



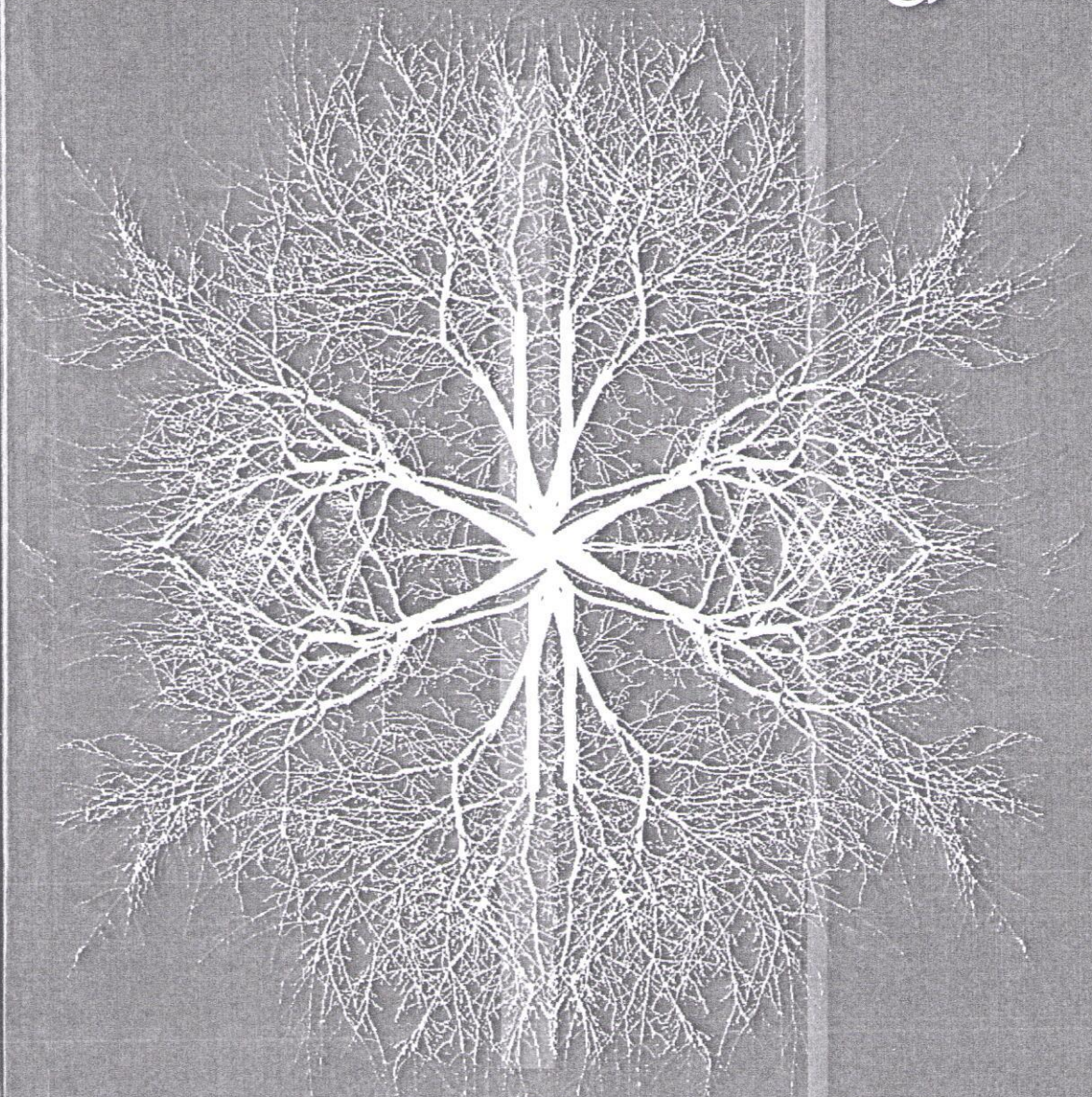
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# Science and Theology



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## CONTENTS

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### EDITORIAL

Religion's changes in the cyberspace of digital media.....	1
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### SELECTED PAPERS

In the beginning was the Internet... <i>Slavomír Gálik</i> .....	5
On virtual reality of religion <i>Juraj Skačan</i> .....	15
National identity in the light of culture tourism: application of the reflections of Saint John Paul II <i>Jana Černá</i> .....	25
Basic pillars of community media typology <i>Lucia Škripcová</i> .....	35
Celebritization of religious leaders in contemporary culture <i>Peter Mikuláš and Oľga Chalányo</i> .....	43
The myth of quality media or seriousness as a brand <i>Hana Pravdová</i> .....	53
Slovak, Czech and Hungarian Catholic literature of the 20 <sup>th</sup> century <i>Ján Gallik</i> .....	65
Communication behaviour: utility and empathy as key variables <i>Martin Ďurko</i> .....	79
'War' as a piece of hard news in British and Slovak media <i>Nataliya Panasenko, Paula Grochalová and Linda Grochalová</i> .....	87
(No)future: notes on media <i>Lukasz P. Wojciechowski</i> .....	101
Theoretical and philosophical basis of the deadpan aesthetics <i>Peter Lančarič</i> .....	107

