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Civil Society and Religion in Post-Communist Hungary

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Religious Community and Civil Society

To what extent is it the original ability and duty of the religious communities to build a civil society? How the churches in Hungary today can help in building civil society without becoming politicised or submerged in a secular world? The civil society “is built from the bottom to the top, where the several groups find the way of self-expression and co-existence together other groups” (Tomka 98: 333), where “the self-organising groups, relatively autonomous from the state, attempt to articulate values and advance their interests” (Linz and Stephan 1996: 7-8). A very similar idea — as a typical catholic political theory — is the conception of the subsidiarity: instead of the centralisation the state locates rights and duties to the lowest level, where they can be practised (Schneider 83, Millon-Delsol 1992, Dwyer 1994, Lechner 1993)

Many of us think that the one of the important roles of churches, religious groups, and movements in a secular state and culture is to build and establish civil society, because it is their the original ability and duty (Martin 199:135-61, Casanova 1994:76-87, Tomka 98:331-35). This can be taken for granted. However one can frequently come across – both in Western and in the post-communist Middle and East European world – different movements which intertwine with the state and the governing parties, or creep into their favour. Then there churches and religious movements that keep away from a society or show an animus against the majority or the whole of a society. Some of the old and the new sects and the new religious movements – mainly the apocalyptic prophetic cults and movements – do not consider the world doomed for devastation worth to build or help. The groups that live estranged from the world – however they are not in conflict with the world and are not expecting its end destruction – are doing well on their own. The quasi-religious and intellectual movements conceived under the aegis of New Age, which have no membership or permanent community but several yet quickly changing clientele, do not actively take part in the construction of the civil society, because they merely have a rather passive commercial relationship with some of their members promising aid to their well-being (Barker 1989, Beckford 1985, Miller 1989). Most of the older and the new religions and churches and the minor, less institutionalised religious communities and movements are situated among the different groups of the pluralist society which have different apprehension, interests, features and which compete with each other.

The churches, religious groups and movements may make up a part of the civil society that is the corporate system of individuals and communities against the interests of bureaucracy and monopolies of the state (Cohen and Arato 1992:46-87). The religious communities may not only demand that the government and its administrative, economic, social and cultural institutions not interfere with the handling of the local, lower-level problems but also that they encourage and help the independence of the lower levels to assume their responsibilities and duties. The religious communities living in post-communist societies have to understand and have to get accustomed to the fact that in a pluralist democratic society the main role does not belong to the impersonal state but to the operative community and group which has to attain (in some cases has to fight for) that the state adjust itself to them too. This is not easy in a transient era, when the churches, religious groups and movements, which are being liberated from suppression, are seeking their own voice, identity, when it is questionable whether they are able to represent and redefine themselves or get lost in the maze of the different religious, political, and cultural organisations, groups and movements. This is not easy for the members of minor churches (according to different surveys, their percentage is between 0.5 and 2.5%), religious groups and movements blurred in the shadow of other, so called "traditional" or "historical" churches. In Hungary these are the Roman Catholic, the Reformed, the Evangelical and the Israelite church, to which 95% of those who declare themselves religious belongs to. According to different empirical surveys, those adults who identify themselves religious in any sense

declare themselves Catholic in 67-75%, Reformed in 17-21%, Evangelical in 3.5-5%, Israelite in 0.2-0.4% (Tomka 1995: 37).

It is not much easier for the churches forming the majority (Catholic and Reformed Churches belong here), and their members, or those with smaller in number but holding certain historical privileges (such as Lutheran and Israelite Churches), since they have to present themselves in the public eye of a society in such a way so that they do not restrict the possibilities of activity of other religious groups. They have to share the social stage with religious communities usually referred to as "sects" by their leaders and the majority of the members, nevertheless this word has negative connotations in Hungarian nowadays (Kamarás 2000a). In Hungary, where anti-semitism is lower than in most Western democracies, intolerance towards religious diversity is higher than it is in western democracies and in many Central and East European countries. (Tomka 1995:61-73)

