal role, like maids or teachers had been until that time.<sup>41</sup> Also, the First Czechoslovak Republic allowed women higher education, including university education, which opened many new fields of work for women. The number of kindergartens and nurseries increased, and the economy adjusted in a way that a man's salary was no longer enough to provide for the whole family.<sup>42</sup> Post-war society encouraged the growth of socialist and later communist ideas and movements that sought to use the country's new situation to advance their goals. On the other hand, there were still active voices calling for the return of society to its pre-war state.

The feeling of a greater threat to society motivated Catholic women, who were supposed to start dealing with social issues. The "dark clouds" in the above quote at the beginning of the study referred to socialism, which had a lot of support after the war.<sup>43</sup> As the main enemy of the Catholic Church, socialism was given a lot of space in the magazine, especially in the first issues. An analysis of the articles in the first issue of the journal reveals a clear focus on themes related to the defence of Catholic values, concerns about secularization, and criticism of socialist ideologies. The opening article defined the association's goals and outlined its commitment to preserving Catholic values in Slovakia. This was followed by a discussion on threats to the family structure, which the authors attributed to post-war secularizing trends. Another article addressed the issue of Slovak schools, criticizing the appointment of Czech teachers who were not Catholic, presenting this as a danger to the national and religious identity of the Slovak people.

A significant portion of the content was dedicated to warnings against the Jewish community, with concerns raised about their alleged attempt to dominate Slovak society. The authors also criticized socialist ideas, viewing them as

39 Naše povinnosti. In *Katolícka jednota*, 1923, vol. 4, no. 6, p. 5.

40 KJŽ gradually spread views that women are responsible for the salvation of the whole family and for the state in which society was, "And so responsible is our task that from our hands, God will demand accounts for the salvation or the damnation of our husband, our children, members of our households, and thus indirectly also for the development of religious life in villages, in various public institutions, in the state." Rezolúcia katolíckych žien, snemujúcich dňa 29. júna 1935 v Prahe pri 1. celoštátnom sjazde katolíkov ČSR. In *Katolícka jednota*, 1935, vol. 16, no. 9, p. 8.

41 BOURDIEU 2010, p. 426.

42 ŠKORVANKOVÁ, Eva. Ženský odbor HSES ako koordinátor sociálnej práce? In *Populačné štúdie Slovenska 13*. Bratislava : Muzeológia a kultúrne dedičstvo, 2020, pp. 59–61.

43 Magazines had a significant influence on public opinion. In Slovakia, a communist magazine called *Proletárka* was founded, which also aimed to appeal to Slovak Catholic women. Articles in the magazines often responded to each other, creating a public debate that took place on their pages. Catholic themed magazines frequently reacted to communist ones, and vice versa. CLAY, Catherine. *Women's Periodicals and Print Culture in Britain, 1918–1939*. Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press, 2018, p. 5.



a danger to both the spiritual and moral values of society. Furthermore, there was a critique of the materialistic pursuit of an “easier life,” which was seen as linked to socialist ideology and a deviation from religious principles.

An analysis of the journal’s content between 1920 and 1923 shows that 59.23% of the articles dealt with themes related to socialism and communism.<sup>44</sup> Such a substantial proportion indicates that despite the journal’s official stance as apolitical and focused on women’s issues, the majority of its socio-political content was dedicated to opposing socialist and communist ideologies. Articles repeatedly warned against the dangers of these movements, viewing them as threats to traditional Catholic values and social order.

This thematic trend continued in the following years, remaining prominent until 1925 when HSLŠ joined the government coalition after the elections. The journal thus played an important role in promoting Catholic and conservative viewpoints, focusing on the protection of traditional values against growing socialist and communist threats.

The constant warnings were aimed at dissuading Catholic women from any interest in socialism as the editors were aware that many Catholic women also voted for Sociálno demokratická strana (the Social Democratic Party), “It is sad to think that not only many Catholic men, but also Catholic women believed in—and still believe in—the wicked social democracy. That this is what we saw best during the elections.”<sup>45</sup> The topics that were chosen to write about were related to the topics that they, as women, wanted to cover. The editors of KJŽ perceived socialism as a fundamental threat to three key areas of life: the Catholic Church, education, and the family. They perceived efforts to secularise public and political life as an attack on their religious identity and faith, considering the weakening of the influence of the Catholic Church dangerous not only for their community but also for the social order based on Christian values. Even though the editors of the magazine focused primarily on issues related to the women’s role in the family, society, and religious life, all these matters were intertwined with the defence of Catholic values against the onset of socialist ideas. In the context of education and the upbringing of children, they advocated the need to preserve traditional religious education, including teaching religion and maintaining church schools, which they considered an integral part of moral formation for children. At the same time, they rejected any attempts to secularise education, i.e. efforts to cancel church schools and religious classes or remove religious symbols from schools.

