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Rockin' the Church: Vernacular Catholic Musical Practices

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HUNGARIAN CATHOLICISM

Living Faith across Diverse
Social and Intellectual Contexts

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KINGA POVEDÁK

Rockin' the Church: Vernacular Catholic Musical Practices

Kinga Povedák studied European Ethnology and American Studies at the University of Szeged, Hungary. Her PhD thesis was on religious modernization through the phenomenon of popular Christian music among Catholics, focusing on and analyzing the peculiarities of vernacular religiosity during the socialist times through the study of the origins of the movement in Hungary. She is research fellow at the MTA-SZTE 'Convivence' Religious Pluralism Research Group (Hungarian Academy of Sciences/ University of Szeged). Her main fields of interest include popular religiosity of late modernity, Catholicism and popular culture, and most recently the musical worlds of Pentecostal Romani communities. She is currently a postdoctoral researcher at the European Research Council Project "Creative Agency and Religious Minorities: 'Hidden Galleries' in the Secret Police Archives in Central and Eastern Europe."

INTRODUCTION

When the discussion of the 1960s Hungary appears in religious studies it is primarily associated with the reforms and adaptations of the Vatican Council II (1962-65). These Council-focused studies mainly focus on theological and historical topics and questions, including persecution and suffering under the communist regime and various forms of religious-ideological oppression. Not much has been written on everyday religious culture in that era. Government control of scholarship helps explain this lacuna: There was no discipline of religious studies independent from political censorship in socialist countries; the regime's ideological expectations permeated the scientific literature of that age. Therefore, no voice was given to religious transformations, personal religious experiences, religious renewal movements or minority religions. Recently, historians have tried to bridge this gap. With a few exceptions, most of their research has examined high-level religious politics, the official state-church relationship, and persecution of religious communities.¹ Exceptions to this elite-focused approach include sociological and anthropological research on Catholic base communities, boy scouts, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, and Jehovah's Witnesses.²

The role that socialist-era Christian popular music played in advancing the Catholic Charismatic Revival (CCR) remains understudied. Although this movement is the largest Catholic renewal movement in Hungary, only Hungarian-language

- 1 Csaba Szabó, *A szentszék és a Magyar Népköztársaság kapcsolatai a hatvanas években* (Budapest: Szent István Társulat – Magyar Országos Levéltár, 2005). Ferenc Tomka, *Halálra szántak, mégis élünk! Egyházüldözés és az ügynökkérdés 1945-1990* (Budapest: Szent István Társulat, 2005).
- 2 András Máté-Tóth, *Bulányi und die Bokor-Bewegung. Eine pastoraltheologische Würdigung* (Wien: UKI, 1996). Mátyás Ivasivka and László Arató, Sziklatábor. *A katakombacserkészlet története* (Budapest: Új Ember – Márton Áron Kiadó, 2006). Zoltán Rajki and Jenő Szigeti, *Szabadegyházak története Magyarországon 1989-ig* (Budapest: Gondolat, 2012). Csaba Fazekas, Attila Jakab, Éva Petrás and Szabolcs Szita, *A magyarországi Jehova Tanúi Egyház története* (Budapest: Gondolat, 2017). Kinga Povedák, "New Music for New Times(?), debates over Catholic congregational music," in *Christian Congregational Music: Local and Global Perspectives*, eds. Tom Wagner, Monique Ingalls and Caroly Landau (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 99-116. Kinga Povedák, "Catholicism in Transition. The 'Religious Beat' Movement in Hungary," in *Christianity in the Modern World: Changes and Controversies*, eds. Giselle Vincett and Elijah Obinna (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 139-156. Kinga Povedák, *Gitáros apostolok. A keresztény könnyűzene elemzése* (Szeged: MTA-SZTE Vallási Kultúrakutató Csoport, 2019).

insider accounts have been published about the CCR.³ According to some estimates, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal is present in nearly every country and has more than 160 million members around the world. Roughly 13 percent of all Catholics are part of the Charismatic Catholic Renewal.⁴ It is difficult to give an exact number from Hungary, since the movement has no membership list, but levels of participation are proportional to nearby countries. The current study aims to illuminate the processes that led to the emergence of the Hungarian Catholic Charismatic Renewal behind the Iron Curtain. Using oral historical interviews and archival sources from the Archives of the Hungarian State Security police force, I intend to show how and when Catholic charismatics appeared in Hungary, what their ecclesiastical and political reception was, and the way contemporary Christian music contributed to their survival.

