

## “For God and Nation”

### Catholicism and the Far-Right in the Central European Context (1918–1945)

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In memory of Yeshayahu Andrej Jelínek (1933–2016)

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The study deals with the somewhat controversial issue of the so-called “clerical fascism”. For this purpose, it summarizes the recent historiographical debates on totalitarianism, in particular on “political religions” or rather politicization of religions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The special emphasis is laid on individual clerics who sympathized and collaborated with fascist regimes in Nazi Germany and the Slovak state, respectively. In applying Roger Griffin’s and Thomas Forstner’s typology, two types of attitudes to fascism and National Socialism are discussed: loyalty and active collaboration.

Key words: Politics. Religion. Catholicism. Fascism. National Socialism. Clergy.

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#### 1. Totalitarianism and political religions

The interest of historiography in phenomena between politics and religion increased especially in the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> This period brought a revival of the theory of totalitarianism as an indirect reaction to the break up of the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc. Apart from the “classical” theories of Carl J. Friedrich, Zbigniew Brzezinski or Hannah Arendt, approaches combining totalitarianism with theories of so-called political religions gradually came into the foreground. According to these theories, Italian Fascism, Nazism and Stalinism had certain allegedly religious qualities such as “deification” of the state or of political leaders and entities such as the nation, “race” or class. According to the proclaimers of this approach, political religions were not identical to the established Christian

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churches, although they did not cast doubt on the general influence of Christianity. In the German environment, they appealed to one of the pioneers of this approach: Eric Voegelin, a political scientist working originally in Austria and later in the USA. As early as 1938 he published a study with the title *Politische Religionen*. Voegelin identified the essence of these phenomena in the process of “immanentization” or secularization of the transcendent. Secular phenomena such as the state, leader, nation, race and class were changed by this process into the so-called *realissimum* that is the perfect highest reality, which becomes the object of religious veneration.<sup>2</sup> Voegelin later gave up use of the term political religion and identified the process of “immanentization” with Gnosticism that is with the teaching originally proclaimed by Early Christian and medieval heretics, demonizing the material world and wishing to merge with the purely spiritual. Voegelin recognized in gnostic dualism the basic principle of a universal historical “revolt against transcendence” and the sacralization of the world culminating in the totalitarianism of the 20th century.<sup>3</sup>

Similar diagnoses are found in recent theories of political religion. The Italian historian Emilio Gentile is a leading representative of this field. In his view, the political religions of fascism, Nazism and Stalinism represent totalitarian deviations from the universal tendency towards religious legitimization of politics embodied especially in the phenomenon of so-called *civil religion* in the USA. This totalitarian deviation began to appear as a result of the crisis of liberalism in Europe at the end of the 19th century and culminated after the First World War with both the politicization of traditional religions and the sacralization of politics in the totalitarian movements and regimes in Italy, Germany and the Soviet Union.<sup>4</sup> The British historian Michael Burleigh undertook to reconstruct the whole process. His general synthesizing works attempt to reconstruct the historical progression from the Enlightenment “religion of reason” to present-day jihad. He did not limit himself to the explicit sacralization of politics, but also considered the reactions of the established churches. The weakness of this approach is the author’s apparent effort to explain the rise and success of political religions as a sort of usurpation of the sacred at the expense of traditional religion.<sup>5</sup>

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2 MAIER, Hans. Political Religion: a Concept and its Limitations. In *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 2007, vol. 8, no. 1, p. 5-16.

3 VOEGELIN, Eric. *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987. ISBN 9780226861142.

4 GENTILE, Emilio. *Politics as Religion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006, 168 p. ISBN 9780691113937.

5 BURLEIGH, Michael. *Earthly Powers: The Conflict between Religion and Politics from the French Revolution to the Great War*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2009, 560 p. ISBN 9780061741456; BURLEIGH, Michael. *Sacred Causes: The Clash of Religion and Politics*

In spite of this, the theory of political religions did not become part of perhaps the most ambitious attempt to reconceptualize totalitarianism, which resulted in the collective monograph *Beyond Totalitarianism*.<sup>6</sup> The American historian David D. Roberts also has written a substantial criticism of totalitarianism, while proposing a deeper conception of political religions.<sup>7</sup> He criticizes in this conception especially its homogenizing tendency, which squeezes empirical historical reality into an interpretative framework determined in advance. In the German environment, this concerns an ambivalent relationship to Christianity, which reduces totalitarianism to a usurper or at best an epigone of Christian semantics. A good example is the application of the motif of the apocalypse as an analytical category in the Nazi ideology and politics as presented by Voegelin's pupil Klaus Vondung.<sup>8</sup> However, Roberts disagrees with the "functionalist" approaches of Emilio Gentile or Roger Griffin as well. In his view, they both incorrectly interpret political religions as a deformed expression of a quasi existential human need to sacralize politics. Roberts, on the other hand, demands that we consider the historical novelty of totalitarianism by creating new categories of analysis – not only by taking over the vocabulary of its contemporaries, who named certain phenomena as they were accustomed, in the case of political religions, with the help of "familiar" Christian terms.<sup>9</sup> Myths of "rebirth" (Griffin) or "apocalypse" in the sense of a Day of Judgement do not express the essence of a secularized historical mission, which the actors of totalitarianism adopt. Indeed, they fight their historic struggle in a world deprived of traditional religious and world-view certainties such as liberalism or Marxism before internal crisis prefiguring the rise of fascism/Nazism and Leninism/Stalinism.<sup>10</sup>

For example, the study by the German theologian Thomas Schirmacher *Hitlers Kriegerreligion* (Hitler's Religion of War) represents an analysis of political religion in the sense described by David D. Roberts. According to Schirmacher, Hitler believed in God, but his God was not about to reveal Christian love, but a social-Darwinist "struggle for survival". He took over the language and symbols of Christianity very selectively. He identified it with the "Aryans", and in

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*From the Great War to the War on Terror*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2008. 576 p. ISBN 9780060580964.