Future of potential media impacts after transformation of media environment <i>Jozef Matúš and Jana Galera</i> .....	119
Theology of communication and media theology <i>Radek Mezulánik</i> .....	125
Influence of selected factors on the effectiveness of print media advertising <i>Peter Krajčovič and Ludmila Čábyová</i> .....	133
Electroencephalography as a tool of advertising research in the context of MAC model <i>Magdaléna Kačániová and Veronika Vargová</i> .....	145
'Evangelitainment' in American mainstream film and television <i>Jana Radošinská</i> .....	157
New trends of marketing communication based on digital games <i>Zdenko Mago</i> .....	171
New terms in English language as reflected in Slovak media <i>Magdaléna Ungerová</i> .....	183
Big Data for Big Marketing <i>Andrej Trnka</i> .....	191
Current TV production trends in Slovakia <i>Zora Hudíková</i> .....	197
Legal frameworks for the phygital concept <i>Marek Švec and Adam Madleňák</i> .....	209
Janus' face of consumer culture <i>Ondřej Roubal</i> .....	219
Social media in university education process <i>Jana Hubinová</i> .....	229
Perception of marketing communication of selected Internet bookstore by readers from the generation Y target group <i>Alena Kusá and Zuzana Záziková</i> .....	239
The issue of media reflection on socio-cultural recognition and global change <i>Martin Solík and Ján Višňovský</i> .....	249

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# SLOVAK, CZECH AND HUNGARIAN CATHOLIC LITERATURE OF THE 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

Ján Gallik\*

Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Faculty of Central European Studies,  
Dražovská cesta 4, 949 74 Nitra, Slovak Republic

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## Abstract

The aim of this paper is to interpret the cultural and literary context of the formation of Slovak, Czech and Hungarian Catholic literature in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as Christianity in its two main forms, namely in Catholicism and Protestantism, has determined the contemporary identity in Europe. And as Martin C. Putna states, Catholic literature exists and it is a phenomenon not only aesthetic, but mainly literary-historical and literary-sociological. It arose during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (in different countries at different times, etc.) due to the secularization as literature of Catholic milieu and on the principle the “opposition” and controversial literature. Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Central European Catholic literature began to significantly enrich by the western European literary and cultural trends, and vice versa implement its literary and cultural richness to the cultures of other nations and ethnic groups. It is important to draw attention to the inculturation element of the Catholic ideological system, in an effort to pass on some aspect of the Christian worldview to adequate artistic expression in an environment of modern times, since many highly educated clerics and lay artists have succeeded due to their remarkable artistic achievements.

*Keywords:* Central Europe, 20<sup>th</sup> century, comparative, spiritual, religious themes

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## 1. Introduction

By paraphrasing Anton Hykisch, in his editorial published in the magazine *Slovenské pohľady* (Slovak Views) under the title *Potichu a bližšie [Quietly and closer]*, Central Europe, in terms of number of inhabitants and surface, as a mix of mid-size and smaller European nations between the developed West and the powerful East, is a geographical space that suffered a lot during its existence because of stronger neighbours (the Kingdom of the Franks, the Byzantine Empire, the Ottoman Empire) and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century experienced probably more intensively than other regions the bitterness of totalitarian systems (Fascism and Communism). Even today, it has its own significant role, in an epoch in which the face of European identity is radically changing, after several centuries of formation on the basis of European civilisation, which is mainly *Christianity* and *Christian culture*. This aspect is

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\*E-mail: jgallik@ukf.sk

also reflected in the literatures of these nations (in narrow sense we mean the four Visegrad Group countries). Mutual relations between these countries were not always at an ideal level – and so are they sometimes still today – but the above mentioned common aspect played a significant role in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with regard to belief and perception of Central Europeans; and it seems that it will be necessary even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century so that it can endure in the consciences, thoughts, and deeds (not only) of Central European nations. Not by chance, the poet, essayist, and thinker Pavol Strauss (whose works have a significant thematic and idealistic consonance with the production of Slovak modern Catholic literary authors), in his diary note as of 20 August 1948, wrote that the world and civilisation can be built only on the right basis of thoughts and morals. Nevertheless, many projects aiming at building a ‘better world’ sent Christianity to retreat; therefore, Strauss supposed that things will never be better unless we try again with Christianity. Similarly, Jozef Tóth – a Greek-Catholic priest, writer, and thinker of the same extent as Pavol Strauss – considered Christian religion as the most perfect anthropological model for human life. Even the Czech literary critic Miloš Dvořák had a similar opinion about the importance of Christian religion and literature. During the '30-ies Miloš Dvořák became a well-defined personality of literary criticism, by evaluating the literary process through the prism of Christian spirituality. Soon after the tragic 1938 Munich Agreement and also during the years of the Protectorate, he showed the importance of connection to the tradition of literary works in which the reader clearly feels the presence of God; and – according to the spirit of such tradition – he encouraged to raise up the Christian Cross against the hooked cross. As for the progressive increase of communist ideology and its schematic (notably campaigning and propagandistic) postulates within literature in the period after World War 2, Dvořák believed that “where senses and leftovers determine the life of our will, there bestiality or ideological schemes easily enter into art and become fake mankind” [1]. According to Dvořák’s system of values, culture should be based on a metaphysical arrangement of values and on assessments deriving from it, because “the link between art and religion defines the creative notion of freedom that begins in the moment when people get liberated from themselves, when they manage to change their egoism in love for their neighbours” [1, p. 51]. This is only an introductory note about a concept that was described also by another Czech literary historian Jaroslav Med: “literary life is largely an image of the social role of literature” [2]. The social mission of literature – notably in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in our (Central European) geopolitical conditions – was the desire of participating in the construction of a new world and of a new state (e.g. the gradual circumstances of the creation, extinction, and recreation of the Czechoslovak Republic). Christian thought significantly shaped European history and culture; in many nations it created a principle of inseparableness between national sentiment, culture, and faith. Consequently, as time went on, Christianity (through its two main confessional currents, i.e. Catholicism and Protestantism) made efforts to react in different ways to often turbulent changes



