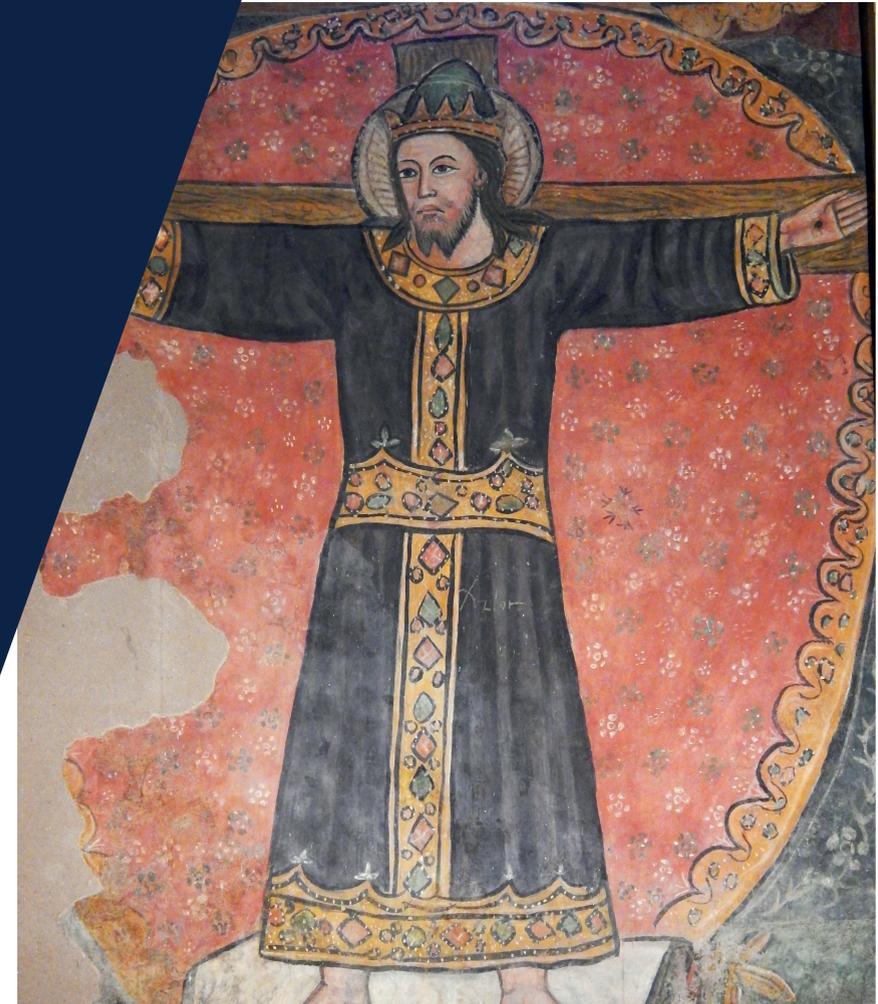


Perspectives on Christian Martyrdom

# Perspectives on Christian Martyrdom



Apor Vilmos  
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Tudás. Hit. Jövő.



Proceedings of a Theological Conference

Vác, 22 February 2025

# **Perspectives on Christian Martyrdom**

Proceedings of a Theological Conference

Editor

*Attila Lovassy*

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## Perspectives on Christian Martyrdom

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## Rector's welcome

Martyrdom was initially given to the apostles. After all, a martyr is nothing else than a witness. First the apostles had the opportunity to bear the most authentic witness to the work and teaching of Jesus. However, a few generations later, bearing this witness became a more debatable gesture. Who can be an authentic witness to Jesus in the Middle Ages, the early modern age, or even in the disastrous periods of the 20th century? An authentic encounter with Him will be a kind of proof of the authenticity of the testimony itself, which in the case of a created being, the man, cannot be more authentic than when he sacrifices his own blood, his life for his relationship with Jesus, in fulfillment of his mission arising from it.

This conference volume provides an intriguing overview of the most diverse forms of this martyrdom, which on the one hand can be an intellectual delight for readers interested in history, church history, theology, or even literary history. Our overview extends in time in a special way from the figure of a forerunner, Saint John the Baptist, to the period of our own lives; in space, from the Coptic martyrs of North Africa through Northern Europe to Hungary; in approach, from the church law framework of relic veneration to the source analyses of secret service files and visions. But we hope that this book can provide more than an overview. Preserving and presenting the memory of the martyrs is a newer and newer testimony to Christian teaching.

