

# CATHOLIC SENTIMENT, NATIONAL IDENTITY

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## PREFACE

Both in undergraduate and graduate studies, my eyes were trained root out nationalist stands in programs, agendas and rhetoric. The “discovery” of national Catholic pilgrimages in a country whose connection between Church and state has significantly revolved around discourse concerning the WWII clerical regime seemed troubling. Furthermore, the repeated injections of national and ethnic distinctions into the “universal” Catholic pilgrimages taking place in Slovakia looked as if they were creating a breeding ground for the reassertion of ethnic conflicts. It appeared that political and religious elites were manipulating the populace by further fostering ethnic divisions within society. I was not so naïve to believe that the Church or State could be unified actors in the formation of these national pilgrimages, but my assumptions directed me towards finding which elements within the Catholic hierarchy and within the political system had a vested interest in contributing to ethnic reification in the midst of religious events. The results of this inquiry challenged my notions concerning the utilization of nationalism.

These national distinctions present in the pilgrimages of Slovakia, of course exist outside of this ritual phenomenon, and despite any *communitas* that may occur at these events, the bulk of the contemporary literature on pilgrimage suggests no reason why these divisions should not be part of the rituals as well. In fact, most literature would suggest that these factors of contestation actually drive the ritual events. Despite the intrusion of nationalizing factors in Slovak pilgrimages, I would suggest that these structural factors are not induced to create, reflect or manipulate popular nationalism (as the literature would suggest); instead, their primary function is to capture as many niche markets as possible. Essentially, this process can be characterized as part of the greater evangelization project of the Catholic Church in Slovakia, a process which adds significant revenue to a Church

hierarchy economically dependent on the state government. The invocation of these nationalizing elements could be easily appropriated for other purposes, but for the present, they function more as inclusive apparatuses of the Catholic Church and its constituent bodies than as exclusive apparatuses between the nationalities. While political and religious elites certainly play a role in these processes, the elements of civil society (political parties, interest groups, social organizations, etc.) are frequently responsible for invoking these national divisions; not to foster ethnic tensions, but to market their product (pilgrimage) and increase revenue.

## INTRODUCTION

Apart from individual spiritual fulfillment, pilgrimage has functioned as an outlet for social action throughout the history of the Slovak lands. Pilgrimage functioned as an assertion of national identity against prevailing foreign powers, mostly notably during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Under communism, pilgrimage was transformed into a form of social protest against government policies, specifically religious policies. In this political context, re-assertion of the Slovak nation was inextricably linked to protest against the regime. As pilgrimage's function for social protest faded away after the regime change, part of its extra-religious appeal faded as well. In its wake, certain national elements of the pilgrimage process remained part of the ritual structure becoming re-appropriated by the organizers for new purposes.

The recent history between church and state, the success of nationalist and Catholic-nationalist political parties, the conflicts between the Slovaks and the Hungarian minority and the tensions between Slovaks and Roma all suggest that these nationally and ethnically exclusive pilgrimages should function as tools for contesting the ritual and social space of the church. Furthermore, the church in Slovakia has been characterized as a battlefield on which these ethnic tensions frequently play out. In Slovakia especially, pilgrimage has strong historical precedent as a mobilizing factor for national movements. The imprints of national distinction appear to have a certain degree of embeddedness in the religious structure of the country.

The National Basilica in the western Slovak town of Šaštín-Stráže holds the distinction of hosting the official Slovak national pilgrimage. Other national pilgrimages can also be found in Gaboltov-- a small village in northeastern Slovakia-- and Nitra-- the oldest city in Slovakia. In the city of Košice, we find a pilgrimage site frequented by both Slovaks

and Hungarians, but the pilgrimage church features two separate ritual points, one altar for Slovaks and one for Hungarians. As part of the Catholic Church's Evangelization Plan for Slovakia (also possibly following the Polish example<sup>1</sup>), separate pilgrimages for Roma have also become part of the regular pilgrimage schedule. Furthermore, the recent phenomenon of the "All-Slovak" pilgrimage has sprung up at ritual sites across the country. In the midst of these pilgrimages where national identity seems so salient, we find contrasting instances like that of Levoča, a site marked by its international character. With Levoča's induction into the European Association of Marian Pilgrimage Centers and the increasing tourism trade in Slovakia, international attention even seems to be on the upswing.

Some religious institutions, like the Orthodox Church, have an obvious national dimension by which they can be characterized. Even some Protestants denominations, such as the Norwegian, Swedish and Anglican Church, are somewhat national in nature. While the Catholic Church outwardly discourages such formations through its papacy-centered, universalistic structure, there are many instances of Catholic Churches with highly national dimensions, Croatia and Poland being two good examples. In most cases, though, the only readily apparent semi-national constructs which can be distinguished are the operational languages of the churches; however, when one examines Catholic pilgrimage in Slovakia, several structural characteristics can be noted which add a definite national dimension. It is precisely these structurally nationalizing elements that will be examined more closely.

What we find in the case of Slovakia are pilgrimages marked by their relative national or non-national character. Why does the national nature of pilgrimages at some ritual sites become fostered by elements within the Church, and why are other pilgrimages able to activate a more international component? Who influences this separation occurring at sites

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<sup>1</sup> "Ethnic and National Minorities in Poland: Programme for the Roma Community in Poland," (Warsaw, 2003) [http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00002633/01/Ethnic\\_and\\_national\\_minorities\\_in\\_Poland.pdf](http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00002633/01/Ethnic_and_national_minorities_in_Poland.pdf) (accessed May 20, 2008), p. 41.

that are all unified by falling under the Catholic hierarchy? In this case, can pilgrimage still be viewed as an overt marker for, or at least an expressive element of, national identity; and is that really their primary extra-religious function?

In order to answer these questions, this study first examines the structurally nationalizing aspects present in Slovak Catholic pilgrimage in relation to the socio-political context and the principal actors involved. Second, I will suggest that while these nationalizing elements are indeed part of the rituals, their intended function is not divisive, but integrative: to mobilize support for Church bodies through a reflection of popularly understood social categories, not a manipulation of popular nationalism.



## CHAPTER 1: THE COMMUNITAS-CONTESTATION POLEMIC

### 1.1 Victor Turner vs. the Contesters

Pilgrimage has captured the imagination of many social scientists over the past half-century. Those like Victor Turner, the pre-eminent anthropological scholar on pilgrimage, have been attracted to its liminality and its 'communitas'<sup>2</sup>. Others like John Eade and Michael Sallnow have focused on its multi-functionality and the ability to utilize the ritual for 'contestation'<sup>3</sup>. While Turnerian approaches do not adequately describe the structural processes on which this paper focuses, they must be introduced in order to fully understand the contestation arguments emerging in response to them. Regardless of the key focal points of the various authors, they all seem to agree that during events which can be characterized as pilgrimage, something more is occurring than individual spiritual fulfillment. One of the themes emerging from the major anthropological literature on pilgrimage concerns the extra-religious functions of the events: the integrative social function best described in Victor Turner's conception of communitas. Turner characterized modern religious pilgrimage by its seemingly universalistic nature; universal, in that these rituals create a situation where pilgrims feel themselves as part of a world-wide community of believers. Since Turner's initial work in the 1970s, many other social scientists have demonstrated that the communitas felt by participants may not connect them to their broader religious community, but may in fact be national, sectarian or otherwise distinguished.

The works of Victor Turner provide much of the modern theoretical framework and terminology by which pilgrimage may be examined. However, by using Turner's strict

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<sup>2</sup> See especially Victor Turner, *Drama, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), and Victor and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).

<sup>3</sup> See especially John Eade and Michael Sallnow, "Introduction," in *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage*, ed. John Eade and Michael Sallnow (London: Routledge, 1991).

dichotomies of tribal and historical, sacred and secular, structure and anti-structure, indicative and subjunctive; a model is formulated which either disallows or at least discourages the conceptualization of multi-functional pilgrimage experiences, and rituals which blur the lines of distinction. Authors since Victor Turner have tried to correct this conceptualization which tends to view pilgrims as a temporarily unified group of social actors with a common goal which may be either subversive to or supportive of the existing social hierarchy or power structure. This subversive nature, which connects strongly with Victor Turner's idea of pilgrimage as anti-structure, is demonstrated in the liminality of the ritual in which there is a momentary dissolution or shuffling of the social order. For Turner, pilgrimage primarily functions in this world of anti-structure.

Turner acknowledges that this anti-structure, which should be thought of as a liminal state, absent of form, is not completely spontaneous or devoid of organization factors. The organization and preparation which a pilgrimage requires highlights that this conceptualization of anti-structure is not *communitas* in anarchy<sup>4</sup>. Not only are these organizational elements required, "but the elite controlling the performance of the ritual can manipulate the multivocality of the usually employed symbols and forms for their own ends. By exploiting the discourse they can try to dictate how the event is to be interpreted<sup>5</sup>." While interpretation of the event remains one of the paramount concerns, this study of Slovak pilgrimage sites will demonstrate that not elites control "the performance of the ritual."

The multivocality can also be seen in the work of Eade and Sallnow, who choose to examine pilgrimage as a "polymorphic" phenomenon<sup>6</sup>. This point is further illustrated by the fact that these authors prefer to use term pilgrimages, instead of pilgrimage in the singular.

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<sup>4</sup> Turner (1974), p. 195.

<sup>5</sup> Jeremy MacClancy, "Popularising Anthropology," in J. MacClancy and C. McDonaugh, eds., *Popularizing Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 1996), 34.

<sup>6</sup> Eade and Sallnow (1991), 5

They envision pilgrimage in general as “an arena for competing religious and secular discourses<sup>7</sup>,” a theme which will receive primacy in this paper.

Multiplicity, “multivocality” and “polymorphism” now characterize the recent research into pilgrimage. While the individual motivations for ritual participation clearly may vary, so too may the group interpretations of the ritual. When analyzing the *communitas* proposed to be endemic to the ritual experience, problems arise as to which groups are asserting their interpretation of the ritual as the dominant one. When looking at Catholic pilgrimage, Turner suggests that the suspension of everyday social structures allows for the creation, albeit temporary, of an overarching, universal, Catholic community which transcends the regularly perceived boundaries; however, further research into Catholic pilgrimage seems to suggest that a universal community is not the only type of *communitas* being fostered. Many would claim that no empirical studies on pilgrimage have yielded the *communitas* that Turner describes. It should be noted that the work of the Victor and Edith Turner reflects their attempts at reconciling the early “tribal” fieldwork with their personal Catholic experiences, a point-of-view which possibly disadvantages the other “historical” religions when applying their theoretical framework. “The Turners have been seen as confusing sociological reality with theological idealism, and of producing a paradigm that works, if at all, rather better for Christian than non-Christian contexts<sup>8</sup>.”

This idea of *communitas* in anti-structure has been criticized by many authors since its proposal by Victor Turner. The recurrent theme in the criticism states that the Turners are analyzing only a single theological element, and structuring it in idealized, universal terms<sup>9</sup>. In other words, they are essentializing the ritual by the over-application of a single principle.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>8</sup> Simon Coleman “Do You Believe in Pilgrimage? *Communitas* contestation and beyond,” *Anthropological Theory* No. 2 (2002), 356.

<sup>9</sup> See both Eade and Sallnow (1991), 5 and Peter Van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 59-60.

“Communitas is seen as just one idealizing discourse about pilgrimage, rather than an empirical description of it<sup>10</sup>.” However, communitas does not have to be interpreted as exclusively one-dimensional. In Image and Pilgrimage, the Turners note that this ideal communitas can be corrupted by elements of the social structure which penetrate the liminal world of the ritual, bringing theological or political divisions into play<sup>11</sup>.

So while the criticism of Turner as essentialist is certainly founded, it perhaps ignores some of the subtleties of his work which allow for simultaneous multiple interpretations of a given ritual; however, Turner announces these social factors as interlopers into the otherwise pristine field of symbols, not as integral parts by which to interpret the ritual. Eade and Sallnow’s counter-argument not only views social distinctions as a part of the ritual, but envisions them as being shaped and reinforced by the ritual. These two viewpoints are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In general terms, ingroup primacy and outgroup differentiation go hand in hand, so the communitas which at a certain social level is created by the ritual may also reinforce relevant outgroup distinctions. So, in order to operationalize Turner’s conception of communitas, one needs to abandon the notion of a “universal” religious community. Insofar as pilgrimage is a social phenomenon, it obviously engenders some form of communitas, whether it is village-based, region-based, nation-based, denomination-based or other. Essentially then, the distinction becomes to what extent societal forces mingle with the religious field of symbols and at what level of identity are these forces salient.