### A Catholic Alternative to Feminist Emancipation

In line with Bourdieu’s theory, the magazine’s discourse shows how Catholic women legitimised their public involvement while adhering to Church ideology. The editors of KJ argued that the traditional family system was “God-given” and “natural” and therefore, the only correct one.<sup>46</sup> They also

<sup>44</sup> In 1920, three issues of the journal were published, and in 1921, 1922, and 1923, there were 11 issues each year. Over this period, a total of 252 articles were published, of which 149 articles contained references to socialism or communism.

<sup>45</sup> Boj proti sociáldemokracii. In *Katolícka jednota*, 1923, vol. 4, no. 6, pp. 14–15.

<sup>46</sup> For example, “In this (family), a man finds support and comfort in worrying about his daily

referred to the teachings of the Catholic Church, which according to them, was infallible.<sup>47</sup> The appeal of the “Church” is as abstract as the “God-given” or “natural” argument, and as such they refused to see a human construct behind it.<sup>48</sup> This also shaped their view of secular feminism. Catholic women relied on the teachings of the Church, which lectured on the complementary nature of men and women within the family and society. The Catholic Church taught that while men and women were equal in dignity, their roles were different. It was therefore natural for Catholic women to reject secular feminist demands for full equality in the public sphere. The editors reminded the readers that it was Jesus who raised woman from the state of slavery and thanks to Christianity, women became equal to men. According to them, the efforts of secular feminists were meant to bring women back into slavery:

I don't think of those unfortunate women who, in a moment of enraged passion, would have been ready to take on pagan slavery as well (marital separation, “free love,” etc.). These, it seems to me, do not know what they are doing!<sup>49</sup>

Members of KJŽ and the editorial staff were faced with the question of how to stand against the secular feminist ideas that were spreading in connection with socialism, and later communism. New ideas on women's freedom, equality, economic independence, and the overall prosperity of the country through women's participation in the labour market appealed to women. However, some of these ideas were not in line with Catholic teachings. Many Catholic women experienced internal conflict when confronted with feminist ideas, which manifested itself mainly in the fact that Catholic women often rejected secular feminist concepts that would disrupt traditional gender roles, but at the same time, felt the need to be active in the public sphere and demonstrate that their role was equally important, yet different.<sup>50</sup>

The editors of KJ magazine looked for arguments to defend traditional gender roles. At the same time, they were very careful not to display inadvertent affection towards secular feminist ideas. The editors continued to see secular feminism as a danger, yet over time, began to accept some secular feminist ideas, especially regarding the activism of women in the public space. They argued that the family as the basic social unit must remain intact because it ensures moral

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bread, a woman finds her natural calling, and children receive their upbringing.” Chráňme si rodinu. In *Katolícka jednota*, 1921, vol. 2, no. 1, p. 1.

47 The Catholic Church created an image of the infallibility of the Pope and the Catholic Church that could not be questioned. Priests could make mistakes, but the teachings of the Church remained indisputable. BOURDIEU, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. London : Routledge, 2010, pp. 399–400.

48 The Church, by its authority, refused to allow the search for truth outside of the Church. The Church was to be the sole mediator of truth and assistance to people, both in matters of family and society, as well as in issues of practicing the faith. BOURDIEU, Pierre. In *Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*. Stanford : Stanford University Press, 1990, p. 151; and REY, Terry. Pierre Bourdieu on Religion. In KING, Richard (ed.) *Religion, Theory, Critique: Classic and Contemporary Approaches and Methodologies*. New York : Columbia University Press, 2017, p. 471.

49 Žena – a žena. In *Katolícka jednota*, 1923, vol. 4, no. 1, p. 3.