Let us read this conference volume! Let us carry on this responsibility together!

*Zoltán Gloviczki*  
rector  
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## The Persecution of the Church in the Kádár Era

From the very beginning, the Communist regime that was established after 1945 considered the churches, particularly the Roman Catholic Church, as enemies, and tried by all means to exclude them from public life. It is not possible to describe the process of loss of space in detail within this presentation, so we will limit ourselves to a list of events: the nationalisation of church estates (18 March 1945), the dissolution of religious associations (4 July 1946), the nationalisation of church schools (16 June 1948), the arrest and conviction of the Primate Archbishop of Esztergom, József Mindszenty (from December 1948 to February 1949), the introduction of optional religious education (1949), the signing of the 1950 convention (30 of August 1950), the revocation of the operating licenses of monastic orders (7 September 1950), the series of show trials against the Archbishop of Kalocsa József Grósz (in 1951), and the trials against the leaders of small communities (in 1952 and 1955).<sup>1</sup>

The bitter experience of the 1950s, as indicated in the above list, showed that the relationship between the Hungarian state and the Hungarian Roman Catholic Church cannot be described as one of equal partners. In both the 1950s and 1960s, religion was and remained a phenomenon that was alien to the political system. Opposition to the power of the regime was not primarily a reaction to its violent actions, but rather one to its attempts to impose a new, utopian system of norms on society as a whole, which

<sup>1</sup> On the person and trial of József Mindszenty, see: BALOGH, Margit, *Mindszenty József (1892–1975) I–II.*, MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont, Budapest 2015.; BALOGH, Margit, “Victim of History”: *Cardinal Mindszenty. A Biography*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington 2022.; FEJÉRDY, András–WIRTHNÉ DIERA, Bernadett [eds.], *Célkeresztben. Mindszenty József pere és a szovjet blokk főpásztorainak meghurcolása*, Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont–Nemzeti Emlékezet Bizottsága 2022.; FEJÉRDY, András –WIRTHNÉ DIERA, Bernadett [eds.] *The Trial of Cardinal József Mindszenty from the Perspective of Seventy Years. The Fate of Church Leaders in Central and Eastern Europe*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2021.; CÚTHNÉ GYÓNI, Eszter, *Magyarországi Mindszenty-kutatások a rendszerváltástól napjainkig* in: BORS-BULBUK, Zsuzsanna–SOÓS, Viktor Attila [eds.], *Bíbor színnel jelzett vértanúság. Tanulmányok Mindszenty József bíboros, hercegprímás életéről és a magyar egyházügyi 1945–1989közötti helyzetéről*, Mindszentyneum, Zalaegerszeg 2022, 153–177.

was alien to the centuries-old traditions of Hungarian society. In addition to this fundamental conflict, the fact that the worldview of the churches differed from the official materialistic and atheistic ideology of the state also made it difficult to establish a *modus vivendi*. The centuries-long presence of the churches in society provided them with a depth of roots, relationships and norm-building power that the new state power, having just been established, was only partially able to eradicate after several years.<sup>2</sup>

### **Clergy in the 1956 Hungarian Revolution**

Catholic church historiography does not consider 1956 a watershed moment, as the Catholic Church did not participate in an organized manner in either the preparation for the revolution or in the events themselves. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the Church largely welcomed the changes, as they marked a temporary restoration of religious freedom: former state-appointed church commissioners and so-called "peace priests" were expelled from episcopal residences, and a number of previously imprisoned priests, monks and nuns were released. Among the events of the revolution, two stand out as particularly significant from the perspective of this study: the actions of the seminarians of the Central Seminary and the activity of Cardinal József Mindszenty following his release on October 31, 1956.

