

Wittenberg, Jason. *Crucibles of Political Loyalty: Church Institutions and Political Continuity in Hungary*. Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 2006. xiv + 293 pp. Tables. Figures. Notes. Appendices. Bibliography. Index. £45.00.

THIS, the first book by a young American political scientist, has the rare distinction of having considerable value to scholars working in distinct academic disciplines. In examining the Christian churches' resistance to the Hungarian Communist regime, and the influence they had on shaping current party affiliations, this study has an importance for both historians and political scientists of post-World War Two Hungary and should be of interest to any scholar studying Communist and post-Communist regimes.

This study derives its double appeal by explaining why traditional party loyalties in Hungary endured the revolutionary transformation of society brought about by the Communist regime that governed the country between 1948 and 1989. Not only did the elections of both 1948 and 1990 result in a victory for the parties of 'the right' but also, as this study carefully demonstrates, an examination of voting preferences on a local level reveals remarkably strong continuities between pre- and post-Communist election outcomes. In spite of the socio-economic and generational changes that took place in Hungary under the Communist regime, many localities in Hungary supported precisely the same type of parties in 1990 that they had supported forty-two years earlier. The key to explaining these continuities, this study argues, lies with the Christian churches which, in spite of the Communist regime's secularizing efforts, retained their influence on, and continued to shape the voting preferences of, the Hungarian electorate.

To demonstrate how the churches were able to retain their influence, the author has made profitable use of local and church archives (supplemented by additional research in the Hungarian National Archive) to examine how, in two sample counties, the Christian churches resisted the secularizing pressures of the Communist regime. The close examination of these two counties situated at opposite ends of the country, the one (Zala) predominantly Catholic, the other (Hajdú-Bihar) predominantly Calvinist, enables this study to provide a compelling account of how both the Catholic and Calvinist churches provided a viable alternative to the Communist regime. The picture of church-state relations that, thereby, emerges from this study (chapters 3 to 5) is considerably more nuanced than previous scholarship has hitherto conveyed.

Even at the national level, the author points out, the churches had some success in retaining a measure of administrative and theological independence from the regime. It was at the local level, however, that the churches most clearly and persistently engaged in a fascinating (and until now overlooked) struggle with party officials to retain the loyalty of the local populace. Many priests and pastors proved adept at exploiting the regime's formal commitment to freedom of worship to promote attendance at religious services, participation in church-sponsored social activities and attendance at religious education classes in schools.

It is to the last of these potential flashpoints, efforts by the local clergy to promote religious instruction in schools, that this study pays the closest attention. It demonstrates that, although by the 1980s, the numbers of pupils attending religious instruction classes had declined nationally, this rate of decline varied dramatically from village to village and that the efforts of the local clergy were instrumental in determining how rapidly this rate of decline took place. Local priests and pastors, especially Catholic clergymen, were remarkably successful in retaining their influence on both the youth (who received religious instruction) and their parents (who requested such instruction for their children).

The study then proceeds to compare (in chapter 6) the strength of what the author terms 'church community' (essentially the registration of students in school religious instruction) with post-Communist voting preferences on a district by district basis. The statistical analysis employed in this chapter reveals that the longer a district, inspired by the efforts of its local clergy, resisted the secularizing pressures of the Communist regime the more likely it was to support the parties of the right in post-Communist elections.

This study, therefore, has an importance both for political scientists interested in post-Communist politics in Hungary and for historians interested in Hungary under the Communist regime. Moreover, the complex and shifting nature of church-state relations revealed by this study and the Christian churches' enduring influence on party affiliations are not exclusively Hungarian phenomena. Scholars of other Communist/post-Communist regimes will also find this study essential reading.

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