

Fiala, Petr

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PETR FIALA

CHRISTIAN POLITICS IN THE CZECH LANDS: THE PAST, THE PRESENT, AND THE PARTIES

Christian political parties in the Czech lands enjoy an unbroken tradition going on for a hundred years. They have been a lasting part of the party spectra of all the various state formations¹ to which the Czech lands belonged at different times during this period. In the current democratic political system of Czech Republic, the development of which started already in the former Czechoslovak federation after November 1989, the avowedly Christian parties (or the one such party) belong to the group of important political subjects, too. This endurance of the Christian parties and their ability to remain competitive in the game of politics in the Czech lands throughout all of the political and social upheavals necessarily attract some attention. This phenomenon becomes even more puzzling when we consider the fact that in the Czech lands all of the political subjects ever to proclaim themselves to be Christian parties have been closely connected with Catholicism. Given the well-known course of the religious and political history of Bohemia and Moravia (and Silesia), Catholicism found itself during the past century often in a political and social isolation and never represented a prevailing cultural and ideological current in the Czech society. The situation remains much the same today, a time when the traditional *Christian and Democratic Union – The Czechoslovak People's Party* (the *KDU-ČSL*, or the *Křesťanská a demokratická unie – Československá strana lidová*) belongs to the few political parties represented in the Czech parliament, participates in the government coalition, and unlike in many other countries, enjoys the position of a political power to be reckoned with. And all that is the case in spite of the fact that according to all comparative empirical research it is the Czech Republic that is characterized by a very low religiosity and a high degree of secularization.

¹ That is to say, with the exception of the so-called Second Republic and the period of the Protectorate. But it was in this period that the Christian Czechoslovak People's Party took an active part in the formation of the exile government. Thus one can surely talk about a continuity.

In the present paper I will attempt to describe and explain the development and the current state of Christian parties in the Czech lands. The causes and important circumstances that determined the formation of Czech Christian parties and still determine their position and function in the current political system of the Czech Republic will also be pointed out.²

1. The Formation and Development of Czech Christian Parties

Catholicism is undoubtedly one of the major phenomena that played a constitutive role in the creation of modern social and political climate, whether in the Austro-Hungarian Empire or later in the Czechoslovak Republic and other Central-European countries. Christian political parties in this part of the world gradually constituted themselves from the 1890s onward, and for a long time they belonged (and in some places still do belong) to the important political subjects. The creation of this special type of political party was in particular determined by the progress of social modernization and its consequences, social and political. Bearing this in mind, the concept of "political and cultural pillars"³ offers some important suggestions facilitating the interpretation of the formation and development of Christian political parties.

1.1. Some Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to the Formation of Christian Political Subjects

The theory of pillars made its first appearance at the end of the 1950s in the Dutch environment, namely, in the works of J. P. Kruijt. This scholar understood "pillars" to be "the social and political camps of the Catholics, the Calvinists, and the Socialists, which gather their supporters not only into a single political party but also in a variety of voluntary interest organizations. These camps influence their followers by means of their own press and other media, and thus isolate them not only from the other "pillars" but also from the civic-liberal secularized culture at large."⁴

This "vertical integration" can also be referred to as "segmentary pluralism," the term used by Lorwin.⁵ Also the theory of "cleavages," first formulated in the

² In some formulations this text relays on my earlier published works concerning the same problems, in particular on the book *Katolicismus a politika (Catholicism and Politics)*, Brno, 1994, and the article "Mezi voliči a anděli. Křesťanské strany v české politice (Between the Voters and the Angels. Christian Parties in Czech Politics)" published in *Respekt*, Vol. 1996, No. 15, pp. 9–12 (in the following referred to as 1996a).

³ For the typological and theoretical aspects of these problems see Fiala, P.: *Křesťanské politické strany v západní Evropě. Teoretické a metodologické přístupy k analýze křesťansko-demokratických stran* (Christian Political Parties of Western Europe. Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to the Analysis of Christian-Democratic Parties), *Politologický časopis*, Vol. 1996, No. 1, pp. 30–37 (in the following referred to as 1996b).

⁴ Kruijt, J. P.: *Verzuiling*. Zaandijk, 1959.

⁵ Cf. Lorwin, V.: *Segmented Pluralism*, *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 3. Pp. 141–175. Cited by

classical work of Lipset and Rokkan⁶ and later elaborated on by M. R. Lepsius⁷ and others, corresponds well to the theory of pillars.

To be able to use the concept of "pillars" in the context of the Czech lands and Central Europe in a methodological manner that is at all appropriate, we have to utilize yet another, different and today (undeservedly) outfashioned term, namely, the "camp." The Austrian historian Hans Righart, in elaboration of the work of Adam Wandruszka,⁸ distinguishes in the case of the inter-war Austria as few as three actual political camps: next to the Socialist and the National camps, an important position was occupied by the Catholic one. The notion of "camps" usually complements the concept of the so-called "pillars." The concept of "pillars" presupposes that within a single political system there co-exist several complexes of political and social organizations, more or less separate and each defined by *Weltanschauung* or religion.⁹ At the same time, however, the term *camp* (*Lager*) is not quite identical with the more complex term *pillar* (*Säule*): according to Rudolf Steininger, in the instance of Austria one can identify three camps, but only two "pillars," namely, the Catholic and the Socialist, because nationalism did not exhibit such a considerable degree of integration.¹⁰ In the case of Catholicism and Socialism, however, this "pillar" definition holds in the light of their characteristic features, such as their strong internal integration and the efforts to organize all social activities with a view to influence all areas of life. Righart points out that there were certain differences between the two "pillars." The most important of these consists in the fact that the Catholic pillar (or camp) covered an area cutting across the social class structure of the society and thus had a rather heterogeneous composition; on the other hand, the Socialist camp was associated with a single class and remained socially homogeneous, as its ideology demanded.¹¹

In the case of Catholicism the causes of the process referred to as the "*Versäulung*" are usually considered to be primarily of a defensive nature: a reaction to certain aspects of the process of social modernization taking place at

Lembruch, G.: *Konkordanzdemokratie*. Nohlen, D. (Hrsg.), *Pipers Wörterbuch zur Politik*. 2. *Westliche Industrie Gesellschaften* (Hrsg. M. G. Schmidt). München, Zürich, 1983. Pp. 200–202.

6 Cf. Lipset, S. M. and Rokkan S. (editors): *Party Systems and Voter Alignments*, New York, 1967.

7 Cf. Lepsius, M. R.: *Parteiensystem und Sozialstruktur: Zur Problem der Demokratisierung der deutschen Gesellschaft*. In: Abel, W. (Hrsg.): *Wirtschaft, Geschichte und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*. Stuttgart 1966. Pp. 371–393.

8 Cf. Wandruszka, A.: *Österreichs politische Struktur. Die Entwicklung der Parteien und politischen Bewegungen*. In: Benedikt, H. (Hrsg.). *Geschichte der Republik Österreich*. München, 1954. P. 291.