Peter Van der Veer paints a vivid picture of the relationship between religion and nationalism in a situation of competing religious structures; however, these conceptualizations can be applied to a situation where the competition surrounds divergent

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<sup>10</sup> Coleman (2002), 357.

<sup>11</sup> Turner and Turner (1978), 136.

interpretations of a single religious system. Van der Veer describes several mechanisms by which nationalism can be spread and asserted, one of which being religious pilgrimage. In addition to the content of the messages presented at the pilgrimage, he shows that the structure of the event itself can contain “nationalizing” elements.

Much of van der Veer’s approach towards religion and pilgrimage roughly coincides with that of Eade and Sallnow, whose edited volume finally lay to rest the theory of pilgrimage as *communitas* popularized by Victor Turner. Since Turner’s publications in the 1970s, his conceptualization was used as a point of departure for most studies of pilgrimage. While many authors such as Morinis, Eade and van der Veer objected to Turner’s conception of religious community-building as the primary function of pilgrimage, it was not until Eade and Sallnow’s Contesting the Sacred that the popular conception of pilgrimage had finally changed<sup>12</sup>. Their view, and van der Veer’s as well, conceptualizes pilgrimage primarily as a social tool for contestation of power, sometimes appearing as struggle over territory and sometimes appearing as a struggle for control over religious or political structures. These authors focus on contextualizing pilgrimage within the relevant power structure, in order to better understand why certain pilgrimage sites receive the amount of ritual attention that they do.

So, essentially, what we find in the relevant literature is one camp attempting to create a grand theory of pilgrimage which privileges the experiential aspects of the pilgrimage while somewhat softening the structural elements, and another camp falling all over itself to reintroduce “structure” back in to the study of pilgrimage. These two camps, however, are mostly talking about two different aspects of the ritual event. Some authors have

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<sup>12</sup> Coleman (2002)

characterized Turner's theory as more pseudo-psychological than anthropological<sup>13</sup>, and they are right. Turner attempts to describe the shared experiences occurring in pilgrimage, while authors of the contestation camp primarily depict organization and not experience. Roughly speaking, this work falls into the second camp, in that it does not attempt to engage the experiential aspects of pilgrimage; instead, dealing almost exclusively with religious, social, political and economic structures. While *communitas* theories obviously fall short, contestation theories do not explain the phenomenon completely. There is something more going on than simply the creation of community or demarcation of community divisions.

One of the most frequently overlooked aims of pilgrimage revolves around fundraising. One should not forget that in many cases, donations from pilgrims bring a significant sum into the church budget. As will be demonstrated, special interest groups may raise awareness for their cause, political parties may attract new voters, youth missionary groups and dioceses may evangelize; but all are able to raise money through this popular expression of religion.

## 1.2 Methodology

The study of pilgrimage has been immensely shaped by the intellectual periods which have fostered the inquiry. The simple fact that materialist discourses concerning expressive cultural elements rose and fell before pilgrimage became a prominent focus of academic inquiry, has frequently left economic incentives off the list of motivations for inducing pilgrimage acts. This is not to say that materialist arguments can explain these phenomena better than the present theories; however, following the money-trail can give significant clues

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<sup>13</sup> Alan Morinis, "Introduction: The Territory of the Anthropology of Pilgrimage," in *Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage*, Alan Morinis ed. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1992) and Yoram Bilu, "The Inner Limits of *Communitas*: A Covert Dimension of Pilgrimage Experience," *Ethos*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (September, 1998), 302-325.

regarding the nature of certain pilgrimages. Furthermore, pilgrimage sites do not continue to receive ritual attention just because they have been given significance in the past. In any given period, there should be a determinable link between ritual attention and the societal forces which direct the ritual attention. Economic rationale can help make this link more analytically determinable.

In this empirical study concerning the structural elements surrounding Slovak pilgrimage (especially organizational factors), I will deal primarily with how these pilgrimages are presented and represented by the actors associated with them. These actors mainly reside within the Catholic Church and its constituent bodies; however, political opportunists, interest groups and entrepreneurs fill out the supporting cast.

Pilgrimage sites in Slovakia may be easily characterized by the audience which they draw: central/core pilgrimages, regional pilgrimages and local pilgrimages<sup>14</sup>. As the sites with which I am dealing can all be considered core pilgrimage, I have chosen to take a step further by recognizing the national or international characteristics which become present at the sites. This dichotomy became instantly problematic upon attempting to operationalize it. For one thing, ritual sites are not inherently national or international in nature; they are merely appropriated as such by event organizers. Most sites host multiple pilgrimages: some organized by the parish (or order responsible for the parish), some by the diocese, some by Catholic lay organizations, and some even by political parties. It is then better to characterize the individual pilgrimages by their nationalizing or internationalizing tendencies, than to assign this label to specific sites.

Admittedly, the national, non-national, or international characteristics of a pilgrimage do not necessarily reflect the most salient aspects of the ritual; nevertheless, these

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<sup>14</sup> Zuzana Novodvorská, "Význam Púte a jej Duchovné Prežívanie," *Slovenský Národopis* (Slovak Ethnology), No. 2 (2007), 181-204.

characteristics exist even if they often make up parts of the organizational structure that go largely unnoticed. These characteristics often manifest themselves in the way which an event is marketed, usually finding reflection in the actual demographic make-up of the event. Pilgrimages marketed especially for Slovaks, Hungarians, Roma, or international pilgrims exist at several of the core ritual sites in Slovakia.

In the spring of 2008, I made several trips to Slovakia in order to visit some of the ritual sites and gather information on how their pilgrimages were portrayed in the Catholic media, in posters and flyers, in Church bulletins, and in the souvenirs sold which commemorate the site. While I was unable to attend any of the sites on their main pilgrimage days<sup>15</sup>, I was able to collect a substantial amount of information, also finding opportunities to view photographs of past events. Photos certainly cannot lead one to an experiential analysis *a la* Turner, but they did provide useful in helping to determine what types of symbols (national symbols, etc.) manifest themselves at the events; thus providing a small window into the actualization of these national or international themes. While these points are important to include, the bulk of the analysis will focus on the events leading up to the pilgrimage: the portrayal and organization of the pilgrimages. Most of the data comes from advertisements, brochures and webpages.

Surveys and structured interviews were not used in the data collection process. This is not because survey data is unimportant in determining the experiential aspects of these nationalizing pilgrimages; in fact, it is essential in linking the intended structure of the event with the actual experience. This study, however, focuses solely on the structural elements, recommending an experiential inquiry as a future topic to be explored.

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<sup>15</sup> Slovak pilgrimages are primarily seasonal phenomena, with most pilgrimages scheduled between May and October.



Apart from advertisement in newspapers, on flyers and on posters, I expected to find brochures for the individual pilgrimage spots and guidebooks to the ritual sites of Slovakia. While brochures were generally uncommon, guidebooks for the ritual sites of Slovakia were entirely absent. The non-existence of Slovakia-wide informational books or pamphlets reflects the overall disunity of the sites found in Slovakia, highlighting the fractured structure of Slovak pilgrimages-- fractured in the sense that organizers and benefactors of the events are not connected in any organized fashion. The lack of informational brochures for specific sites further reveals this point. With many sites hosting multiple pilgrimages each year, different organizers frequently utilize the same ritual space at different moments in time. Multiple organizers often indicate multiple interpretations of the ritual events, thus creating multiple interpretations of the ritual point of attention.

## CHAPTER 2: THE RITUAL SITES OF SLOVAKIA

### 2.1 History Significance

Well-established historical links exist between Catholic pilgrimage and the Slovak nation. Slovakia contains around 30 sites that receive ritual attention, some of which have been traced back to the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. With multiple pilgrimages occurring at many of the ritual sites, it is possible to speak of somewhere between 60 and 80 ritual events on the schedule during one year. For Catholics in Slovakia, pilgrimage as a form of social action and ritual devotion, has once again found a place in the cultural canon. Because pilgrimage in Slovakia has become a common cultural action, largely independent of the constraints of the religious calendar, it is difficult to envision liminality, which Turner considers to foster anti-structure, as exclusionary towards structural elements. In fact, religious and political elements often become intertwined during the events.

During the mid-to-late 1980s, pilgrimage became a popular form of social protest in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. The underground church became a driving force in the Slovak dissident movement. Often advertising in the religious samizdats which began circulating through the Slovak lands at this time, the individuals associated with the underground church were able to mobilize tens, sometimes hundreds of thousands of primarily Slovak believers for these religious gatherings with highly political motivations<sup>16</sup>. Religion became envisioned as the vessel of the nation under the illegitimate communist rule<sup>17</sup>, and pilgrimage became its symbol.

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<sup>16</sup> David Doellinger, "Prayers, Pilgrimages and Petitions: The Secret Church and the Growth of Civil Society in Slovakia," *Nationalities Papers* Vol. 30, No. 2 (2002).

<sup>17</sup> Frans Hoppenbrouwers, "Nationalistic Tendencies In the Slovak Roman Catholic Church," *Religion in Eastern Europe* Vol. 18, No. 6 (December 1998), 2.

The communist period was not the first time the Slovak nation and pilgrimage became intertwined. Since the dawn of the Slovak national movement, pilgrimages have been used to mobilize popular support for proposed national aspirations. During this period (in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century), new pilgrimage sites sprang up and centuries-old sites garnered new attention. Centers of Catholic pilgrimage and centers of national protest were often one and the same; or rather, shrines that received renewed attention were those closest to the heart of the national project.

Van der Veer asserts that the significance of certain ritual sites seems to depend on the socio-political context of the given time. All too often, popular writing on pilgrimage ignores the extra-religious context of the ritual and focuses more on the religious significance of each individual shrine. So, when applying this to Slovakia, it becomes important to ask which of the ritual sites in Slovakia are most important today and why?"

With so many ritual sites from which to choose, selecting the case studies on which to focus was a problematic task. Ultimately, I decided upon four primary cases, but examples from other pilgrimage sites have been inserted to highlight certain influences in the organizational process. The four sites chosen include Levoča, Gaboltov, Košice-Kalvaria and Šaštín-Stráže. These four sites showcase instances of multiple appropriations and multiple representations of the pilgrimages featured at these locations.

## *2.2 An Introduction to the Ritual Sites*

Levoča, the home of the famous Marian pilgrimage, and the most well-attended of the pilgrimages, draws not only Slovaks but many international pilgrims as well. Located in the Spišská Nová Ves district of eastern Slovakia, Levoča was once a prominent medieval trade center as evidenced by its well-restored center showcasing an enormous Gothic cathedral containing the tallest wooden altar in Europe. The ritual site of Levoča's pilgrimage is

located a few kilometers outside of town on Marianská Hora (Marian Hill). While the site has received ritual attention since the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, the present pilgrimage church was built in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. During John Paul II's tenure as pope, the church was elevated to the status of a Basilica Minor. This site has a long history of ritual attention, but has really blossomed into the most important pilgrimage site in Slovakia since the fall of the communist regime. Dr. František Dlugoš, one of the most prominent clergymen in eastern Slovakia, emphasizes the pilgrimage at Levoča as one of the keys to the "spiritual renewal of Slovakia"<sup>18</sup>.

Despite the international flavor of this pilgrimage, there is often an element of ethnic election that accompanies any site supposedly visited by the Virgin Mary. "When the Virgin Mary appears, she bestows a sense of choseness and specialness upon the persons to whom she appears, and upon the social collectivity- normally the ethnic group of a nation- with which these persons identify"<sup>19</sup>. So, the Virgin not only recognizes national difference, but selects a nation on which to bestow her blessings. While much literature has been written on the connection between Marian veneration and ethnic election, this concept has not been applied to the Slovak cases, and remains a fruitful field of inquiry.

After Levoča, the national pilgrimage to Šaštín garners the most public attention as evidenced by its attendance numbers<sup>20</sup>. The town of Šaštín-Stráže sits near the Czech border, in the newly created Bratislava Archdiocese. The Slovak National Party (SNS), which features regular information regarding Slovak pilgrimages on its website, contributes to an active public campaign regarding the Šaštín national pilgrimage. In 1927 Pope Pius XI officially recognized the patron of the Šaštín pilgrimage, Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows, as

<sup>18</sup> František Dlugoš, "Persecution of Catholic Church of Slovakia in the Mirror of Levoča's Pilgrimages," *Slovak Heritage Live* Vol. 11, No. 2 (Summer 2003).