In the West, many churches and congregations seem to have lost their way, becoming largely secularised, which nonbelievers may find very attractive, but the core-believers experience instead of a living religious community a social club. In contrast to the community and society-building role of the churches, the conformism of religious leaders, which could be observed in Hungary in the four decades before the changes in 1989, is frequently cited. (Tomka 1995:61-73) Naturally, it characterises the upper leading persons rather than the leaders of local congregations, since the human relations, manners and traditions of local religious communities used to be independent from the political attitude of leaders higher-up. At the same time, it is also true that a great portion of the priests, who did not enter into deals with the communist leadership, is unprepared for the partnership with the local society because they were socialised to very different roles – like advowee, autocracy, passive resistant, not adjusting to the secular world. Another factor that alienates the religious communities from civil society is the spiritualization of the religious community, that is, retreating into sanctity, religious rites and the closed world of the holy community (Kamarás 2000b:245-48) It is true that a respectable percentage of the religious congregations is as much a living, communicating, receptive community as the members of that certain church would like to or as it is declared to be the main characteristic of that church. Besides these, in religious assemblies in which the potential "neighbour" is restricted to a narrow circle of believers and demonstrations of love are not dynamic and intensive, regular gatherings function as means to smooth away atomisation. This was the case in Hungary even in the vegetating religious communities during the years of communist dictatorship which restrained community-forming (Tomka 1998: 340-41)

The Churches as Bases of Hungarian Civil Society

During the communist dictatorship, it was only the church that made up a structural network that both horizontally (regionally) and vertically (is bridging the gap between classes) included the people of the country into a whole system. The church offered a role for the common people of the former generations. While parallel to the emergence of civil society, the social, political and community-forming role of the churches has decreased everywhere in Europe, it was the communist system that preserved the social and political role of the church in Hungary (and in the other Soviet-like dictatorships).

However, in Hungary, the organisms and unions of the civil community (civilian and religious organisations as well) were abolished in 1949, while the semi-official ones – especially those in villages – were not. Besides the remainders of the local communities and the only communist Party, the church was the third formation in which the voluntariness of participation and a certain autonomy of the organisation were sustained. Instead of degradation – in consequence of the persecution of the church – the religious communities consolidated as an anti-culture, anti-society. An American sociologist (Jason. Wittenberg), who – examining the party-preferences, mainly the preference towards Christian democratic parties during the elections of the 1990's in Hungary – pointed out the continuity in the electors' behaviour which he explained with the role of the churches (especially the Catholic church). According to Wittenberg, the churches that are called "historical" in Hungary (mainly the Catholic church) administered to maintain a mode of a civil society. At its assemblies and through its believers the social autonomy and its way of organisation was preserved in integrity. Thus

the civil society that survived the utmost oppression – even if it sometimes confronted with the oppressing political authority – could be the opposition to the soviet kind of socialism, the party-state and sustained the adherence to the right-wing (Wittenberg 1999: 84-95). Wittenberg's research questions the view – popular mainly among left-wing and liberal intellectuals – which says that the dictatorial system incorporated the religious leaders. Holding the leaders of the churches at bay, blackmailing them and the compromise and collaboration of some of their members is out of question, but if the leaders of the churches (with their diminished yet still considerable authority) had not supported the traditions of the religious communities' protecting and maintaining activity (including value-orientation, communities, civil autonomy) the religious communities could not have been such effective alternatives to the ruling political system. Wittenberg showed that in settlements where the number of students of divinity was higher than the average before the changes, more people voted for right-wing, Christian democratic parties than elsewhere (Wittenberg 199: 121-133). The relatively high number of the participants of catechesis can be explained by not only the activity of the priests working effectively, but also by the original religious community, which proves that the civil society of the settlements with more or less casualties but survived the dictatorship.