On 22 October, the seminarians of the Central Seminary began a seven-day spiritual retreat, which was not interrupted by the outbreak of the revolution. During their meditations and prayers, the seminarians could hear the sounds of the nearby events, including the crackle of gunfire. Although they were not permitted to converse with one another during the retreat, the priest directing the exercises provided them with information about the unfolding situation. Until the conclusion of the retreat on 29 October, they took no action and did not leave the seminary building. However, following the end of the retreat, the seminarians responded to a request from the Red Cross and became actively involved in humanitarian efforts. They organized the collection and distribution of aid, visited hospitals to compile lists of the wounded for the purpose of notifying family members, and offered spiritual care and consolation to the injured and the dying. Beyond this charitable assistance, a few seminarians – acutely aware of the

<sup>2</sup> TOMKA, Miklós, *A vallásosság mint az elitbe kerülés ellenpólusa a Kádár-korszakban* in: MAJTÉNYI, György– SZABÓ, Csaba [eds.], *Rendszerváltás és Kádár-korszak*, ÁBTL–Kossuth, Budapest 2008, 557–568.

historical gravity of the events – undertook the task of documenting their experiences during the revolution. They collected and edited personal accounts and texts produced during the brief period of renewed ecclesiastical freedom, with the intention of disseminating them to members of the rural clergy. The brochure was compiled by László Marosfalvi, Antal Kuklay, Imre Varjú, and Károly Marcheschi. Through their efforts, reliable and first-hand information regarding the events of the revolution reached members of the clergy living in rural areas. The brochure included, among other materials, the pastoral letters addressed to the Hungarian people by Pope Pius XII, as well as the written transcript of Cardinal József Mindszenty's radio address delivered on 3 November. In the aftermath of the revolution's violent suppression, this collection came into the possession of the state security services and was subsequently designated as a principal piece of incriminating evidence. The retributive apparatus of the regime extended not only to the editors of the brochure but, as the investigation progressed, also implicated additional clergy and seminarians. On the basis of alleged "hostile activities," several were arrested and sentenced to terms of imprisonment, further illustrating the expansive and punitive scope of post-revolutionary reprisals against ecclesiastical actors.

Cardinal József Mindszenty arrived in Budapest on 31 October, following his release from house arrest in Felsőpetény. News of his liberation prompted widespread public celebration, drawing not only large numbers of the faithful but also numerous delegations and official representatives to the Primate's Palace on Űri Street. Having been held in near-complete isolation from public life for nearly eight years, Mindszenty's return to freedom marked not only the restoration of his physical liberty but also the beginning of his reorientation to the radically altered political and ecclesiastical landscape. In the early days of November, it remained uncertain whether there would be sufficient time for meaningful political or ecclesiastical renewal. Nonetheless, within this brief window, Mindszenty took two decisive actions that, in effect, nullified years of systematic efforts by the communist dictatorship. On 31 October, a general assembly of Budapest clergy was convened at the Central Seminary. During the proceedings, several participants publicly demanded the dissolution of the State Office for Church Affairs (Állami Egyházügyi Hivatal, ÁEH), the confiscation of its documents, and the prosecution of so-called peace or pax priests – those clerics who had cooperated with or benefited from the state's ecclesiastical policies. In response to these appeals, one of Mindszenty's first authoritative acts was to instruct the bishops of Hungary's dioceses to remove all peace

priests from their leadership positions. Furthermore, he mandated that these individuals return to their respective dioceses and cease exercising any administrative authority. The consequences of this directive were profound: the State Office for Church Affairs, already severely destabilized by the revolutionary upheaval, found itself incapable of responding effectively, and it was not until several months later that the regime was able to begin reasserting control over the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

The initiative to secure and preserve the documents of the State Office for Church Affairs, as demanded during the clergy assembly, was undertaken on 3 November at the explicit request of the Archbishop of Esztergom. Under the direction of Father Egon Turchányi – who, during the revolutionary interregnum, served as Cardinal József Mindszenty’s personal secretary – a group composed of László Marosfalvi, Antal Kuklay, and Szabolcs Vigh proceeded to the ÁEH’s headquarters on Pasaréti Street. Their mission was to prevent the destruction or unauthorized appropriation of sensitive state files by securing the archive for the Church’s use and historical record. Initially, the building was protected by the three seminarians, assisted by several Jesuit novices in civilian attire. Subsequently, local National Guard units from Újpest assumed responsibility for guarding the premises. Cardinal Mindszenty entrusted the coordination of a more permanent security arrangement to István Tabódy, then a fourth-year seminarian at the Central Seminary and a trusted acquaintance from Mindszenty’s earlier pastoral tenure in Zalaegerszeg. Tabódy promptly began organizing the effort; however, the large-scale Soviet military intervention launched on 4 November rendered the fulfillment of this objective untenable. Although ultimately unsuccessful, the episode stands as a symbolically charged moment of alignment between Cardinal Mindszenty and the seminarians of the Central Seminary, who – among ecclesiastical actors – played a particularly active and visible role in the events of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. This moment of collaboration underscores the intergenerational transmission of resistance within the Church and the seminarians’ commitment to safeguarding institutional memory during a period of extreme political uncertainty.