<sup>19</sup> Zlatko Skrbis "The Apparitions of the Virgin Mary of Medjugorje: the Convergence of Croatian Nationalism and her Apparitions," *Nations and Nationalism*. Vol. 11, No. 3 (2005), 448.

<sup>20</sup> "Levoča Pilgrimage Draws Hundreds of Thousands," *The Slovak Spectator*, July 16, 2007.

the patron saint of the Slovak people (not of Slovakia). In the region, both Poland and Croatia have incarnations of the Virgin Mary installed as the nations' patron, where Our Lady is referred to as "the Queen of Poland<sup>21</sup>" and "the Queen of the Croats<sup>22</sup>" respectively. Such titles lend an obvious national dimension to Marian devotion in these countries. Šaštín Basilica is one of 1267 churches in Slovakia dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and one of 219 specifically dedicated to Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows<sup>23</sup>.

Gabolto, also characterized as a national pilgrimage site, holds four main pilgrimages. Gabolto is quite an interesting case, for several reasons. The pilgrimage site in Gabolto is partly administered by the archdiocese in Košice, and partly by the Redemptionist Order at Gabolto. Other prominent pilgrimages to ritual sites in eastern Slovakia like that of Levoča do not fall under the direct control of the archdiocese, but are organized in-house. Since some of the activities at Gabolto are directly prescribed by the archdiocese, we can attribute the intentionality of its structure more to the "Slovak Church" than we can in some other instances of pilgrimage. Where specific orders and religious lay organizations are in charge of the events, as is frequently the case in Slovakia, the structure is dictated by extra-diocesan bodies; therefore, it cannot be characterized as under direct influence of the "Slovak Church." Such a distinction is important when attempting to determine the official line of the Church in national political discourse.

Three main pilgrimages are organized to Gabolto during the summer months: an almost exclusively Slovak one, a pilgrimage for the Košice archdiocese, a separate Roma pilgrimage and a men's (read Slovak men) pilgrimage. This out-of-the-way pilgrimage spot is ideally utilized in national pilgrimages for reifying the oft-espoused "plebian" nature of the

<sup>21</sup> Kinga Sekerdej, Agnieszka Pasięka and Marta Warat, "Popular Religion and Postsocialist Nostalgia: Lichen as a Polysemic Pilgrimage Centre in Poland" *Polish Sociological Review* No. 4 (2007), 431-444; 434.

<sup>22</sup> Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 60.

<sup>23</sup> Slovakia Tourism website, "Sites of Pilgrimage," Slovakia: Little Big Country <http://www.sacr.sk/category2?id=25&lang=en>

Slovak nation<sup>24</sup>. Romanticizing village life is not only part of the general discourse concerning the Slovak nation, but the Church continually portrays Slovak villagers as the vessels of true Catholic faith in the country. Pope Benedict XVI, in a 2007 address to the Slovak bishops, brought this notion to the surface once again by stating that the rural areas of Slovakia “have best preserved the Christian culture and spirituality<sup>25</sup>.”

The Roma pilgrimage, which draws participants from the surrounding countries as well, has been relatively well-attended since its recent inception. Despite the fact that it is an obvious sign of segregation within a Church committed to “integration,” the Roma participants have generally responded positively to having “their own” pilgrimage<sup>26</sup>. Despite the positive perception, the separate pilgrimage echoes other forms of segregation still found in some areas of Slovakia: separate Sunday masses held for Roma on Saturdays, separate places at the back of the church during services, and separate sections of the church graveyard<sup>27</sup>. However, the recent prominence of the Salesian order in the region, among other factors, has begun to positively influence Catholic initiatives directly specifically toward Romanies. For some, the inclusion in Catholic proceedings that accompanies the Roma pilgrimage seems to outweigh the ethnic exclusion.

Out of the core pilgrimage spots in Slovakia, Košice can best be envisioned using van der Veer’s (and Eade and Sallnow’s) idea of pilgrimage as contestation. Košice, Slovakia’s second largest city, lies in the historically contested southeastern part of the country. This pilgrimage draws mostly Slovak and Hungarians from the surrounding ethnically-mixed

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<sup>24</sup> Silvia Miháliková, “Political Symbolism of Slovakia: Between the Cross and European Star,” *Sociológia* Vol. 37, No. 6 (2005), 539.

<sup>25</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “Address to Bishops of Slovakia,” Libreria Editrice Vaticana (June 15, 2007), <http://www.catholicculture.org/library/view.cfm?recnum=7719> (accessed May 2007).

<sup>26</sup> Danijela Djurišičová, “Church—an Initiator of Changes in the Romany Community: Chances and Limitations (based on an example from the Bardejov district).” *Final Report of the Project “Religiousness of the Slovak Romanies”* (Budapest: Open Society Institute, 2003).

<sup>27</sup> Milan Kovac and Arne B. Mann, “The Romanies and Religious Faith,” *Final Report of the Project “Religiousness of the Slovak Romanies”* (Budapest: Open Society Institute, 2003).

region. When looking at Van der Veer's conceptualization of the pilgrimage to Ayodhya, the striking feature seems to be the contestation of sacral space, which when transferred into political terms becomes the contestation of symbolic geography and its attachment to the relevant groups. Instead, what can be seen in the case of pilgrimages in Slovakia is not the contestation of sites or territory, but the structural separation of "national" groups. For example, the Košice pilgrimage in eastern Slovakia incorporates the Slovak and Hungarian Catholics of the region, but the ritual sites of the pilgrimage are separated into two separate altars within the same church, referred to as the "Church of Slovakia" and the "Church of Hungary." This pilgrimage, designed in part to develop a partnership between the Hungarian and Slovak Catholics of the region, instead functions as yet another separation of "national" difference. The same archdiocese organizes another pilgrimage exclusively for its Slovak population which goes to the town of Gaboltov in northeastern Slovakia, where almost no Hungarians live. It is important to note that Slovak pilgrimages, by and large, are managed by the clergy of the Slovak diocesan system who are predominantly Slovak, even in the areas which have Hungarian majorities.

### *2.3 Ritual and Political Significance*

As van der Veer demonstrates, pilgrimage sites do not contain constant levels of ritual significance, and that significance rarely stems from purely religious convictions. Pilgrimage varies greatly across Slovakia, from the almost exclusively international pilgrimage in Bratislava to the almost exclusively national pilgrimages in Šaštín and Gaboltov. Those sites that cater primarily to Slovaks contain some unique features which allow for multiple interpretations of the same events. These pilgrimages function on many more levels than simple religious devotion. This is precisely the lesson to be extracted from van der Veer's

treatment of the phenomenon: not only are religious communities involved not unified actors as they appear on the surface, but public rituals often involve contestation and co-option from secular interests as well. As demonstrated, the ritual events may be shaped by political, ethnic, economic and religious interests, while other functions are purely symbolic.

The “sacred geography” of a territory can be reinforced by the veneration of connected ritual sites<sup>28</sup>. It is possible to see how the pilgrimage network in Slovakia also contributes to the geographical unity of the territory despite the predominantly Hungarian areas of southern Slovakia. In fact, despite the proliferation of shrines receiving ritual attention in Slovakia, few pilgrimages exist in the areas heavily populated by Hungarians. Discussing the association between religion and geography, van der Veer suggests that worshipping gods whose history is linked to the land continually reaffirms the connection between gods and territory<sup>29</sup>. So this begs the question, who is being venerated in Slovakia?

At Šaštín, it is Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows, the Church-declared patron of Slovakia. At that time of the proclamation there was no Slovak state, so she was named as the patron of the Slovak nation, a distinction which continues until today despite the realization of a Slovak state. In fact, the pilgrimage and feast day dedicated to Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows is currently a national holiday in Slovakia<sup>30</sup>. At Gaboltov, it is another incarnation of the Mary, the Virgin Mary of Carmel. Levoča, as the largest regional Marian pilgrimage site, also focuses its veneration on the Virgin Mary. In fact, a majority of the approximately thirty Catholic pilgrimage sites in Slovakia can be characterized as Marian shrines, thereby further enhancing the ethnic election aspect of the veneration.

Multi-functionality, then, seems the best way to characterize the appeal of these core Slovak pilgrimages. In addition to offering individual spiritual fulfillment, these sites seem

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<sup>28</sup> Peter van der Veer (1994), 122.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 120.

<sup>30</sup> Slovakia Tourism website <http://www.sacr.sk/category2?id=25&lang=en> (accessed April 2008).



to capture politically-motivated Catholics channeled to attend by parties like the SNS and the KDH (Christian Democratic Movement), reinforce religio-nationalist ideas like ethnic election, benefit regional economic aspirations, and provide another battlefield for Slovak ethnic entrepreneurs in the Hungarian southern part of the country. The pilgrimage sites also showcase the sacred geographical unity of a country with a short independent history. However, as van der Veer aptly notes in the case of India, “there is no constant and static existence of Hindu feelings and values. They are not ‘cultural givens’; rather they are the products of a political process<sup>31</sup>.” The same formulation should be offered for Catholic Slovaks.

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<sup>31</sup> Peter van der Veer (1987), “God Must Be Liberated! A Hindu Liberation Movement in Ayodhya,” *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 21, No. 2 (1987), 299.

## CHAPTER 3: RELIGION AND POLITICS IN SLOVAKIA TODAY

Though it would be wrong to accuse the Slovak Roman Catholic Church of outright nationalism...there are some examples of an unwarranted recycling of history. This indicates plain naïvete and a nationalistic way of thinking as well<sup>32</sup>.

Before engaging in an analysis of the pilgrimages and their relation to Church actors as well as other organizational forces, one must first examine the context in which these relationships occur: the overall climate of religion and politics in post-independence Slovakia.

### *3.1 History and the Shaping of Public Discourse*

Much of what binds religion and politics together in Slovakia today involves the historical representations of Jozef Tiso and WWII “semi-independent” state of Slovakia. This is the main explicit battleground for representations of the church, the nation and the state. After the German annexation of the Sudetenland and the subsequent occupation of Bohemia and Moravia, the independent state of Slovakia emerged with, Catholic priest and head of the ruling party, Jozef Tiso as the president. “The wartime state is regarded by some Roman Catholics as an ideal society, where the Roman Catholic social doctrine prevailed, or as a time when Roman Catholic Church life flourished<sup>33</sup>.” WWII-era Slovakia is often referred to as a Nazi puppet-state, a charge that supports the arguments of those for and those against a rehabilitation of the Father Tiso and the regime. For opponents of the rehabilitation, the fact that Slovakia carried out actions at the behest of Nazi Germany makes evident its fascist and totalitarian connections; however, for those attempting to rehabilitate Tiso, the fact that Slovakia was under pressure from the Nazis seems to indicate that he begrudgingly

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<sup>32</sup> Hoppenbrouwers (1998), 27.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 2.

facilitated German plans in order to spare his country as much as possible from the horrors of war<sup>34</sup>.

Three main actors are responsible for attempting to rehabilitate Tiso and his regime, thereby triggering some of the modern expressions of anti-Semitism: the right-wing Slovak cultural institution, Matica Slovenska; the nationalist political parties with religious affiliation, most notably the SNS (Slovak People's Party) and the KDH (Christian Democratic Movement), although the support of these parties for rehabilitation varies over time and circumstance; and certain elements of the Catholic Church in Slovakia. While the Church has made recent attempts to keep as silent as possible about its connection with the clerical-fascist state, certain Catholic organizations engage in the debate, attempting to portray Tiso not as a Nazi ally but as a savior of the Slovak Jews<sup>35</sup>. One piece of propaganda, in the form of an academic history of Slovakia, even goes so far as to describe the wartime Slovak state as an "oasis in a Nazi desert"<sup>36</sup>.

In the first years after the fall of the communist regime, several plaques and memorials were unveiled across Slovakia in commemoration of Tiso as well as his party predecessor, Andrej Hlinka. Several bishops and even Cardinal-Bishop Jan Korec<sup>37</sup> were in attendance at these unveilings, speaking words of praise for these individuals with checkered pasts. By the mid-to-late 1990s, some of the bishops (most notably Monsignor Rudolf Balaž) had reversed their public opinions on these individuals; however, this apparent change-of-heart seems to have more to do with a fall-out between the bishops regarding support for the

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<sup>34</sup> Michael Shafir, "Varieties of Anti-Semitism in Post Communist East Central Europe: Motivations and Political Discourse," in *Jewish Studies at the Central European University 2002-2003* A. Kovács and E. Ander eds. (Budapest: 2004) 178.