The softening dictatorship could less and less (and perhaps did not even want to) withhold the activity of the churches maintaining (and in some places reconstructing) the local society, but the old system tried – in different places with different effort – to impede the pastoration of the youth (and in consequence rejuvenating the civil society) even in its final hours. Nevertheless it is also true that the activity of the priests successful in catechesis was limited by their overcautious supervisors (parish-priests, bishops). We must admit that the priest compromising with the Soviet-type socialist system (called “priests of peace” in Hungary, Because they became members of the organisation of the collaborating priests called Priests' Peace Movement) received the essential parishes (mainly in the major cities). Nevertheless, they were different regarding their motivations and intentions. In some cases, they gave shelter to their co-religionists or colleagues who carried catechism too far. With such explanation many priests were moved to other parishes from where they were removed over and over again following successful catechises as many as four-five times in a decade. Some bishops at handing over the official order whispered to their priests that they were forced to relocate them but continue their activity at the new place with the same enthusiasm and faith (Tomka 1994:104-12).

Religious Communities in Hungarian Civil Society

The biggest traditional churches such as Catholic, Reformed and Lutheran) are participants in a civil society in a different way than the minor traditional churches like Israelite and Christian churches, the newer but at least 50-100 years old minor, mainly neo-protestant churches and the newest Christian sects (existing only for 5-25 years, working at most for 10 years legally), new religious and quasi religious movements and working groups of oriental religions. The believers of the smaller churches are represented only by few people in most settlements and – nevertheless they could form a valuable diversity in the local community – due to different reasons (weakness, lack of strategy, preoccupation against them) they cannot or do not want to take part in the life of the local society. At the same time, the very same religious communities (e.g. Baptists, Methodists and the Pentecostals) are important factors of the cultural life of the country of the region, active participants in social work due to their national or regional organisations. Significant differences can be observed in the roles played in the civil society by the different religions as well as within each religion. The management of the historical churches, their assemblies, movements, base communities, orders, and organisations led by laymen play different roles in the local society.

There are some religious leaders, congregations, organisations that would rather lead than serve the local society (either as the representative or the privileged one of the political authority). This behaviour is most characteristic of the representatives of the historical churches. There are ecclesiastical communities that form an enclosure or island in the local community and there are some that are at war with the sinner society or the ungodly groups of the society. This behaviour is mostly characteristic of the members of the (old and new) cults living in the promise of the approaching advent and end of the world. And there are many religious communities – both within the traditional

churches and the religious communities which are new to Hungary – that are capable of dialogue and co-operation in such a way that they are integral constituent and challenging contrast of the civil society at the same time. According to Herwig Büchele they are “contrast-societies” in the society (Büchele 1987: 84). Several religious communities belong to each group. Some of those who are capable of dialogue are for example: a Catholic parish practising in a residential area in the capital, which is built up on minor communities, personal connections forming a brotherhood of 1500-2000 people (Bögre 1999:45-46), a neo-Protestant congregation which gives a new image to a disjointed gipsy community (as well as occupation and new self-esteem), a village founded by Krishna believers and based on Vedic traditions, practising bio-farming (Kamarás 1999:415-19).

The different churches, religious groups and movements are not represented equally in the various sectors of civil society. They are most active in the social sphere, helping the poor, the sick, the old and handicapped, in education, helping the families, alternative medication, protection of human life, helping the victims of disasters, supporting the Hungarians living outside the country's borders, they are getting more active in the media, publishing, education (elementary and secondary, the historical churches in undergraduate education as well). Theological colleges are run by the Methodist, Adventist church, a dozen of Buddhist groups together and the Hungarian based neo-protestant Congregation of Faith institutionalised from a movement into a church. They are less active in popular culture, education of adults, recreation, pastime, in the lives of the youth and children and the everyday life of the local communities. The vacuum in the place of the Soviet-type children's and youth movements could not be occupied by either the civilian or the religious institutions organisations and movements. The extent of participation and effectiveness – in most cases – is not in relation with the population of the participating churches. While the historical churches having a population of hundreds of thousands and millions publish one or two 4-8 pages long religious weekly papers, the Congregation of Faith (which has a population of merely 40,000) issues *Hetek*, a 16-page national political newspaper. The Unification Church, the Congregation of Faith and the Krishna believers regularly organise international conferences on science, politics and public life.