in the society. This is also one of the reasons why we remark several (not to well-known) analogies and links between Slovak, Czech, and Hungarian Catholic literature in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This phenomenon is primarily due to sharing of a common Central European space. "As it was already written on many occasions: Catholic literature originated as a consequence of secularisation: It is the expression of a 'second confessionalisation', i.e. the creation of well-marked religious and political opinion groups within the frame of modern society. The more the traditional Catholic part of the society is marginalised by modern development, the more it builds its 'parallel polis', its 'Catholic milieu' and – within its frame – it also produces specific Catholic literature as one of the means of reinforcement, self-consciousness, and education." [3]

## 2. The research about this theme

Within the frame of his own reception and interpretation of Central European Catholic literature (notably, in the production of authors belonging to the so-called 'Modern Catholic literature'), Róbert Kiss Szemán observed that a concrete group of poets, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – tried to carry out an *inculturation* of the Catholic system of ideas, by means of good and valuable artistic literature [4]. This can also be interpreted as a reaction to contemporary modernism, which – according to Zoltán Szénási from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences – after the Middle Ages, "established scientific empiricism as the basic experience of the world, removed God from the centre of European thinking and replaced Him with man; and therefore, it threw the medieval *weltanschauung* in the category of obsolete conjectures according to which the cosmos is a system regulated by the Creator and man is considered as an elected being of the created world. In other words, in the past the unitary religious conception of the world represented an undoubted truth, whereas since the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century new ideas were gradually replacing the old conception. They were founded on science and human intellect, and on its capacity of independently building its own authority; and they gradually rejected the divine agent from the contingencies of understanding of the world and of our interior dimension." [5] In this respect, Szemán legitimately assumed that Catholic literature of both centuries has the same common constant factors. Therefore, he formulated the notions of *ideogeme* (contentual and formal element, present in artistic works as a way of expressing some system of ideas) and *politogeme* (situation in which the political sphere develops such a strong influence on artistic currents and works that we observe consequential elements in the works of art; with regard to historical excursus in Central European countries we remark that politics was often connected to art – in either positive and negative sense). According to Kiss Szemán, in the context of Central European area, a practical approach consists in a differentiation that facilitates the periodization of art with Catholic tendency. For the purpose of writing a sort of history of Czech, Hungarian, and Slovak Catholic artistic movement, he

identified three stages [4], as we will illustrate in single subchapters – by adding significant material from our research.

### 2.1. First stage – end of 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century

The early stage of the history of Czech, Hungarian, and Slovak Catholic artistic production begins in the second half of 19<sup>th</sup> century and ends at the end of World War I. This period is featured above all by the early phase of modernisation of society, accompanied by conservatism as system of ideas. Catholic literature from this historical period served mostly for spiritual and pastoral purposes and it had very little or no ambition in terms of aesthetical judgements. Already in late 19<sup>th</sup> century the Western European-like structure of the Czech society had created such a spiritual environment that allowed inculturation of Catholicism in modern art. In his attempt of description of this period, Ivo Pospíšil reports that, in general terms, “the renewal of religious current in literature, directly connected with the Catholic theology of the tradition, had a natural international and pan European character; and this revival started already in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: a sort of canon of Catholic literature is gradually created, both in the historicizing current and in the permeation of modernistic style levels (Paul Claudel, Francis James, Jacques Maritain, Georges Bernanos, François Mauriac, John Ruskin, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Gilbert Keith Chesterton, Hilaire Bellow, Ewelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, Gertruda von le Fort, Rainer Maria Rilke – whose Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge were translated into Czech by another Catholic author, Josef Suchý (1923–2003), translator of German, Austrian, and Sorbian poetry – Reinhold Schneider, Hans Canossa, Richard Billinger, Giovanni Papini, Sigrid Undsetová, etc.). Czech and Slovak literature with such an orientation were then part of this quite solid current: in the Czech context it appeared in the work of worldwide known symbolist literate Otokar Březina (1868–1929) and Jakub Deml (1878–1961) already in connection with modernism since the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, whereas in the production of some other authors it appeared even earlier.” [6] Within this stage, we could summarise R.K. Szemán’s statements in the following way: in the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a revival of Catholic philosophic thinking. An appeal to such revival was included notably in the encyclical *Aeterni patris*, released by Pope Leo XIII in 1879, through which the Pope encouraged the intelligentsia to study scholastic philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas, an immensely influential medieval philosopher and theologian in the tradition of Catholic philosophy. Although application of Aristotelian-Thomistic aesthetics helped Christian-oriented literary criticism develop a clearer view of world and national literature (originating at that time in the Kingdom of Bohemia and in the Kingdom of Hungary, by considering especially concrete production of Hungarian and Slovak authors, since Czech and Ugrian cultural and spiritual history have many things in common), the Catholic literary production was mostly based on folkloristic and didactic or moralising traditions of the previous periods.