<sup>35</sup> Dennis Barton, "Fr. Tiso, Slovakia and Hitler," (The Church in History Information Centre, 2003) <http://www.churchinhistory.org/pages/booklets/tiso.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>37</sup> Shari J. Cohen, *Politics Without a Past: The Absence of History in Postcommunist Nationalism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999), 146.

Mečiar regime than an actual re-interpretation of the WWII state<sup>38</sup>. Support for Tiso became a way to publicly criticize certain bishops whose real error was being too accommodating to the regime during the second Mečiar government<sup>39</sup>.

The SNS, KDH and Matica Slovenska have all been quite publicly active in their campaigns to rehabilitate Tiso, especially regarding the institution of public holidays, decision-making over history textbooks and initiation of general public debate. The KDH and Matica Slovenska have consistently called for a reappraisal of the WWII state, but support from the SNS for such initiatives has varied over time. Initially, the SNS positioned themselves against the KDH over this issue and the fact that the KDH was demonstrating itself to be more Catholic than nationalist<sup>40</sup>.

These organizations are not exclusively fringe groups. The SNS, which advertises itself as the longest running continuous party in Slovakia (despite no historical continuity with the party of the same name founded in 1871) elicited almost 10 percent of the vote in the most recent national elections<sup>41</sup>. Furthermore, it is once again included in the ruling coalition. KDH has been included in several of the coalition governments since independence, and also frequently garners a substantial portion of the popular vote in national elections (over 8 percent in the 2006 elections). Matica Slovenska, while not overtly political, has exercised much influence over the re-creation of Slovak social and political life. Shortly after independence in 1993, Matica was charged by the Slovak government to “strengthen Slovak patriotism,” “strengthen relations between cultures of citizens who claim to be national minorities and ethnic groups on the territory of the Slovak Republic with the Slovak national culture,” “cooperate in the creation of schoolbooks and textbooks in some

<sup>38</sup> Hoppenbrouwers (1998), 17.

<sup>39</sup> For more on the developments between the first and second Mečiar governments, see Shari J. Cohen, *Politics Without a Past*.

<sup>40</sup> Shari J. Cohen (1999), 138.

<sup>41</sup> SNS website, <http://www.sns.sk/clanky/sns-k-sviatku-patronky-slovenska-363.html> (accessed on April 15, 2008).

social science subjects,” and to generally promote Slovakia domestically as well as abroad<sup>42</sup>.

This put the organization in a privileged position for influencing youth opinion and the general social discourse, especially regarding the interpretation of Tiso. “To Slovaks, and others familiar with the codewords of Slovak history and politics, this endorsement of Tiso also implies support for a particular historical identification between the Slovak nation and the Slovak Catholic Church<sup>43</sup>.”

### *3.2 The Church and the State*

In the year 2000, a coalition government made up of the KDH, SMK (Hungarian Coalition Party), the SDKU (Slovak Democratic and Christian Union and ANO (Alliance of New Citizens) entered into a concordat agreement with the Vatican, primarily at the insistence of the KDH and the SDKU<sup>44</sup>. “That was followed up by the publication of four specific draft treaties that would effectively extend Catholic influence in schools, the health system, the army, and prisons. Under the draft education treaty, religious (read: Catholic) education would become mandatory, with non-Catholics and nonbelievers having the alternative of attending ethics classes, and schools established by the Church would enjoy state support<sup>45</sup>.” Whether or not the Catholic Church has directed the agenda of some political players like the KDH, there are definite links between the two entities. As one of the most vocal bishops in Slovakia, Rudolf Balaž, has had to forced to defend, “We respect them

<sup>42</sup> 68/1997 Coll. Laws, Law from February 13, 1997 on the “Matica slovenská” (Slovak Cultural Society) [http://www.culture.gov.sk/uploads/Kj/3k/Kj3k7G3KmJ0mhJMt5k460A/act\\_maticasvk.pdf](http://www.culture.gov.sk/uploads/Kj/3k/Kj3k7G3KmJ0mhJMt5k460A/act_maticasvk.pdf) (accessed April 2008).

<sup>43</sup> Timothy Byrnes, “Church and Nation in the Slovak Republic,” *Religion, State and Society* Vol. 25, No. 3 (1997), 281-292; 286.

<sup>44</sup> B. Tancerová, “Catholic yet Liberal?” *Transitions Online* (2003).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*

as a political party that sticks to Catholic teaching, but it is absolutely not true that we are giving them instructions<sup>46</sup>.”

### 3.3 *The Church and the Slovak Nation*

In van der Veer’s conception of religious analysis, he determines that it is altogether impractical to separate the study of religious values from the social context that shapes them. “Religious experience cannot be seen apart from religious organization and group formation; and since the latter changes over time, the former changes with it<sup>47</sup>.” So, the first question one must ask concerns the make-up of the relevant social groups. In Slovakia, over 70% of the population describes themselves as Catholic<sup>48</sup> (although many of them are frequently characterized as “lukewarm Catholics”), but when we make reference to the connection between Church and state, who exactly are we talking about? Is it possible to speak of a national Catholic religious complex as a unified actor? As van der Veer suggests, the actors who are important to consider, are those “who dominate the religious scene<sup>49</sup>.” In the case of Slovakia, these important actors would include the bishops, other prominent clergy, and politically active laymen who consider themselves advocates for “Slovak Catholics.” When looking at the structurally nationalizing aspects of Catholic pilgrimage in Slovakia, it is important to remember that the Catholics of the country make up a very diverse group—ethnically, economically and sometimes even politically—and that actions, words, and thoughts attributed to “the Catholics” frequently stem from a single political party, a single meeting of the bishops’ conference or an advocacy group fighting for a specific group within the Catholic Church.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid

<sup>47</sup> Van der Veer (1987), 284.

<sup>48</sup> Tancerová (2003)

<sup>49</sup> Van der Veer (1987), 284.

On the political level, the church as a unified actor rarely exists; yet many politically active church clergymen and laypersons alike attempt to influence the political process, and simultaneously political parties vie for the support of the clergy and church members in sort of a mutual exploitation. In this sense, even though religious contestation is not a salient conflict within the country, pilgrimage can be imagined to function as a contestation over political hegemony and Slovak Catholic identity.

In Slovakia, there exists a Church whose intricate connection with the nation has been well-established. Although politically and socially active even throughout recent history, the Church has found itself in a socio-political situation where overt political pronouncements made by its officials are met with skepticism. In the past decade, politically (and ethnically) divisive statements and actions have been made by several Church officials, even by some of the most prominent individuals like Archbishop Sokol of Trnava<sup>50</sup> (who has been frequently criticized for his cooperation with the communist regime<sup>51</sup>), Archbishop Tkac of Košice<sup>52</sup> and former Cardinal Korec<sup>53</sup>. There is some speculation that the decision to split the Bratislava-Trnava archdiocese into two separate units (with the Trnava archdiocese subordinate to the Bratislava archdiocese) was suggested to relieve Archbishop Sokol of some of his authority. At present, while direct political pronouncements from Church leaders are eschewed, nationalizing ideas can still be found emanating from church sources, although in a more covert manner.

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<sup>50</sup> Hoppenbrouwers (1998), 17.

<sup>51</sup> Timothy Byrnes (1997), 286.

<sup>52</sup> Hoppenbrouwers (1998), 15.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 15.

### 3.4 The Slovak Church and the Hungarian Minority

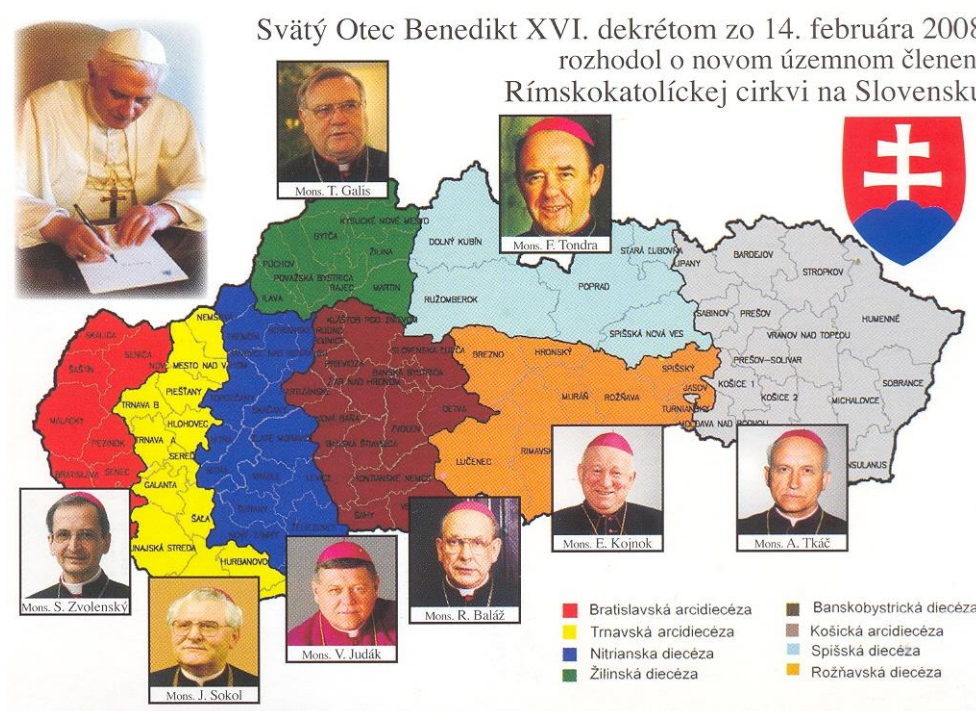


Figure 1: Postcard detailing the diocesan borders of Slovakia, featuring the head bishops and archbishops of each diocese.

The maintenance of diocesan borders has been a problematic task for the Vatican as it attempts to balance the complaints of (Catholic) Hungarian minority and the countercharges of the Slovak Catholic hierarchy. “The Catholic Church in Slovakia, in other words, is more than an observer of, or even a participant in, ethnic conflict between Slovaks and Hungarians. It is itself the central arena of that conflict<sup>54</sup>.” In Slovakia, ethnic Hungarians occupy much of the area along the southern border; however, diocesan borders are drawn (for the most part) in long, skinny strips, traveling more north-to-south, than east-to-west. Therefore, no diocese in Slovakia contains a majority Hungarian population, which might be the case if diocesan borders were re-arranged. For many years now, the Vatican has refused to redraw

<sup>54</sup> Timothy Byrnes (1997), 283.



diocesan borders along ethnic lines in an attempt to keep popular ethnic unrest from becoming institutionally entrenched in the Slovak Catholic Church. As it stands now, the claimants of repression are laypersons and parish leaders, but not individuals who have attained positions of power in the dioceses.

Many Catholic Hungarians in Slovakia are disappointed in the number of Hungarian priests, and claim that the Slovak priests installed in their parishes do not have an adequate knowledge of Hungarian language. The Slovak bishops continually counter that there would be more Hungarian priests, but priestly vocations remain low in number for the Hungarian areas of the country. Furthermore, they maintain that the Slovak priests that they install in Hungarian parishes speak reasonably good Hungarian, but of course it is not their native language. In addition to issues with the priests, Hungarian Catholics feel that there is an institutional nationalism inherent in the Slovak Catholic Church that prevents the election of a bishop of “Hungarian blood” in Slovakia<sup>55</sup>. Regardless of the legitimacy of the claims, these issues continue to bring national conflict into the realm of church affairs. “Even discounting for Slovak platitudes and Hungarian hyperbole, we are left with a church that continues to divide itself institutionally, linguistically and pastorally along ethnic lines<sup>56</sup>.”

The past decade has witnessed a decrease in ethno-national pronouncements coming from Slovak Church sources. It appears that the Catholic hierarchy is attempting to keep the nationalist opinions of some members of the clergy in check, and the relative absence of overt national rhetoric appears to be a sign of their success. So, while overt nationalism as emanating from elements of the Church hierarchy may be declining, nationalizing strands are still visible in the societal organs that associate with the Catholic Church.

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<sup>55</sup> Timothy Byrnes (1997), 287.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 288.