9 Righart, H.: *Das Entstehen der katolischen Versäulung in Österreich 1887–1907*. *Zeitgeschichte*, Vol. 11 (1983–4), Heft 3. Pp. 69ff.

10 Cf. Steininger, R.: *Polarisierung und Integration. Eine vergleichende Untersuchung der strukturellen Versäulung der Gessellschaft in den Niederlanden und in Österreich*. Meisenheim am Glan, 1975. Pp. 184ff.

11 Righart (1984), p. 69.

the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century. In this context Righart points out primarily (1) the structural differentiation, a term which should be understood as referring especially to the creation of a differentiated vocational structure with many subcategories, and (2) the social and cultural disintegration caused by the migration and transfer of large groups of rural inhabitants into the cities, which caused the weakening of social control exercised previously by the Church and altered the conditions for its pastoral activity. These problems, according to Righart, found their solutions precisely in the "*Versäulung*," which basically went on with the assistance of modern means, such as the establishment of various types of organizations, propaganda, etc. As far as the formation of the Catholic pillar is concerned, its defensive and reactive character is often emphasized: when a non-confessional liberal employers' union was founded, a confessional union of Catholic employers was also founded. Similarly, the reaction to the socialist trade unions was the establishment of the Catholic workers' movement, etc.¹²

However, the constitution of the pillar-type political culture in the case of Catholicism should not be interpreted simply as a conservative reaction to the process of modernization. True, the "*Versäulung*" did serve a "traditional purpose," that is to say, maintaining the Christian faith in a secularized society, and it surely was a method of defence against the increasing secularization. Nevertheless, modern means were used to accomplish these objectives. Therefore, this process can be referred to as a "*partial modernization*" (Righart)¹³ or an "*instrumental modernization for the sake of tradition*" (Wehler).¹⁴ This thesis is after all supported also by the opponents of the process. In the Austro-Hungarian Empire these were at the beginning primarily the bishops and certain conservative politicians. Their opinions begin to alter only after the papal encyclical *Rerum Novarum* was published in 1891.¹⁵

The process of creation of the pillar-type Catholic political culture can be summarized in the following six points. First, there is a chronological relationship between the process of structural differentiation and social and cultural disintegration, on the one hand, and that of the "*Versäulung*" among the Catholics, on the other. Second, this process begins in such areas where the modernization impulses were strongest. Third, the creation of Christian social organizations among the lower middle classes, the workers, and the peasants had a reactive character.¹⁶ Fourth, in this process the crucial position was assumed by the lower clergy, which played a socially integrative role and whose participation

12 Ibid., p. 71.

13 Ibid., p. 72.

14 Wehler, H.-U. *Modernisierungstheorie und Geschichte*. Göttingen 1975. P. 21. Cited by Righart (1984), p. 85.

15 Righart (1984), p. 81.

16 Cf. Hanisch, E.: *Ambivalenzen der Modernisierung. Die Formierung der politischen Lager in den 'Alpenländer'*. In: Rumper, H. (Hrsg.). *Innere Staatsbildung und gesellschaftliche Modernisierung in Österreich und Deutschland 1876/77-1914*. Wien, München 1991. Pp. 177-178.

was motivated mainly by pastoral reasons. Fifth, the entire process we are dealing with soon assumed a pronouncedly political character. And finally, this process had from its very beginning certain strong opponents among the bishops and the Catholic conservative politicians. However, their resistance weakened already in the middle of the 1890s, and the disagreement was eventually resolved in favor of the Christian social movement. Among the important factors behind this resolution was not only the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, but also the formidable positions of political power secured by the Christian Socials, and last but not least, the actual modernization process, which gradually affected the Catholic conservative circles themselves.¹⁷

When we compare the pan-Austrian developments with the actual situation in the Czech lands, we observe that here, too, Catholicism can be interpreted as an important social and political camp and an ideological and social political subculture, or as a pillar-type complex political culture in the sense specified above.

The hypothesis of the pillar-type character of political culture was applied to the Czech environment for instance by the historian Jiří Malíř of Brno. He did so at the occasion of explaining the formation and development of the Czech and German party systems in Moravia in the period of the Habsburg monarchy. (At that time Moravia was one of the many lands of the Austro-Hungarian Empire with its own functioning Land Diet and an autonomous political and party system.) Malíř points out that "based on the newest research, a significant feature of the political parties in the Habsburg monarchy is considered to be the unusual degree to which these political parties and their organizations permeated through the non-political spheres of the public as well as the private life".¹⁸

This "*Versäulungsprozess*" resulted in "relatively exclusive social and cultural environments" closely related to the particular political camps, each with its own system of non-political trade-unionist, professional, youth, student, women's, athletic, cooperative, and other organizations corresponding to the similar organizations of other political camps but at the same time completely independent of them.

The strong influence of the camps (in the Moravian environment these included in particular the National-Liberal, Catholic, and Social-Democratic) was manifest in "the daily life of any individual."¹⁹ Malíř emphasizes that the process by which the particular political parties permeated through the society and created political camps had a long-term character and was differentiated regionally according to the individual lands of the Habsburg monarchy. In the case of the Czech lands this naturally meant specific (although in many ways parallel) developments in Bohemia and in Moravia (and Silesia).

¹⁷ Righart (1984), p. 84.

¹⁸ Cf. Malíř, J.: *Politické strany na Moravě v období habsburské monarchie (Pokus o srovnání systému českých a německých stran na Moravě)* [Political Parties in Moravia in the Period of the Habsburg Monarchy (An Attempted Comparison of the Czech and German Party Systems in Moravia)]. In: *Politické strany a spolky na jižní Moravě, XXII (Political Parties and Clubs in Southern Moravia XXII)*. The Mikulov Symposium 1992, Brno, 1993. P. 11.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 11f.

Another aspect also needs to be emphasized here: the identification with Catholicism or, on the other hand, with the socialist ideology, did *not* succeed in overcoming the national principle. True, the Czech and German societies in Bohemia and Moravia did differentiate themselves into exclusive social and political environments, but the power of the ideas behind the creation of these *social and moral milieu*²⁰ did not overcome the nationalist approach. In spite of various minor attempts no unification ever took place, such as between the Czech and German Catholics in Bohemia and Moravia. They never formed any common political party, common Catholic organizations, etc.

In the Czech lands the formation of Catholicism into a "pillar" with the entire necessary and complex political and social structure paralleled the trends visible also in other ideological currents. These exhibited signs of the "*Versäulung*" process, too, particularly as far as the constitution of an actual political party is concerned. Nevertheless, the historical research on the Czech lands carried out to date in my opinion suggests that one can distinguish (as Steininger does in the case of Austria) two, at most four actual pillars. Still, it remains questionable whether the national-liberal and agrarian movements can really qualify as "pillars" comparable to the Socialist and the Catholic. Malíř, for instance, prefers to work with five Moravian political camps. Besides the original three, namely, the Liberal, the Catholic, and the Social-Democratic, Malíř also recognizes the Agrarian camp and the National-Social one.²¹ At any rate, the concept of political camp remains an indispensable descriptive tool applicable to the party systems of that time. As such it is important for us, too. It helps to reveal that political and social Catholicism did not define itself exclusively against the similar pillar-type socialist subculture: on the political level Catholicism faced several other political platforms. Their ideological foundation may not have had as high integrative capacity as Catholicism and socialism, yet they nevertheless managed to compete with Catholicism successfully in politics.