The Impact of the 1956 Revolution Together, the violent transformation of the political, economic and social systems led to the explosion of the revolution of 1956, which had an impact not only in Hungary, but also in Europe and worldwide. Due to the complex international situation and relations, the Hungarian uprising was unable to unfold, and under János Kádár’s leadership a kind of regression could be observed. It took a long time to consolidate the new power, as János Kádár, who had crushed the uprising

with the help of the Soviets, had to establish internal and external order in the face of rejection by the general public. The most important aim of the Kádár regime was to punish those who were involved in the uprising, to declare it a counter-revolution and at the same time to make it taboo. In Hungary, the events of October 1956 could not be commemorated until the change of regime more than thirty years later. Between 1956 and 1961, politics was constantly dominated by procedures against the participants of the uprising, although with varying degrees of intensity. These trials punished not only those involved in armed struggle, but also those who, because of their positions of leadership in local communities, might have posed a potential threat to the newly emerging regime. Although the severity of the reprisals diminished after the execution of Prime Minister Imre Nagy 16 June 1958, this symbolic event set the framework within which the society of the Kádár regime could move.

In its first months the Kádár regime, which had crushed the 1956 uprising with Soviet help, had no strength for further confrontation, and there was considerable rejection of its power. Church policy issues were first discussed in March 1957 within the closest circles of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt, MSZMP). It is worth quoting the thoughts of Gyula Kállai, the ideological secretary of the MSZMP: "I think the time has come to take action against the reaction of the Church. Another thing is that not all churches should be treated in the same way, on the same basis, in the same circumstances. There are suggestions here that arrests should be made. That is what I propose. But we should consider arresting priests from the Reformed Church, for example. Let's start with the Catholics, the Reformed will learn this and will know what to do."<sup>3</sup> With this statement, Kállai demonstrated the continuity of the Rákosi and Kádár eras. In 1957, as the regime was consolidating, the intimidation of the churches began.<sup>4</sup> The means were extremely diverse, ranging from persecution for participation in the uprising to clergymen being murdered or disappearing under mysterious circumstances.<sup>5</sup> According to an internal affairs report of 1957, forty-nine Reformed pastors were under operative investigation, and Lajos Gulyás, a Reformed

<sup>3</sup> Citing the contribution of Gyula Kállai: NÉMETHNÉ VÁLYI, Karola–URBÁN, Aladár [eds.], *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt Ideiglenes vezető testületeinek jegyzőkönyvei. II.*, Napvilág, Budapest 1993, 246.

<sup>4</sup> FÖLDVÁRYNÉ KISS, Réka, *A Kádár-kormány első éve. A megtorlás és a korai egyházpolitika* in: BELLAVICS, István–FÖLDVÁRYNÉ KISS, Réka [eds.], *Halálra ítélve. Papi sorsok '56után*, Nemzeti Emlékezet Bizottsága–Országház Kiadó, Budapest 2018, 40–51.