## CHAPTER 4: THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AS MANY ACTORS

### *4.1 Diocesan versus Extra-Diocesan Roles*

The Catholic Church in Slovakia finds itself in a situation of economic dependence on the state, although this is not dissimilar from the situations of other religious institutions in Slovakia. This entails a certain amount of give-and-take between church and state in order for the Church to be considered as a legitimate negotiation partner. Whether the Church's occasions of support (as well as opposition) to state political initiatives has been purely pragmatic remains to be seen. Due to the difficulty in considering the Slovak Catholic Church as a unified actor, determining definite intentionality is quite problematic. Instead, what we can determine is that like society at large, certain nationalist elements exist within specific segments of the church, sometimes in the diocesan church hierarchy and perhaps more frequently in the extra-diocesan realm. By extra-diocesan realm, I refer to those Catholic orders not under direct diocesan control as well as those social organs of the Catholic Church such as the St. Vojtech Foundation and the Catholic media. For both diocesan and extra-diocesan bodies, fundraising becomes one important reason for organizing pilgrimage, though by no means the only reason.

Throughout Slovakia, the Don Bosco Salesian order has managed to capture several of the more popular religious festivals, retreats and pilgrimages under its umbrella. The Salesians operate not only at Šaštín, but Košice and Bardejov (near Gaboltov) as well. In fact, the Salesian network casts a relatively large web also controlling churches in Bratislava, Dubnica nad Váhom, Nový Dubník, Partizanská, Michalovce, Hemenne, Poprad, Rožňava,

Trnava, Žilina, and Banská Bystrica<sup>57</sup>. As evidence of their evangelizing and fundraising efficiency, almost all of these sites host pilgrimages. Not surprisingly, since many of the evangelization projects of the order are directed towards the youth, the Salesians frequently run schools on or near these ritual sites. In Šaštín, the school physically connects to the Basilica. In Košice, it operates on the church grounds. Near Gaboltov, their recent initiative is a Salesian school for Roma (named after the first Roma saint, Zefir Jimez Malla from Spain) a little over 10km away on the outskirts of Bardejov.

The Salesian organization prides itself on its international nature, emphasizing the global ministry initiated by the founder, Don Bosco. Be this as it may, the order is responsible for administering or organizing some of the most structurally national pilgrimages in Slovakia, the national pilgrimage to Šaštín, the separate Roma pilgrimage to Gaboltov and the Slovak and Hungarian pilgrimage to Košice. The educational and evangelical work of the Salesians also directly coincides with the recommendation of the Slovak Bishop's Conference: that missionary stations ("pastorisation centers") be established in Roma communities to organize special pilgrimages and to initiate other evangelical and educational works<sup>58</sup>. This agreement between the Bishop's Conference and the Salesians shows that diocesan and extra-diocesan goals can find overlap in certain instances.

Just as we should not fall into the trap of categorizing pilgrimages in Slovakia as purely national or international (or rather non-national), we should also not attempt to pigeon-hole ritual events as diocesan or extra-diocesan. For example, even at the national pilgrimage to Šaštín (a site controlled by the Salesians), cooperation exists between the bishops and the home order of the basilica. While diocesan support and administration seems to be important

<sup>57</sup>Website of the National Basilica at Šaštín, [www.bazilika.sk](http://www.bazilika.sk) (accessed April 21, 2008).

<sup>58</sup> Slovak Bishop's Conference, "Pastorisation and Evangelisation Plan of the Catholic Church in Slovakia 2001-2006," Trans. Alexander Rehák of the Prometheus Society of Slovakia, May 10, 2001 [http://www.concordatwatch.eu/showtopic.php?org\\_id=849&kb\\_header\\_id=5411](http://www.concordatwatch.eu/showtopic.php?org_id=849&kb_header_id=5411) (accessed April 2008).

for many of the pilgrimage sites, many exist mostly in the peripheral extra-diocesan realm. For example, when I approached the archbishop's office in Košice shortly before the start of the pilgrimage season, not only did they not have any prepared information regarding the coming pilgrimages taking place within the Košická arcidiecéza, but they required a day to assemble even the dates and locations of several nearby pilgrimages before they could give me the most rudimentary information concerning the sites. This is not because ritual sites in Eastern Slovakia are few or sparsely-attended; on the contrary, there are many sites of ritual significance in eastern Slovakia, several of which are quite well-attended. Interestingly, they could not provide any information on Levoča (only one and a half hour away by public transport), which is arguably the most important site in all of Slovakia, and definitely the most well-attended. The office in Košice advised me to contact the Spiš diocese directly even to obtain information regarding pilgrimage and feast days at Levoča. Of course, one should not expect the Košice office to keep information on small pilgrimages outside their diocese; however, the lack of information regarding the most visited ritual site in Slovakia is particularly telling. Furthermore, if any Catholic office outside of the farský urad (priest council) in Levoča *should* have information about the pilgrimage to Marianská Hora in Levoča, it should be Košice. While railway connections do exist between Bratislava and Spišská Nová Ves (the nearest main railway connection to Levoča), Košice remains the standard jumping-off point for pilgrims going to Levoča.

Another pilgrimage in the Košice archdiocese for which the archbishop's office did not provide information is Gaboltov, a well-attended site in the Bardejov district. As with Levoča, Košice is the most logical jumping-off point for travel to Gaboltov. Košice has frequent direct connections to Bardejov (mostly by bus), from which the village of Gaboltov lies less than 15km away. While the archdiocese hosts its own pilgrimage at Gaboltov, the Salesians, who reside in nearby Bardejov, also administer pilgrimages at this site. My first

instinct was that the archbishop's office had no information about the site because Gaboltov's pilgrimage administration is largely extra-diocesan; however, the archbishop's office did provide me some information regarding the pilgrimage site in Košice, which is also administered by the Salesians, but only after I specifically requested information on this site. Despite one pilgrimage organized by the archdiocese and another by the Salesians, the Redemptorist Order<sup>59</sup> has control over the site, administering the other pilgrimages as well as taking part in the Salesian and archdiocesan events.

The Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, or Redemptorist Order, also controls the ritual site at Staré Hory (a popular pilgrimage spot in Central Slovakia). The Redemptorists, an order devoted to the education of the poor, are the most active Greek Catholic order<sup>60</sup>. With the re-introduction of the order to Slovakia after the communist period, the Greek Catholic hierarchy has joined with the Catholic bishops in several initiatives, most notably the funding of the Catholic radio station, Radio Lumen; however, each Catholic diocese invests far more capital in the station than do the Greek Catholic eparchies. The Roman Catholic hierarchy seems to ignore the elements of the Greek Catholic Church that they would normally consider heretical, creating joint ventures on many ritual and evangelical events.

In addition to the Salesians and the Redemptorists, other Catholic orders in residence throughout the country include the Dominicans, the Franciscans, the Paulines and the Society of the Divine Word. The Dominicans host one of the larger pilgrimages in Bratislava and the Paulines host the very popular pilgrimage to Marianka near Bratislava<sup>61</sup>, but most of the other

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<sup>59</sup> Not to be confused with the Redemptionists, a Trinitarian order within the Catholic Church. While not very strong in Slovakia, the Redemptionists have a powerful voice in Poland, where one of the most powerful Redemptionists, Tadeusz Rydzyk, heads the controversial evangelical radio station, Radio Maryja.

<sup>60</sup> The Greek Catholics (also called Uniates) follow Catholic doctrine as prescribed by the papacy, but have adopted some elements of orthodox iconography and hierarchical organization. The Greek Catholics were the most heavily persecuted denomination under the communist regime, and were banned in 1950.

<sup>61</sup> [www.sacr.sk](http://www.sacr.sk) (accessed April 15, 2008)

orders organize few pilgrimages to their shrines, churches and monasteries. Further research should be done on the restitution of church lands after the end of the communist regime and how this relates to the orders which ended up controlling the more historically important ritual sites.

Košice-Kalvária, the ritual point for pilgrimage to Košice, sits less than 2km away from the historic old town of Košice where most of the city's churches can be found. At this site, the Salesians of Don Bosco operate a small school and provide outdoor courts for children to play basketball, soccer and other games, making the grounds of the church an unusual-looking site for a pilgrimage. The Salesians also administer regular services at the church at least three times daily. It should be noted that at Šaštín, another site operated by the Salesians, church grounds have been made over to accommodate basketball and tennis courts, and much of the old monastery has been reconfigured as a gymnasium. This stands in sharp contrast to ritual sites like Marianská Hora at Levoča, where pristine nature and a beautiful panorama induce contemplation and spiritual reflection; or Gaboltov, with its quaint village setting and also a beautiful panorama from the Calvary hill.

The church at Košice-Kalvária is a multi-level Baroque structure with two separate altars. The ground floor houses the ritual point for Slovak pilgrims, an altar known as the "Slovak Church," while the upper floor contains another altar referred to as the "Hungarian Church<sup>62</sup>." The pilgrimage church hosts two main pilgrimages attended both by Slovaks and Hungarians, as well as a third whose ritual attention is constructed more for Slovaks. This third pilgrimage is dedicated to Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows, the patron of the Slovaks, who is also venerated at Šaštín as well as many other locations. While this structural situation seems to call out for Eade and Sallnow, the ethnic contestation of these ritual moments in time does not seem to be particularly powerful. Two of the individuals that I

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<sup>62</sup> *ibid*

spoke with at the Košice site seem to suggest that everyone (meaning the Slovaks and Hungarians) is content with simply being included. While the opinion of two Slovak parishioners certainly does not constitute an objective interpretation of the events, it would not be a surprise if tensions were subjugated at these somewhat ethnically mixed rituals, although not for reasons that Turner might suggest. Quite simply, the residents of this region have a long history of working and living together, and “the strongest anti-Hungarian feelings are to be found amongst the Slovaks who live in the parts of the country furthest away from the areas populated by ethnic Hungarians<sup>63</sup>.”

Extra-diocesan pilgrimages are not only limited to Catholic orders like the Salesians or Greek Catholic orders like the Redemptorists. In addition, I encountered many advertisements for pilgrimages organized and sponsored by Catholic youth organizations. These excursions go to various ritual sites, but provide a schedule of events specifically catering to teenagers. This is consistent with emphasis placed on youth outreach as emphasized in the concordat and pastoral plans for the Catholic Church in Slovakia. Just as John Paul II prominently advocated youth ministry in Slovakia and beyond, so too has Pope Benedict. The Catholic Church’s *Plan for Pastoral Care and Evangelization* for the years 2007 to 2013 emphasizes the need for “special attention to the youth apostolate in the contexts of both school and parish<sup>64</sup>.” Furthermore, it is an investment for the future, as a method of socializing a new generation to considering pilgrimage as regular part of their religious and social lives.

(Re)Evangelization thus has two important roles: instilling religious values and beliefs in the younger generation and making the church the ritual point of significance in their lives. Having a population with a general level of spirituality that does not make the

<sup>63</sup> Krivý, as cited in Tim Haughton, “HZDS: The Ideology, Organisation and Support Base of Slovakia’s Most Successful Party,” *Europe-Asia Studies* Vol. 53, No. 5 (July 2001), 762.

<sup>64</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “Address to Bishops of Slovakia,” *Libreria Editrice Vaticana* (June 15, 2007), <http://www.catholicculture.org/library/view.cfm?recnum=7719> (accessed May 2007).

church its main reference point does the Catholic Church no good, and does not create future benefactors for the church. In re-emphasizing Pope John Paul II's motto for his 2003 pastoral visit to Slovakia, "Faithful to Christ, faithful to the Church," Pope Benedict XVI maintains that "this motto continues to be an authentic apostolic and missionary programme, not only for the Church in Slovakia but for all the People of God, subjected as they are, especially in Europe, to an insistent ideological pressure that would like to reduce Christianity to a merely 'private' dimension<sup>65</sup>."

#### *4.2 The Vatican, the Slovak Bishop's Conference and Pilgrimage*

The Holy See, especially under John Paul II, has promoted something in Slovakia and Poland especially, which cannot exactly be called nationalism, but leads to a national frame of reference. The Vatican has charged certain nations (most notably Slovakia, Croatia and Poland) with the task of leading the (re)-evangelization of Europe. For years, Pope John Paul II criticized the rest of Europe for its secularism, moral relativism, hedonism and consumerism; and his successor proceeds on the same path. In Slovakia specifically, the Holy See has jumped on the image of Cyril and Methodius' missionary project, reworking it to demonstrate that Slovakia and Poland should join their forces to act as the modern-day incarnations of the saints in (re)-evangelizing Europe. One can read how the Vatican has attempted to channel some of the Euro-skepticism found in Slovakia towards this evangelization project. The first step in this evangelization plan entails securing the Church's position in Slovakia itself.