The role played by the civil society is largely influenced by the fact that the vast majority of the newer religious communities is connected to the social liberals who are in opposition of the current right-wing, conservative, Christian democratic governing parties, whilst the leaders and the majority of the members of the historical churches supports the governing parties, and there are some that sympathise with far right-wing parties. In Hungary nowadays, many of the representatives of the local self-governments give priority to party-interests instead of the local well-being and professional arguments. Local churches and religious groups take part in these fights between different parties.

The Catholic Church and Civil Society after the Changes

The overwhelming majority of Catholic believers and clergy feel that the 40 years of communist dictatorship in Hungary (1949-1989) had an impeding and destructive impact on parochial work. However, some add that the government did not influence spiritual life as much as it influenced the activity of the organisation. The dictatorship also had positive moral and practical effects: a stronger identity and sense of belonging of many believers, several valuable innovations brought forth by illegality and semi-illegality, and not only within the movements and small communities, but also in parochial work. Although the government succeeded in dividing both the believers and the clergy, it inadvertently encouraged new types of community and alliances. Clericalism became stronger, since priests had to carry out many functions in place of laymen, who wanted to protect their families and jobs. Government pressure was rather different by period and location, but congregational leaders did not always realise this: they either risked too much or missed good opportunities, the latter being much more frequent (Tomka 1994,1995)

In the 1980s the practice of the 1960s and 1970s continued almost without a hitch, the blessings of the "soft dictatorship" (as the late Hungarian variant was often called) could not be felt much, and in some places even the ghost of the strict 1950s came back to haunt. In this period, sociologists wandering around the country could observe island-type churches with very different

parochial activities in villages next to each other -- a traditional "pre-war" religious life here and a "run-down" religiousness there, in the spirit of "tridentium" here and in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council there, the terror of a local communist dictator here and parochial participation in the construction of local society there, only the administration of the sacraments, at various levels of quality here, and a colourful community life there. Some believers and priests courageously and patiently tested the softness of the dictatorship, while others settled down conveniently in the narrow space allotted to them. These attempts were, of course, very closely watched by the authorities, but open intervention became less and less frequent.

Priests played a key role in the parochial communities before the change of the political system; not only because the church was "overclericalized," but also because lay participation was still rather risky, even in the 1980s (Kamarás 1992:40-54). The clergy was extremely divided, and even those who acted in a highly courageous way represented the spirit of the populist church before World War II rather than that of the Second Vatican Council. The mentality of arrogance often came with a knowledge of theology and other areas, with organising skills and courage. On the other hand, these priests did more or less what they were expected to do, and thus represented continuity. (Tomka 1995) It is unknown in which direction they would have driven the church if there had been no dictatorship. Another question is whether or not they could have done more even in spite of the dictatorship, had they been more suitable for the job. These parsons, who ruled rather than served, commanded rather than dialogued, who interpreted their role in the pre-Council spirit very likely also shaped parochial life (Kamarás 1999:418-422). It is also true that the believers did accept (and therefore validated) these priests — although this area needs more research.

The change of the political system surprised the Catholic Church as well as other churches. This is why in many cases it tried to follow the ways of the old (pre-World War II), ruling state-church, popular church. The priests of the historical churches and the majority of the believers – many of whom mastered the role of the member of the oppressed community – feel strange in the position of being the members of one of the rival social groups (Tomka 1995:99-117). Some of the priests and believers wanted their church to function as a leading, privileged church either within a Christian state or in tight co-operation with a Christian democratic government. This opinion could not become an official point of view since besides being anachronistic it would also contradict the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. After all, no clear conception was formed yet as an alternative to the nostalgic model and the opinion still shows up – either at the organisation of a new Catholic school, in the race to acquire media, during elections, or in participating in the life of the local society – which demands at least the position of being first among the peers for the Catholic Church.