1.2. Constitution of the Subsystem of Christian Parties in the Czech Lands

The formation of Christian political parties in the Czech lands (ie., in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia, separate at the time, each with a relatively very autonomous party system)²² within the framework of the process described above is generally associated with the establishment of various Catholic clubs and voluntary interest organizations after the the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* was published.²³ Their activities gradually became politicized and eventually lead to

20 Cf. Rohe, K.: *Wahlen und Wählertraditionen in Deutschland*. Frankfurt am Main, 1992. Pp. 19ff.

21 Malíř (1993), p. 13.

22 There were no Christian parties established in Silesia, only a local organization of the Moravian Christian-Social Party was later founded there.

23 Cf. eg. Huber, K. A.: *Die Enzyklika 'Rerum Novarum' und die Genesis der christlichsozialen Volkspartei in der Tschechoslowakei*. In: Bosl, K. (1979), pp. 241–257.

the need to create a new political subject, one that could effectively defend Catholic interests on the parliamentary level. The Christian political parties thus grew from clubs that were not only Catholic but often also professionally oriented (such as the Club of Catholic Czech Peasants). This very fact suggests that the process was hardly smooth, and in particular, that it had a *pluralist* character.²⁴

The first Christian party of Bohemia was founded under the leadership of a former social-democratic editor T. J. Jiroušek already in 1894 in the town of Litomyšl. It was called the Christian-Social Party for Bohemia and Moravia (*Křesťansko-sociální strana pro Čechy a Moravu*), yet its actual activities in Moravia remained very limited.²⁵ Already five years later the party split up into the Christian-Social Party (*Strana křesťansko-sociální*) and the so-called Christian Democrats, who named themselves the Christian-Social People's Party (*Křesťansko-sociální strana lidová*). Both parties managed to merge before the national elections of 1906, thus forming the Party of the Catholic People (*Strana katolického lidu*), but this united party split again after 1911, giving birth to three new subjects. These were the Czech Christian-Social Party (*Česká strana křesťansko-sociální*), the strongest of the three, later to become a part of the ČSL, the short-lived Conservative People's Party (*Konservativní strana lidová*), and a Catholic national party, whose remains survived until 1918.²⁶ Besides the Christian-social parties there was in Bohemia also a National Catholic

²⁴ From the voluminous literature on the history of Czech Christian parties, see for example the following: Malíř, J.: *Politické strany na Moravě v období habsburské monarchie (Pokus o srovnání systému českých a německých stran na Moravě)* [Political Parties in Moravia in the period of the Habsburg Monarchy (An Attempted Comparison of the Czech and German Party Systems in Moravia)]. *Politické strany a spolky na jižní Moravě, XXII (Political Parties and Clubs in Southern Moravia XXII)*. The Mikulov Symposium 1992, Brno, 1993; Podstufka, J.: *Klerikální politický proud na Moravě před první světovou válkou* (The Clerical Political Current in Moravia before World War One). A thesis, Brno, 1983. Kraváček, F.: *Ke vzniku Křesťansko-sociální strany na Moravě* (On the Founding of the Christian-Social Party in Moravia.). In: *Příspěvky k dějinám dělnického hnutí na Moravě* (Contributions to the History of the Workers' Movement in Moravia). Praha, 1960. Pp. 7–27. Trapl, V.: *Politické strany v Československu v letech 1918–1938* (Political Parties in Czechoslovakia, 1918–1938). In: *Politické strany a spolky (Political Parties and Clubs)*. 1993. Pp. 43f. Trapl, V.: *Politický katolicismus a Čs. strana lidová* (Political Catholicism and the Czechoslovak People's Party). Praha, 1990. Trapl, V.: *Politika českého katolicismu na Moravě 1918–38 (The Politics of Czech Catholicism in Moravia 1918–38)*. Praha, 1968. Žampach, F. M.: *Přehled dějin československé strany lidové* (A Short History of the Czechoslovak People's Party). Brno, 1933. Blabolil, A.: *Křesťanské politické hnutí v Čechách, na Moravě a ve Slezsku a Československá strana lidová* (The Christian political movement in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia, and the Czechoslovak People's Party). Praha, 1970. Pecháček, J.: *Die Rolle des politischen Katholizismus in der ČSR*. In: Bosl, K. (Hrsg.). *Die Erste Tschechoslowakische Republik als multinationaler Parteienstaat*. München, Wien, 1979.

²⁵ Cf. Urban, O.: *Česká společnost 1848–1918 (The Czech Society, 1848–1918)*. Praha, 1982. P. 483.

²⁶ Žampach, F. M.: *Z dějin Československé strany lidové* (From the History of the Czechoslovak People's Party). An unpaginated manuscript. MZA, G-297, Kart. 2, in. č. 43.

Party in the Czech Kingdom (*Národní strana katolická v království českém*), headed by Count Schönborn and Reverend Canon Drozd. In Bohemia thus existed at some times as many as three or four Czech Catholic parties, due to the internal disharmony within the Catholic movement.²⁷

The situation in Moravia was somewhat different, although there never was a single Moravian Catholic party, either. In 1896 the Catholic platform within the Moravian National Party became independent, thus forming the *Catholic National Party in Moravia* (*Katolická strana národní na Moravě*) headed by Mořic Hruban, an attorney from Olomouc. Already in 1896 the party celebrated its first success at the land-wide elections.²⁸ The party strived to court primarily the conservative peasantry and little businessmen of the Moravian country and cities, who were "controlled through Catholic political unions."²⁹ However, that did not quite fit all of the Catholic activists, particularly not those who dedicated themselves to social work among the workers and the poorer peasants already since the beginning of the 1890s. Out of this Christian-social movement the Christian-Social Party (*Křesťansko-sociální strana*) formed itself in 1899 under the leadership of Jan Šrámek, a chaplain from the town of Nový Jičín.³⁰ Both Catholic political parties remained separate throughout the entire period until the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but unlike the Christian parties in Bohemia they did cooperate closely. Very instrumental for their cooperation proved to be a division of the spheres of influence: the more conservative Catholic-national party (headed by M. Hruban, J. Koudela, V. Ševčík, and T. Šillingr) attempted to establish itself among the wealthier and more conservative urban inhabitants and the middle-class peasants in the country, while the Christian Socials (lead by J. Šrámek, J. Kadlčák, F. Valoušek, and J. Šamalík) were active especially among the workers and artisans in the cities. The close cooperation between the two parties – this Moravian Catholic current is sometimes referred to as "the bi-party"³¹ lead to undisputed electoral successes (such as in the elections to the Moravian Land Diet in 1906, when the Catholics became the strongest Czech party in all the elective bodies of the Czech lands).³² Nevertheless, certain differences of opinion did appear also in Moravia. For instance, the Catholics failed to agree on a common approach toward the proposed general voting right, and in a few cases there was even a manifest lack of willingness to agree on common candidates to run in the particular election districts.³³ Hence,

27 Pecháček (1979), p. 261.

28 Cf. Fiala, P.: *Zastoupení českých politických stran na moravském zemském sněmu na konci 19. století* (The Representation of Czech Political Parties in the Moravian Land Diet at the End of the 19th Century). *Časopis Matice moravské*. 1988, Vol. 106. Pp. 61–83.