Therefore, within the literary context of that time, it represented a sort of artistic anachronism. As Jaroslav Med states, in the Czech literary milieu we can mention e.g. the connection with the work of the Catholic priest and patriot Boleslav Jablonský (real name: Karel Tupý, 1813–1881), whereas in the Kingdom of Hungary we may refer to Hungarian literary Catholicism which got paralysed – as Martin C. Putna explains [3, p. 9] – in a separated Catholic literary current vowed to agitation, anti-liberal polemics, social criticism, and patriotism, represented by the opinions of the bishop of Székesfehérvár, Ottokár Prohászka, born in Nitra (1858–1927). With regard to Slovak literary context, back then incorporated in the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary, we can mention similar ethical, educational, liturgical, catechetical, homiletic, literary-historical works and prayer books written by the Slovak Roman Catholic priest, writer, publicist, and prominent organiser of cultural life, František Richard Osvald (1845–1926), who edited the whole translation of the Bible in 1910–1920. The so-called *Osvald's group* of Catholic intellectuals (clergymen and laymen) was shaped between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through a magazine named *Kazatelňa [Pulpit]* and its annexes *Literárne listy [Literary papers]*. They tied up with the literary tradition of patriotically conscious Catholic priesthood participating in the development of contemporary Slovak culture throughout personal literary activity (Anton Bernolák, Ján Hollý, etc.). In the opinion of Július Pašteka, many Catholic authors of that time should be considered only as poets of smaller format compared to Ján Hollý, as they were not able to give a significant boost to the development of literature in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A partial innovation of poetical structure was provided at least by the literary production of the poet and Roman Catholic priest Dlhomír Poľský (real name: Andrej Majer, 1864–1935), who belongs to the intergenerational layer of authors between P.O. Hviezdoslav and the production of Slovak modern literary modernism. As an author of lyric poems with romantic, natural, and religious themes, he published his own poems for magazines and manuscripts only later in his career (in the mid 1920's). He planned a complete collection of five volumes, but only two of them were published – under the title *Spisy básnické Dlhomíra Poľského [Poetic scripts of Dlhomír Poľský]* (1925–1926). There is also another 'forgotten' predecessor of Slovak (and Catholic) modernism, the Roman Catholic priest, writer, and translator Tichomír Milkin (real name: Ján Donoval, 1868–1920), who left us some fragmentary social application of his own poetic conception [7], by publishing his poetry only in magazines and revues (*Slovenské pohľady*, *Katolícke noviny*, *almanach Tovaryšstvo*, etc.).

In the Czech Catholic literary context, another group of writers tried to overcome the didactic and moralising tendencies, by getting closer to the literary flow of their times and by elevating Catholic inspired literature to a higher artistic and aesthetical level. The members of this group presented their compositions in an almanac known as *Pod jedním praporem [Under one banner]*, dedicated in 1895 to the celebration of the birth anniversary of the Vyšehrad canonic Beneš Metod Kulda (with contribution from 50 authors).

“The main initiators of this group (called by F. V. Krejčí ‘Catholic Modernism’ as analogy with ‘Czech Modernism’) were: Sigismund Bouška, Xaver Dvořák, and Karel Dostál-Lutinov. The *Nový život* [New Life] (1896–1907) magazine became a sort of ‘official’ revue of the Catholic Modernism. Its publisher was Dostál-Lutinov, who was also the author of an article entitled: What is poetry? (originally in *Hlídka literární* [Literary watch], preprinted in *Niva*, 1895), which became something like a programmatic manifesto of the artistic efforts of Catholic Modernism.” [1, p. 32-33] Nevertheless, since the very beginning, the Czech Catholic Modernism consisted in two tendencies (the first tendency aimed at uniting the efforts of Catholic Modernism with formal conquests of contemporary art, notably symbolism; the second tendency preferred to continue with the local tradition on the basis of inspiration provided by folkloristic sources with the goal of educating people). The differences between these two tendencies represented a significant obstacle to possibilities of implementing the defined artistic aims; thus, this early phase of development of Catholic modern literature remained in the periphery of general literary development. Its ennoblement to an adequate artistic expression in the environment of modern times took place only under new socio-political conditions, i.e. after World War I. There is also another aspect that recalls our attention during the transit from first to second stage of development of Catholic literature into a modern and better artistic and aesthetical phenomenon: the religious atmosphere and many Christian motives that we observe in the production of the three most prominent representatives of symbolism in the Czech-Slovak-Hungarian literary context. Otokar Březina (real name: Václav Jebavý, 1868–1929), Ivan Krasko (real name: Ján Botto, 1876–1958), and Endre Ady (1877–1919) had many things in common due to their date of birth and in terms of production character. Of course, they significantly influenced many generations of writers, incl. those who were strictly Catholic authors. The famous Czech literary critic F.X. Šalda stated that only “through symbolisation it is possible to describe the transcendent idealism of the being and of the world”, which for Šalda was the highest and most important scope of whatsoever form of art [1, p. 33]. These artistic production requirements strongly influenced even the poetic production of Otokar Březina. This is also the reason why Březina’s later symbolic poetry was well perceived in the literary criticism of Miloš Dvořák, within efforts of a Christian revival in Czech literature as an ideal model. With regard to the Slovak author Ivan Krasko, whose poetics was a mix of several orientations (symbolism, impressionism, neo-romanticism, hints of decadence), we should start by mentioning his first poem collection *Nox et solitudo* (1909). These poems can be perceived as delicately psychological analyses, unveiling “the interior vulnerability and fragility of the lyric subject, oscillating between faith and knowledge, between sense and intellect. It is an intimate lyric of melancholically attenuated and finely cultivated verbally sensual and intellectual dramas of a modernistically sensitive human being; and this lyric is also featured by strokes in the sphere of super-personal rise. (...) The past is highlighted; we often observe metaphorical