HISTORICAL CONDITIONS

The cultural revolution of the 1960s had the greatest effect on the field of popular music, articulating explicitly the feelings of the baby boomer generation and their

- 3 For research on the Catholic Charismatic Renewal broadly, see Thomas J. Csordas, *Language, Charisma, and Creativity: The Ritual Life of a Religious Movement* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997). Thomas J. Csordas, "Global religion and the re-enchantment of the world: The case of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal," *Anthropological Theory* 7, no. 3 (2007): 295–314, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499607080192>. Important studies of Charismatic/Pentecostal Christian churches include Allan H. Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195386431.001.0001>. Simon Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511488221>. Concerning Pentecostal churches in Eastern Europe, see László Fosztó, *Ritual Revitalisation after Socialism: Community, personhood, and conversion among Roma in a Transylvanian village* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2009). Barbara Rose Lange, *Holy Brotherhood: Romani Music in a Hungarian Pentecostal Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). Kinga Povedák, "Belonging, Integration and Tradition: Mediating Romani Identity Through Pentecostal Praise and Worship Music," in *Congregational Music Making and Community in a Mediated Age*, eds. Anna Nekola and Thomas Wagner (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 161–184. Kinga Povedák, "Hillsongization, Religious ecumenism, and uniformity," in *The Hillsong Movement Examined. You Call Me Out Upon the Waters*, eds. Tania Riches and Thomas Wagner (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 181–198, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-59656-3_10. Marc Roscoe Loustau, "Risking a Miracle: Transcendentally Oriented Improvisation and Catholic Charismatics' Involvement in a Transylvanian Canonization," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 31, no. 3 (2016): 335–350, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537903.2016.1206229>.
- 4 See <https://www.Catholic.com/magazine/online-edition/the-Catholic-charismatic-movement-is-alive-and-bearing-fruit>.

desire to rebel against their parents' conformist, authoritarian, and conservative middle-class values. This process was different in socialist and capitalist societies of the era, though, and brought different results in different measures. Even though members of the baby boomer generation on either side of the Iron Curtain used popular music to satisfy fundamentally similar desires, their societies' divergent ideological environments—official atheism or religious pluralism—resulted in significant differences in the field of popular music. Just as we cannot speak of a single pattern and uniformly occurring process of modernization, so we cannot speak of a uniform Christian reaction to socialist atheist culture. Just as there are many different kinds of modernity, so also do Christian churches, including the Catholic Church, modernize in many different ways.⁵

In democratic countries of Western Europe and North America, the “rebellion” of the 1960s did not simply produce an atheistic abandonment of faith but also a spiritual awakening, an opening towards so far obscure—and, therefore, even more appealing—exotic eastern philosophies and religions. The hippie movement was captivated by Rousseau's “back to nature” philosophy, viewing it as a quasi-religious ideology and way of life centering on the creation of utopian and egalitarian intentional communities based on the principle of rejecting consumer society. Around this time, eastern and esoteric spiritual groups became popular in some of the same milieus, and in many cases musicians took the lead in promoting these

5 It is worth noting that among the many definitions of modernity, the one used here is that of multiple modernities that rejects the idea that there could be a single perspective, a kind of master narrative to explain the changes, and that takes the position that alternative modernities have arisen side by side. It must be stressed therefore that there is no generally valid modernization thesis and that the most frequent use of the term as a synonym of Westernization and Europeanization is mistaken. See Urs Altermatt, *A katolicizmus és a modern kor* (Budapest: Osiris, 2001), 33. As Herzfeld concluded, modernity cannot be regarded as exclusively the property of the West. Naturally, this does not mean that the importance of the West in the processes is being questioned, but simply that its role is not regarded as absolute and the global processes are decentralized. Michael Herzfeld, *Anthropology. Theoretical Practice in Culture and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 83. As Niedermüller writes, “research must move beyond the previously accustomed national, regional or local frames, it must also extend its attention to the global connections.” Péter Niedermüller, “Sokféle modernitás: perspektívák, modellek, értelmezések,” in *Sokféle modernitás. A modernizáció stratégiái és modelljei a globális világban*, eds. Péter Niedermüller, Kata Horváth, Márton Oblath and Máté Zombory (Budapest: Nyitott Könyv – L'Harmattan, 2008), 9.

new religious movements.⁶ Music was the most striking manifestation of the general cultural revolution that appeared in the 1960s, especially in Western societies. Music was able to express in an explicit way the feelings of the young generation of that time and their rejection of their parents' values, including conformism, authoritarianism, and hierarchy. Because of the prominent part popular music played in the baby boomer generation's cultural rebellion, for many members of this group music was never just music. It was and remains today an expression of an entire way of life, a broad orientation toward rebellion, autonomy, and separateness. The baby boomer generation on both sides of the Iron Curtain viewed popular music as something akin to a confession of faith.