With a view to 2013, the year when you will commemorate the 1,150th anniversary of the beginning of the mission in your Region of Sts Cyril and Methodius, you have therefore decided to revive and bring up to date the evangelizing action of the two Brother Saints from Thessalonica. And you have started on this

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.



unanimous missionary mobilization with the rediscovery of tradition and of the strong and deep roots of Christianity in your people.<sup>66</sup>

While pilgrimage is not mentioned by name in this plan, it suggests that the Church in Slovakia focus on organizing “pastoral meetings, retreats and spiritual exercises<sup>67</sup>.” In Slovakia, of course, pilgrimage is the logical, culturally-embedded form which these suggestions would take. While the Vatican has recognized the sites of Šaštín and Levoča, it would be problematic for the Pope to advocate pilgrimage in general as most sites that garner ritual attention have never received definitive legitimization from the Papacy. In other words, the body of the Catholic Church has not adjudicated on whether the alleged miracles (usually Marian apparitions or miracles attributed to the intercession of the Virgin) that originally sparked interest in these sites centuries ago can be considered part of the official Catholic canon. Essentially, it remains up to the archbishops to decide which pilgrimage sites can be administered by diocesan officials<sup>68</sup>.

However, in assessing agency regarding the consistent use of pilgrimage in Slovakia, the Catholic Church (as in the international body) should be envisioned more as an advisory committee than as an essential actor. That being said, their decisions do create the structural conditions under which the Slovak Church and its lay organizations operate. The creation of missions for the Slovak Church, the drawing of diocesan borders, and the naming of bishops and archbishops all effect how the organs of the Catholic Church operate in Slovakia.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Arcibiskupský úrad v Košiciach, Košická arcidiecéza: Partikulárne normy, “Dekrét o pútnických miestach” [http://www.rimkat.sk/rs/storage/partikularne\\_normy.pdf](http://www.rimkat.sk/rs/storage/partikularne_normy.pdf) (2007).

### 4.3 Slovak Pilgrimage and Special Interest Groups

The aforementioned evangelization plan is not the first attempt to focus church efforts on specific groups in Slovakia. The Pastorization and Evangelization Plan of the Catholic Church in Slovakia 2001-2006 enumerates several groups to which the church needs to pay better attention: national minorities, the Roma (listed separately from national minorities), the armed forces, the handicapped, addicts, prisoners, migrants, and Slovaks living abroad<sup>69</sup>. Since the initiation of this plan, new pilgrimages have been initiated for several of these groups, most notably, the Roma pilgrimage at Gaboltov.

Another initiative has been the National Pilgrimage of the Slovak Armed Forces and Armed Corps to Rome and the Vatican<sup>70</sup>. This pilgrimage includes prominent military and defense ministry personnel, the Slovak Honor Guard, several chaplains, and representatives from different segments of the armed forces, police force, prison guards, bailiffs, fire fighters and emergency rescue personnel. While representatives from each group attend, the total numbers are actually quite small. The Vatican pilgrimage joins several other existing pilgrimages for military personnel, the most prominent of which travels from Zaľubica to Levoča<sup>71</sup>.

In addition, several Catholic charitable foundations have initiated pilgrimages for handicapped and other disadvantaged persons, one of the largest being the *Celoslovenská púť inak obdarovaných* organized by the Viera a Svetlo foundation<sup>72</sup>. This pilgrimage designed specifically for mentally handicapped, their families and friends, has become one of the many

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid

<sup>70</sup> Jozef Žiak, "A Spiritual Pilgrimage: Service Members Visit Rome and Vatican City." *Slovak Armed Forces*, Magazine of the Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic (December 2007), 9.

<sup>71</sup> Slovak tourism website, <http://www.sacr.sk/category2?id=25&lang=en>.

<sup>72</sup> Flyer printed by the Viera a Svetlo foundation, 2008. Found on the bulletin boards of churches throughout Slovakia April and May of 2008.

pilgrimages whose ritual focus is the Basilica at Šaštín. It includes fewer sessions in the church than other pilgrimage schedules, instead featuring picnics and informational sessions. The proliferation of pilgrimages at Šaštín demonstrates not only the popularity of the ritual site (and groups wanting to benefit from that popularity), but the possibility for multiple interpretations of the same ritual shrine.

Youth ministry can also be conceptualized as a special interest group when it comes to pilgrimage. At the churches visited in Slovakia, posters and other advertisements for youth retreats and pilgrimages were just as numerous as other listings. These organizations, often attached to specific orders, host specifically youth-oriented pilgrimages at almost all of the major sites.

These new pilgrimage initiatives demonstrate two major points: that the Evangelization Plan for the Catholic Church in Slovakia seems to act as a blueprint for Catholic organizations; and that “pilgrimage is a favoured religious manifestation<sup>73</sup>,” but not just favored, it remains a socially-accepted construct by which popular mobilization is regarded to be obtained. In other words, pilgrimage as a method of social action has attained a level of normalcy, or embeddedness, in Slovak Catholic society. Furthermore, the directives and aims of the social action frequently serve to secularize the proceedings, despite their unquestionably Catholic context.

#### *4.4 Conclusion*

In general, the Slovak Church hierarchy only plays a small part in the actual pilgrimage process. The Bishop’s Conference, as the main organizational body of the Slovak Church, advocates pilgrimage in general, but makes little reference to specific pilgrimages.

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<sup>73</sup> Slovak Bishop’s Conference, “Pastorisation and Evangelisation Plan of the Catholic Church in Slovakia 2001-2006,” Trans. Alexander Rehak of the Prometheus Society of Slovakia, May 10, 2001 (accessed on Concordat Watch, April 2008).

One illustration of this limited affiliation comes from the official website of the Catholic Church in Slovakia<sup>74</sup>. On the calendar of Church events for the year, pilgrimage remains conspicuously absent from the ritual events and holidays listed. Diocesan websites also feature little information regarding pilgrimage, except in certain cases like that of the Košice archdiocese pilgrimage to Gaboltov. Whether this more reflects the ambivalence of the Slovak Church towards certain interpretations of pilgrimage events or simply their organizational distance, it is difficult to say.

Agency regarding the organization and administration of pilgrimages falls mainly on specific parishes, often controlled by Catholic orders. These orders frequently create charitable foundations, societal organizations and youth ministries; which in turn, function as the benefactors and organizers of many of the smaller pilgrimages. These orders, with their social, educational and philanthropic wings, do not act in conjunction with the other Catholic orders. They are separate actors, utilizing pilgrimage to realize separate goals; goals which usually include fundraising.

One aspect uniting these disparate actors under the Catholic umbrella is the result which comes from organizing a successful pilgrimage. The bishops may gain an opportunity to evangelize, the special interest groups may elicit increased advocacy from the church hierarchy or possibly from individual pilgrims, the orders may increase the number of their adherents or improve their standing in the view of the bishops; but all who organize a successful pilgrimage see increased bank accounts. Donations from pilgrims usually increase revenues for most organizers, but especially for the parishes or orders permanently installed at the pilgrimage churches. Not only church-related organizers can make money off of pilgrimage events. As will be shown, some of the influential actors outside of the church structure have also found ways to make money off of pilgrimage.

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<sup>74</sup> Official website for the Roman Catholic Church in Slovakia, [www.rimkat.sk](http://www.rimkat.sk) (accessed April 2008).

## CHAPTER 5: ACTORS OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

### *5.1 The Catholic Media and Pilgrimage*

In addition to flyers and posters, Katolícké Noviny (the weekly Catholic newspaper for all of Slovakia) posts advertisements for pilgrimage tours both in print and online. In addition, the online version of the newspaper frequently announces pilgrimage dates on the calendar of upcoming events. Since pilgrimage information seems to be largely absent from the weekly church bulletins, Catholic media outlets such as Katolícké Noviny, Radio Lumen and TV Lux are responsible for most dissemination of pilgrimage information to the Catholic public. Individual farské uradí (priest councils) at the pilgrimage sites also contribute to the publicizing of the pilgrimage events which their parish hosts. Pilgrimage information is noticeably absent from the official informational websites of the Catholic Church in Slovakia and the Slovak Bishop's Conference. While in-depth fiscal analysis of the distribution of church funds needs to be undertaken in order to accurately determine the stake which the Slovak Church in general has in domestic pilgrimages, the evidence at hand seems to suggest that those church organs with the most to gain (i.e. the individual dioceses, parishes and Catholic orders) are the most active in promoting pilgrimage.

From viewing the Official Register of Companies in the Slovak Republic<sup>75</sup>, one can see that Radio Lumen's constituent body of investors mostly includes the individual dioceses and archdioceses of Slovakia, also including a couple of Greek Catholic (Uniate) Churches. Presumably, as the economic backers of the station, the Bishop's Conference has more of a say in decisions regarding its programming. The powerful organization behind Radio Lumen

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<sup>75</sup> Online database for the Official Companies Register of Slovakia, [www.orsr.sk](http://www.orsr.sk), (accessed May 13, 2008).

suggests how this Catholic station was able to get BBC World Service's bandwidth in Slovakia when the Slovak government restricted BBC's use of the frequency<sup>76</sup>.

The powers behind Katolícké Noviny are little harder to track. It is published by the St. Vojtech Group (hereafter referred to as SSV- Spolok Svetého Vojtecha), which in turn has several different backers, two private individuals and one corporation<sup>77</sup>. One of the private individuals is a priest from the Rožňava diocese named Vendelín Pleva. In addition to running Katolícké Noviny, SSV publishes other religious materials apart from periodicals. They also operate several shops selling devotional literature, Catholic gifts and memorabilia; one of these shops being located directly behind the basilica at Šaštín.



Figure 2: logo for Spolok Sv. Vojtecha (SSV)

SSV chooses to distinguish itself as a specifically Slovak religious organization, as can be quickly determined by their logo which incorporates elements from the slovenský znak (Slovak national crest). It transports the double cross and three mountains (representing the Tatra, Matra and Fatra mountain ranges) from the symbol of Slovakia and inserts them inside a halo, which sits atop a book (presumably the Bible) with the words Fidei et Scietiae printed across the open pages. As a registered business, SSV's main concern is profit, not

<sup>76</sup> Ľuba Lesná and Tom Nicholson, "BBC's Radio License Yanked for Use of English," *The Slovak Spectator* (Jan 29, 2007).

<sup>77</sup> Online database for the Official Companies Register of Slovakia, [www.orsr.sk](http://www.orsr.sk), (accessed May 13, 2008).

evangelization; although perhaps that is a secondary concern. Its choice of representative logo attempts to connect the organization not just with Catholicism, but with Slovakism.

## *5.2 Slovak Political Parties and Pilgrimage*

As mentioned earlier, the Slovak National Party makes frequent attempts to appropriate the national pilgrimage at Šaštín for its own goals. Both the SNS and the KDH attempt to establish connections with ritual sites in Slovakia. This is a particularly curious situation for the SNS, because while their particular nationalist ideology attempts to find support from conservative religious camps, they maintain an outwardly anti-clerical stance. Their anti-clerical nature becomes a distinguishing factor between their platform and that of the KDH, thereby creating a precarious position vis-à-vis their relationship to the KDH. A rough characterization of the parties would show the SNS as more nationalist than religious, while the KDH would be shown as more religious than nationalist; however, both parties contain some of the same conservative elements.

A distinguishing factor between the two parties, as far as their relationship to pilgrimage goes, comes from the ritual sites (and specific pilgrimages to those ritual sites) that they actively support. With the SNS, the national pilgrimage to Šaštín becomes an obvious choice, especially given the heavy nationalist leanings of the party. SNS publishes not only a history of the pilgrimage, which is in itself a particular interpretation of Slovak historical events, but also publishes a schedule of events and photos from past pilgrimages<sup>78</sup>. SNS officials, as well as other government functionaries, attempt to make themselves visible for photo opportunities at the ritual event; however, such tactics are not particular to Šaštín<sup>79</sup>.

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<sup>78</sup> SNS website, <http://www.sns.sk/clanky/sns-k-sviatku-patronky-slovenska-363.html> (accessed April 15, 2008).

<sup>79</sup> STV website, "Národná púť slovákov (National Pilgrimage of Slovaks)," [http://www.dimenzie.sk/2000\\_01/03news.htm](http://www.dimenzie.sk/2000_01/03news.htm) (accessed May 2008).



With the KDH, we see a different kind of appropriation: the KDH has organized its own pilgrimage of Slovak Christian Democrats to Levoča, a site receiving both national and international attention.