- 6 GEYER, Michael – FITZPATRICK, Sheila (eds). *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 536 p. ISBN 9780521897969.
- 7 ROBERTS, David D. „Political Religion“ and the Totalitarian Departures of Inter-war Europe: On the Uses and Disadvantages of an Analytical Category. In *Contemporary European History*, 2009, vol. 18, no. 4, p. 381-414. ISSN 0960-7773.
- 8 VONDUNG, Klaus. *The Apocalypse in Germany*. Translated by Stephan D. Ricks. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000. 437 p. ISBN 9780826212924.
- 9 ROBERTS, ref. 7, p. 396-399.
- 10 ROBERTS, ref. 7, p. 399-405.

contrast to other fanatical Nazis led by Heinrich Himmler, he did not regard it as a “Jewish product”.<sup>11</sup> Schirmacher emphasizes that religious analysis of Hitler’s world view does not mean ignoring other important aspects of Nazi ideology and practice. However, Roger Eatwell criticizes precisely this on the conception of political religions.<sup>12</sup> In his view this conception essentially develops the criticism of mass society from the 1950s and 1960s, which interpreted the tendencies towards fascism in the context of the loss of “meaning” (anomy) of the uprooted modern man. According to Eatwell, however, fascism and Nazism with their cult of the leader and aestheticization of politics did not represent only an appeal to the emotions, but to a large extent “rational” attempts to find some sort of a “third way” between liberalism and socialism. Therefore, fascism and Nazism need to be considered as ideologies and this also applies to their expansionism and racism, that were legitimated by (pseudo)-scientific means, and not through “*affective pseudo-religious sentiments*”.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. Clerical Fascism

Together with the conception of political religions, Roger Eatwell also criticizes another, even more problematic concept, that of so-called clerical fascism. This term originated in Italy and designated the sympathy of part of the Catholic clergy led by some members of parliament for the democratic People’s Party towards the growing, originally anti-clerical fascist movement.<sup>14</sup> These sympathies were motivated both ideologically with corporatism as an alternative to liberal capitalism and collectivist socialism, and through common “enemies”, namely the liberal state and international left. This coming together culminated in the conclusion of the Lateran Treaties between fascist Italy and the Vatican, but cracks appeared as a result of disputes about the organization of young people in Catholic Action and the real test came in the context of war in Ethiopia and the adoption of racist legislation following the example of Nazi Germany at the end of the 1930s. In spite of this, a large part of the Catholic hierarchy headed by Pope Pius XI remained in alliance with Mussolini.<sup>15</sup>

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11 SCHIRRMACHER, Thomas. *Hitlers Kriegsreligion. Die Verankerung der Weltanschauung Hitlers in seiner religiösen Begrifflichkeit*. Bonn: Verlag für Wissenschaft und Kultur, 2007, 583 p. ISBN 3938116315.

12 EATWELL, Roger. Reflections on Fascism and Religion. In *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 2003, vol. 4, no. 3, p. 145-166. ISSN 1469-0764.

13 EATWELL, ref. 12, p. 147.

14 POLLARD, John F. Conservative Catholics and Italian Fascism: The Clero-fascists. In BLINKHORN, Martin (ed.). *Fascists and Conservatives: The Radical Right and the Establishment of Twentieth Century Europe*. London: Unwin Hyman, 1990, p. 31-49. ISBN 0049400878.

15 KERTZER, David I. *The Pope and Mussolini: The Secret History of Pius XI and the Rise of Fascism in Europe*. New York: Random House, 2014, 554 p. ISBN 9780812983678.

The situation in Germany was different. Hitler's NSDAP emphasized its support for a non-confessional "positive Christianity" already in its original programme from 1920. After coming to power in 1933, Hitler's government also concluded a concordat with the Vatican and used its power to unite the Protestant churches, where the so-called "German Christians" close to the Nazis were promoted. In the second half of the 1930s, the Nazis unleashed an anti-Catholic and partly also anti-Lutheran campaign, but after the outbreak of war the status quo was more or less maintained. In spite of the fact that the churches and the Nazis also had common enemies in Germany headed by the communists and "Jews", Roger Eatwell refuses to use the term clerical fascism, which, in his view, should designate explicitly religious fascist movements such as the Rumanian Iron Guard. According to him, in Germany and Italy we have at most "clerical fellow-travellers" or "clerical opportunists".<sup>16</sup>

Richard J. Wolff and Jörg K. Hoensch already rejected the expression clerical fascism with a similar explanation to Eatwell in the introduction to a collective monograph on Catholicism and fascism in inter-war Europe from the 1980s. In their view it is not possible to define a clerical-fascist ideology or its bearers, since "*Repudiation of class struggle, criticism of capitalism and socialism, reliance upon the corporatist structures, recognition of the Catholic Church as a mainstay of national culture and identity, and opposition to communism*" cannot balance disagreement with the basic premises of fascist thinking on the role of the state and churches or the position of the individual in society and racist theories. The more revolutionary the regime, the less support it had from the Church.<sup>17</sup>