Despite the explosive growth of interest in eastern and esoteric traditions in the second half of the twentieth century, recent anthropological and historical research has also highlighted the baby boomer generation's fascination with Christian popular music.⁷ Indeed, we cannot unambiguously state that during this period there was an obvious or complete turn away from Christianity. This is true even of socialist countries behind the Iron Curtain. To greater or lesser degrees, all socialist governments were suspicious of rock and roll and Western capitalist societies' hippie culture. Religious renewal was lumped together with rock and roll music as a danger to the socialist system and the state's official atheistic culture. The Hungarian journalist Péter Tardos, writing in 1972, complained about the growing number of albums with religious themes:

Johnny Hallyday's [sic] song on Jesus Christ is number one on the charts.

6 Santana was a follower of Sri Chinmoy; The Beatles and the Beach Boys made Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and his Transcendental Meditation Centre well-known. Jay R. Howard and John M. Streck note that "Guitarist John McLaughlin amended his name to Mahavishnu John McLaughlin after meeting up with Sri Chinmoy; Carlos Santana billed himself as Devadip Santana for a number of years. Pete Townsend and Ronnie Lane became devotees of Meher Baba; Seals and Crofts advocated the Bahai faith; Richard Thompson became a strict Sufi; and Rastafarianism [...] became a household word with most American rockers thanks to the emergence of reggae music." Jay R. Howard and John M. Streck, *Apostles of Rock. The Splintered World of Contemporary Christian Music* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 29. Along these spiritual affiliations, we know that the Osmonds, coming from Salt Lake City, were Mormons and two members of The Shadows, Hank Marvin and Bruce Welch, belonged to Jehovah's Witnesses.

7 See Tanya Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God* (New York: Alfred E. Knopf, 2012).

He is waiting for some kind of a contemporary Messiah. Jeremy Faith's "Jesus" is a hit in France and England. "Jesus, Jesus come back to us/ For the marijuana/ For the words we say/ For the people thinkin'/ The world is OK/ Save us, save us hallelujah..." In London, the band Nazareth was formed and [the film *Jesus Christ*] *Superstar* is being shot in Nazareth, the Holy Land [...] The band Quintessence's new song mentions "Sweet Jesus" [...] and George Harrison sings "My Sweet Lord": "I really want to see you/ I really want to be with you."⁸ Bob Dylan in his album *New Morning* sings of the Father of the Universe, José Feliciano, the blind Puerto Rican singer sings the songs of his land: "Come Down Jesus." The well-known folk-rock band, The Birds has "Jesus is Alright" in their standard repertoire. The French electronic composer, Pierre Henry composed the record ceremony for Spooky Tooth. Galt McDermot, the composer of *Hair* is preparing to debut the *Divine Hair Mass* in a New York Cathedral. The rock version of Händel's *Messiah* is coming out from OAK records. It will condense the Bible into 26 rock opera hits. The record is entitled the *Truth of Truths* [...] With the success of these Jesus-hits, it seems today that a group addicted to the pleasures of drugs and spiritual comfort, and which first searched after the fashionable Krishna's teachings, is now calling for a new opium. Jesus has become fashionable for the hippies, but only superficially. They pin a large yellow disk on their jackets saying "Jesus is love," but they will change it depending on the day to a different, more appealing slogan. [...] There are never so many for Christ as there are today...⁹

The socialist regime led by General Secretary János Kádár was committed to a "soft dictatorship" or "Goulash communism," a hybrid of private and public production and commerce that lasted from 1956 until 1989. Cultural policy during this period was dubbed the "3 T ideology" after *támogat* (support), *tűr* (tolerate) and *tilt* (prohibit). Because the Kádár regime perceived that rock and roll had the power to create subcultures or alternative social groups with a basis of solidarity

8 It is worth noting that the song was used in churches and during masses as well. See János Sebők, *A Beatlestől az új hullámig. A rock a hetvenes években* (Budapest: Zeneműkiadó, 1981), 45.

9 Péter Tardos, *Beat-pop-rock* (Budapest, Zeneműkiadó, 1972), 54-56. Surprisingly, the secularized consumers did not critique the religious content, rather the unauthentic religious content and associated industry and business-like attitudes.

independent of the government, it was regarded as extremely dangerous. The state was unable to cease its spread even though it continuously monitored pop cultural music and censored lyrics. Writing in the early 1970s, Ferenc Tomka noted that the party leadership was aware of the fact that, “community represents strength because it may be the source of an independent way of thinking and perhaps even resistance.”¹⁰