visions of the space anchored in Christian symbolism.” [8] Such an artistic tradition (with such a created poetry) undoubtedly paved the way to the larger generation of authors of Slovak Catholic Modernism in the 1930’s and their further successors represented by younger generations of Catholic authors. Even the highly appreciated Hungarian poet Endre Ady, who belonged to the “other root of Hungarian cultural identity (i.e. Reformation), felt the necessity of reflecting the first root (i.e. Catholicism)” [3, p. 11]. Such statement is notably proved by his two poems translated into Czech as *Póčská Marie* and *Modlitba večer, šeptem* [Evening prayer, whispering]. The first poem was inspired by a visit to the Catholic place of pilgrimage Máriapócs (in his native region – East Hungary, where most of the people are Calvinists). The Marian leitmotiv – quite common in the poems of Czech and Slovak Catholic poets – is largely dominating in every strophe of Ady’s poem. In his second poem, *Evening prayer, whispering*, Ady focused on the aspect of prayer, as literary genre or as a certain segment of a literary text, which is mainly used as a motive destined to provide a general expression and externalisation of the theme, so that the author can manifest his own relation with God as Heavenly Father.

## 2.2. Second stage - 1918–1945

According to R.K. Szemán, the Catholic literature of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century may represent a second stage called Catholic Modernism or Neo-Catholic Literature. This trend developed over the successes of artistic modernism – in many cases, even avant-garde artistic trends. It had the ambition of becoming an integral part of national literature. In other words, it wanted to be assessed on the basis of aesthetical criteria, just like other literary currents. Once again, it is necessary to further analyse Szemán’s statement within the concrete socio-political context. Indeed, 1918 became a crucial year with important breakthroughs in several directions. After the fall of Austria-Hungary, at the end of World War I, several new successor countries were created (among them Czechoslovakia and Hungary, which are of particular interest for this article). Europe changed its face. This circumstance significantly influenced the literary life of European countries, notably in Central Europe. During the 1920’s, left-wing utopianism was more and more dominating the cultural and political models of literary life. This caused, above all, a degradation of traditional values, disruption of intergenerational links, and the invasion of modernity – the traditional image of culture existing before World War I was liquidated. “This modernity was carried forward on the wave of revolutionary principles, notably fomented by an idealised conception of the liberating power of the Russian Revolution. According to left-wing ideas, only this historic event could initiate the origination of a new society through revolutionary intervention.” [2, p. 9] In the minds of many people, the doctrine of the proletarian culture and revolutionary production had to acquire a dominant position also in the artistic field (especially literature). In 1920, the artistic federation *Devětsil*, was created in Prague. It was mostly formed by young

generation of poets who were inclined towards the left-wing revolutionary programme. Two years later, also in Prague, a group of young left-wing oriented Czecho-Slovak intellectuals was formed under the name of DAV. In 1924 they also started to publish their own magazine with the same name and they had a significant role in influencing the development of Marxism in Slovakia. Immediately after World War 1, even the Hungarian working class built its own proletarian homeland (the Hungarian Soviet Republic). At that time, fourteen-year old Attila József (one of the future prominent Hungarian proletarian poets) was diligently following the historical work of the Hungarian proletariat and was studying Lenin's book *The State and Revolution*. Disillusionment came with the defeat of revolution and with the creation of Miklós Horthy's regime. In 1920, Horthy became country administrator and its politics started to incline more and more towards fascism. The Communist Party was condemned as illegal. The poet Attila József, still a member of this party, was making tireless efforts in order to bring the ideal of revolutionary determination to its final victory. For this reason, it is quite interesting that his poetic collections also include poems with pronounced spiritual and Christian motives. He invokes God in his prayers and he looks at God in his own heart (see poems: *God* and *Oh God*). Elsewhere, in a Christmas carol named *The Kings of Bethlehem* it looks as though he is also welcoming the Son of God. This fact witnesses the complexity of this epoch and of formation of ideas that occurred and got problematized in the conscience of single individuals and of collective mass. We can also observe something similar in the conscience of many other main authors during the years of the first Czechoslovak Republic. Notably between the 1920's and 1930's, a generational debate was taking place between left-wing positions, right-wing opposition, and liberals – with intervention in this debate also from the Catholic community. In the Slovak and Hungarian environment, even after 1918, there was still a growing inclination towards Christianity, notably Catholicism (before 1918 the proportion of Catholics was about 50%, whereas the 1920 census recorded 63% of Catholics in Hungary and 69% in Slovakia). In the Czech context, religion (especially Catholicism) was implausible for the majority of the population, mainly because of pre-war connection between the Catholic Church and the Habsburg dynasty. Even the Czech “Catholic authors and writers accessed the new state with a certain insecurity and with a sort of sense of guilt for the behaviour of Catholic Church before and during the war” [2, p. 21]. Anti-Catholic moods were largely supported also by President Masaryk – and this led to a sort of ‘cultural fight’, in which the Catholic Church had to be discredited and condemned to the status of insignificant minority. As Jaroslav Med explains, eventually this circumstance was paradoxically helping the Catholics. Indeed, there were no longer connections between ‘the throne and the altar’ and the Church could rely only on resources deriving from its bimillenary culture and artistic tradition. The representative of older Czech Catholic Modernism, like S. Bouška, X. Dvořák, K. Dostál-Lutinov and J. Š. Baar remained in the background. In substance, outside the range of literary life of that time, “Catholicism, as life