The book by the American historian Richard Steigmann-Gall *The Holy Reich* stirred up a much wider debate than Eatwell at the same time. His enterprise was the opposite to that of the others. He was not primarily concerned with political religions or with clerical fascism, but with the "conceptions of Christianity" of prominent Nazis, starting from the above mentioned programme of the NSDAP about "positive Christianity". Steigmann-Gall reduces this "positive Christianity" essentially to the field of radical nationalism and common "enemies": anti-liberalism, anti-Marxism and understandably anti-Semitism, which was expressed in German Protestant circles in a tendency to cast doubt on the Jewish origin of Jesus Christ and demand the removal of the Old Testament from the Bible.<sup>18</sup>

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16 EATWELL, ref. 12, p. 154.

17 WOLFF, Richard J. – HOENSCH, Jörg K. Introduction. In WOLFF, HOENSCH (eds.). *Catholics, the State, and the European Radical Right, 1919–1945*. Boulder: East European Monographs, 1987, p. xii. ISBN 0880331267.

18 STEIGMANN-GALL, Richard. *The Holy Reich: Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919–1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 294 p. ISBN 0521603528.

Extraordinarily critical views on Steigmann-Gall's thesis were published, for example, in a thematic issue of *The Journal of Contemporary History*.<sup>19</sup>

The discussions of political religions and the “revisionism” of Steigmann-Gall eventually stimulated the first more serious attempt to reconceptualize clerical fascism in the form of an international academic conference. The papers from it were published in a thematic issue of the journal *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, and later also in a book.<sup>20</sup> The leitmotiv of this reconceptualization is analysis of “hybridizations” of two “ostensibly antagonistic faith systems”: traditional religion (“long-established and monotheistic”) and modern nationalism (“secular and revolutionary”).<sup>21</sup> The study by Roger Griffin is an independent programme article outlining both the history of this largely polemic concept and providing a starting point in the form of a clear conceptualization. This is based on the distinction made by Emilio Gentile between “politics as religion” and “sacralization of politics” potentially culminating in political religion. Griffin postulates the conception of “clerical fascism” reduced to an instrument for the analysis of phenomena, when the representatives of established churches (“clerics”) engage in favour of a secular “revolutionary” ideology, find points of contact and similarities and in extreme cases attempt a synthesis or “hybridization” of two autonomous phenomena. In the first case they submit to the fascist myth of “rebirth” and overlook its real, secular and revolutionary essence, mainly thanks to faith that a common “enemy” – materialism, Bolshevism, the Jew – is an adequate guarantee of an unstable ideological balance. In this sense, Griffin proposes to speak of “collusion” or “merging” of two separate ideological currents. He finds examples in the regimes of the Slovak State or the “Independent State of Croatia”. In his view, the second case happens when “identification and synthesis” replace “collusion”: “a clerical variant of fascism in which the vision of a cleansing national revolution is expressed and rationalized in a seemingly homogenized, unified Christian discourse”.<sup>22</sup> Griffin illustrates this tendency using the example of the so-called “German Christians” – Protestants, who identified with Nazism also on the theological level. Griffin eventually derives from his reconceptualization of the term “clerical fascism” four conclusions that his research has to accept: 1. the need for definition of a term, 2. the question of

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19 Nazism, Christianity and Political Religion. A Debate. In *The Journal of Contemporary History*, 2007, vol. 42, no. 1. ISSN 00220094.

20 FELDMAN, Matthew – TURDA, Marius – GEORGESCU, Tudor (eds.). *Clerical Fascism in Interwar Europe*. London: Routledge, 2008, 264 p. ISBN 0415448247.

21 FELDMAN, Matthew – TURDA, Marius. “Clerical Fascism” in Interwar Europe: An Introduction. In *Feldman*, ref. 20 p. xiii.

22 GRIFFIN, Roger. The “Holy Storm”: “Clerical Fascism” through the Lens of Modernism. In *Feldman*, ref. 20, p. 8.



agents – the term does not have to designate the regime as a whole, but only part of it, namely individual actors or collaborators, 3. an emphasis on the secular, anti-Christian “core” of fascism, 4. an inter-disciplinary approach.<sup>23</sup>

Griffin more precisely defines these views in a further study, where he devotes his attention specifically to the relationship between fascism and Catholicism. In his view, fascism is incompatible with Catholicism in the theological, soteriological and cosmological sense, because fascism is a secular and immanent attempt to achieve “rebirth of the nation” in a specific form depending on the historical context, while Catholicism represents institutionally and morally founded faith in the Divine Saviour Jesus Christ. On the other hand, Griffin also recognizes that Catholics and fascists are linked by common values in relation to modernity. Both camps, although for different reasons, oppose materialism, individualism, decadence, atomization, moral anarchy and sexual emancipation, but support family life, patriarchy and the values of “community” against the threats from liberal capitalism and communism.<sup>24</sup> The representatives of both proclaimed anti-Semitism, in which all these threats were personified.