Religious revival movements like the CCR fell between the cracks of the regime’s “3 T’s” system, and was situated on the borders of toleration and prohibition. According to the official state propaganda there was religious freedom in Hungary, and indeed participation in various religious rituals was not prohibited. However, the church’s social presence and role was made insignificant and was confined to the ordained ministry of the clergy. All other social organizations and activities came under party and state control,¹¹ including the emergent religious movements that belonged to officially accepted churches as determined by the regulations of the Hungarian Council of Free Churches.¹² Only those religious phenomena were tolerated that were controlled by the officially-accepted churches be they either the Roman Catholic Church or the Protestant Hungarian Council of Free Churches. In order to control Catholicism, the state created a movement of ordained priests called “peace priest movement.”¹³ Most priests who joined had to report regularly on the Church’s activities to the secret police. Moreover, throughout the 1950s and early 1960s the state tried to intimate the clergy and laity by arresting religious activists and submitting them to show trials. These were the primary ways the communist government tried to expel religion from public social life and relegate it to the private sphere.

Socialist state officials and the ordained Christian clergy who collaborated with them both regarded religious grassroots revival movements like the CCR with

10 Tomka, *Halálra*, 173.

11 Tibor Valuch, *Magyar társadalomtörténeti olvasókönyv 1944-től napjainkig* (Budapest: Argumentum – Osiris, 2004), 149.

12 Zoltán Rajki and Jenő Szigeti, *Szabadegyházak története Magyarországon 1989-ig* (Budapest: Gondolat, 2012).

13 Roman Catholicism is the biggest religious organization in Hungary. Nearly 2/3 of all registered members of religious groups belong to the Catholic Church.

suspicion. During this period, many churches perceived themselves to be oppressed and dependent on the state's tolerance. Naturally, what was considered a prohibited or tolerated phenomenon by the political regime had to be treated similarly by the churches as well. This might provide a partial answer as to why Catholic Church officials did not initially give their approval to the emerging forms of guitar-centered popular devotional music, even though this style was gaining popularity with young Catholics. Nor did Church officials recognize small revival movements including the Catholic Charismatic Revival—that were doing the most to promote this music. Church officials at various levels in the hierarchy either tolerated or rejected these communities, and only in a very few cases encouraged them. As a consequence, members of the Hungarian Conference of Catholic Bishops kept a clear distance from Hungary's growing network of grassroots religious festivals, which were increasingly popular with young people and often functioned also to popularize the emerging style of Christian popular music. Therefore, it is due primarily to political reasons that the head of the Catholic Church in Hungary, László Cardinal Lékai, waited until he visited Pope Saint John Paul II in 1980 to recognize the “underground” religious festival that had taken place in Nagymaros near Budapest since 1971. It was only after this visit that Cardinal Lékai made a public appearance at the festival,¹⁴ which is to say that the Church at that point only tolerated—but did not yet approve—this festival.¹⁵

In this sense not only Christian popular music but also emerging Roman Catholic renewal movements that used this musical genre can be considered a *threefold alternative movement* in communist Hungary. First, from a political point of view this new genre of church music was *outside* officially accepted socialist culture; it belonged to the counterculture created by “western rock and roll music.” At the same time, being religious during the communist regime was to, in a sense, oppose the political system. And third, the Church regarded renewal movements as an alternative religiosity and result of an *external* ideology—i.e. secular rock and roll. Renewal movements threatened the Church by introducing new forms of rituals, and therefore ecclesiastical officials believed they endangered the traditions of the Church and its conventional religious rituals. In the 1970s, many religious renewal movements within the Hungarian Catholic Church, including and especially the

Catholic Charismatic Renewal, embraced a symbiotic relationship with the new religio-musical languages and genres of Christian popular music, but also faced fear and suspicion from ecclesiastical officials, who sometimes even went so far as to reject renewal movements' ritual and liturgical innovations.

This ambiguous character is well demonstrated by informer reports found at the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security. A young priest taking up a position in Hungary's third largest city, Szeged, at the southern border with Serbia, received the following advice from his clerical supervisor: "It may be worthwhile to host all gatherings publicly in the church so that everyone will know about them. It is no good visiting families at home or having special gatherings in other locations in the evening. For this reason, working with young people at the university is a rather delicate matter. You must handle university students quite carefully, especially when it comes to having evening events for them."¹⁶

Political scientist Leslie László has argued that, in regards to official policy toward the Catholic Church, the official aim of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party was to wean young people away from religion, which the communist government identified with false consciousness and unreal idealism. The state saw all such attitudes as harmful to the development of a new socialist generation and society. The Hungarian public was bombarded with articles appearing in periodicals and in the daily press, roundtable discussions on the radio, and television programs featuring portrayals of juvenile delinquency, including nihilistic, cynical, and hedonistic young people wearing jeans and playing rock music.¹⁷ Catholics' attitude toward the Church's grassroots movements was destabilized by a variety of factors; this destabilization encompassed the Charismatic renewal movements that incorporated modern, guitar-centered music in summer festival-style gatherings. Even as the popularity of the CCR among young and educated was contributing to the survival and renewal of Catholicism, this movement was also a threat to the political system.