29 Malíř (1993), p. 15.

30 Cf. eg. Kraváček (1960), pp. 7ff.

31 Malíř (1993), p. 15.

32 Fiala P.: *Sociální skladba české politické reprezentace na Moravě na počátku 20. století* (The Social Composition of the Czech Political Representation in Moravia at the Beginning of the 20th Century). *Časopis Matice moravské*. 1987, Vol. 106. Pp. 52–72.

33 Cf. Žampach, unpaginated. (P. 16.)

it took a long time before the close cooperation lead to an actual merger of the two parties.

At the end of the 19th and during the first two decades of the 20th century thus several political parties coexisted within the Catholic pillar in the Czech lands. These parties not always cooperated with one another (particularly in Bohemia). When we add to the picture the German Christian parties active on the same territory and completely separate from their Czech counterparts,³⁴ we can see that Czech political Catholicism displayed in its initial phases a high degree of *heterogeneity*. That is to say, the Czech Catholic political tradition was founded as a pluralist one, and the trend toward unification and cooperation of at least the Czech Catholic parties was very weak indeed and for a long time did not prevail over the various differences of opinion and personal aversions. Therefore, it can be summarized that in the Czech lands a visible Catholic political and cultural pillar did develop (albeit one defined nationally) and more or less clearly differentiated itself against other political camps, but it was at the same time itself fragmented. This situation altered only under the different social, political, and cultural condition of the new Czechoslovak republic.

1.3. The Unification of Czech Christian Politics: The ČSL from 1918 to 1989

The situation of political Catholicism in the period of the interwar Czechoslovak "First Republic" (1918–38) is usually considered from the perspective of a unified Christian (Catholic) platform represented by the Czechoslovak People's Party (the ČSL, or the *Československá strana lidová*). It was founded in January 1919 by means of a merger of the Bohemian Catholic parties with their counterparts from Moravia (themselves unified already since September 1918). It should be noted, however, that the long-lasting divisions depicted above had to become apparent in the newly established People's Party as well. Nevertheless, in spite of all the various inner tensions, today no longer very well known, the People's Party remained basically unified. This feat should be attributed chiefly to the following two factors: (1) the "anticlerical" atmosphere prevailing in Czechoslovakia throughout the 1920s, and (2) the personality and political skills of the party Chairman Jan Šrámek.

The starting position of Czech Catholics in the new Czechoslovak state was rather poor. They were not perceived as an integral part of the new state and the Czech society; in many aspects they were considered a foreign element.³⁵ (I surely do not have to expand on the reasons for this, such as the close interconnection between the Catholic Church and the Austrian state, later used by the liberal and leftist elements as a ground for a massive anti-Catholic campaign.) In such a situation the Czech Catholics had to take a mostly defensive stance, and their unification was in many ways enforced by external conditions.

³⁴ Cf. Schütz, H.: *Die Deutsche christlichsoziale Volkspartei in der Ersten Tschechoslowakischen Republik*. In: Bosl (Hrsg.), pp. 271–290. Also Malif (1993), pp. 20f.

³⁵ Pecháček (1979), p. 259.

However, Chairman Šrámek soon succeeded in securing for the People's Party an acceptable position as a part of the new power elite. I cannot reconstruct the history of the People's Party in any detail in the present paper, therefore suffice it to say that under Šrámek's leadership the ČSL gradually became a "state-forming" party and by the end of the 1930s it was counted among the "pillars" of the First Republic. However, as noted by some commentators, the price the People's Party had to pay for this undisputable success was not a minor one: "in this way Czech Catholicism identified itself with the Czech national goals and thus lost contact with the German and Slovak political Catholicism."³⁶ The important question why there was no closer cooperation between Czech, Slovak, and German Catholics on the political level and why the national identification overcame the common social, confessional, and moral objectives even within the Catholic environment, cannot be addressed adequately in the present paper. Let us deal exclusively with the Czech society and examine just how much unified the first-republic ČSL actually was.

It is often pointed out that the party suffered from a rather weak organizational structure – an inheritance of the separate developments of party organizations in Bohemia and in Moravia. In spite of the existence of common supreme organs of the party, the ČSL organizations in the lands remained in many respects autonomous, whether one looks at the land-level financial matters or at the decision-making process regarding everyday political questions. The land-level organizations even disposed of their own press. This organizational weakness impaired the ability of the party to take action. In the 1930s it apparently became one of the causes responsible for the stagnation of the ČSL.³⁷

The decentralized organizational structure, although to a certain degree typical for all Christian parties, was still further weakened by the existence of several fractions and opinion groups within the People's Party. Their political stances differed considerably, as did also their concepts of what the party should look like in the future. The most influential among all these alternative platforms became the fraction headed by the Reverend Canon of Vyšehrad Bohumil Stašek, the Chairman of the Bohemian Land Executive committee, and the trade-unionist current lead by Antonín Čuřík, the Chairman of the Christian-Social trade-unions.

The conflict between Stašek and Šrámek, particularly virulent during the 1930s, was a long-term affair and its front-line lead between the Bohemian and the Moravian leaderships. Stašek pushed his concept of a basically corporatist state, he attempted to establish connections to the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (*Hlinkova slovenská ľudová strana*) and to initiate changes within the People's Party itself. However, Stašek's efforts ultimately failed to win a sufficient support in the ČSL due to the formidable position of the Moravian wing of

36 Campbell, F. G.: Die Tschechische Volkspartei und die deutschen Christlichsozialen. In: Bosl (1979), p. 303.

37 Hajek, F. J.: *Catholics and Politics in Czechoslovakia, 1918–1929: Jan Šrámek and the People's Party*. Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1975. P. 316. Cited in Pecháček (1979), p. 265.

the party in general and of Chairman Šrámek in particular. In the final analysis Stašek failed also because the majority of the ČSL politicians inclined toward the democratic system of the First Republic and to the Czech national interests.³⁸ During the period of the so-called Second Republic this conflict worsened, but there was not time enough for it to result in an actual break-up of the party.³⁹

A somewhat different course of the constitution of internal opposition can be observed in the case of the trade-union movement, which seceded from the party already in 1929 under the leadership of Antonín Čuřík. After that an independent Czechoslovak Christian-Social Party (*Československá křesťansko-sociální strana*) was founded, but its electoral participation on the party lists of the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (a Slovak Catholic party with a nationalist orientation) was a failure. In 1938 Čuřík's party eventually entered the Party of National Unity (*Strana národní jednoty*).⁴⁰