In spite of this, Griffin cannot convincingly explain why many Catholics sought “salvation” in the secular ideology of fascism or even Nazism, which some also attempted to defend in theological terms. In my view, it is not enough to point to the contradictory nature of the human psyche or the unclear boundaries between the two camps. For the purposes of historical analysis, it is essential to attempt to create analytical terms or instruments, which enable us to interpret the tension between a revealed religion with its ethics and a secular ideology, even if the objects of analysis are not aware of it. One of the possibilities is two at first sight incompatible definitions of religion: “external/historical” and “internal/ideal”, which Doris Bergen applies to the movement of the so-called “German Christians”.<sup>25</sup> However, Bergen understands these definitions in the wider historical context: “The same tension abounds throughout the history of Christianity (and perhaps of all other utopian religions and movements), where the ironic and often violent contradictions between ideals (love of neighbour; liberty, equality and fraternity; from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs) and realities (slavery, racism, terror, ethnocide) is the everyday

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23 GRIFFIN, ref. 22, p. 12-13.

24 GRIFFIN, Roger. An Unholy Alliance? The Convergence between Revealed Religion and Sacralized Politics in Inter-War Europe. In NELIS, Jan – MORELLI, Anne – PRAET, Danni (eds.). *Catholicism and Fascism in Europe 1918–1945*. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2015, p. 55-57. ISBN 3487152436.

25 BERGEN, Doris L. Nazism and Christianity: Partners and Rivals? A Response to Richard Steigmann-Gall, *The Holy Reich. Nazi Conceptions of Christianity, 1919–1945*. In *The Journal of Contemporary History*, 2007, vol. 42, no. 1, p. 28-29.

stuff of human history.”<sup>26</sup> According to Bergen, reducing religion to idealism and faith is unsatisfactory: “*Tradition, ritual, community and institutions are much more important than belief or doctrine in most people’s religious identities.*”<sup>27</sup>

Clerical fascism was not only a polemical term, it soon became established in the historical and social sciences, and not only in the Italian context, but also in relation to the so-called Austro-fascism, which Roger Griffin placed among the “para-fascist” movements, because they did not aim at “revolutionary” change of the state and society.<sup>28</sup> Immediately after the Second World War, the American historian Charles Gulick, influenced by the Marxist definition of fascism as a synonym for monopoly capitalism, defined the Austrian regime of 1934–1938 as “*The totalitarianism that [...] was shared, by constitutional stipulation, with the Roman Catholic Church.*”<sup>29</sup> According to Gulick, Austrian fascism was not a mass movement, but it strove to prevent the penetration of German Nazism into Austria by imitating it, and since Nazism or “Greater German” nationalism was associated with Protestantism, the dictators Dollfuss and Schuschnigg built a “new order” on the ideological basis of papal encyclicals.<sup>30</sup> In the 1970s Klaus-Jörg Siegfried refused to define the Austrian regime as “semi-fascist” in a study with the title *Clerical fascism*, because according to Marxist criteria it was a dictatorship directed against the working class and its representatives for the purpose “*of overcoming a crisis in the reproduction of totalitarian monopoly capital*”, although the regime did not have a mass base.<sup>31</sup> The Austrian historian Ernst Hanisch later entirely rejected the term clerical fascism already used by the social democrat ideologue Otto Bauer, because of its inadequate theoretical basis and socialist argumentation he turned it around: According to Hanisch the strong engagement of the Catholic Church in favour of the regime was not an indication of its fascist nature, but rather an obstacle to it.<sup>32</sup>

The term clerical fascism was also used to designate the regime of Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party in the Slovak state. If we ignore the pseudo-scientific polemics in the spirit of the official communist doctrine, which used the slogan

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26 BERGEN, ref. 25, p. 29.

27 BERGEN, ref. 25.

28 GRIFFIN, ref. 22, p. 2.

29 GULICK, Charles A. *Austria from Habsburg to Hitler*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1948, vol. 1, p. 5. ISBN 9780520042117.

30 GULICK, ref. 29, p. 6.

31 SIEGFRIED, Klaus-Jörg. *Klerikalfaschismus. Zur Entstehung und sozialen Funktion des Dollfussregimes in Österreich. Ein Beitrag zur Faschismuskussion*. Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1979, p. 78-79. ISBN 3820464182.

32 HANISCH, Ernst. Der politische Katholizismus als ideologischer Träger des „Austrofaschismus“. In TÁLOS, Emmerich – NEUGEBAUER, Wolfgang (eds.). *Austrofaschismus. Politik – Ökonomie – Kultur*. Wien: LIT, 2014, p. 67. ISBN 9783825877125.



"clerico-fascism" as a battle cry,<sup>33</sup> perhaps the only extensive attempt to apply this term to Slovak realities is the monograph by Yeshayahu Andrej Jelínek *The Parish Republic* from 1976.<sup>34</sup> Jelínek was not inspired by Marxism. He analysed the ideology and political practice of Hlinka's Slovak People's Party, in which political Catholicism played a dominant although ambiguous role in relation to its fragmentation and the foreign policy framework of the Nazi "New Europe". Therefore, in his conclusion Jelínek distinguishes between the "clerical-fascist" claims and the resulting reality: "*The intentions were to establish a kind of theocracy in modern totalitarian dress. Instead, the outcome was a clerical authoritarian system using, more or less efficiently, several totalitarian methods.*"<sup>35</sup> Jelínek's attempt to conceptualize the term "clerical fascism" remained isolated for a long time. (Later he distanced himself from this term, perhaps under the influence of the criticism of Wolff and Hoensch.<sup>36</sup>) In more recent years, the French historian Alain Soubigou used the term clerical fascism because in his view it better corresponds to the character of the regime of the Slovak State than fascism in the sense of Griffin's "new consensus" or political religion, but Soubigou's conception of clerical fascism remains unclear.<sup>37</sup> We learn only that according to Soubigou, in the Slovak case we cannot speak of a fascist "Leader" or about a state-party with mass support, while the anti-Jewish policy allegedly "*derived mainly from Catholic anti-Judaism, rather than from racial anti-Semitism*".<sup>38</sup> The term clerical fascism was most recently used in a biography of Jozef Tiso by the American historian James Malice Ward. According to Ward, Tiso was not a "clerical fascist", but a "Christian national socialist", because he shifted between the authorities that had to legitimize him, sometimes "revolutionary" but at other