50 “A woman first belongs to the family and the household, and only then does she belong to society and the secular public.” Rodičom o dievčatách. In *Katolícka jednota*, 1921, vol. 2, no. 1, p. 11; or “A mother, a natural educator of children, is called by God.” Vplyv matkin. In *Katolícka jednota*, 1921, vol. 2, no. 3, p. 1.

order and stability,<sup>51</sup> which conflicted with how some feminist trends emphasised the independence of women from marriage and family. In articles, they emphasised that if the emancipation of women is to be successful, it must follow Christian teachings, which do not deny the importance of a woman's role in society but at the same time, define the position based on gender and religious principles.<sup>52</sup> The editors thus created an alternative to feminist emancipation. According to them, emancipation should engender women in finding their fulfilment and self-realisation in the family and public only in the case of defending their faith.<sup>53</sup> This approach rejected feminist notions of freedom as a choice between family and career. Instead, they emphasised the harmony between a woman's spiritual and family role:

Therefore, a woman must return to her life's vocation. Fulfil it seriously and realistically. In its fulfilment, seek your value, virtue and your ideal consciousness, even pride. She must know that in the fulfilment of her life duties, she stands on the highest level of the feminine ideal.<sup>54</sup>

Their motivation was not to fight for women's rights, but rather to fight for the values they professed. Women were called to activism through slogans such as "Mothers, defend yourself!"<sup>55</sup> or "Catholic women—to fight!"<sup>56</sup> However, these appeals were not addressed directly to women as individuals, but emphasised their social roles, i.e. as mothers or Catholics. They perceived efforts to promote the legal possibility of marital separation and divorce negatively because it went against the biblical passage "Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate,"<sup>57</sup> and although women themselves fought for the possibility of divorces and separations in parliament, Catholic women, including a member of Parliament Augusta Rozsypalová, condemned both institutes.<sup>58</sup>

51 "Under the protection of the sacramental nature of the family, Christian spouses in the 9<sup>th</sup> century lived in fidelity and nurtured the undergrowth of the Church and the state. And wasn't the world better, more reliable, more moral and healthier? [...] And the foundations of this family are being undermined by freethinkers, social democrats, mischief-makers and a few prejudiced people? They do this partly for the reason that, supposedly, they want to free man from forced bonds. Well, of course, from moral bonds, which are an obstacle to human mischief. What will happen to future generations, that doesn't matter to them." *Chráňme si rodinu*. In *Katolícka jednota*, 1921, vol. 2, no. 1, p. 3.

52 "A woman is irreplaceably necessary for family life, but equally necessary for the interests of Christ's kingdom, everywhere in public life—that is, in short, the motto of a well-understood Christian emancipation of women." VÁCLAVÍKOVÁ-MATULAYOVÁ, Margita. *Katolíčky – do práce!* In *Katolícka jednota*, 1936, vol. 17, no. 2, p. 5.

53 "The apostolate of women has a wide field of action. In the family and in the neighborhood, on the street and in the shops, on trains and at the ballot boxes, that is, in private and in public life." *Apoštolát žien*. In *Katolícka jednota*, 1923, vol. 4, no. 1, p. 8. Similarly, French noblewomen did not join the feminist movement but instead founded their own organizations to support the preservation of traditional family and society. Elizabeth C. Macknight argues that this was largely because noblewomen accepted subordination because their social environment was dominated by institutions such as the family and the Catholic Church. As the political and economic influence of the French aristocracy began to decline in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, noblewomen supported the preservation of the values that also supported their social status. Tradition and Catholic values transcended personal demands, and therefore they gave these values greater importance than women's rights. MACKNIGHT, Elizabeth C. *Why Weren't They Feminists? Parisian Noble Women and the Campaigns for Women's Rights in France, 1880–1914*. In *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 2007, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 127–140.

54 *Ideálna žena*. In *Katolícka jednota*, 1923, vol. 4, no. 8, p. 8.

55 *Matky, bráňte sa!* In *Katolícka jednota*, 1924, vol. 5, no. 2, p. 3.

56 *Katolícke ženy – do boja!* In *Katolícka jednota*, 1935, vol. 16, no. 4, pp. 4–5.

57 Matthew 19:6. Catholic translation. This quote from the Bible was used in several articles dealing with marriage, divorce, and separation.

58 Augusta Rozsypalová, the only woman elected to the Czechoslovak People's Party, used her parlia-

These organisations used the term “women’s movement” and saw their activities as responsible citizenship or service to the Church rather than activism for women’s rights. Activism perceived in this way was more acceptable, especially for women from a more conservative environment.<sup>59</sup> Also, the so-called social motherhood, i.e. the extension of the primary role of caring for family and society, was the most widespread reason for the activation and emergence of Catholic women’s movements.<sup>60</sup> It meant being educators and maintainers of morality with their actions and their voice, but also by expanding charities in the sense of caring not only for children and the household, but also for the needy in society.<sup>61</sup>

## Conclusion

The foundation of KJŽ and the launch of its magazine, KJ, in 1920 must be understood within the broader socio-political context of interwar Slovakia. During this period, the growing influence of the Social Democratic Party, and later the Communist Party, introduced secular feminist discourses that challenged traditional Catholic conceptions of gender and society. Catholic women, often marginalized both for their faith and their gender, responded by establishing their own organisational and intellectual space. Through the magazine KJ, they sought to demonstrate that Catholic women were not passive recipients of religious doctrine, but intellectually capable individuals engaged in contemporary social and political debates.