As the development of Czech political Catholicism before 1938 demonstrates, the later interpretations emphasizing its unity and solid ranks are untenable in the light of history and political science. Czech political Catholicism was never unified, not even at the time of its formation and constitution, when it sought for its own position within the Czech political community. It was not really quite unified even at the time of Czechoslovak Republic, when it largely managed to remain concentrated in a single political subject (albeit often not very solid one) thanks mostly to the adverse external conditions and to the political stature of Chairman Jan Šrámek. In spite of all that, J. Pecháček's claim that the main weakness of political Catholicism even at the period of the first Czechoslovak Republic was its *splintered character*,⁴¹ remains valid. I think it also should be emphasized here that the divisions and differences of opinion within the Czechoslovak People's Party were not the only lines dividing Czech political Catholicism. Many Catholics were also active in other political parties, such as the Agrarian Party (*Agrární strana*), which made no secret of its "anti-clerical" character and yet had some Catholic priests in its ranks. (It was Čuřík's break-away fraction of the People's Party that cooperated with the Agrarians closely.)⁴²

An evaluation of the position and function of Christian parties and later the ČSL in the political system of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Czechoslovak Republic, as well as an assessment of the entire Czech Catholic "pillar" in general, is a complicated task that must always be carried out in the historical context. The general framework was provided by the emancipatory efforts of the middle and later also the lower classes of the society in the second half of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th centuries. These efforts were manifest for instance in the rapid expansion of clubs and later in the creation of a wide

38 Regarding the person of B. Stašek, see Trapl (1993), pp. 44 and 53. Also Pecháček (1979), pp. 265f.

39 Pecháček (1979), p. 267.

40 Trapl (1993), p. 53, notes 78 and 79.

41 Pecháček (1979), p. 267.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 269.

spectrum of political parties. The Catholics, who with many a difficulty faced the consequences of social modernization, discovered that political and social Catholicism along with the establishment of their own clubs, voluntary interest organizations, and eventually a political party (or a number of such parties) can serve as an effective means of self-mobilization. This self-mobilization in turn enabled the Catholics to remain a political power to be reckoned with even under the new conditions. They managed to defend their political positions successfully and in some instances even to strengthen them, particularly in Moravia, where they were most successful in forming a far-reaching social and political structure based on the social teachings of the Catholic Church. In this first phase, that is to say, in the period of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and during the early years of the First Republic, Czech political Catholicism indeed played a positive role.⁴³

On the other hand, the "consistent" division of the society in the Czech lands into its Czech part and the German one, and the further subdivision of the Czech part (as well as the German one) into a number of exclusive ideological currents, made any contacts and fruitful exchange of ideas between the various opinion groups difficult. Later it rendered impossible even such solutions as otherwise would have been generally advantageous and effective. However, political Catholicism found itself during the last years of the Austro-Hungarian Empire as well as during certain initial phases of the first Czechoslovak Republic in a more or less explicit isolation (although in some respects it was merely a proclaimed one). This fact gives support to the hypothesis that a high degree of internal integration and consistency of the ideological system may on the political level produce isolationist trends and that the psychology of "ghetto," which was in some periods apparent among the Catholics, may also have causes beyond the external circumstances.

At the same time, however, the gradually increasing political importance of the ČSL did not quite correspond to its electoral results. The electoral support for the People's Party decreased slowly but steadily throughout the entire period of the First Republic: in the 1920 elections the People's Party polled 11.3% while in 1935 a mere 7.5%. Nevertheless, the political skills of the ČSL elite and its principled stance against the looming Nazi menace helped the party Chairman Jan Šrámek to secure the position of the Prime Minister of the exile government in London during World War Two. The People's Party was thus also ensured a position in the forcibly reduced party spectrum of the renewed Czechoslovakia after 1945. The ČSL thus became the only non-socialist party of the Czech lands to play a role in the quasi-democratic political system (reduced democracy) that lasted until the Communist takeover in 1948. In the only elections of this period, in 1946, the ČSL celebrated its historically greatest electoral victory, polling 20% of the vote and thus securing 46 mandates in the 231-seat Constituent National Assembly. Yet this electoral success can hardly

⁴³ For a similar positive evaluation of German social and political Catholicism of this period, cf. eg. Ockenfels, W. : *Katolická sociální nauka* (The Catholic Social Teaching). Praha, 1994. Pp. 94f.

be compared either to the results of the free elections in the interwar Czechoslovakia, or to the elections after 1989. In the period 1945–48 only four political parties were allowed to exist in the Czech lands: the ČSL, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (the KSČ, or the *Komunistická strana Československa*), the Czechoslovak Social Democracy (*Československá sociální demokracie*), and the Czechoslovak National-Socialist Party (*Československá strana národně socialistická*). Such parties as the Agrarians, the most important right-wing political power and the strongest of all first-republic parties, were banned altogether. Under these conditions the ČSL automatically represented the only alternative to the Socialist and Communist parties. It should be noted in this context, however, that even in such a situation the ČSL was never perceived to be the crucial opposition party standing against the expansion of the Communists – the Czechoslovak National-Socialist Party was allowed to assume this role.

The remarkable practical adaptability of the ČSL, frequently not quite in accordance (and sometimes perhaps even in an outright contradiction) with the resoluteness of the program fundamentals from which Christian politics ensues, and its peculiar ability to exist or co-exist in a variety of social and political situations enabled the party to survive also throughout the entire period of the Communist dictatorship 1948–1989. This entire period is not very significant from our present point of view, because the existence of the ČSL, forced to accept the constitutionally defined and violently enforced “leading role” of the Communist party, was more or less formal. One can hardly even talk of a political party in the full sense of the term, because there were no elections or political competition allowed, and such matters as the recruitment of new party members, the party internal organization, and personnel politics all depended on the decisions of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ).

2. Czech Christian Parties after November 1989

It was the infamous history of the People's Party as a “Christian” satellite of the KSČ that became the main reason why the subsystem of Christian political parties revived and why “Christian politics” was redivided again immediately after the fall of the totalitarian system. The ČSL was given a rival in the Christian-Democratic Party (the KDS, or the *Křesťansko-demokratická strana*), which was founded already on December 3, 1989, thus becoming one of the first parties newly established after November 1989. The KDS seems to have been primarily an attempt of certain Catholic intellectuals to create a modern Christian party, one not only without the troubling heritage of the Communist past, but also free of the residues of pre-war political Catholicism. The differences between the two Christian parties soon proved to be more significant than their common inspiration by Christianity. This fact was demonstrated especially by the short life of their coalition called the Christian and Democratic Union (the KDU, or the *Křesťanská a demokratická unie*), which was never renewed after the first free parliamentary elections in 1990. After that the KDS formed coali-

tions exclusively with the Civic Democratic Party (the ODS, or the *Občanská demokratická strana*), while the name of the Christian coalition was added by the ČSL to its original name on March 28, 1992 (the party thus officially became the KDU-ČSL). The process of differentiation of the Christian current in Czech politics continued somewhat later by the secession of a group formed around the ČSL ex-Chairman Josef Bartončík. In the middle of 1992 these people founded a party of their own called the Christian-Social Union (the KSU, or the *Křesťansko-sociální unie*). However, the KSU never gained as much as a regional influence, and as a completely insignificant political subject *de facto* ceased to exist at the end of 1995 through the act of joining the Bohemian-Moravian Union of the Center (the ČMUS, or the *Českomoravská unie středu*).⁴⁴