16 See the reports of secret agent "Kerekes" in the Historical Archives of the Hungarian Secret Police (ÁBTL): file H-36278/1, 9.

17 László Leslie, "The Catholic Church in Hungary," in *Catholicism and Politics in Communist Societies*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 166.

CHARISMATIC RENEWAL IN HUNGARY

Photo courtesy of
Kinga Povedák

While numerous anthropologists and historians have offered detailed accounts of the American roots of the charismatic renewal in Catholicism, we still have only a vague understanding of the movement's origins outside of North America, especially in Eastern Europe and Hungary.¹⁸ We know that the reforms of the Second Vatican Council appeared in the Hungarian Catholic church considerably late, some years after the close of the Council. Due to the efforts of fearless priests and lay people, some renewal and base communities (Focolare, Bokor Movement, Catholic charismatics) began appearing in Hungary in the 1970s. The first

18 The Catholic Charismatic Renewal began in January 1967 in Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania). A few teachers and students of the Duquesne University faculty of theology went for spiritual exercises (Duquesne weekend) where they experienced the spiritual awakening of "Baptism in the holy Spirit". They soon shared their experience with students of Notre Dame University and Michigan State University. As Csordas notes, the new "Pentecostal Catholics" promised individuals a unique spiritual experience, the direct experience of divine power through numerous "spiritual gifts" and "charisms", the result of which will be a drastic renewal of church life based on the re-baptism and "personal contact" with Jesus. Csordas, *Language, Charisma, and Creativity: The Ritual Life of a Religious Movement*, 4. In contrast with the earlier Pentecostal awakening, the Charismatic Renewal attracted mainly educated, middle-class Catholics from the suburbs. The new movement spread like wildfire through the United States, then appeared in all Catholic regions of the world, including Hungary.

Catholic Charismatic groups in Hungary were formed in 1975-76. In 1982 the TŰZ (Fire) movement was launched with the aim of evangelization—introducing and discovering the Holy Spirit with the help of various courses (Philip Course, John Course, Andrew Session etc.). Secret police reports show that Catholic charismatics appeared as underground urban communities who had close relations with Pentecostal charismatics, with whom they sometimes mutually organized religious gatherings.¹⁹ Christian popular music was an important foundation of these “ecumenical” Pentecostal/Catholic ritual communities. Modern guitar-centered masses, which had been a feature of Catholic practice since 1967, thus prepared the ground for this particular manifestation of contemporary ecumenism in Hungary.

Two points must be made clear here. First, Christian popular music and the charismatic movement can be mentioned side by side, since the latter helped solidify a new musical language and a new mode of religious experience in the Hungarian Catholic Church. Still, while Catholics embraced guitar centered popular music, underground ecumenical renewal communities remained officially independent of the Church. Conversions from Catholicism to Pentecostalism began later, only in the early 1990s. Second, the spread of the religious renewal and modern Christian music did not necessarily mean the significant spread of charismatic experience. While Catholic charismatic worship certainly used Christian popular musical genres and languages, not all who played modern popular music in Catholic churches became members of the Catholic charismatic renewal movement.

The movements may have seemed similar in their ritual and musical styles. They also sometimes intermingled on an everyday and vernacular level. Still, both government and Roman Catholic church authorities clearly distinguished them and looked upon them with suspicion. Communist authorities found both charismatic movements dangerous, since they fell outside the competency of the religious leaders to control them. That is, they were often independent of official ecclesiastical lines of authority and differed in style and content from conventional ritual practices. As one Roman Catholic priest added in his reports to the secret police:

¹⁹ Pentecostal charismatic movements appeared basically parallel in Hungary due to the activity of preachers visiting from Western Europe and the U.S.