The magazine became a central tool through which these women articulated a vision of Catholic femininity grounded in tradition, yet responsive to modern challenges. While opposing the ideological premises of secular feminism—particularly its roots in socialism and communism—the editors also asserted a form of public engagement that allowed Catholic women to speak on matters of family, education, morality, and national identity. Thus, the publication contributed to the formation of Catholic women as intellectually aware and socially active persons, but always within the limits of Church teachings.<sup>62</sup> In doing so, they offered a distinct Catholic alternative to secular feminist movements; a form of Catholic feminism that defended traditional gender roles yet

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mentary mandate to advocate for the repeal of legislation permitting divorce and legal separation, as well as to oppose the legalisation of abortion. Similarly, the Czech Catholic women’s organisation Union of Catholic Women and Girls submitted a petition to the government demanding the annulment of the law that allowed divorce and separation. Throughout the entire interwar period, Catholic political parties in parliament consistently opposed legislation that contradicted Catholic teaching. MUSILOVÁ, Dana. *Z ženského pohledu. Poslankyně a senátorky Národního shromáždění Československé republiky 1918–1939*. České Budějovice : Vedita, 2007, p. 69.

59 BEAUMONT, Caitriona. Fighting for the ‘Privileges of Citizenship’: the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), feminism and the women’s movement, 1928–1945. In *Women’s History Review*, 2014, vol. 23, no. 3, p. 464. It was this perception of women as moralists that distanced Catholic women from any form of radicalism. MORGAN, Sue (ed.) *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain, 1750–1900*. New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, p. 3.

60 BLASCO HERRANZ, Inmaculada. Citizenship and Female Catholic Militancy in 1920s Spain. In *Gender and History*, 2007, vol. 19, no. 3, p. 441.

61 MÍNGUEZ-BLASCO 2021, pp. 98–99.

62 MORGAN, Sue – DE VRIES, Jacqueline (eds.) *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800–1940*. London : Routledge, 2010, p. 192.



simultaneously carved out space for women's agency and intellectual participation in public life. The magazine's efforts were not only reactive, but also constructive, redefining what it meant to be a modern Catholic woman in a rapidly transforming society.

The trend of establishing Catholic women's organizations began in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as a response to the growing influence of secular feminism, whose ideas were often incompatible with Catholic teachings. The success of secular feminist movements also motivated the formation of opposing Catholic groups. Similar resistance to secular feminist ideas, as seen in Slovakia, was also present in countries like Ireland, Great Britain, and France, where Catholic women's movements emerged that opposed feminist ideas deemed inconsistent with Catholic values. These movements were part of a wider international response to secular feminism and reflected the Catholic Church's struggle to preserve traditional social structures in a rapidly modernizing world. Feminism was viewed as part of modernity, which the Catholic Church had long resisted. As James Chappel noted, Catholic intellectuals sought to challenge modern trends, positioning Church teachings as the antithesis to modernity.

In contrast, in some predominantly Catholic countries such as Italy and Spain, a distinct form of Catholic feminism developed. These movements sought to integrate feminist ideas, particularly women's rights, with Christian principles. Such associations included the English Catholic Women's Suffrage Society—later renamed the St. Joan's Social and Political Alliance, the Italian Association of Catholic Women,<sup>63</sup> and the Spanish Catholic Women's Movement under the leadership of Juana Salas de Jiménez.<sup>64</sup> These organizations were not focused on opposing secular feminism but rather on advocating for women's rights from a Catholic perspective, linking social motherhood with political activism for women's rights and using the term "Christian feminism" to describe this approach. Importantly, movements such as the St. Joan's Alliance and others were also supported by certain members of the clergy and grounded their activities in Catholic teaching—though they interpreted it in a more progressive way, better aligned with ideas shared by secular feminism, while never directly opposing Church teaching.<sup>65</sup>

63 DAWES, Helena. The Catholic Church and the Woman Question: Catholic Feminism in Italy in The Early 1900s. In *The Catholic Historical Review*, 2011, vol. 97, no. 3, p. 499.

64 BLASCO HERRANZ 2007, p. 441.

65 CLARK, Elaine. Catholics and the Campaign for Women's Suffrage in England. In *Church History*, 2004, vol. 73, no. 3, pp. 635–665.