Although the situation was by no means identical, the beginning of the 1990s thus in fact witnessed a virtual replication of the pluralist model of Christian politics that had existed already at the turn of the century, a time of formation of the Christian political "pillar." However, unlike in the previous situation, now there were no longer any social or political and cultural reasons for creating a closed Catholic pillar-type subculture. Moreover, the Christian "social and moral milieu" was not only radically reduced, but also largely eroded. For the Czech Christian parties this situation had two major consequences very much unlike the trends manifest in Czech Christian politics at the end of the 1920s: (1) the process of unification of Christian politics leading to the eventual existence of a single explicitly Christian party went on very rapidly, and (2) the various Christian parties did *not* merge with one another. Let us now examine the situation of the two significant Christian parties active in the first half of the 1990s.⁴⁵

2.1 The Christian-Democratic Party (KDS)

The six years of the KDS existence – ended by the integration of the KDS majority into the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) on March 31, 1996 – obviously had a rather double-sided character. On the one hand, the KDS never succeeded at as much as jeopardizing the dominant position enjoyed by the KDU-ČSL among the Christian parties. The KDS also did not manage to address majority of the voters with a Christian orientation, and it never became an alternative to the other civic parties, either. On the other hand, however, the KDS did boast a remarkably successful strategy and cabinet politics, which provided this party of a few hundred members and a voter support of less than 1% with ministerial chairs along with political influence that was by no means negligible. In spite of all these successes, however, there could hardly exist a Christian-democratic party of the German CDU type in the Czech environment. The KDS fate could not have been averted, not even by the December 1993 attempt to alter the party

⁴⁴ Regarding the development of political parties, cf. Pšejja, P.: *Stranický systém české republiky po listopadu 1989* (The Party System of Czech Republic after November 1989). A thesis, Masaryk University, Brno. 1996.

⁴⁵ Given its little significance, I will not deal separately with the KSU in the present paper.

image, when the young economist Ivan Pilip replaced the leading Catholic dissident and the KDS "founding-father" Chairman Václav Benda, a move preceded by lengthy discussions within the party.

The reason behind the KDS failure, as I have explained already in my book *Catholicism and Politics (Katolicismus a politika)*, can be found primarily in the position of the Christian Democrats in the political spectrum. The KDS stood in between the two civic parties, namely the ODS and the ODA (the Civic Democratic Alliance, or the *Občanská demokratická aliance*), on the one hand, and the Christian subject (the KDU-ČSL), on the other. When political culture is taken into account, such a position appears to have been rather disadvantageous, because it did not enable the party to capture any significant part of the vote: the Christians who did not want to vote for an explicitly Christian party (or for those non-Christians who for a variety of reasons preferred to vote for a conservative party) the political subjects of choice turned out to be the two above-mentioned civic parties of the right center, whose political program after all does relate to Christianity as a value inspiration. At the same time, the KDU-ČSL represents a quite adequate type of political subject for those Christians (particularly the Catholics) who support the existence of a Christian party, prefer the traditional conception of Christian political activity, and consider it necessary that the Christian party be a consistent defender of the Christian moral codex in the secularized and liberalized society. It is even theoretically improbable that the group of voters standing somewhere between these two ideal-type stances should become particularly significant, and as the practice demonstrated, its numbers are indeed very low.

The KDS thus did not, and in fact simply could not, succeed in establishing itself on the Czech political scene. The analysis of its own potential carried out prior to the parliamentary elections of 1996 could have yielded only one logical recommendation, and the KDS acted accordingly: it chose to merge with another political subject. For a long time it was apparent that the crucial decision-makers in the KDS inclined toward the ODS. After all, a merger with the ODS appears to have been politically the most consistent alternative from among the few that the KDS could seriously consider. Besides, when examining the parallel cases in Western-European countries, we observe that a number of liberal-conservative parties have in their ranks a more or less formalized Christian-democratic fraction, whose amount of influence on the party at large is determined by the ability of its representatives to establish themselves within the framework of the standard party mechanisms. The best-known example of such an arrangement may be the Democratic Force (formerly the Center of Social Democrats), which is a Christian-democratic wing of the liberal French *Union pour la démocratie française (UDF)*, or the Christian-democratic fraction within the liberal Spanish People's Party, etc.⁴⁶ However, the degree to which the remains of Czech Christian Democrats succeed in creating a visible and consistent fraction within the ODS remains yet to be seen.

⁴⁶ Cf. Fiala (1996b), p. 31. See also for further bibliography.

Their doubts concerning the possibilities of carrying out Christian politics within the ODS did after all persuade certain members of the KDS to transfer to the KDU-ČSL even before the arranged merger with the ODS took place. There were some attempts to form a stronger alternative opinion group (or perhaps even to persuade the party majority in favor of integration with the People's Party), particularly around the KDS Vice-Chairman Pavel Tollner. Nevertheless, those who became members of the KDU-ČSL were mostly detached individuals, while the party majority accepted the decision to merge with the ODS. This is the right moment to ask the following important question: why the two (or three) Christian parties did not merge together? The answer, however, is not too difficult: (1) the fact that the two parties inclined toward different concepts of Christian politics played an important role; (2) the KDS was founded as an alternative to the KDU-ČSL, whose past and to some degree also the resulting composition of membership were unacceptable to many members of the KDS; and finally, (3) there existed personal aversions and even some hidden conflicts between the two parties throughout the entire period of their parallel existence.

2.2. The Christian and Democratic Union – The Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL)

With both the KDS and the Christian-Social Union gone, the KDU-ČSL remains the single Christian political power on the Czech political scene. Of course, this statement is valid only in its narrowest sense: the ODS with its Christian-democratic segment also professes a Christian inspiration, the founders of the Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA) come from the environment of the Catholic dissent, too, the Democratic Union (the DEU, or the *Demokratická unie*) has repeatedly proclaimed itself a Christian-democratic party, and the Bohemian-Moravian Union of the Center courts Moravian Christian voters. But it is only the KDU-ČSL that comes explicitly from the old Catholic political camp, and only the KDU-ČSL can claim itself to be the inheritor of the entire century of Christian political tradition in the Czech lands. The People's Party also attracts an overwhelming majority of those voters who can be considered active believers with an intimate relationship to the Church. Nevertheless, the future of the KDU-ČSL is not quite guaranteed to be rosy, either.