In this sense the social encyclical letter of the Hungarian Catholic Bishops' Magistracy (Magyar 1996) meant a significant progress, intended to have the subsidiarity one of the basic issues and insisted on the creation of civil society. For this reason, it urges responsibility and participation, bottom-up, multi-levelled, wide-ranging society and a state that protects the rights of the individuals and communities. However, the men of the street sympathised with the churches after the changes more than in some other post-communist countries (for example in Slovenia), It still means that churches promote the achievement of democracy, in Hungarian society learning the ways of democracy the participation of historical churches (without democratic structures) – thus the participation of the Catholic Church too – is problematic in the local society having democratic structures. The active members of the church frequently get confused because they get much less possibilities and respect than in lay organisations. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church appeared as the organic constituent of the civil society in many fields: with its schools, charities, cultural institutions, Catholic publishing, Catholic media, associations connected loosely or tightly to the clerical hierarchy, like the Keresztény Értelmiségiek Szövetsége (Christian Intellectuals' League). Within the Catholic church, which was a part of the civil society, besides the "official" church there were some organisations formed that can be called "civil churches" or "the church of movements". In addition to the Catholic associations formed with the approval of the ecclesiastical leadership and were operating in close relation with the Bishops' Magistracy, the "non official Catholic"

associations belong to this category as well, like Magyar Pax Roma (Hungarian Pax Roma), Zsinati Klub (Council Club). Compared to the parish of the diocese, a base community operating on the territory of a parish (sometimes co-operating with it) is a civil society.

Local Civil Society and the Parishes

Before the political changes, the parish communities working publicly meant the most important part of the sustaining civil society, albeit most activities were restricted to administering the sacraments, while the life of the faith and community were merely vegetating (Kamarás 1992). What can explain the fact that in the area of parochial work we do not see such an upward trend only some significant developments, as in teaching and religious instruction, and as in charity and society work? I will try to answer this question on the basis of an empirical survey into parochial activity in post-communist states, within the framework of the Aufbruch Project (Kamarás 99:415-422). Catholic parishes remained fairly independent of the political behaviour of upper and middle officials in the church hierarchy. Although the creation of religious communities outside the churches was prohibited, illegal and even persecuted, it did happen throughout the period in some places and in some way (Kamarás 1992a:29-39, 1992b:9-40, 1994:65-97).

In the light of our survey, the Catholic congregations of the revolutionary years looked very different. They could be described as having as many deficiencies or advantages, if not more:

A) Congregations in secularised and de-spiritualised areas, struggling but persevering, shrinking and deteriorating, or trading quantity for quality.

B) Congregations in the order of a town (especially in the larger cities), where pastoral care was nothing but the administration of the sacraments, and where an excellent and loyal core community was able to be formed.

C) Village congregations with traditional spirituality and with high "religious indicators," where mostly the quantitative indicators of religious life are good, where the congregation means a community of a traditional religious life, which shapes the image of the whole village, and where traditional attitudes are combined with modern forms of expression of spirituality and with community-building methods.

D) The congregations in socially, culturally and economically run-down villages, with a deteriorating religious life. (Kamarás 1999:420-22)

In a third of the 125 congregations, the number of regular believers had increased, in another third the number of people regularly attending masses had decreased, in one fifth it was the same, while in one seventh it increased in the period 1989 - 1991, then, a few years later (mostly since 1994) it was declining again.

In a good many congregations, for the overwhelming majority of believers, religious life is limited to Sunday mass or, in the case of children, to religious instruction. Some congregations have a weak, stagnating, or deteriorating religious life, the majority are parishes or branches without a priest. We can make another group out of parishes with an average-to-deteriorating religious life, most of which are in small communities where traditional religiousness has worn out. More frequent than these two seem to be the congregation with an average and relatively stable religious life (both in towns and villages). Less frequent is the congregation with an average-to-developing religious life. In these places, a small but growing group of believers are active not only in receiving the sacraments, but also in building the community. The well-functioning congregations develop fast, almost without exception. The various small communities – which mainly belong to the parochial and spiritual movements – the "civil church" inside the local church played an important role.