principle, was presented in the 1920's literature by two main currents: on the one hand the Old Empire initiatives of Josef Florian; and on the other hand militant publications and literary production of Jaroslav Durych, main protagonist of post-war Czech Catholic literature" [2, p. 22]. In the 1920's, the Old Empire circle was also represented by Bohuslav Reynek and – to a certain extent – by the eternal solitaire Jakub Deml. In this context, an interesting personality is the Czech Christian poet Bohuslav Reynek (1892–1971) who considered the post-war avant-garde ideas of mankind (i.e. the storm of vitalism, materialism, hedonism, collectivism, etc.) as chaos and nothingness. His early production is dominated by an absolute faith in God, giving a sense of redemption to everything. In Czech Christian-oriented literature, the literary production of B. Reynek advocates for one of the fundamental values of Czech expressionism. He accurately transfers to literary life the basic sense of jeopardy of human life in the lure of evil and "exacerbation for what Christianity from time immemorial names 'devil', with his clenched claw of the original sin inserted in human hearts" [1, p. 92]. During the above mentioned years, in the Slovak literary sphere, we find an interesting connector between older generation (the so-called Osvald's group, Tichomír Milkin, Dlhomír Poľský) and the new generation of Catholic authors (the emerging strong generation of Catholic Modernism in the 1930's): Ignác Grebáč Orlov (civil name: Ignác Grebáč, 1888–1957), Catholic priest, writer, translator, and journalist. As Grebáč himself admitted, in his production, he intensively exploited inspiration from Czech Catholic Modernism and was in close connection with its representatives (e.g. with K. Dostál-Lutinov, J. Deml, etc.). In 1931, Milan Pišút defined him a religious idyllist and a singer from Orava who stood before the cradle of Catholic Modernism in our country. J.E. Bor considered him as the modern initiator of Catholic poetry in Slovakia, serving as reference for the following authors of the Slovak Catholic Modernism. As a journalist he contributed to Slovak periodical press by writing numerous cultural, religious, and notably political articles; and he was also intensively engaged in the Catholic wing of the Slovak National Movement. In 1992, Rudolf Jurolek (writer and journalist) prepared a collection of poems from Grebáč. He published it with the title *Ignác Grebáč Orlov: Moja lýra (výber z poézie)* [*Ignác Grebáč Orlov: My Lyre (selection of poems)*]. The afterword and the 'calendarium' were drawn up by Augustín Maťovčík, who considers Ignác Grebáč Orlov as a poet with sincere heart and creative verve, always searching appropriate poetic expressions and inspiration with regard to nature, nation, family, and God. It is true that – during the years in which he composed poems – Grebáč remained in a secondary position compared to more resonant names like Ivan Krasko, Vladimír Roy, Martin Rázus, Štefan Krčméry or Janko Jesenský. An interesting coincidence is represented by Sándor Sík (1889–1963), Hungarian Catholic writer, converted from Judaism, Piarist monk, historian of literature, charismatic teacher, and aesthete – who was only one year younger than Ignác Grebáč Orlov. Although Hungarian literature does not show the phenomenon of Catholic Modernism to the same extent as Czech and Slovak

context, Sándor Sík acted as a very important representative of Catholicism. He stated that “Catholic literature is first of all literature; and Catholic art is thoroughly Catholic if it is only art” [3, p. 225]. Thanks to Sándor Sík, in the same historical period (i.e. in the 1930’s), Hungarian literature welcomed a strong enclave of excellent Catholic authors; and the same thing happened in Bohemia where the strong generation of Czech Catholic authors (like Josef Florian, Jakub Deml or Jaroslav Durych) was followed by a group of young poets between the end of the 1920’s and the beginning of the 1930’s. The works of this group of authors “was totally or partially embodied under the notion of spiritual poetry: Halas, Holan, Závada, Zahradníček, Lazecký, and a little later Renč, Hrubín, Dokulil, and others. At the end of the 1930’s a whole fresh generation of authors arrived, guided by Kamil Bednář” [9]; and we could describe the Slovak situation in similar terms. Here, the ‘flag’ of the group of young poets of first generation Slovak Catholic Modernism was carried by its most popular member, Rudolf Dilong; besides him, there were two poets of almost the same age, Pavol Gašparovič Hlbina and Ján Haranta. As for the second generational wave, we should mention Janko Silan, Mikuláš Šprinc, Pavol Ušák Oliva, Svetoslav Veigl, and many others. In Bohemia, Catholic oriented magazines were founded, like *Akord*, *Řád* or the revue named *Tvar*. In Slovakia, this analogous idealistic line was represented by periodical publications as *Kultúra*, *Katolícke noviny*, *Postup* or *Prameň*. In the same years, within the Central European space, there were also other Catholic cultural revues like the Bavarian *Hochland*, the Slovenian *Križ na gori* or the Polish *Verbum*; moreover, the young generation getting formed round the Hungarian revue *Vigilia* (founded in 1935), meant the beginning of Hungarian Catholic literature as an artistically relevant phenomenon of living reading. In his homonymous essay (*Vigilia*) Sándor Sík presented the idealistic and artistic manifesto of the new generation: “We are writers; we identify ourselves with living Hungarian literature. We are not a cult or a party; we are not even a group of writers; we are simply Hungarian writers. We don’t stand against other writers and we don’t keep distance from them. The fact that we are Catholics does not separate us from them, but it brings us closer to them: understanding, love, universality – beyond the borders of the social law of professional cohesion and the law that inscribed our passionate love for the Hungarian word in our blood – are for us an order of our consciences.” [3, p. 32] In Sándor Sík’s mind, the symbol of vigil and watch was at the same time a serious and important mission, i.e. a service for the great tradition of Hungarian literature. As a Catholic, he believed that – together with other writers – they are guarding the even greater tradition of Christianity. In a brief historical excursus, he doesn’t hesitate to reckon a number of names of authors and periodicals promoting the idea that Hungarian Catholicism in social, cultural, and literary life is not a matter of the past, but of the future. The demonstrating character of Sík’s essay, his appeal, faith, hope, desire of a revival of Catholic literature in the 20<sup>th</sup> century largely reminds the significant efforts for the same goal taking place in the Slovak literary context, notably through the pen of Rudolf Dilong.