The KDU-ČSL does have a certain "political capital," and it succeeds in utilizing it in the right way. This is documented by the remarkable success in the local elections of 1994 (a total of mere 8.6% of the vote gave the KDU-ČSL 13.3% of the mandates, more than any other party garnered) and the more or less acceptable showing in the parliamentary elections in June 1996 (8.1% of the vote). First and foremost, the party disposes of a large and mobilizable membership, ideologically rather homogeneous (Catholic) and geographically concentrated (the areas of stable voter support for the People's Party—particularly Moravian rural regions with a high degree of religiosity—have remained the same practically since the beginning of the 20th century).⁴⁷ One of the

⁴⁷ Jehlička, P. and Sýkora, L.: *Stabilita regionální podpory tradičních politických stran v če-*

particular virtues of the People's Party is its continuous century-long presence on the scene and the consequent existence of a well-developed organizational structure from the community level upward. The KDU-ČSL is thus strong exactly on those levels of politics where other political parties must labor to build their organizational structures from the scratch, or at least to recreate them, as is the case with the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (the KSČM, or the *Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy*). This is one of the reasons why the existence of the People's Party throughout the period of the Communist dictatorship should not be interpreted only as a disadvantage. Now it becomes apparent that unlike the largely collaborating upper *strata* of the party, often not easily distinguishable from the Communist *nomenklatura* itself, there existed a large group of lower-level party officials who managed to use the protection provided by the People's Party for the sake of organizing various religious and cultural activities or an actual work in the local government in various communities. On the community level these people, most of them Catholic believers respected for their moral integrity, gained the confidence of their compatriots, which today becomes an important political capital of the People's Party. It remains yet to be seen, whether this advantage can be effectively converted into success in parliamentary elections, but it is nevertheless an invaluable asset for local and future regional politics.

However, this brings us to the risk factors present in the current situation of the People's Party. These may endanger the party to some degree in the long run. In spite of its large membership (over 80 thousand) and high proportion of stable supporters (48%, which is more than any other Czech political party can claim),⁴⁸ there subsist within the KDU-ČSL various currents of opinion, whose influence has been held in an acceptable balance so far, yet they may under certain conditions cause complications. The lines of conflict within the party, as far as they can be at all recognized from the outside, manifest different degrees of intensity and in some instances overlap. Let us attempt to point out at least some of them: (1) there is a tension between the traditionalists and those who consider it necessary to carry out a party reform; further, there are also (2) traditional and variable differences between the Bohemian section of the People's Party and its Moravian wing; and last but not least, yet (3) another conflict looms between the more leftist supporters (more than few of them still under the influence of the concepts of corporatist state and the social teachings of the

ských zemích (1920–1990) [The Stability of the Regional Support of the Traditional Political Parties in the Czech Lands (1920–1990)]. In: *Sborník České geografické společnosti*. 1991, No. 2. P. 84. Cited in Krejčí, O.: *Kniha o volbách* (A Book about the Elections). Praha, 1994. Pp. 215f. Gregor, M. and Čaha L.: *Volby a okresy. Rozdíly v postojích k politickým stranám mezi okresy a jejich souvislost s některými sociálními charakteristikami* (The Elections and the Regions. The Differences in Sympathies toward Political Parties between Regions and their Relationships with Certain Social Characteristics). *Sociologický časopis*. 1993, No. 4. Pp. 493–515.

⁴⁸ The matter considered here is the intensity of the voter's identification with the party preferred, according to a research done in May 1992. Krejčí (1994), p. 248.

Church prior to the Second Vatican Council) and those who would like to see the party to identify itself explicitly with the conservative-liberal right (of the type of the German CDU). These tensions do not have to prove fatal and they may not even become particularly manifest. After all, as the entire history of the Czech Christian political movement in general and of the People's Party in particular documents, the feelings of "endangerment" as well as the awareness of one's own minority position within the society and thus also within the political system can fulfill the integrative function quite adequately and maintain the actual unity of the party.

Certain problems are caused also by the structure of the party membership and in the final analysis also by that of its votership. First and foremost, the party can hardly profit from the rather high average age of its supporters. This is the case particularly under the present conditions, when the KDU-ČSL by far exceeds other parties—with the exception of the Communists and the Movement of Seniors for a Secured Life (the HDŽJ, or the *Hnutí důchodců za životní jistoty*)—in the size of its membership, while the proportion of citizens under 29 in its ranks remains very low. Similarly, it is disadvantageous that among the KDU-ČSL supporters there is a large proportion of peasants, and the party successes thus take place mostly in villages and towns under 5 thousand inhabitants. That is exactly what gives the party such a chance to succeed in the local elections, provided that the number of mandates is considered to be the decisive measure of success, but it is disadvantageous (or has a rather little positive effect) in parliamentary elections. The large number of lower-skilled supporters and a very small proportion of university graduates also corresponds to this. Moreover, the difference between the size of the KDU-ČSL membership and the overall number of its voters remains also rather low.⁴⁹

The stability of its membership and votership is in the case of the KDU-ČSL a questionable advantage. On the one hand, the more than 80 thousand members and approximately five times as many rather reliable voters have regularly enabled the People's Party to satisfy the 5% clause required to enter the parliament. They also have guaranteed the party success in local elections even at a time when the KDU-ČSL was politically not very successful. At the same time, however, this traditional membership acts to a certain degree also as a burden, because it complicates the necessary transformation steps the party must take if it wants to address effectively other voter groups. And the attempt to attract other potential voters is simply a must for the People's Party, because its membership and votership are bound to decrease in the nearest future as a result of irreversible social processes. Nothing but a break-through among voter groups other than those it already disposes of in traditional rural and small-town areas of high religiosity can ensure the KDU-ČSL further existence as a parliamentary party.

⁴⁹ For instance, in the elections to the Czech National Council in 1992 the People's Party received 406,341 votes, which is slightly more than four times the number of its members. This difference is much larger in the case of all other parties (again with the exception of the Communists, or at the time, the Left Bloc). Krejčí (1994), pp. 229–250.

When we add up all of the various above-mentioned data, they do not necessarily provide us with much grounds for optimism. The People's Party disposes of a membership and votership bound to decrease in number. It is so not only due to the natural aging of the KDU-ČSL supporters, but also as a result of the expected decrease in the proportion of population engaged in agriculture, as well as the gradual depopulation of small communities. All of these trends (with the exception of the natural aging of the party membership and votership) can apparently be slowed down by certain already well-tested means, but they can be never stopped entirely. The KDU-ČSL is thus forced to enlarge its votership not only in order to increase its support in the future but primarily to maintain the positions it enjoys today.

2.3 The Position of Czech Christian Parties in the Spectrum of Political Parties

The basic dilemma faced by the Czech Christian parties after 1989 nevertheless did not arise primarily from their internal problems. Their predicaments were, and still remain, of the same kind as the difficulties besetting European Christian-democratic parties in general. The crisis of Christian identification, the change in understanding one's personal religiosity (which ceased to be the determining factor of one's political stance), the break-up of traditional communities (such as the rural ones), the weakening of religious cleavages, and many other processes of the same kind gradually lead to an erosion of the Christian social and moral *milieu*, manifested in various phenomena such as the weakening of the position of Christian parties, particularly of those that did not succeed in transforming themselves into a catch-all party.⁵⁰ Various analyses of contemporary Christian politics yield a simple and rather plausible conclusion that seems to hold also in the case of the Czech Christian parties: either they succeed in becoming a dominant power in the right part of the political spectrum, or they remain a mere fringe party (parties) with electoral support hovering around the minimum required to enter the parliament at all. However, to assume the dominant position as the unifier of all conservative powers is by no means an easy task, and Christian parties accomplished it successfully only in a few countries. A high price had to be paid for it, too: it required a transformation of a traditional *Christian party* into a *catch-all civic party*.