Transposing catechises to schools strengthened as much as it weakened the identity-seeking, community-forming activity of the parish communities (and only for Catholic parochial communities). For students catechises in most cases simply became one of their subjects, and for the pupils and the parents enrolment for catechesis did not mean a decision, courage, espousal or preserving their identity. Caritative activity of the church marks its role in the local society more significantly. However, in most parishes this means visitation of the sick and subsidising those in need, but the five hundred parochial charity organisations formed recently is a huge achievement, for many became a living community

(Kamarás 1999:421). Yet Miklós Tomka is right to ask why there are only this many, and whether or not there exist enough actual love and determination to help and represent those in need. Charity work is much broader now than it was ten years ago. In addition to visiting the sick and clothing those in need, it also includes making gifts for those in old age homes, organising a Day of the Elderly, running a shop of cheap merchandise, a group for handicapped children, a soup kitchen at the rectory, or organising a day-care centre for the elderly. Parochial charity works well where supporting those in need is combined with the spiritual activity of small communities. It happened more than once that a community of persons having completed a Holy Spirit seminar transformed itself into a devotional group and at the same time into a charity group. Charity is beginning to become a main, or very significant, function of youth groups (Tomka 1998:334-39).

This is the area where the "official" and the "civil" churches within the church can form a unity. The parochial communities' activity in the local society had started before the changes, in the beginning of the 1980s, semi-legally, cautiously, or eventually intrepidly and in some places it achieved considerable successes. In this, besides brave and creative priests and believers, the similarly brave and creative librarians and educators of the masses played a serious – and initiating – role, rather than the strictly controlled teachers. The outer conditions became better after the changes, but the inner conditions turned for the better much more slowly. Many questions are still unsettled within the Catholic communities (as well as in other religions): grow more powerful within or co-operate with others? Assimilate, risking our identity, or bearing our own colours represent a contrast in the local society? Compete or co-operate? Missionize or dialogise? Sanctificate the profane world or become secular? Speak or listen? Inform or be informed? Let the world enter the parish or flock out? Convert or help without converting? Participate in the local politics as members of the parish or just as individuals?

After analysing parochial strategies we were able to identify the following types: A) The congregation does not participate in building the local community because its relationship with the local authorities is "bad," "cold" or "peaceful, but keeping a distance." B) Participation is rather formal and/or limited to certain areas and events. C) There is no real co-operation, but the relationship is good. D) The congregation actually participates in building the local community. Atomisation characterised the society which called itself "socialist" more than the civilian societies because collectivism and collectivisation organised and controlled top-down displaced the real civil self-organisations. Most parochial communities were only possibilities to form real communities. The change of the system did not bring a radical turn in this question. A parish-priest complains: "This is a serving church, lacking fraternity and community. "In less passionate voice, a sociologist affirms: "The congregation is most often not a living community as its faithful would like it to be. It can match its own ideals only very fragmentarily." (Tomka 1998:342-43). In one third of the parishes surveyed, "rosary societies" are the only communities, and even they do not function as a genuine community. In other places the parson did not support the initiative of the believers, therefore these embryonic communities either withered away or walked out of the parish. It is typical of these parishes that the groups are mostly organised from above (by the priests). On the other hand, a strong community life is typical of the parishes where there are communities blending with each other and influencing a significant portion of the congregation as well as of the parishes explicitly built on these very communities.

While in lay life, mainly in civil society even in post-communist countries, it is now possible to learn and practice democracy, in the Catholic Church it is less possible, however this is the only field where most average people may play more or less a role or in power-sharing. Most believers observe that the priests are the only authorities, they lead without consulting anybody. There are priests who are not adept at leading and giving commands, who let things slip out of their hands, on the basis of "everyone should do what he knows best" (or with similar slogans). Such parishes are characterised not by democracy but by chaos. There are numerous good examples of a not really

democratic but wise and flexible leadership. In some parishes the parson deliberately tries to be open to a democratic leadership (even though not calling it that), by involving experts, a representative body or spiritual communities. In the representative bodies some change can be felt since the change of the political system. These bodies have become more active, they are involved in a variety of issues and in more significant decisions, the proportion of younger members and of women is increasing (Kamarás 1999:421-23). A considerable part of laymen feel a sharp antagonism between the priests' "thinking in terms of nation and church" and the "minority church" existing in a pluralist world; as well as between the civil democracy, openness, enterprise experienced in their everyday life and the pre-Council attitude of their priests doing parochial work.