<sup>5</sup> Soós, Viktor Attila, *Párhuzamos vonások két hitvalló pap életében, vértanúságában (Boldog Brenner János és Kováts Ferenc életáldozata a kommunista diktatúra éveiben)* in: *Vasi Szemle* 72(2018/6), 701–722.

pastor from Levél, was sentenced to death for his participation in the uprising of 1956 (he had in fact warned the crowd to calm down during the massacre at Mosonmagyaróvár and saved the life of a state security officer), and was executed on the last day of the year.<sup>6</sup> Gulyás' death sentence was based on the fact that the power that was being established had no interest in releasing potent figures who could have been a point of reference for local society in the future and who thus could have become (ideological) leaders of potential resistance. Another aspect of the period of retribution that is less well known is that during the course of 1957 we know of at least seven Roman Catholic priests who were murdered, and there was no satisfactory investigation into their cases to bring the culprits to justice.<sup>7</sup> The best known of them was János Brenner, who was executed 15 December 1957. His beatification took place 1 May 2018 in Szombathely.<sup>8</sup> In the case of Lajos Kenyeres, parish priest of Tiszavárkony, who belonged to the diocese of Vác, the real perpetrators also remained obscure. The motives behind these murders were similar to those of Lajos Gulyás, in that the (local) authorities tried to eliminate those who were popular among the public and who could influence the local population. In the case of smaller settlements in particular, local parish priests and chaplains were the most visible representatives of the church, and therefore the regime targeted them, especially in turbulent times such as the months following the suppression of the revolution.

### **The Most Significant Episode of Ecclesiastical Persecution during the Kádár Era: the 'Black Ravens' Case**

By 1958, the “consolidating” regime had enough strength and opportunity to turn its attention back to those strata that it had previously lacked the energy to target, and so two resolutions were passed in the summer of 1958 which subsequently determined the

<sup>6</sup> ERDŐS, Kristóf, *Vasalt nadrággal a bitófa alá* in: CZÓKOS, Gergely–KISS, Réka–MÁTHÉ, Áron–SZALAI, Zoltán [eds.], *Magyar Hősök. Elfeledett életutak a 20. századból*, Matthias Corvinus Collegium Alapítvány–Nemzeti Emlékezet Bizottsága, Budapest 2020, 138–143.; ERDŐS, Kristóf, *Lajos Gulyás: With Ironed Trousers under the Gallows* in: CZÓKOS, Gergely–KISS, Réka–MÁTHÉ, Áron–SZALAI, Zoltán [eds.], *Heroes Among Us. 50 True Stories of Brave Hungarians in the 20th Century*, Open Books, Budapest 2021, 95–100.

<sup>7</sup> SZABÓ Csaba, *Katolikus papok mártíriuma a forradalom után* in: BELLAVICS, István–FÖLDVÁRYNÉ KISS, Réka [eds.], *Halálra ítélve. Papi sorsok '56 után*, Nemzeti Emlékezet Bizottsága–Országház Kiadó, Budapest 2018, 92–101.

<sup>8</sup> SOÓS, Viktor Attila, *“I Am Not Afraid!” The Life of Blessed János Brenner, the First Beatified Martyr of the Kádár Dictatorship* in: KISS, Réka –HORVÁTH, Zsolt [eds.], *NEB Yearbook 2016–2017*, Committee of National Remembrance, Budapest 2018, 291–309.

MSZMP's church policy.<sup>9</sup> The tone and language of the resolutions showed both similarities and differences with the Rákosi era's church policy statements. At the rhetorical level, the authorities abandoned the desire for a quick and spectacular elimination of the churches (one of the reasons why the elimination did not succeed was that, despite the removal, imprisonment and persecution of "reactionary elements", the church continued to thrive in its organisation and mass base) and formulated a new policy: "Since the churches will continue to exist for a long time under Socialism, it is necessary to establish cooperation between the Socialist state and the various churches. Cooperation is also necessary because the struggle between the state and the churches takes an enormous amount of energy and attention away from the Socialist construction work, and this is in no way to our advantage. Nor is it beneficial for the churches to fight, because it would inevitably lead to the application of restrictive measures from which the church would not benefit."<sup>10</sup> The church policy of the Kádár regime was characterised simultaneously by the limited operational freedom of the churches, the apparent concessions and the anti-church struggle.<sup>11</sup> When the "left wing" of the party grew stronger, administrative actions against the church became a regular occurrence. A striking manifestation of this strengthening was the resolution of the Political Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt Politikai Bizottsága, MSZMP PB), adopted 21 June 1960, which identified the "ecclesiastical right wing" and "illegal clericalism" as the main forces of reaction,<sup>12</sup> and which resolution allowed the Ministry of the Interior to launch the nationwide operation that became known as the "Black Ravens" case.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Information on the resolution of the Political Committee of the Central Committee of MSZMP 10 June 1958 concerning the relationship between the state and the churches. Published by: BALOGH, Margit–GERGELY, Jenő [eds.], *Állam, egyházak, vallásgyakorlás Magyarországon, 1790–2005. II.*, História–MTA Történettudományi Intézete, Budapest 2005, 999–1006.; Resolution of the Political Committee of the MSZMP 22 July 1958. Published by: BALOGH, Margit–GERGELY, Jenő [eds.], *Állam, egyházak, vallásgyakorlás Magyarországon, 1790–2005. II.*, História–MTA Történettudományi Intézete, Budapest 2005, 1007–1013.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 1003.