My general experience is that Bulányist groups, small prayer groups, evangelical Christians and so-called charismatics are generally mistaken if they appear in Catholic circles. The question is further complicated by the fact that none of the movements are clearly defined, they share traits and furthermore, their effect is intensified, they find help in each other and doctrines are spread from one group to the other. [...] For me this is not the most dangerous process, but the youth movements within the Protestant churches, mainly among Baptist we find the Charismatic movement. They have Hungarian propaganda material, mainly through foreign—primarily Dutch—financial support. These propaganda materials are found from the Central Seminary to the smallest parish churches, everywhere. [...] and they spread such propaganda material that could be resourced from Catholic publishers as well. Moreover, they include authors that are found in Catholic prayer books as well. The propaganda material is added as expletive in an appealing and popularizing way.²⁰

Based on oral history interviews and the critical use of the descriptions found in secret police archives, we can provide a relatively comprehensive summary of charismatic renewal groups' worship during this period. It is clear that the anti-religious propaganda of the communist regime significantly contributed to participants' embrace a "protest religion." Charismatic renewal groups appealed to individuals with an injured religious identity who then felt an even greater urge to protect and maintain their particular style of religiosity. They developed secret rituals and survival strategies to hide and protected themselves from the eyes of the secret police. Congregants came together in hidden house churches and evangelized on a one-to-one bases through personal relations. Margit Bangó, a popular and internationally acclaimed Hungarian Roma singer, evoked this interpersonal and underground milieu in her conversion story:

There was a preacher, Uncle Jani Ander, and I told him I wanted to be one of them. From there on he regularly visited me in my flat. At the age of 25 I got

20 The Catholic renewal movement called Bokor [bush] around the figure György Bulányi (1919-2010), based on biblical teachings and laying great emphasis on the role of base communities. For more see András Máté-Tóth, *Bulányi*, 1996. See the reports of secret agent "Rákoshgyi" in the Historical Archives of the Hungarian Secret Police (ÁBTI): file H-63879, 17.

baptized as well. Not much later, in Pest an independent congregation convened in my house. Gypsies who were both musicians and non-musicians got to know the Bible during that period. I knew that I was under surveillance, and I knew that many in the music industry did not like it. But I did not experience any further harm. Of course, this all happened in the early 1980s. We wanted to put out an album, *The Songs of Love*, with worship music. But they did not allow us. It was stopped. Only later, after the political transition, in 1996 was it possible to release the cassette and CD.²¹

The situation was similar in rural settings too. Close to the Soviet-Hungarian border, in the small village of Uszka, the Pentecostal charismatic preacher Jenő Kopasz went house to house visiting locals. He formed congregations of converted Roma women in the late 1970s. The structure and style of typical charismatic ritual practice might help explain the effectiveness of this conversion campaign: Charismatic ritual builds on the structure of personal testimony—singing, worship, teaching—and has an intimate, home-like atmosphere encouraging active involvement and strengthening the feeling of belonging. Exemplary figures in these movements did not fear opposing government authorities and dedicated their life to establishing religious communities.

This movement's forced seclusion limited both the speed with which it could spread as well as charismatic communities' structural development. Different groups became interconnected through persons who visited many local congregations to spread information and spiritual literature. The religious music of charismatic communities also spread in the form of *samizdat*, or clandestinely copied and distributed literature banned by the state. According to one charismatic Catholic active during this time,

After I got to Budapest, it was my job to collect music sheets since Jenő [Jenő Sillye, the “father” of Hungarian Christian popular music] and his friends' reputation had even reached Szeged. Each time I went home, Aunt Emese would ask me, “So, have you brought any new songs?” ... In Budapest, they didn't tell

21 István Povedák, *Színvak könyv. A cigány identitás mintázatai* (Szeged: Szegedi Keresztény Roma Szakkollégium, 2018), 55-56.

you too much. They didn't tell you whose song it was, who wrote it, why he wrote it, what he wrote it for.²²

Such people often found themselves the target of the state secret police. Through their informers, the secret police were present in local communities and reported back on the rituals, group dynamics and structures to their officers. Authorities found such local communities especially interesting when guests, for instance a visiting preacher, visited these congregations for ecumenical services. Visiting preachers connected isolated, local communities with each other, and sometimes also helped the authorities come to understand the expansion and organization of the movement.²³ We have access only to a limited amount of information about the expansion of hidden religious networks. Still, the effects of the renewal movements should not to be underestimated. As the Vatican delegate to the communist bloc, Cardinal Casaroli, put it:

The Church separated from the young seemed weak [...] Less and less people went to church [...] Entire social groups disappeared from there, such as teachers, soldiers, public officials. Except in Poland—according to the Marxists hopes—the Church showed the signs of dying. [...] However, the spiritual church survived in secret, and groups were organized in underground circumstances. They were often subjected to the rigor of authorities, but continuously persisted and, contrary to the opposition of the governments, they continued to spread.²⁴

Group-formation is perhaps the most important social consequence of Christian popular music under the political circumstances of socialism. These communities—be they charismatics or not—worked as long-term referential points for individuals defining their way of thinking, worldview, and actions. Charismatic groups

22 Interviewee L.Sz. 54-year-old man, Szeged, Hungary, 2009.

23 Secret agents sometimes—intentionally or accidentally—misinterpreted the size of these religious networks. By visualizing an extended, presupposed web of conspiring religious communities the importance and the efforts of the agent became indispensable.