I have found the following types of involved laymen at the parishes surveyed:

A) The priest does almost everything because he does not need assistance, he is willing to more involve believers in parochial work, but there is no one available, he is willing to involve laymen but believers of traditional attitudes or of a consumer mentality would not accept them.

B) There is an active group in addition to the priest: the active core is surrounded by a passive mass, the active group is the priest's clique or a clique that entangles the priest, the group only consists of paid members, several parochial helpers.

C) A democratically functioning congregation: the work groups and the core-community try to involve as many persons as possible, and they succeed sometimes, they rely on the representative body, the congregation is built on communities, a parochial assistant team around the priest, to do the liturgy and to serve a dozen of parishes (Kamarás 1999:422-23).

Parochial pastoral work can be considered fruitful where a deep traditional religiousness is alive and well managed, charismatic personalities lead the congregation, there are some traditions of movements, there is a regional community of priests, the parish relies on small communities, the parson can rely on work groups that are becoming a community, a living community is combined with a regional organisation, the parish is built on communities originating from collective experiences, the parish is built from bottom-up, from small communities. Thus, fruitful parochial work is, on the one hand, heavily dependent on personality and, on the other, also depends on the community. Today the majority of parishes are made up of congregations unable to do parochial work in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. "Church-building is not based on quality, personality and content. It is without a strategy and a concept," a member of a representative body concluded. There are several indications that the deep currents of religious life most of the time go around parishes, and they are shifting toward spiritual movements. In spite of the fact (or maybe as a result) that the life of parishes is not characterised by a deep spirituality, they shut themselves up in a more shallower religious world, where the world and the church lack dialogue. It is a fact that before the change of the regime some of the parochial activities were carried out - openly or clandestinely - by regional or national organisations, but this does not mean that these or others could not become integral parts of parochial community life.

The future offers more options. A situation can easily rise where the church will give up the Christlike character of the roles believers would play in the secular world, and the world will not disturb the believers and their religious life. The concepts and experiments I collected are of a different direction: they try to break out of the ghetto imposed on them by the dictatorship as well as the anachronistic way of thinking, exhaustion, inertia, the ghetto within whose boundaries they could maintain continuity along with the remnants of civil society.

Catholic Movements and Small Communities

The Catholic movements and small communities belonged to the underground church until the change of the system in 1989. Their activity was illegal during the years of communist dictatorship its leaders and members were persecuted. During the softer dictatorship, it was partially legal, which meant sufferance, in worse cases constant harassment. Communities of spiritual movements, parochial or non-parochial communities of amity not connected to spiritual movements can be positioned on a wide scale depending on to what extent they belong to the official church or the civil church. From the several dozens

of Hungarian spiritual movements the neocatechumen or the Schönstadt movements were closest to the official church, the Focolare

was somewhat farther, the Catholic charismatic movement and the ecumenical movements were even farther, and the farthest was the Bokor (Bush) movement led by György Bulányi.

The vast majority of the priests still greet every spiritual movement, every base community with suspicion. However, most parish communities had been motivated by a priest or community belonging to a spiritual movement.

After the changes, the majority of spiritual movements and base communities became visible, even as important and significant factors of civil society. Many run different organisations and institutions: newspapers, periodicals, schools, artistic and scientific workshops, sports clubs, institutions of pastime and recreation. Some cover areas that the official church has not occupied, like the Catholic youth leaders' training run by Regnum Marianum movement or the ecological workshop of Bokor. After the changes, hundreds of leaders and members of the old base communities became (sometimes higher rank) leaders of political, economic and cultural life. Thus, some politicians of self-governments, parties and local organisations came from the apolitical religious communities. The Catholic spiritual movements and small communities – even those closest to the strongly clerical official church – being a "civil church" mean the alternative to the official church since most of their members and leaders are not clerics. On the other hand, civil society meets the church through them, in many cases in such a role that the official church does not undertake. While some Bokor-members and groups criticise the leadership of the Hungarian Catholic Church aggressively, most of the members strive for the reconciliation of different religions, cults and nations. It was one of Bokor communities (the community of György Bisztray) that organised the – historical – action in 1990 during which 300 Romanian families belonging to the radical nationalist "Vatra" movement were invited for a week-end to Hungarian Catholic families.