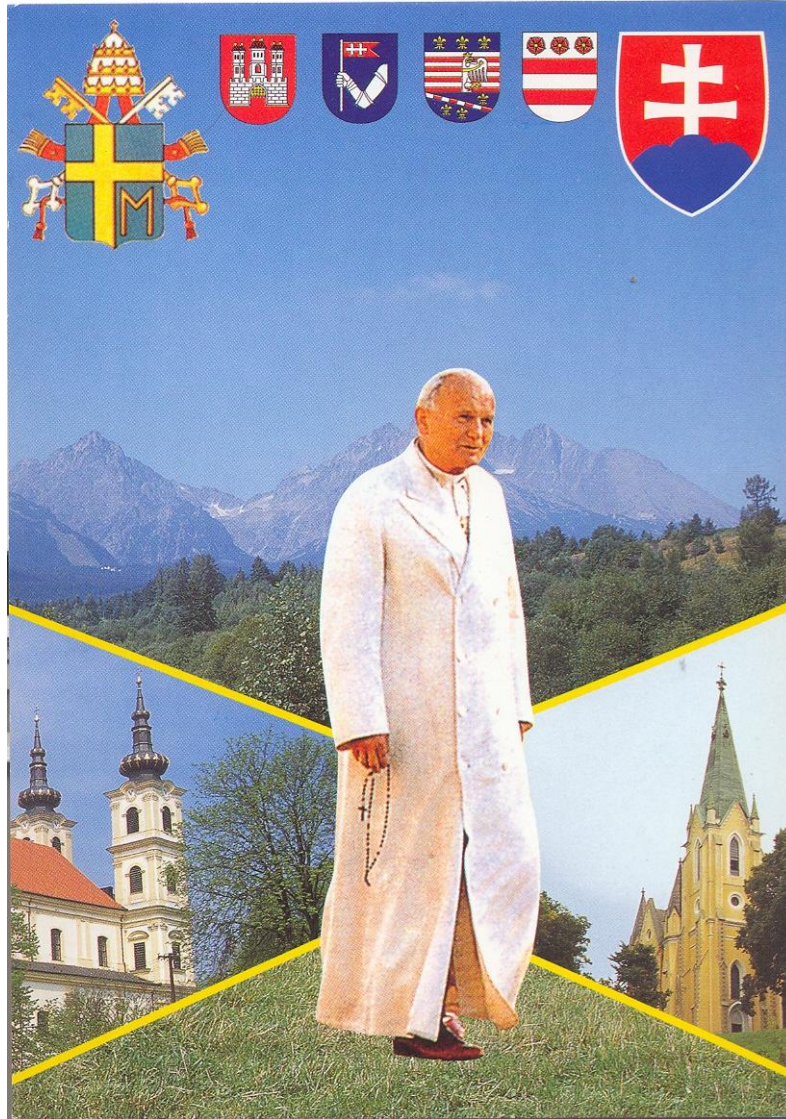


Figure 3; Postcard from the Pope's 1995 visit to Slovakia, highlighting the ritual sites of Šaštín (left) and Levoča (right), with the Tatra Mountains (one of the symbols of Slovakia) in the background.

Since the 1995 visit by the Pope to Šaštín and Levoča, both sites have become a source of national pride for many Catholics in Slovakia. Before the papal visit, these pilgrimage were two of the most important and widely-attended sites in Slovakia. After the visit, they became *the* two most important and widely-attended sites in Slovakia. Papal



recognition of these sites as the dual symbols of the Slovak Catholics certainly played a role in their rise to prominence. As political entrepreneurs, SNS and KDH obviously would choose these two sites for their pilgrimage projects, not because of their papal attachment but because of their prominence partly influenced by papal connections.



Figure 4: Poster for the All-Slovak Pilgrimage of Christian Democrats to Levoča.

The poster shown above was found hanging in a window by the main entrance to the historic old town of Levoča during my visit there in 2008. Notice the date of the scheduled pilgrimage event, 31 August 2003. In my visits to pilgrimage spots across Slovakia, I did not find a single poster or advertisement remaining from previous events, except for this one which managed to stay posted for 5 years. This displays the importance of one particular interpretation of the events at Levoča, at least for the individual that has kept this sign posted

for so many years. While KDH has not sponsored its *own* pilgrimage in the last few years, the party still remains active in advertising specific pilgrimages and advocating pilgrimage in general to its party adherents.

## CHAPTER 6: THE “ALL-SLOVAK” PILGRIMAGE PHENOMENON

During the 1980s, when pilgrimage attendance was at its height, devout Catholics were not the only ones participating in the ritual events. As these pilgrimages were highly political in nature, they gathered support across confessional lines. Thus Hoppenbrouwers notes that “Slovak Roman Catholic Church became in the 1980s an important oppositional *party* organizing mass pilgrimages to holy shrines on Slovak territory<sup>80</sup>,” in fact becoming the eminent oppositional force in all of the Slovak territory. The Church became (and portrayed itself as) a symbol against communist repression, but not for philanthropic reasons. Religious samizdats of the time, along with members of the secret church, originally mobilized their support base against the religious policies of the communist government, not the communist government itself. After the 1985 pilgrimage to Velehrad (in the Czech lands), which was mostly attended by Slovak youth, it was shown that mass organized events were indeed possible. With this turn of events, the Catholic Church became the most readily available symbol and vehicle for opposition against the regime yielding high numbers of supporters from outside the church.

Perhaps the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Slovakia wants to capitalize once again on the evangelization powers of pilgrimage; perhaps individual organizers simply want to achieve attendance numbers like in the 1980s. Certainly, some officials in the Slovak Catholic Church see the pastorisation potential of the events. In this sense, the bishops seek to “mediate” the “believers’ religious experience<sup>81</sup>,” thus re-appropriating ritual events which often exist largely out of direct diocesan control. Homilies delivered, bishops present and events scheduled shape not only the particular ritual moment in time, but also reinforce

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<sup>80</sup> Hoppenbrouwers (1998).

<sup>81</sup> Slovak Bishop’s Conference, “Pastorisation and Evangelisation Plan of the Catholic Church in Slovakia 2001-2006,” Trans. Alexander Rehak of the Prometheus Society of Slovakia, May 10, 2001 (accessed on Concordat Watch, April 2008).

Catholic values as espoused by the Church. These events create a platform for the bishops to reaffirm their stance on specific issues, and to impart relevant cultural idioms to the pilgrims in attendance. In other words, bishops who attend these ceremonies have the opportunity to reveal their interpretations of certain religious (and other social) messages. Since the past decade has witnessed a significant decline in the overt political proclamations made by Catholic Church leaders in Slovakia, these events allow for bishops to indirectly shape the political posture of Slovak Catholics receptive to their influence.

The “All-Slovak” pilgrimages provide the Church hierarchy not only with an avenue towards crystallizing pastoral opinions, but they provide opportunities to evangelize across confessional lines. This confessional inclusivity, especially directed towards Orthodox and Uniate communities, is obviously marked by national exclusivity, thereby invoking discourse concerning who is indeed part of the nation. These “All-Slovak” pilgrimages include the already mentioned All-Slovak pilgrimage for the mentally handicapped, the All-Slovak Holy Spirit Pilgrimage (which takes place on the weekend of Pentecost), the All-Slovak Pilgrimage of Christian Democrats, as well as several others.

The titles alone obviously infer some structurally national aspect to the event, even if the content of the ritual is devoid of national undertones; however, one should not discount the fact that the *Celoslovenská púť* (“All-Slovak”) label on many of the pilgrimages seems to have the intent of demonstrating inclusivity across confessional lines. More research would have to be conducted regarding the actual intentions regarding the use of this label in order to accurately describe the processes occurring here.

## CHAPTER 7: TOURISM AND PILGRIMAGE

### *7.1 The Influence of Travel Agencies*

Pilgrimage as tourism, has seen one of the most recent booms in the literature of the field. The recent academic link forged between pilgrimage and tourism primarily concerns those individuals who participate in the ritual events; however, also important is the role that tour groups and travel agencies play in shaping the events. In the visitation of around thirty Catholic churches in the vicinities of Košice, Baredajov (near Gaboltov), Levoča, Bratislava and Šaštín, I encountered dozens of flyers and advertisements for pilgrimage package tours. Three tourist agencies were responsible for the bulk of the flyers: Stella Maris, Trinity and Omega Tours; however, none of these travel agencies feature a website on their flyers. Inquiries and reservations should be submitted via email. If one were only to read the announcements and advertisements posted on church bulletin boards, it would appear that the travel agencies were the most involved actor in the dissemination process. While travel agencies capitalize on the high level of religiosity found throughout the country, they are not the driving force behind the pilgrimages.

Most of the advertisements for pilgrimage tours showcase international sites of devotion for Catholic tourist-pilgrims: Rome and the Vatican, the Holy Land, Lourdes, Fatima and Santiago de Compostela. While international destinations make up most of the package tours on offer, several Slovak travel agencies offer trips to domestic religious destinations as well. Constant advertisement such as this serves to further socialize Catholic individuals into considering pilgrimage as an important part of their religious and social lives.

The Bishop's Conference has even begun attempting to select official travel agencies to organize Slovak pilgrimages to the Vatican, as well as other destinations<sup>82</sup>.

The travel agencies tours to Slovak ritual sites frequently only included transportation by bus. These agencies have a market for their product primarily because of the general lack of train and bus connections to many of the ritual sites. Furthermore, the capacity of passengers for the services that do exist would often be well exceeded by the number of pilgrims attempting to attend. Only in a few instances were lodging opportunities offered as well, mostly outside of the pilgrimage town in the nearest larger cities and towns. Due to the location of many of these sites in small villages and towns, pilgrims wanting to stay for the full schedule of ritual events may find difficulty in procuring lodging. For those unwilling to use campsites, they must either rent a room in a private home or find utilize a travel agency to reserve one of the few hotel rooms in the area. The advertisements for pilgrimage sites in Slovakia were generally rare, but that should not be a surprise as many parishes organize bus trips to the events for their parishioners.

Not all of the ritual sites are marked by a lack of transportation options and guest services, Bratislava and Košice being two good examples. Partly due to its location in the capital, the pilgrimage to Bratislava sits on the European circuit of pilgrimages. Its internationalizing character has made it relatively unknown to many Slovak Catholics despite the prominence of its location. In addition to this site which receives more international than domestic attention, several other sites exists in Bratislava which could be characterized more as local pilgrimages. If accommodation opportunities, ease of access, and these types of structural considerations were the prominent factor in shaping the face of pilgrimage sites, the Bratislava pilgrimages would receive much more attention than they currently do. However,

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<sup>82</sup> Slovak Bishop's Conference, "Pastorisation and Evangelisation Plan of the Catholic Church in Slovakia 2001-2006."

all of this may be changing now that the Bratislava-Trnava archdiocese (formerly based in Trnava) has split into two separate archdioceses. With the more vested interest of a separate archbishop in Bratislava, it is possible that a more active promotional campaign may develop regarding the ritual sites of the city.

## *7.2 The Economic Benefits of Pilgrimage as Tourism*

Mart Bax's account of Medjugorje in Bosnia illustrates how pilgrimage towns stand to economically benefit from the influx of pilgrims/tourist-pilgrims<sup>83</sup>. In the case of the sites visited in Slovakia, only certain indicators of economic benefit could be observed. For example, in the large cities like Bratislava and Košice, the economic impact of Catholic tourist-pilgrims would be almost impossible to assess, but the gains are presumably relatively low. In Gaboltov, Šaštín and Levoča, many locals rent out rooms in their homes to pilgrims, primarily advertising online. In addition, local restaurants and markets may benefit from the increased business surrounding the ritual events. Gaboltov may be an exception to this because of the small size of the village and its relative lack of services. Other entrepreneurs many earn some extra money selling commemorative items and religious souvenirs during the pilgrimage season. Šaštín even has two permanent structures selling devotional materials and Catholic gifts.