24 Cardinal Agostino Casaroli served as the Vatican's liaison to the communist bloc from the 1960s. Agostino Casaroli, *A türelem vértanúsága. A Szent szék és a kommunista államok. 1963-1989* (Budapest: Szent István Társulat), 83-84.

therefore contributed to the survival of Catholicism and Christianity and—indirectly—of a democratic, anti-communist religious attitude.

THE BEGINNINGS OF 'PENTECOSTALIZATION'

Although this paper does not aim to provide an aesthetic analysis, certain musico-logical or sonic features should be mentioned. These also were shaped by the peculiarities of the political-historical conditions under which the charismatic renewal emerged and developed during the Cold War era. It is obvious that the religious music revolution of the 1960s was built on the fashionable music styles of the time. The “folk mass” movement began in the United States in the 1960s under the influence of the folk song inspired protest songs hallmarked by Bob Dylan or Joan Baez.²⁵ The Jesuit priest Aimé Duval was inspired by French chansons in the 1950s when he picked up his guitar and toured around the world with his religious music. The Belgian Dominican “singing nun” Soeur Sourire’s song “Dominique” reached the top of European and the American pop charts in 1963. There were several independent trends within this religious music revolution such as the Hungarian that appeared strikingly early. In 1967, Imre Szilas, a 17-year-old young student wrote a “beat mass” that launched a whole guitar mass movement.²⁶ Between 1967 and approximately 1990, the style of Christian music did not change, but remained the “beat-style” of the 1960–70s. This peculiarly Hungarian style is named “Jenő-style” after the most emblematic author-performer, Jenő Sillye who has been its leading performer since 1971.

The similarity between the music of Pentecostal and Catholic charismatic renewal movements and “standard” Christian popular music in Hungary is striking. An obvious reason is that all took inspiration from the same—secular—musical roots. The lack of characteristically different features of charismatic worship music and liturgical Christian popular music used facilitated musical cross-fertilization, the transdenominational spread of genres, and consequent theological and ideological hybridities. Musical cross-fertilization did not only mean the borrowing of music

25 Ken Canedo, *Keep the Fire Burning: The Folk-Mass Revolution* (Portland, OR: Pastoral Press, 2009).

26 That was not a coincidence that Szilas emigrated to the United States in 1970. Reading the propaganda in the newspapers against his “Mass Teenager” he decided to leave the country. Povedák, *Gitáros*, 98–99.

but the transfer of religious practices, producing ritual and embodied homologies.²⁷

István Kamarás and Ferenc Körmendy emphasized in 1990 that guitar masses had resulted not only in communication but also in communion: “[h]igh art and believers had become separated, and the preference for youth music, which offered an answer to alienation, has become an interest among the masses.... There has not been such major activity in church music among young people in centuries.”²⁸ A good example of this is the “beat mass” of the American group Only for Jesus, which the secret police documented in detail. The American Pentecostal charismatic “song and music group”—as the report describes them—held a youth “beat mass” with the title of “Unity” in Budapest on August 2, 1976 in the Roman Catholic Saint Stephen’s basilica, one of the most prestigious churches in Hungary. The mass was translated by the Pentecostal preacher Lajos Simonfalvi and was held with the permission of the Roman Catholic assistant chaplain Árpád Alberti. The event attracted roughly 2,000 young people—Seventh-Day Adventists, Pentecostals, and Catholics—and was characterized by observers from the Budapest Police Headquarters as dangerous, in part because “they did not have permission from the authorities to hold it.”²⁹ According to the police, it was “a premeditated political action, in its ecclesiastical aspect.”³⁰ They were also suspicious because the interdenominational event was a new phenomenon that they had not anticipated: “In respect of the sects it was especially the case, given that the church action is organized jointly with the Roman Catholic Church.”³¹ An informer who participated in the “rock devotions” held in September 1982 in the Bükköny Street Roman Catholic parish in Budapest gave a strikingly similar report about this event. According to his account, 140–150 persons, from teenagers to people in their sixties, gathered to listen to a four-member band who had come from America and who performed

27 Csordás, *Language*, 1997.

28 István Kamarás and Ferenc Körmendy, “Religiózus beat? (szociográfia) II,” *Új forrás* 22, no. 3 (1990): 57.

29 See the reports in the Historical Archives of the Hungarian Secret Police (ÁBTL): file 3.1.2. M-40918/7.2.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

Photo courtesy of
Kinga Povedák

in English. After the performance, Géza Németh, a Calvinist minister known as “Uncle Géza,” addressed the audience.³²