In the correspondence, interviews or memoirs of many authors of the Slovak Catholic Modernism, but also of other artists who did not belong to this circle, we notice that Rudolf Dilong was always able to raise awareness on his own works and thoughts. Through his own production and literary critic's activity, he managed to direct the juvenile works of many young (male and female) poets and prosaists. These statements are clearly confirmed by the *Antológia mladej slovenskej poézie* [*Anthology of young Slovak poetry*] (1933), (assembled by Dilong) and by Dilong's involvement in a group of authors who edited a revue called *Postup* [*Proceeding*] (in 1934–1935), later replaced by the revue *Prameň* [*Source*], in 1936–1937. Both the above mentioned periodicals are considered as 'tribunes' of Catholic Modernism, despite the fact that the editorial staff largely denies this assumption. As a matter of fact, they served as base of publication for many authors of the Slovak Catholic Modernism, including Rudolf Dilong. The latter also wrote an article in the last edition of the revue *Prameň* (no. 10, 1937) with the title *Slovo o našej situácii* [*A word about our situation*] and with the subheading *K povšimnutiu katolickej vrchnosti* [*Becoming aware of Catholic establishment*]. Similarly to Sándor Sík in the revue *Vigília*, Dilong defended the right of young Catholic authors to creative freedom, for the purpose of creating artistic and aesthetical valuable works also destined to the cultivated and aesthetically more sensitive intelligentsia. Back to complicated socio-political and economic conditions of the 1930's – that started to be more and more expressively reflected even in literary life of Middle European nations (and not only in Europe) – it is necessary to emphasise a statement of Jaroslav Med, according to which the 1920's were dominated by optimistic efforts for identification with the new state (Czechoslovak Republic) and the writers presented themselves mainly through programmatically compact groups (proletarian literature, poetism, etc.), whereas in the 1930's we notice – since the beginning – a considerable individualisation of the modes of creating and expressing ideas. In Czech, Slovak or Hungarian Catholic oriented writers and intellectuals we notice a specific approach towards the pan-European atmosphere characterised by a sort of 'tiredness of democracy', with alarming social impact on large masses, paving the way to the social and political upsurge of totalitarian ideologies (forms of atheist socialism, communism, fascism, etc.). This specific attitude mirrors a common denominator: the influence of the conservative thoughts of recognised English and French Catholic writers and intellectuals (e.g. G.K. Chesterton, H. Belloc, E. Mounier, J. Maritain, etc.) who criticised the democracies led by materialistic and liberal capitalism and announced the importance of returning to a fair relation between human society and God (as the Absolute), by condemning all forms of atheistic fascism and other ideologies.

### **2.3. Third stage – from the end of World War 2 up to current period**

The experiences of World War 2 left extraordinarily deep marks in the Catholic literature of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, followed by the

