

RELIGIONS, CHURCHES IN MODERN HUNGARY AND *METEM* RESEARCH

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Crises in identity are a common phenomenon in the life of individuals, societies, institutions and churches of our days. For the Roman Catholic Church the Second Vatican Council had the task of offering guidelines on how the church should see itself in the modern world. And similar efforts can be detected in religions and churches everywhere. For obvious reasons in Hungary all this was and is still moving very slowly. Churches and religions are just starting to take account of themselves, to find their identity by rediscovering their history, and to catch up with the rapidly changing world around them.

For this reason we all should welcome the present symposium organized by the Hungarian Studies Program of Indiana University. It gives us an opportunity to reflect, and take account of what are the functions of the churches and religions in our modern age. I commend this initiative because an analysis of the impact linguistics makes on religion and religion on linguistics is long overdue. For example, studies on the Finnish Language and its impact on Finnish Lutheranism, the Hungarian Language on Hungarian Roman Catholicism and Hungarian Judaism, the Uzbek Language on Uzbek Islam, etc., and conversely, could be the topic of a challenging Uralic and Altaic Studies Conference to be held in Bloomington or in Budapest. But I commend this initiative especially because it highlights the objective of *METEM* research, making the Hungarian Church self-conscious in the light of its history. The research began in 1985 and now it is part of the churches and religions in modern Hungary.

METEM is an acronym for the Hungarian name *Magyar Egyháztörténeti Enciklopédia Munkaközössége*, "Society for an Encyclopedia of Hungarian Church History." Its objective is to prepare and publish an Encyclopedia of Church History in Hungary, which would list in alphabetical order places, persons, councils, documents, monuments, and writings relevant to the one thousand year history of religious faith in Hungary. It is expected that the project will give perspective and purpose to the manifold ongoing research,

facilitate the retrieval of the results of past investigations, and point to various areas overlooked thus far (*METEM Vázlatok, Essays in Hungarian Church History* 1989, 1:6-7, 279-324; 3:245-258).

Membership is open to individuals of all beliefs, cultures, religions, countries who support the purpose of the Society and who are dedicated to maintaining high scholarly standards, and able to make a contribution to the realization of METEM objectives.

Research into the history of parishes has preeminence in the project. They are the founding communities of the people of God which in the light of *Lumen gentium* of Vatican II (13-16) include not only Catholics but non-Catholics, Jews, Muslims, theists, and atheists who "moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience" (no. 16). Such a history of parishes is something new; it needs, therefore, a preliminary reflection, a search for methods in the light of modern historiography.

For the preparation of this project a periodical entitled *Vázlatok, Essays in Church History in Hungary* was launched in 1989 for the discussion and critical assessment of studies in preparation for their final incorporation in an encyclopedia. The aim of the periodical is to provide a forum for experts to discuss and express their views on the various topics. By doing this it is expected that articles, prior to their incorporation in the encyclopedia, will be scholarly and of high academic standards. Manuscripts are welcome in Hungarian, English, French, German, Spanish, Rumanian, Croatian, Slovak and other Slavic languages. They must be scholarly, well-documented, self-critical and attentive to the hermeneutical influence of one's own tradition. Each essay is followed by an English resumé.

Essays are published under 20 main headings, which concretely illustrate what we understand under church and religion.

Here are the 20 headings:

1. Parishes, local communities
2. Persons
3. Buildings
4. Prayers
5. Worship and Liturgy
6. Organizations, social structure
7. Associations, religious orders, etc.
8. Spirituality
9. Persecutions
10. Activities:
 1. Pastoral
 2. Teaching

3. Political and diplomatic
4. Scientific
5. Charities
6. Economic
7. Artistic creations, painting, works of art
8. Music
9. Entertainment
10. Literature, poetry

All these entities and activities make up a church. To study a church is to study at least all these things. Looking at the program of our symposium we can see that a great number of the presentations is focused on the political and diplomatic activities of the churches, and other topics are not mentioned at all.

In the remaining part of my presentation I would like to mention some examples symptomatic of the modern age in religions and churches in Hungary. Being a Roman Catholic I am more familiar with the movements in my own church. Thus the examples I present are taken from the Roman Catholic Church. Yet the tendencies and initiatives mentioned here, in various degrees, were and are active in all the religions and churches in Hungary. I limit myself to three movements with examples taken from the times between the two world wars, when modern initiatives started to take shape in Hungary.

1. Local communities

In modern Hungary as in the modern world in general there is a greater emphasis on smaller geographic units, on basic communities, the local parishes. It might be true that the parish is just a part of greater units like the diocese or the global church, yet it is also true that the parish is the visible image, the symbol of any larger units, the global church included. It is the realization, the *Verwirklichung* as one of the great theologians of this century, Karl Rahner, said: "Die Pfarrei ist die primäre Verwirklichung der Kirche als Ereignis" "Plébánia az Egyháznak mint eseménynek *elsődleges* megvalósulása" (K. Rahner, 1956, 34). The history of the churches is really not so much the history of kings and bishops, and of their political intrigues, as the history of the people, the history of the common people, an idea that "plébánia," the Hungarian name for parish, expresses so well.

The German word "Pfarrei" comes from the old Gothic word *parra* which means a "umgrenzter Bezirk," a fenced off region with its head, the "Pfarrer," the "Pfarr-Herr," the lord of the parish territory (Melzer, 1965, 214). The

English "Parish", like the Latin "parochia" and the Greek *paroikia*, means neighborhood, or more exactly, a place (*oikia*), where people live side by side "ahol nép egymás mellett (*para*) él." Whereas, the Hungarian "plébánia," "plébános" comes from the Latin word *plebs*, *plebeius*, which means people, common people, "közönséges nép," everyone, the "plebs." The parish priest, the "plébános," therefore, is not a "Herr," but a man of the people, an idea which is very close to the Second Vatican Council's concept of the church, the people of God, to which, every human being, in various degrees, is related, and belongs (*Lumen Gentium*, 13-16).