A scholarly explanation centering on the dynamics of consumer culture and fashion can be found for these phenomena, one that is not merely limited to Morel’s theory that each age must find a “new religious language”—and we may add, channel—through which the Church’s message can be understood by believers.³³ Religious experiences found in different religious groups are similar not simply because of the music used, but also because a particular kind of musical style is better suited to given religious experiences. It seems that religious experience together with consumer cultural industries determine the basic features of emerging modern religious music. In other words, charismatic experience and its ritual frame that correspond to postmodern religious demands and therefore can be “sold” successfully on the religious market result in the appearance of a similar music style, which

32 See the reports in the Historical Archives of the Hungarian Secret Police (ÁBTL): file 2.7.1. NOIJ BRFK-110/1982.09.02. 1

33 Gyula Morel, *A jövő biztosabb, mint a múlt. Őszinte kísérlet a lényeg keresésére* (Budapest: Egyház Fórum Alapítvány, 1995), 31.

in the present case functions not only as an aesthetic category but also as a channel of religious communication. In this way a form of consumer culture “fashion” has appeared, based on aesthetic demands, in the religious environment. But this fashion owes its popularity and long life to the fact that these aesthetic demands have been successfully implanted into the religious demands.

Besides the need for religious renewal, it is important to emphasize that different types of religious music result in different religious experiences with different forms of expression. The rituals of the charismatic awakening movements share common features; congregants enact similar types of expressive bodily movements and emotional outbursts. These practices themselves differ significantly from the more traditional and structured Roman Catholic liturgy. Even some of the faithful and the clergy expressed ill feelings against non-traditional expressive forms.³⁴ Others were attracted to the informal, spontaneous, and active style of participation: “this performance is a form of apostleship and dialogue, and it is a rather effective tool and it is appealing especially because as the older priests say—it is not ‘churchlike’ enough.”³⁵ This tension with the traditional, “churchlike” Catholic liturgy should call to mind scholars’ judgment that postmodern forms of religious ritual tend to be anti-authoritarian. As Tardy puts it: “They gave themselves over to natural and supernatural things with the same openness and naivete, the same sincerity and enthusiasm. This combined with the basic drive for freedom, which expressed itself in the search for new opportunities to have a direct encounter with God. Post-Conciliar religiosity was in the process of being born, and they sought a style suitable for expressing their faith, experiences, and belonging, one in which they had already learned to express their relationship with worldly things.”³⁶

Finally, a comment has to be made concerning the “new religious musical language.” It is true that Hungarian Christian popular music appeared parallel with its Western equivalents and showed great similarities in the 1960s, but due to the

34 See the reports of the III/III. Department of the Police Headquarters of Csongrád County in the Historical Archives of the Hungarian Secret Police (ÁBTL): file 3.1.5. O-16039/150. 10.

35 Ibid.

36 László Tardy, “Istenélmény a mai zenében,” *Vigilia* 1 (2007), last accessed February 27, 2016, <http://vigilia.hu/regihonlap/2007/1/tardy.htm>.

political circumstances their development went in different directions. While especially in the United States a commercial Contemporary Christian Music industry evolved with many fashionable styles, the entire Hungarian Christian popular musical scene operated in a bubble, untouched by the “Western” styles and influences and by the 1990s became anachronistic, having lost its “modern” and “fashionable” attractivity towards the younger generations.

CONCLUSION

If we take into consideration the religious tendencies and the turn away from institutional religions during state socialism in Hungary, then the question of “how could religious popular music and religious renewals and base communities spread and experience a revival during the times of persecution?” automatically emerge. Under the given political circumstances of socialist Hungary, churches could not and did not encourage renewal movements, however, on the local microlevel the base communities served as islands. Tomka compares the Catholic Church during this period to a group of islands. The metaphor of islands represents the well-operating, active parish churches, and these islands were quite independent.³⁷ These communities often gained a secondary, political feature as most religious activities were done in a hidden and secret way. Therefore, being religious at this point is not only worldview and faith anymore, but in certain cases—when members of a given pursued religious group are aware of the persecution, still they insist on their religious identity and participate in clandestine church rituals—might become a political act as well. Besides, samizdat religious culture developed under ideological pressure inevitably assigned a political feature. The political control of religious freedom and persecution hurt the religious identity of the believers in a way that sometimes the token of survival was—rather than becoming more secularized—belonging to a community of faith such as the charismatic group with great commitment.

37 Miklós Tomka, *Magyar Katolicizmus 1991* (Budapest: Országos Lelkipásztori Intézet Katolikus Társadalomtudományi Akadémia, 1991), 79.

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