<sup>11</sup> BALOGH, Margit, *Egyház és egyházpolitika a Kádár-korszakban* in: *Eszmélet* 9(1997/34), 69–79.

<sup>12</sup> KÖBEL, Szilvia, „Oszd meg és uralkodj!” *Az állam és az egyházak politikai, jogi és igazgatási kapcsolatai Magyarországon 1945–1989 között*, Rejtjel, Budapest 2005, 137.

<sup>13</sup> For the processing of the case, see: WIRTHNÉ DIERA, Bernadett, A „Fekete Hollók”-ügy, in: BELLAVICS, István–FÖLDVÁRYNÉ KISS, Réka [eds.], *Halálra ítélve. Papi sorsok '56 után*, Nemzeti Emlékezet Bizottsága–Országház Kiadó, Budapest 2018, 112–119.; WIRTHNÉ DIERA, Bernadett, A „Fekete Hollók” ügy. A Kádár-rendszer vélt vagy valós ellenfelei: a katolikus kisközösségek, *Rubicon* 38(2017/4), 78–81.; WIRTHNÉ DIERA, Bernadett, *Katolikus hitoktatás és elitképzés a Kádár-korszakban: az 1961-es "Fekete Hollók" fedőnevű ügy elemzése*, PhD-dolgozat, Budapest 2015; WIRTHNÉ DIERA, Bernadett, *The Situation of the Catholic Church and Youth Pastoral Care in Hungary: A Presentation of Operation "Black Ravens"*, in: KISS, Réka–HORVÁTH, Zsolt [eds.], *NEB Yearbook 2014–2015*, Committee of National Remembrance, Budapest 163–187.; WIRTHNÉ DIERA, Bernadett, *A Magyar Katolikus Egyház tagjai ellen folytatott perek 1956 után* -

The “Black Ravens” case is a typical example of the thinking behind the Kádár regime’s church policy, in that it took reprisal measures against those who sought to teach their faith. However, the scale and scope of the operation, the police actions and the extent of the subsequent judicial proceedings highlight the “Black Ravens” case, not only among the political trials against members of the clergy, but also among the “anti-state” crimes of the Kádár regime as a whole. The “Black Ravens” case can be considered the largest police action of the Kádár era: between 1956 and 1989, apart from reprisals against the uprising, there was no police action as widespread and as large in number as that regarding the “Black Ravens” case in 1961. Implementation of the operation began in February 1961, with searches being conducted nationwide and several arrests effected. In court proceedings held during the summer, most of those arrested on remand were sentenced to terms in prison. In addition to those convicted, there were several more who had their cases dropped, but whose lives were made difficult for years or decades by being removed from their jobs or, for example, being expelled from university. The size and complexity of these cases stand out from others of their kind in the Kádár era. The name (the codename of the action) was given by state security officials, indicating that it was a case regarding people who were part of the “black reaction”, or “clerical reaction”. By using the metaphor of the raven, the power of the negative images associated with this bird and the deterrent power of the image of the “bird of death” were certainly anticipated. By arresting and prosecuting the people who were involved in the “Black Ravens” case, the hand of power was extended to all those who persisted and educated the next generation of Catholics over the following decade and a half.