V) Prospects

In the West it is clear to many observers that if civil society is to grow and prosper, the role the state needs to be limited, and they call for more private initiative, including churches, to help the needy not only materially, but also psychologically and spiritually via one-on-one involvement (Olasky 1992). At the same time social, psychological and moral challenge for churches: to be active participants in re-building civil society. The signal question is how the churches become part of civil society. Many of Western observers are right to ask how could the churches keep away from becoming politicised or submerged in a secular world, losing their authentic rationale of saving souls. In sum, the churches and religions in Hungary are too sluggish in the form of institutions, they are too rigid to become an organic part of the civil society, and that a parochial community can integrate into the life of the local society more easily if it works as a network of smaller communities. When the churches today here are too far from "guilty" word, more and more often swing to the other extreme. If they want not to lose their way, they have to play the role as a participant of a special form of civil society: the "contrast-society", where in the slogan "to think globally, to act locally". "Globally thinking" in our context means Christlike thinking. "Locally acting" Christlike way means Good Samaritan-like behaviour, but in a broader meaning. The Good Samaritan of the contemporary civil "contrast-society" not only pours oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them, but demands from the local authorities better public security. The "contrast-society" as well as means a "counter-culture" with a alternative set of values (Leddy and De Roo and Rouche 1992: 172-79). In a not conforming, but challenging Christian "counter-culture" the church has to be more pluralistic, more tolerant, "Are we to deny that Christ can be in our culture? Are we to deny the Christ of the stadiums, the Christ of space travel?", asks Douglas Roche (a Christian writer and lecturer, the former Member of Canadian Parliament), and Remi De Roo (bishop in Victoria, B.C.) answers: "I see the whole universe undergoing a constant process of begetting, giving and sharing of life from the womb of God. Not a manipulating, mechanical God, but the Source of all life.", and adds "the unique contribution of our counter-culture is to do the social critique not only in light of all the contemporary sciences, but also in light of Gospel values" (Leddy and De Roo

and Rouche 1992: 175-79). There are similarly thinking and acting Christians in Hungary too. In addition to above mentioned examples, a Catholic priest in a social worker role interposes between gypsies and local authorities.

According to Helmut Schelsky, only the churches institutionalised in the appropriate way are capable to accommodate civil society and become part of it. Accommodation is not a conformist assimilation – Schelsky says –, the accommodating party has to preserve the inner laws of its own life and resist assimilation (Schelsky 1965:98-104) The optimal accommodation takes place in the form of a dialogue. To achieve this, the churches have to become institutions capable of dialogue. The church has to share the laws that determine the behaviour of the modern world, accept the emancipated, independent social forms, has to integrate into the world of industrial work, mass-democracy and politics, recreation culture and mass media as part of civil society. In this aspect, the Hungarian churches, religious groups and movements – in spite of every hopeful signs – are just in the beginning of a promisingly process.

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ABSTRACT of Civil Society and Religion in Post-Communist Hungary

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How the churches in Hungary today can help in building civil society without becoming politicised or submerged in a secular world? Answering the questions the author analyses the role of the churches in the years of communist dictatorship, the different roles and activities in civil society of the bigger and smaller churches (especially the catholic congregations and smaller communities), new religious movements and groups, the “official church” and the “civil church”. When the churches today here are too far from “guilty” word, more and more often swing to the other extreme. If they want not to lost their way, they have to play the role as a participant of a special form of civil society: the “contrast-society”. Only the churches institutionalised in the appropriate way are capable to accommodate (not to assimilate!) civil society and become part of it mainly in the form of a dialogue.