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33 LIPTÁK, Ľubomír. Jozef Tiso – problém slovenskej politiky a slovenskej historiografie. (Jozef Tiso – a problem for Slovak politics and Slovak historiography.). In BYSTRICKÝ, Valerián – FANO, Štefan (eds.). *Pokus o politický a osobný profil Jozefa Tisu. Zborník materiálov z vedeckého sympózia Častá-Papiernička, 5. – 7. mája 1992*. Bratislava: Historický ústav SAV, 1992, p. 18. ISBN 8090044158. See, for example, SIRÁCKY, Andrej. *Klérofašistická ideológia ľudáctva. (The clerico-fascist ideology of the Ludáks)*. Bratislava: SAV, 1955, 143 p.

34 JELINEK, Yeshayahu. *The Parish Republic: Hlinka's Slovak People's Party 1939–1945*. Boulder: East European Monographs, 1976, 206 p. ISBN 0914710079.

35 JELINEK, ref. 34, p. 138.

36 See e.g. JELINEK, Yeshayahu A. On the Condition of Women in Wartime Slovakia and Croatia. In FRUCHT, Richard (ed.). *Labyrinth of Nationalism, Complexities of Diplomacy: Essays in Honor of Charles and Barbara Jelavich*. Columbus: University of Missouri Press, 1992, p. 207-208, note 1. ISBN 9780893572334.

37 SOUBIGOU, Alain. Le „clérico-fascisme“ slovaque fut-il religion politique? In SANDU, Traian (ed.). *Vers un profil convergent des fascismes? „Nouveau consensus“ et religion politique en Europe centrale*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010, p. 75-80. ISBN 9782296130982.

38 SOUBIGOU, ref. 37, p. 79.

times moderate and pragmatic. Ward emphasizes the Christian social starting points of Tiso's world view. However, his inclination to nationalism acquired the character and quality of "nationalist socialism", in the sense, as described by Zeev Sternhell, of an alternative to "materialist" Marxism, rather than of the racist understanding of German Nazism.<sup>39</sup>

In Slovakia after 1989 minimal attention was devoted to the problem of Catholicism and rightist radicalism with the exception of several volumes about Jozef Tiso from the beginning of the 1990s, while the factor of defence against Nazism was given greater emphasis.<sup>40</sup> However, a lively academic discussion on this theme has occurred in the neighbouring Czech Republic. Especially the literary historian Martin C. Putna attempted to define the term "clerical fascism" in connection with some religious argumentation from inter-war Czech intellectuals such as Jaroslav Durych. He proposes to speak of a sort of "fourth way" between the "godless" principles of liberalism, Bolshevism and Nazism.<sup>41</sup> However, in some specific cases, Putna does not protest against the term "Catholic fascism".<sup>42</sup>

### 3. Catholic "hybridization" of fascism – the case of the clergy

Recent discussion of the spread of fascism in inter-war Europe emphasizes the dynamic character of this process with an open end. For example, the British historian Aristotle Kallis proposes that instead of the static classification in the style "fascism – authoritarian regimes – radical right", we should direct attention to the "fascist effect", which influenced all the anti-liberal and anti-socialist movements and regimes that to a greater or lesser degree adopted fascist elements or fascist style, whether this meant the Leader principle, corporatist structures or the building of a terror apparatus to remove political "enemies".<sup>43</sup> Austria

39 WARD, James M. *Priest, Politician, Collaborator: Jozef Tiso and the Making of Fascist Slovakia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013, p. 289. ISBN 9780801449888.

40 SLEPČAN, Peter – LETZ, Róbert. *Križom k svetlu. Život a dielo biskupa Michala Buzalku. (With a cross to the light. The life and work of Bishop Michal Buzalka)*. Trnava: Dobrá kniha, 2011. ISBN 9788071417316.

41 PUTNA, Martin C. Svatý Václave, vyžeň fašisty! A pokračování o tom, jak je (zase) nevyhnal. (St. Václav, drive out the fascists! And a continuation about how he has not driven them out yet). In BÚTORA, Martin – MESEŽNIKOV, Grigorij – BÚTOROVÁ, Zora – KOLLÁR, Miroslav (zost.). *Odkiaľ a kam. 20 rokov samostatnosti*. Bratislava: Inštitút pre verejné otázky; Kalligram, 2013, p. 81-88. ISBN 9788089345427. See also ŠEBEK, Jaroslav. *Za Boha, národ, porádek. (For God, nation, order)*. Praha: Academia, Historický ústav AVČR, 2016, 464 p. ISBN 9788020025760.