It follows already from these basic premises that the Czech Christian parties can hardly compare themselves to their German or Austrian name-sakes. Those parties find themselves in a different situation and their identification with Christianity is often manifested in a manner different from the Czech parties. Neither did the KDU-ČSL (or the KDS) succeed in assuming a dominant position among the right-center parties—and in the Czech political culture, secularized as it is, such an accomplishment was hardly ever possible at all. The establishment of the two civic parties (the ODS and the ODA) effectively prevented the Christian parties also from assuming the “secondary” position, taken at least

⁵⁰ Fiala (1996b), p. 35.

temporarily by the ODA, not by either the People's Party or the Christian Democrats.

The truly life-saving efforts of the KDU-ČSL must now concentrate on addressing wider (and not only wider Christian) strata of the population. The People's Party must overcome its dependency on the group of traditional voters, limited in numbers and composed mostly of active Catholics. Here we arrive at a dilemma with no simple solution: to satisfy the requirements of this well-defined but not particularly numerous group (some 4–6% of the population, according to the latest research)⁵¹ and at the same time to attract other voters, that is definitely not an easy task. To keep the votes of the active Catholics in the future, the KDU-ČSL will have to demonstrate its "Christian identity" more consistently, particularly in regards of such issues as abortion and the adjustment of the respective laws, should there be any. It is the opinions concerning abortion (and not the restitution of the Church property confiscated by the Communist regime) that may prove to be the fundamental test of the proclaimed Christian stance. A consistent anti-abortion position, however, would hardly satisfy the *potential voters*, who tend to prefer a rather more liberal approach to questions of this kind.⁵² On the other hand, however, a more liberal approach may cause at least some defections among the *traditional voters*. Similarly, a movement toward the imaginary political center can hardly prove advantageous, either. Quite a few of the KDU-ČSL members may sympathize with the center to some degree, but such a trend would in practice require the party to emphasize certain social questions. Yet such issues are already monopolized by the Left. Moreover, the two civic parties leave little space available for another alternative (center) politics.

Nevertheless, the results of the parliamentary elections of 1996 suggest that the KDU-ČSL has indeed made the first steps toward addressing new voters. The efforts of the party leadership thus far have brought some undoubtedly positive results. Behind them stand factors such as the consolidation of its own political representation, successes of the Ministry of Agriculture headed by Josef Lux, the KDU-ČSL Chairman, and certain spectacular actions designed to catch the attention of the media (such as the prosecution of "drug-possessors," the proclaimed war on crime, the disagreement with the increase in pension age, etc.). At the same time, however, it should be noted that the competitors of the KDU-ČSL in the right center of the political spectrum have been lately weakened. While the ODS has already managed to establish its formidable position as the dominant subject of the right part of the party spectrum, the position of the second, smaller center-right party, one that could offer the voters an alternative

⁵¹ In this matter, cf. Zulehner, P. M.: *K stavu religiozity v Evropě* (On the State of Religiosity in Europe). *Teologické listy*, Vol. 1995, No. 1. Pp. 12–17. Also Opatrný, A.: *Zamyšlení nad sociologickými výzkumy* (Thinking over Sociological Research). In: *Teologické texty*. Vol. 1992, No. 1. Pp. 17–20.

⁵² Cf. Sláma, J.: *Parlamentní volby 1935, 1946, 1990 – ne pouze historie* (The Parliamentary Elections, 1935, 1946, 1990: Not Just History). *Sociologický časopis*. 1992, No. 2. Pp. 184–199, particularly pp. 196f.

to the ODS and yet represent no leftist opposition, has not yet been filled quite so explicitly. Only two years ago it seemed that this position would remain a domain of the ODA and that the People's Party would not get a chance to step out of "its own shadow" and court these voter groups. Yet the situation is quite different today. Due to certain well-known developments within the ODA and a number of political errors committed by its leadership that have cost the Civic Democratic Alliance a part of its support, the KDU-ČSL has at least partly succeeded in pushing the ODA out of its position of the "safe" alternative to the ODS. At least temporarily, the KDU-ČSL assumed this position itself. This shift was possible primarily due to the fact that both parties define themselves in their programs as normative alternatives to the "morally relativist" and "pragmatist" liberalism of the ODS and both also interpret themselves as a necessary correction of the ODS politics.

Moreover, the most recent developments suggest that many voters consider the simple campaign catchwords used by the People's Party (whether regarding the solution to crime, the drugs problem, or the term "socially oriented market economy," misinterpreted in the Czech environment) more persuasive than the often too sophisticated issues of the ODA (such as the question of the higher self-administrative regions, control over the intelligence services, or the not quite fully exploited initiative to lower the taxes). The percentage movement in electoral preferences is not very easily predictable in the case of the ODA, and it may change suddenly. The ODA lacks a stable votership and its political success often depends on the persuasiveness of its leaders and the correct choice of attractive political issues. Besides, one cannot really consider the above-suggested "competition" between the two parties as an actual struggle for one another's voters. Such a view would be incorrect and could hardly find any support in the empirical research. The real issue much more likely appears to be which of the two parties will be better able to "collect" the undecided and partially critical voters in the center of the political spectrum. The successes of the KDU-ČSL in this area at the present time – as questionable as they perhaps may be – undoubtedly suggest that the KDU-ČSL leadership in spite of all internal difficulties succeeds in carrying out some effective political work and that under certain conditions the People's Party could become a political power acceptable to a broader group of voters.

Yet the undisputed political successes the KDU-ČSL achieved in the last year and the high stability of its membership and votership determined by the traditions of Christian politics in the Czech lands do not provide grounds for any far-reaching conclusions.⁵³ The People's Party must expect a future struggle with the problems faced by European Christian-democratic parties in general. These problems will be particularly pronounced in the secularized Czech environment. The erosion of the traditional Christian social and moral *milieu* means that no

⁵³ The pre-election opinion polls in the middle of 1994 gave the KDU-ČSL less than the required 5%, by fall 1995 it was slightly over 6%, in March 1996 the KDU-ČSL popularity peaked at as much as 9%, and in the actual elections the party polled 8.1%.

Christian party can do without a number of compromises, transformation steps, and much search for new issues. The KDU-ČSL with such an explicit group of traditional voters has few alternative plans of how to proceed in the future: it has to satisfy the demands of the well-defined but numerically weak and still weakening group of active Catholics, and at the same time, it must address other voters for whom it must struggle in the relatively narrow “center” of the Czech political spectrum not only with the two civic parties but also with the Social Democracy. As the experience of other European party spectra suggests, such a position is far from easy and does not have to ensure a lasting political success. The future of “Christian politics” in Czech Republic is by no means guaranteed.

(Translated by Tomáš Suchomel)