The case study of the so-called “Black Ravens” affair admits of multiple interpretive frameworks. Most centrally, it may be understood as a final, concerted effort by the communist regime to subjugate the Catholic Church through a demonstrative act of repression. The operation was marked by an unusual degree of speed, precision, and focus: state security forces moved decisively against the principal actors implicated in the case, carrying out arrests and initiating judicial proceedings between 1961 and 1962. A closer examination of the procedural timeline reveals that approximately six months separated the initial detentions from the delivery of verdicts – an exceptionally brief period that underscores the regime’s intention to carry out a tightly orchestrated and

*különös tekintettel a "Fekete Hollók"- ügyre in: BORS-BULBUK, Zsuzsanna–SOÓS, Viktor Attila [eds.], *Bíbor színnel jelzett vértanúság. Tanulmányok Mindszenty József bíboros, hercegprímás életéről és a magyar egyház-ügy 1945–1989 közötti helyzetéről*, Mindszentyneum, Zalaegerszeg 2022, 367–387.*

symbolically charged campaign. This concentrated act of state violence stands out as unparalleled not only in relation to ecclesiastical persecution during the Kádár era, but also within the broader context of post-1956 political repression. The *Black Ravens Affair* thus exemplifies the state's strategic use of legal and extralegal instruments to assert dominance over religious institutions, while simultaneously signaling to the wider society the limits of tolerated dissent.

In addition to its immediate significance, the “Black Ravens Affair” can be situated within the broader framework of post-1956 retribution, functioning as a distinct episode in the Kádár regime’s systematic consolidation of power. Following the Soviet intervention and the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution on 4 November 1956, János Kádár assumed leadership under highly precarious circumstances, requiring the simultaneous neutralization of multiple threats to the nascent regime. The first phase of power consolidation, generally dated between 1956 and 1959, focused primarily on suppressing participants in the uprising, alongside the political sidelining of radical left-wing critics who challenged Kádár from within the communist ideological spectrum. In the subsequent phase, the regime redirected its attention toward the Catholic Church, long regarded as a source of moral authority and latent resistance. Within this context, the *Black Ravens Affair* emerges as the most consequential and emblematic manifestation of anti-clerical repression during the early 1960s. Through targeted arrests, orchestrated trials, and symbolic public messaging, the regime sought not merely to intimidate religious actors, but to undermine the institutional integrity of the Church as a whole. This strategic assault on ecclesiastical independence must be viewed as an integral component of Kádár’s broader campaign to eliminate autonomous centers of influence within Hungarian society. The final stage in this process of regime consolidation occurred between 1961 and 1962, marked by the marginalization of orthodox Marxists within the ruling elite. With their removal, Kádár secured ideological hegemony within the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party, thereby completing the structural and political stabilization of his authority.

A third possible interpretive framework for the “Black Ravens Affair” concerns the extent to which Hungary’s State Security apparatus functioned as an autonomous and initiative-taking actor in the genesis and development of the case. Within this framework, some scholars have argued that the State Security services – seeking to assert their continued institutional relevance in the aftermath of the 1956 revolution – played an

active role in the fabrication or strategic construction of certain cases. As the intensity of revolutionary reprisals began to subside, investigative bodies found themselves with a diminishing volume of work, and in order to maintain their operational legitimacy and bureaucratic indispensability, they increasingly sought out or engineered new targets.

This hypothesis is supported by archival evidence indicating that, as early as 1957, State Security began the systematic surveillance and operational mapping of various ecclesiastical matters, which were later consolidated under the rubric of the *Black Ravens* case. In this sense, the security services had already amassed a substantial body of intelligence and potential incriminating material, which could be mobilized and framed into a major case as required. Within this interpretive context, the notion of case construction – or the purposeful creation of criminal narratives – becomes analytically significant. Although internal documents suggest that State Security aimed to launch the operation as early as 1958 – by arresting and initiating legal proceedings against key ecclesiastical figures – this did not materialize at the time, pointing to the limits of the organization's institutional autonomy. Rather than possessing the authority to act independently in politically sensitive domains, State Security remained subordinated to the strategic priorities of the ruling party. It was not until the summer of 1960, during a session of the Political Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP), that the political leadership formally authorized the commencement of the action. Only thereafter, and in alignment with the party's directive, were the accumulated materials operationalized, culminating in the coordinated arrests and trials carried out in 1961. This sequence of events underscores the fundamentally reactive – and politically contingent – nature of State Security's activities in this period, revealing the degree to which its initiatives were ultimately dependent upon high-level party sanction.