42 PUTNA, Martin C. Searching for a "Fourth Path": Czech Catholicism between Liberalism, Communism, and Nazism. In BERGLUND, Bruce R. – PORTER-SZŰCS, Brian (eds.). *Christianity and Modernity in Eastern Europe*. Budapest: CEU Press, 2010, p. 89. ISBN 9789639776654.

43 KALLIS, Aristotle. The „Fascist Effect“: On the Dynamics of Political Hybridization in In-

adopted the model of fascism "from above", when the traditional elites, with the approval of the Church hierarchy and the remains of the Christian Social Party, decided to eliminate the Nazi movement with its more moderate fascist competitor – the Heimwehr paramilitary group.<sup>44</sup> Another model appeared in Slovakia, when a faction of the clerical-conservative Hlinka's Slovak People's Party unambiguously accepted fascist influence or the "fascist effect". In the 1920s this occurred mainly in the circle of the paramilitary organization Rodobrana (Home Defence) and later partially in the group of rising politicians associated around the revue *Nástup* (Deployment). The search for balance between the "moderate" clericals and the "radicals" from the paramilitary Hlinka Guard created the dynamic of the political regime during almost the whole duration of the wartime Slovak Republic.

When considering Kallis' "fascist effect" and the demands of Roger Griffin, research into the penetration of fascism into the religious context or hybrid and syncretic phenomena such as "clerical fascism", it is necessary to direct attention first of all to the "clerics" or clergy, theologians and Catholic intellectuals. However, we should not limit ourselves to journalistic and intellectual fora. We must also take into account the spheres where discourse and ideology are put into practice. The result should be analysis of the thought and actions of specific people, and if possible not only of well-known members of the elites. If we want to understand how religion could co-exist with fascist principles, we must follow the ideas of the American historian Brian Porter-Szűcs, who proclaims the need for new hermeneutic and anthropological approaches to research on religious history, to reconstruct the impact of propaganda, official declarations or programme texts on the thinking and everyday life of specific people.<sup>45</sup> The Catholic clergy represent a specific case of this.

Several years ago the American historian Kevin Spicer published the monograph *Hitler's Priests*, where he considers the activity of representatives of the German Catholic clergy, who actively supported Hitler and in some cases spread the ideology of Nazism, but in spite of this usually did not abandon their Catholic identity.<sup>46</sup> The German historian Thomas Forstner extended and systematized Spicer's approach in a recently published dissertation on "brown priests".

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ter-War Europe. In PINTO, António Costa – KALLIS, Aristotle (eds.). *Rethinking Fascism and Dictatorship in Europe*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 13-41. ISBN 9781137384409.

44 BOTZ, Gerhard. The Coming of the Dollfuss-Schuschnigg Regime and the Stages of its Development. In PINTO, KALLIS, ref. 43, p. 121-153.

45 PORTER-SZŰCS, Brian. Introduction. In PORTER-SZŰCS, ref. 42, p. 18-20.

46 SPICER, Kevin. *Hitler's Priests: Catholic Clergy and National Socialism*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008, 369 p. ISBN 9781612540559.

Starting from the typology of Olaf Blaschke in relation to collaboration between Catholicism and Nazism in Germany, Forstner distinguishes two types of position of the so-called “brown priests” in relation to Hitler’s regime: 1. Efforts to achieve consensus and loyalty. 2. Active collaboration. The first group agreed with important elements of Nazi doctrine, but did not identify with it as a whole. The motives for the efforts to achieve consensus and expressions of loyalty were usually nationalism, Christian social teaching, anti-communism and anti-Semitism. The church leadership to a large extent tolerated these political expressions, and these priests did not have an interest in leaving the Church. In relation to these facts we do not know how big this group was. It may have been rather large. On the other hand, the active collaborators represented only a very small group, not exceeding a number of 150 in the whole territory of the Third Reich. Forstner divides them into two sub-groups: Some of the collaborators had “*difficulties with celibacy*”, which meant they appeared to be opportunists, whereas the others were radical nationalists.<sup>47</sup>

Where the Slovak clergy are concerned, detailed research is not available, except in the case of Jozef Tiso. Orientation points are provided only by a dissertation on Catholic priests in the Slovak parliament,<sup>48</sup> the publication of the philosopher Theodor Münz about nationalism among Catholic theologians,<sup>49</sup> and shorter studies about so-called “Slovak National Socialism”.<sup>50</sup> On the basis of these works, it is already possible to distinguish between two types of position: an emphasis on an autochthonous, Catholic Slovak nationalism (analogous to Hitler’s slogan: “Nazism is not for export”), and more or less sincere adoption of the German model (“Slovak national socialism”). What motivated some Slovak priests to become “brown”? Apart from the general euphoria evoked by propaganda presenting Hitler and German Nazism as guarantors of Slovak statehood and national “survival”, we must also consider here personal ambitions and the