traumatic process of formation of Soviet-type communist dictatorships. Catholic literature during the years of the totalitarian system (quite often forbidden and circulating as underground publications called samizdats) can be defined as Catholic/Christian existentialism – or even Christian absurdism. This literary orientation was also considered as integrating part of national literature. It consistently and expressively offered resistance to ideological terror. It adopted the procedures of modernisation and – in certain years or decades of totalitarian regime – it was almost the only current of national literature that fulfilled its aesthetical or artistic expectations (e.g. in the production of Jan Zahradníček, János Pilinszky or Jozef Tóth). Life destinies of these three authors were everything but simple, but they mastered their miserable situation with braveness and fortitude, just like the One in whose Word they believed – and spread it throughout their literary production. Due to the repressive measures of the communist regime, Jan Zahradníček was unjustly arrested in 1951 and condemned to 13-year prison sentence. While he was in jail, his whole family got poisoned with mushrooms and eventually his two daughters died because of it. Nevertheless, even this terrible circumstance did not change the nature of his production: connection between spiritual passion and fragile sentiments and emotionalism. As he wrote some time later, after spending nine years in jail: “it was a life of its kind and it belonged to me, to my destiny, just like many other experiences, acquaintances, and relationships” [10]. Jozef Tóth and János Pilinszky have similar thoughts. J. Tóth was freed from communist work camp in 1954 and returned to civil life – of course, as a citizen of second category, without possibility of obtaining a suitable job for his level of education and talent. He worked for several enterprises, mostly as proof-reader in the Eastern Slovakian Print factories in the city of Košice. In 1969, he was secretly consecrated as Greek Catholic priest. During twenty years, down in the ‘catacombs’, he prepared young candidates to priesthood. After November 1989, he was able to freely contribute to further development of the Church. With regard to János Pilinszky, in the 1950’s his publications were banned and in the 1960’s he decided to pursue the path of silence. After the instauration of communist regimes, both Jozef Tóth and János Pilinszky soon prophesied that this new ideology was building ‘full troughs’ in the forefront of human thinking and behaviour and was going to rapidly achieve power over human minds. The poetry of Jozef Tóth, Jan Zahradníček, and János Pilinszky shows the universal validity of the words of Paul Claudel, according to whom religion does not bring us only chants, but also the word – and it did not bring only joy to the world, but also the meaning of things. The poetry of Catholic Modernism, interpreted by these three authors, becomes a modernism of humanistic values.

Let’s come to Catholic literature at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. the period we usually call also ‘post-modern’. At this regard, it is interesting to remark the opinion stated by Petr Kučera, a germanist and slavist from Plzeň. In his study named *Žánr katolícké poezie v postmoderní situaci* [*The genre of Catholic poetry in post-modern situation*] he considers the notion of *Catholic poetry* as an expression that we could relatively easily discredit from a

genological point of view, because “the text labelled with such a definition do not show specific poetological features that are relevant for differentiating this type of poetic production from other Christian oriented spiritual lyric. Moreover, it is necessary to consider that – in (post)-modern poetry – even within the frame of spiritual lyric there are always less defined borders not only between production of Protestant and Catholic poets, but also Jewish, Muslim, etc. Indeed, the existential dimension of critical life situations represents a stronger and stronger social connecting link in modern era. It is tough to precisely define Catholic poetry in terms of structure of themes and motives (e.g. some Christian motives are commonly found even in poetry with different orientations). The same thing applies also for traditional liturgical genres that are modified, parodied or otherwise processed by modern poetical production.” [11] Despite this primary observation, Petr Kučera adds that the specificity of Catholic poetry is highlighted by a specific point of view, “that makes the author gravitate towards a peculiar reflection about circumstances in the broadest sense, i.e. even supernatural circumstances. The transcendental dimension in the deep structure of the poetic text of Catholic authors is not just a simple object of reflection but a goal towards which they move.” [11] In such a way, we can understand or classify the definition of genres and motives even with regard to contemporary Slovak spiritual (Catholic) literature, which has many aspects in common with the production of authors belonging to the artistic group of Slovak (and – we can say – also Czech) Catholic Modernism. Indeed, the older poets are undoubtedly a source of inspiration for contemporary authors – and this fact consciously witnesses the connection, continuity, and genetic similarity with spiritual literary works of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With a sort of generational stratification (from older to younger generations), among the contemporary male and female authors of Slovak spiritually oriented literature, we can include the already mentioned Greek Catholic priest, poet, and prosaist Jozef Tóth, the poet Teofil Klas (real name: Jozef Zavarský), the poet and literary historian Eva Fordinálová, the poet Michal Chuda, the literary scientist, poet, and prosaist Mária Bátorová, the poet, translator, and chief-editor of the bi-weekly revue *Kultúra* Teodor Križka, the poet and chief-editor of the bi-weekly religious and cultural revue *VOX* Pavol Prikryl, the poet, journalist and essayist Ján Maršálek, the Roman Catholic priest and poet Pavol Ondřík, the poet – Capuchin Pavol Korba, the poet Gabriela Grznárová, the poet and prosaist Katarína Džunková, and many other authors whose verbal construction is built on the very basis of spiritual and Christian values (Jozef Tomášik, Michal Mikuláš, etc.).

### **3. Conclusions**

Despite the above described socio-political events and consequences of totalitarian regimes, Slovak, Czech, and Hungarian Catholic authors were clearly conscious of the fact that – in whatsoever epoch – art and religion cannot be in contrast between them, because their originator is God and the faith in God's truth is much more precious than politics or state borders constructed by human

society. Yes, there have been several efforts and attempts of unification or grouping these Catholic authors – but they are always primarily individual creative personalities. They are not a mass of people, but single Catholic individualities. One important aspect is that they always managed to create a sort of cohesion between them, even in times when (cultural or ecclesiastical) institutions did not help them at all. The organizational and creative work of Šik, Dilong or Florian was never useless; similarly, the work of their predecessors (very frequently recalled in their literary production and very closely connected to their literary tradition) resulted to be a very useful element. This fact is witnessed by a number of Christian personalities of literature and culture – from our point of view mostly belonging to the Catholic confession. Before, during, and after World War 2, these authors believed – above all – that the greatest form of love (i.e. God) is present in the heart of people who are willing to seed also forms of religious art and ability of changing the world into a better place for human life – and eventually many highly educated clerical and lay artist managed to achieve this goal thanks to their extraordinary artistic performances.

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