The economic impact of pilgrimage as tourism, even for those sites which receive international tourist-pilgrim, should not be overestimated. When speaking with employees at the two main hotels on the square in Levoča, they replied that apart from the main pilgrimage week in early July, very few of their guests are pilgrims. Most of them are simply tourists. This seems to deflate some of the economic argument when it comes to entrepreneurs in and

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<sup>83</sup> Mart Bax, *Medjugorje: Religion, Politics, and Violence in Rural Bosnia* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1995).

around pilgrimage towns having a major stake in the promotion and growth of the local pilgrimages; however, it is important to note that these front desk employees would have little way of telling whether their guests had come primarily to visit the historic old town, the pilgrimage center or both. Pilgrims, for the most part, no longer whether the emblems of their journey as they once did in order to signal themselves to fellow pilgrims and protect themselves from bandits. One of the hotel employees even remarked that I did not look like someone who would be interested in the pilgrimage site, further reinforcing the argument that these informants were operating under the assumption that pilgrims should act, dress, or look differently than other kinds of tourists—an assumption which is simply not the case.

Not only are pilgrims and tourists difficult to distinguish, so too are the concepts of pilgrimage and tourism. As the emerging literature on pilgrimage and tourism suggests, the lines of distinction between the two hitherto separate disciplines are increasing difficult to determine<sup>84</sup>. Just as the marketing is important for establishing a steady stream of tourists to vacation destinations, marketing (as highlighted earlier) plays an important role in inducing would-be pilgrims to make the trek. This brings us back to our question concerning why organizations choose to advertise their pilgrimages by emphasizing their national dimensions. Are organizers attempting to portray ethnic and national inclusion as a factor which enhances belongingness (or *communitas*) at the events?

While motivation, or intentionality, is difficult to definitively determine when referring to the organizers' depiction of events as nationally or ethnically-based, the actors' stake in selling the events provides some clues to better understanding this relationship. The national pilgrimage to Šaštín has become one of the most successful pilgrimages in Slovakia. Perhaps other pilgrimages are being constructed as national and All-Slovak pilgrimages in an

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<sup>84</sup> See especially Eds. William Swatos and Luigi Tomasi, *From Medieval Pilgrimage to Religious Tourism: the Social and Cultural Economics of Piety* (Westport: Praeger, 2002), and Kathryn Rountree, "Re-inventing Malta's Neolithic Temples: Contemporary Interpretations and Agendas," *History and Anthropology* Vol. 13, No. 1 (2002), 31-51.



attempt to capture some of that same success. Motivations for attending pilgrimage are varied, and frequently are a combination of sacred and secular reasons; therefore, the marketing of an event which attempts to appeal to secular issues of identity should not come as a surprise<sup>85</sup>. However, the attendance numbers at Levoča routinely surpass those at Šaštín, so why has Levoča not become the prominent model?

I would argue that many of the organizers are structurally disadvantaged for competing in the international pilgrimage marketplace: they lack the capital, the networks and the overall resources necessary for initiating large-scale marketing. Furthermore, many organizers are charitable foundations and religious organizations that operate only in the Slovak Republic and may be unfamiliar names across borders. Marketing to the audience at hand, therefore, makes the most sense. This, of course, is only one formulation by which these pilgrimages can be conceptualized.

This idea of modeling may provide some sense regarding many of the pilgrimages outside of Levoča and Šaštín, but how can those two examples be explained? The years of protest against the communist regime placed Levoča and Šaštín, among a handful of other sites, in a privileged position. The events held there in the late 1980s attracted the most pilgrims, thereby achieving widespread recognition<sup>86</sup>. They had the initial start-up, in the form of social capital, required to attract pilgrims and tourists-pilgrims from the beginning of the open religious marketplace.

One of the main aspects of Levoča's prominence is its marketing success, which brings tourist-pilgrims not only to Levoča but to Košice and Bardejov in the often neglected eastern part of Slovakia. The Catholic Church and its organs, both inside and outside Slovakia, have managed to effectively market this pilgrimage to a very broad audience. In

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<sup>85</sup> William Swatos and Luigi Tomasi, eds., (2002)

<sup>86</sup> Doellinger (2002), 226.

addition to the marketing through Church networks, certain individuals from the town also engaged in an active marketing campaign to sell the tourist attractions of Levoča, one of which being the pilgrimage church. “In the 1950s...the communists stripped Levoča of its administrative reins over the Spiš region and handed them to Spišska Nová Ves. This proud town lost its attention of being the nerve center of the region<sup>87</sup>.” With the loss of symbolic power, also came the loss of economic power creating marked competition between the two centers<sup>88</sup>. With the flourishing of the Marian pilgrimage, certain citizens who economically benefit from the pilgrims seem to prying their way back into the leading position. While this approach certainly does not encapsulate all of the reasons behind Levoča’s rise to international pilgrimage success, it demonstrates that theological concerns do not fully dictate how ritual sites develop.

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<sup>87</sup> Michael Lewis, “Levoča: Medieval Square a Real Gem to See,” *The Slovak Spectator* (April 10, 1997).

<sup>88</sup> Zuzana Jalčová, “Scenic Spiš is Slovakia’s Land of Superlatives,” *The Slovak Spectator* (November 20, 1996).

## CHAPTER 8: COMMUNITAS AND CONTESTATION REVISITED

Admittedly a stretch, one can even envision special interest pilgrimages, like the one for mentally handicapped persons at Šaštín, as a form of contestation: charitable foundations like Viera a Svetlo attempting to engage the church in increased advocacy for people with mental handicaps. If you search for contestation, you can indeed find it everywhere: villagers may dislike the disruptions brought by tourist-pilgrims; order and diocese may disagree over the exact interpretation of a ritual event; Roman Catholics and Greek Catholics may misinterpret each other's iconography. These conflicts need not find a voice in the ritual itself. "It becomes possible to see how the juxtaposition of varied interpretations and practices need not be regarded as, by definition, reflecting overt struggles for hegemony in restricted cultural and geographic space<sup>89</sup>." So, while identifying motives certainly aids in understanding the reason for the phenomenon, one should not ignore the unifying factors present in such rituals.

Contestation has largely replaced *communitas* in the literature concerning pilgrimage; however, they are not mutually exclusive. In fact, it may be more accurate to say that they go hand-in-hand. *Communitas* on one social level engenders contestation on another. One only needs to look back to the "All-Slovak" pilgrimages to find an excellent example for this. While its inclusivity across confessional lines beckons *communitas*, its ethnic exclusivity raises questions concerning who is really Slovak, and what does it mean to be Slovak. By acknowledging not just multiple interpretations of a ritual, but multiple levels of interpretation that may be imagined simultaneously, one can envision a system where neither *communitas* nor contestation have to be the dominant force behind the event.

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<sup>89</sup> Simon Coleman (2002), 359.

More empirical works like Ger Duijzings' piece on pilgrimage in Kosovo, Genvieve Zubrzycki's monograph on the Crosses of Auschwitz and Mart Bax's work on Medjugorje have stepped beyond this *communitas*-*contestation* dichotomy. They incorporate Turnerian elements, especially when analyzing contingency, but their analysis of organization and structure falls mainly into the *contestation* camp. As Duijzings notes, "this 'spontaneous' *communitas* can acquire a political and ideological function and can be manipulated by worldly and religious authorities alike<sup>90</sup>." When analyzing spontaneous and contingent aspects of the ritual proceedings, *communitas* can be to some extent operationalized; and in some cases, it can be fused with *contestation*. This demonstrates that the respective schools of thought are describing two different processes which may be intertwined or completely independent from each other. Furthermore, neither theory explains the entire pilgrimage process.

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<sup>90</sup> Ger Duijzings, Religion and the Politics of Identity in Kosovo, (London: Hurst and Company, 2000), 84.

## CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

In the end, it is not the pilgrimage site which contains the nationalizing or internationalizing components; as sites may host multiple pilgrimages which vary greatly on the national-international scale. The multiple interpretations possible for each of these sites highlight the interconnectedness between sacred and secular social structures. The organizers, in conjunction with the advertisers, shape the direction of the pilgrimage, skillfully adapting or ignoring structurally national or international aspects which may or may not be present at the site. Once again, it is important to note that sometimes we see an elite-driven, top-down structural relationship developing at these ritual sites; but often, it is a bottom-up, grassroots-style organizational behavior that invokes these nationalizing elements.

As Mart Bax suggests, as difficulties exist in attempting to operationalize the sacred-secular dichotomy, authors should look more towards conceptualizing places, acts and words by processes of secularization and sacralization<sup>91</sup>. From the perspective of the Church hierarchy, one might consider any ritual attention as a further sacralization of the ritual sites; however, after analyzing the structure of the events and the actors involved, secularizing elements become readily apparent. Once again, it comes back to whose interpretation of the event can hold the dominant position, and the role of interpreter frequently resides with the organizer.

National distinctions are constantly present, further maintained by the national and ethnic pilgrimages, but they are not the most salient reference points for the many of the organizers or participants. We do not see a proliferation of flag waving at these ritual events, although flags are frequently present. These nationalizing elements make up the structure

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<sup>91</sup> Bax (1995), 66-67.

and cultural milieu of the events, but the content remains light in nationalizing rhetoric and symbols.

However, on another level, the fact that national references are used to sell the events seems to suggest that overt, positive national distinctions are attractive for at least a portion of the intended audience. The nationalization of shrines for specific moments in time highlights the appeal of linking nation and Catholicism, at least for a portion of the participants. The national and All-Slovak pilgrimages continue to weave strands of interconnected between the Catholic Church in Slovakia and the Slovaks, leading to a reification of the Slovak Catholic as the prototype for the nation. In this sense, the marketing of the event becomes the primary nationalizing element of each pilgrimage.

Essentially, each parish benefits two-fold from hosting pilgrimage events: one, as a pathway towards further evangelization; and two, as a source of revenue coming from pilgrim donations. It should be noted that further evangelization entails socializing new generations into the pilgrimage community, thereby producing potential streams of revenue for the future. The Catholic orders benefit not only from the increased revenue and evangelization opportunities; organizing successful pilgrimages provides them with a privileged position vis-à-vis the diocesan Church hierarchy.

The special interest groups, while benefiting from fundraising at the events, seem to primarily utilize pilgrimage as a platform for advancing their particular agenda within the Church community: as a means for increasing church advocacy and collecting new members, both methods of gaining potential capital.

Political parties do not conceal their intentions. Engaging their supporters in pilgrimage participation further enhances the legitimacy of the parties to represent the Catholic voters. Obviously, in an attempt to gain new supporters from the flock, they

appropriate Catholic “values” and “concerns” for their political agendas. Roughly speaking, this may be characterized as the secular equivalent of evangelization processes.

Travel agencies, whether they specialize in religious tours to pilgrimage sites or simply concentrate their advertising in the Catholic market, remain largely focused on events outside of Slovakia whether there is more money to be made. The bus trips organized to Slovak pilgrimage sites remain a minor part of their business; however, since public transportation routes to many of these sites offer limited service, they have indeed captured a market for those who do not want to or cannot drive to the events.

So many actors, both inside and outside the Catholic Church structure play significant roles in the organization, administration and marketing of Slovak pilgrimages. Occasionally, elements of contestation are structurally significant, as in the Roma pilgrimage to Gaboltov or the dual Slovak-Hungarian pilgrimage to Košice. The national and All-Slovak pilgrimages may also be conceptualized using contestation theories, but to suggest that contestation plays the dominant role in these events would be misleading. The positive, integrative functions of this type of marketing dominate the ritual; while the negative, exclusionary functions of the structure seem largely ignored by the participants.

In order to fully establish what type of connection exists between the structure and the actual experience, more research should be done. Specifically, the topic of nationalism in marketing should be more thoroughly engaged. At the present, what can be determined is that both integrative and exclusionary principles play certain roles in creating the structure of these pilgrimages; therefore, neither *communitas* nor contestation hold the absolute key for understanding the nationalizing or internationalizing of a pilgrimage. While they can provide excellent starting points from which to engage the topic, other factors must be engaged as well. With the swift opening of the religious marketplace in post-communist Slovakia, one

can see how economic factors played a formative role in shaping the direction of the different pilgrimage sites and their multiple pilgrimages.

In some instances, *communitas* theories can help to explain interpretation of the pilgrimage experience. More frequently, contestation arguments can provide insight into the structure of the event. One point on which neither of these theories focus, is the fundamental reason for organizing a pilgrimage. Authors frequently accept the continuity of these public displays of religiosity, without questioning why they keep occurring year after year. Once the reason for the continuity and proliferation of pilgrimages is understood, the structural forces at work become much clearer. In the case of these Slovak pilgrimages with national distinctions, the significant actors may be seeking pathways to greater evangelization or greater fundraising. Thus, one can identify both ideological and material concerns. While I would not assert that material concerns are always the most salient point of reference when approaching pilgrimage, they are significant factors which have been largely ignored.



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