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- 47 FORSTNER, Thomas. Braune Priester – Katholische Geistliche im Spannungsfeld von Katholizismus und Nationalsozialismus. In GAILUS, Manfred (zost.). *Täter und Komplizen in Theologie und Kirche 1933–1945*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015, p. 113-139. ISBN 9783835316492.
- 48 KAŠŠOVIC, Stanislav. *Politická činnosť katolíckych kňazov – poslancov Slovenského snemu 1939 – 1945. (The political activity of Catholic priests as members of the Slovak Parliament, 1939–1945)*. Nitra: Kňazský seminár sv. Gorazda, 2011. 252 p. ISBN 9788089481071.
- 49 MÜNZ, Teodor. Nacionálna otázka u teológov za Slovenského štátu. (The national question among theologians in the Slovak state.). In *Filozofia*, 1992, year 47, no. 1, p. 21-29. ISSN 0046385X.
- 50 PEKÁR, Martin. Štátna ideológia a jej vplyv na charakter režimu. (The state ideology and its influence on the character of the regime). In FIAMOVÁ, Martina – HLAVINKA, Ján – SCHVARC, Michal a kol. *Slovenský štát 1939 – 1945. Predstavy a realita*. Bratislava: Historický ústav SAV, 2014, p. 137-152. ISBN 9788089396320.

temptations of politics. Anti-communism and anti-Semitism were not in last place as integrating factors that seduced many clerical fascists into adopting the language of "national socialism". The French historian Zeev Sternhell defines this term as an alternative to the liberal promise of "happiness" and wellbeing for the individual and the Marxist class struggle. It was originally an ideology of people who had fallen away from Marxism, and who emphasized, like Catholic and Protestant social teaching, collectivism and solidarity, however already not of a society divided into classes, but a nation or "race" living on productive, mostly agricultural work and threatened by unproductive, international financial capitalist exploitation. According to the national socialists, the Marxist class war splits the national community and deprives it of the energy needed for the social-Darwinist struggle for survival between nations because it does not distinguish between productive and unproductive capitalism. The national socialists, like the Christian socialists usually identified the Jews as the embodiment of both unproductive capitalism and international Marxism.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, the category of "(Christian) national socialism" could be one of the useful instruments for analysing the hybridization of Catholic and fascist discourse in the conditions of the Slovak state.<sup>52</sup> It could offer an answer to some basic questions, for example: To what extent and in what discursive framework were Slovak Catholic theologians inspired by models in Germany and Austria, when on one side they condemned Hitler's racism as "neo-paganism", but on the other they increasingly adopted the language of racial anti-Semitism?<sup>53</sup>

The case of the Bratislava canon and city parish priest Karol Körper (1894–1969) shows how the influence of Catholic social teaching and national socialism in Sternhell's understanding created the basis for clero-fascism in the specific conditions of the crisis of liberal democracy of the late 1930s and early 1940s. Körper was one of the most socially active representatives of the clergy in inter-war Slovakia. His activities ranged from organizing the laity in the framework of the Catholic Action to the abstinence and hiking movements.<sup>54</sup> He also engaged in politics. Already in the 1920s he not only joined Hlinka's Slovak People's Party but also the radical Rodobrana. When Alexander Mach founded the second daily paper of Hlinka's Slovak People's Party with the title *Slovenská pravda* in 1936, Karol Körper became its chief commentator. By the end of 1939, he had written about a thousand editorials with religious and national themes,

51 STERNHELL, Zeev. *Neither Right Nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995, 416 p. ISBN 9780691006291.

52 See WARD, ref. 39, p. 289.

53 CONNELLY, John. *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews, 1933–1965*. Berlin: DeGruyter, 2012, 384 p. ISBN 9780674057821.

54 On Körper see KAŠŠOVIC, ref. 48, p. 215–220.

criticizing the Prague government in the spirit of autonomism.<sup>55</sup> In foreign policy editorials, he concerned himself especially with the threat of Bolshevism, which he unmasked with iron regularity as the work of the “Jews”. At first he criticized Nazism in the spirit of Papal encyclicals as a pagan cult of blood, but after the declaration of the Slovak state in March 1939 he began to openly praise Hitler and the Wehrmacht as guarantors of the national existence of the Slovaks. As a spiritual leader of the Hlinka Guard he appeared at public assemblies wearing its symbols and spoke on the radio in the spirit of its ideology.<sup>56</sup> When the newspaper *Gardista* accused him of corruption, he gave up his position and switched to Tiso’s moderate wing. However, he praised the German and Slovak “Leaders” and the rule of one party, appealing to the Slovak people to bear sacrifices in the newspaper *Slovák*, at public assemblies and as a member of the Slovak parliament for the district of Ilava. Until 1943 he continued to praise the war as a form of spiritual “purification”.<sup>57</sup>

While Karol Körper moderated after his initial radicalism, Viliam Ries (1906–1989) openly progressed to a Nazi position and persisted with it until the end.<sup>58</sup> Ries studied theology at Innsbruck and worked as a parish priest in the Banská Štiavnica area after his ordination. At first, he did not engage in the politics of the inter-war period, but he wrote poems, which appeared under the pseudonym Ivan Javor in the publications of Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party and Catholic cultural periodicals.<sup>59</sup> This changed in the second half of the 1930s, when he became a member of Banská Štiavnica town council for Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party and editor of its weekly paper *Štiavničan*. Ries’s activity is an example of how the term “national socialism” gained meaning in the Slovak context. Articles criticizing the social policies of the government or demanding social justice especially for local miners appeared ever more frequently in the *Štiavničan* during 1940. Ries, at this time both parish priest and commander of the Hlinka Guard at Svätý Anton eventually provoked the authorities and with the help of the Catholic Church hierarchy he was transferred to the outlying parish of Sebechleby and finally suspended at the beginning of 1942. He moved to

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55 KÖRPER, Karol. *Môj život (My life)*. Bratislava: Lúč, 1992, p. 136-137.