It is in the parish where one can see, not in theory or in the abstract but in reality, what a church as a people of God is. The parish is the church incarnate, embodied in a specific time and place with its eucharistic celebration, the foundation and center of the parish (Riepe, 1967, 1018).

Such a conception of the Church had motivated the *Kalot* (Katolikus Agrár Legények Országos Tanácsa), the Council of Catholic Agrarian Young Men. The Jesuit Jenő Kerkai founded it in 1935 and within 10 years it had about half a million members. The aim was to save the agrarian youth of the Hungarian countryside. "Műveltebb falut!" a "More Educated Rural Country" was one of its guiding principles which mobilized Hungary's most numerous social class, living without hope in a self-defeating lethargy. They were simple people. Thus they were the appropriate symbol of a Church which dared to boast of the title "the people" of God. Reflecting on them the Hungarian church could begin to discover itself as the people of God, with the vocation of becoming a more Christian, human, and vigorous people. Since neither was the concern of the communist ideology, the beginning of the communist regime had to be the end of *Kalot*.

2. Economy

METEM has listed economic function with economic responsibility as one of the ten functions of the churches. And I propose this as the second example of the symptoms of the modern age in religions and churches.

Economics is concerned not only with distribution and consumption of goods but with production of goods and creating jobs. Labor is one of the most important economic factors. A study of the history of the Church is not complete unless it pays attention to the Church's economic functions, its production and distribution of goods, its job creating function and so on. Notwithstanding its supernatural vocation the church can be considered as one of the most significant and lasting economic institutions of the world. Through centuries it has invested its accumulated wealth in constructions, building

churches, cathedrals, schools, hospitals, rectories with decorations and special furnishings. It has promoted artefacts and artistic creations. Especially through its religious orders it has cultivated land and taught people to work and produce food. In doing this the church produced goods and created opportunities for work. And as a result it shared both the benefits and the problems of any economic enterprise with its inherent temptations, failures and injustices yet without giving up its will to correct faults by means of trial and error. The economic concerns expressed in the Vatican II document, entitled *Gaudium et Spes*, suggest a self-corrective "economic system" of this kind, practiced throughout two millennia.

Whereas in its Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium*, the Church reflected on itself, its identity, and its function, in its Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*, Chapter 3, Part 2 the church addressed the economy, and now we can ask whether the church follows in its own economy the guiding principles laid down in its own document.

Reading the document one has the impression that the economy practiced by the Church is characterized by a concern aiming at equilibrium and equity among the people in the world and, specially more recently, at involving as many people as possible in the decision-making process in financial matters.

The difficulty and intriguing problem for the Church is how to give unconditional priority to the Church's spiritual vision and mission in a world where profit is a fundamental prerequisite for any institution that plans to function for more than a year or two. The difficulty of such a problem, however, may be just the incentive for an inventive mind. The challenge of great polarities is one of the resources that in economics is called the entrepreneurial spirit. Reassured by faith in the providence of God there are some real entrepreneurs in the Church. Ferenc Bíró in 1921 gathered a group of Hungarian women for bringing the Church into the world of economics. And he called them simply "Népleányok", the Daughters of the People, the People of God. Though the name was later changed to Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the mission remains unchanged: an effort to give unconditional priority to the Church's spiritual vision and mission and compete, at the same time, with a world of economics where profit seems to be the only rule for survival (Bíró, 1920, 1935, 1943).

3. Alienation

In addition to the two rather positive symptoms of the modern age I would like to mention one more symptom, a negative one: alienation, alienation from

oneself and alienation from everyone else. One of the modern age's most ostentatious displays of alienation was Marxist-Stalinist communism. Its dazzling effect was the alienation of parents from their children, and children from their parents, wives from their husbands and husbands from their wives, friends from their friends.

There are some who believe that the damage the communist dictatorship inflicted on the Hungarian people and particularly on the Hungarian church was heavier than the damage done by the previous three national disasters, The Devastation of the Tartars, "Tatárjárás", Turkish Menace, "Török veszedelem," and the Austrian Oppression, "Osztrák elnyomás." The Communist dictatorship, "a kommunista egyeduralom" is a strong fourth contender. It was communism which systematically tried to bury all the churches forcing them to march on the road to Calvary. The life of Cardinal Mindszenty is the best documented symbol of that.

Coming back from the road to Calvary the revenge cannot be the church's answer. Religions and churches have to forgive. But forgiving is not forgetting. Forgetting might be dangerous because it may enhance the possibility of repeating the past and failing the future. *Historia est mater studiorum*. And this should be METEM's modest contribution to the post-Calvary life of the Hungarian religions and churches: placing great tragedies within the panorama of a remarkable past and offering hope for a better future guaranteed by an impressive past.

Hungarian religions and Hungarian churches share a common past. And this past includes also the pre-Christian Hungarian religion that in the light of Vatican II can be considered also as a vehicle of grace. The life of a nation and the life of its religions and churches are one, because no religion or church can exist without people and no people can live without hope, without ideals and convictions transcending the "here and now" of a material world. The road to Calvary was a common journey for the church as well as for the people of Hungary. We hope and pray that the road to recovery will be also a common journey for both the Hungarian people and the religions and churches in a modern Hungary.

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