56 KÁRPÁTY, Vojtech. *Vae Victis! Zo života Dr. Karola Körpera. (Vae Victis! From the life of Dr. Karol Körper)*. In *Kultúra*, 2017, vol. 20, no. 21, p. 4.

57 KÖRPER, Karol. *Vojna je súdom Božím. (War is the judgement of God)*. In *Slovák*, vol. 22, no. 165, 16. 7. 1940, p. 1.

58 There is no relevant research on Ries, only references in biographical volumes and syntheses. See SZABÓ, Miloslav. *Klérofašisti. (Clerical fascists)*. Bratislava: Slovart, 2019 (forthcoming).

59 PAŠTEKA, Július. *Tvár a tvorba slovenskej katolíckej moderny. (The nature and work of Slovak Catholic modernism)*. Bratislava: Lúč, 2002, p. 229-231.



Bratislava, where he became editor of the new magazine *Náš boj* (Our Struggle) published by the Hlinka Guard radical Otomar Kubala in cooperation with German authorities. With Viliam Ries as its editor, *Náš boj* developed into the most unambiguously radical pro-Nazi forum in the Slovak language. It spread racial anti-Semitism and celebrated Nazism. Ries also achieved a career in the Hlinka Guard. At the end of 1944 he was appointed to the position of captain and representative of its propaganda department. In the spring of 1945 he was evacuated to the American occupation zone in Austria, from where they sent him back to Czechoslovakia. The People's Court in Bratislava sentenced him to 15 years in prison for treason to the republic, which he mostly served in Leopoldov, together with Karol Körper. In his diaries, he presented himself as a martyr. He distanced himself from politics, and in 1947 the administrator of the Archdiocese of Trnava ended his suspension.<sup>60</sup>

The views and activities of Karol Körper and Viliam Ries correspond to the range and typology of collaborating priests as outlined by the German historian Thomas Forstner, extending from an effort at consensus and loyalty to open collaboration. They are also evidence that these phenomena were not limited only to German speaking regions under direct Nazi control, but were also covering the satellites in the "new Europe". They also confirm the usefulness and justification for research on the level of everyday life, since the problem of collaboration did not concern only the highest state representatives such as Jozef Tiso and some high ranking Church dignitaries.<sup>61</sup> This approach throws new light on the problem of politicized religion, which was not limited only to developed fascist modernity. On the contrary, it was also found in traditional societies such as that of Slovakia which had been at the crossroads of competing nationalisms.<sup>62</sup> If the term "clerical fascism" has any explanatory value, then it lies precisely here.

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60 KÖRPER, ref. 55, p. 220.

61 HLAVINKA, Ján – KAMENEC, Ivan. *The Burden of the Past: Catholic Bishop Ján Vojtaššák and the Regime in Slovakia (1938–1945)*. Bratislava: Dokumentačné stredisko holokaustu, 2014. 123 p. ISBN 9788096985777.

62 LORMAN, Thomas. For God and which Nation? The Ideology of František Jehlička, Priest, Politician and Pariah of Slovak National Movement. In *Slavonic and East European Review*, 2018, vol. 96, no. 3, p. 507-540.

## **„Für Gott und die Nation“**

Der Katholizismus und die radikale Rechte im zentraleuropäischen Kontext  
(1918–1945)

MILOSLAV SZABÓ

Die Studie beschäftigt sich mit dem umstrittenen Begriff des sogenannten „Klerikalfaschismus“. Zu diesem Zweck werden die in den vergangenen Jahrzehnten intensiv diskutierten Ansätze der Totalitarismusforschung, insbesondere die Theorien der „politischen Religionen“ beziehungsweise der Politisierung von Religion, zusammengefasst. Dabei werden die Ergebnisse der neueren Forschung berücksichtigt, die weniger die vermeintlichen politischen Religionen der totalitären Bewegungen und Regime wie Faschismus, Nationalsozialismus oder Stalinismus, vielmehr die verschiedenen Synthesen und „Hybridisierungen“ (Roger Griffin) zwischen überlieferten Religionen und säkularen Ideologien in den Blick nimmt. Ausgehend von dieser Forschungstendenz wird eine Neuinterpretation des häufig in polemischer Absicht verwendeten Begriffs Klerikalfaschismus unternommen.

Die neuere Forschung untersucht diese Zusammenhänge bevorzugt auf der Ebene der individuellen Kleriker. Neben der Politisierung der protestantischen Theologie in NS-Deutschland rücken zunehmend auch katholische Priester in den Blickpunkt, wie die Untersuchungen von Kevin Spicer und anderen beweisen. Dabei erweist sich insbesondere die Typologie Thomas Forstners als hilfreich, mit deren Hilfe sich der Grad der Politisierung von Religion auch qualitativ bestimmen lässt. Die Skala reicht von Loyalität bis zur aktiven Kollaboration der katholischen Geistlichen mit dem NS-Regime. Diese Typologie wird abschließend für die Untersuchung der Politisierung von Religion unter den Bedingungen des autoritären/faschistischen Regimes des Slowakischen Staates (1939–1945) fruchtbar gemacht. Am Beispiel von zwei slowakischen katholischen Priestern, Karol Körper und Viliam Ries, wird die Einstellung zum Regime von Hlinkas Slowakischer Volkspartei beziehungsweise zu NS-Deutschland skizziert, die in Zukunft genauer erforscht werden muss.

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