Between 1961 and 1963, several members of the clergy served prison sentences. Many were released as a result of the amnesty of 1963, but there were others who continued to serve their sentences, either because they were considered re-offenders or because they had been convicted of disloyalty.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> WIRTHNÉ DIERA, Bernadett, "Az egyházzal szembeni magatartás nem változott semmit." *Egyháziak elleni perek a hatvanas években, különös tekintettel a Soltész-Szigeti-ügyre* in: ERDŐS, Kristóf-SZULY, Rita-TABAJDI, Gábor-WIRTHNÉ DIERA, Bernadett [eds.], *Küzdelem a lelkekért. Pártállam és egyházak a hosszú hatvanas években*, Nemzeti Emlékezet Bizottsága Hivatala, Budapest 2023, 773–801.

## **The Process Leading to the 1964 Partial Agreement between the Holy See and the Hungarian State**

The 1960s brought a change and a softening of Hungary's international image. The Hungarian People's Republic saw one of the ways of freeing itself from international isolation (after the uprising of 1956) in opening up towards the Vatican. After the death of Pius XII, John XXIII's approach towards the Communist countries was first raised at the level of the Holy See and the Soviet Union. The Second Vatican Council not only redefined the mission of the Roman Catholic Church in the world, but also created an opportunity to seek direct contact with the countries of the Eastern Bloc and their Catholic believers, in the context of international détente.<sup>15</sup> With the prospect of a relationship that would benefit both sides, diplomatic rapprochement was initiated. For the Holy See, the slowly unfolding politics towards the East and the benefits it hoped to achieve made it desirable to take the first fumbling steps.

The first bishop from Western Europe to cross the Iron Curtain and arrive in Hungary was Archbishop Franz König of Vienna, who travelled to Budapest 18 April 1963 to meet Cardinal József Mindszenty, who had been living in voluntary captivity in his homeland since November 1956, at the American embassy in Budapest. König's visit could not have taken place, of course, if the Hungarian authorities had not allowed him to enter Hungary, but representatives of the Hungarian state and the Holy See emphasised that the archbishop entered Hungary as a private person.<sup>16</sup> The formal

<sup>15</sup> On the synod and the Holy See's policy towards the East, see: SZABÓ, Ferenc, *A Vatikán keleti politikája közelről: az Ostpolitik színe és visszája*, Jézus Társasága Magyarországi Rendtartománya–L'Harmattan, Budapest 2012; ADRIÁNYI, Gábor, *Die Ostpolitik des Vatikans 1958–1978 gegenüber Ungarn: Der Fall Kardinal Mindszenty*, Verlag Tibor Schäfer, Herne 2003; FEJÉRDY, András, *Az 1959–1965 közötti szentszéki–magyar kapcsolatok történetének forrásai* in: BALOGH, Margit [ed.], *Alattad a föld, fölötted az ég...Források, módszerek és útkeresések a történetírásban*, ELTE BTK Történelemtudományok Doktori Iskola, Budapest 2010, 51–65.; FEJÉRDY, András, *A vatikáni Ostpolitik. Historiográfiai status quo és kutatási perspektívák* in: BÁNKUTI, Gábor–NAGY, Mihály Zoltán [eds.], *Historiográfiai mérleg és az egyháztörténeti kutatások új irányai. Tanulmányok a Posticum 2015-ben és 2016-ban tartott egyháztörténeti konferenciáinak előadásaiból*, META, Pécs 2018, 25–39.; FEJÉRDY, András, *New Perspectives in Researching the Vatican's Eastern Policy* in: FEJÉRDY, András, [ed.], *The Vatican's Ostpolitik 1958–1978. Responsibility and Witness during John XXIII and Paul VI*, Bibliotheca Academiae Hungariae–Roma–Studia 5, Viella, Rome 2015, 9–16.; FEJÉRDY, András, *Magyarország és a II. Vatikáni Zsinat 1959–1965*, MTA Történettudományi Intézet, Budapest, 2011; FEJÉRDY, A., *Pressed by a Double Loyalty: Hungarian Attendance at the Second Vatican Council, 1959–1965*, Central European University Press, New York 2016.

<sup>16</sup> For more about the trip, see: FEJÉRDY, András, *König bíboros első találkozója Mindszenty Józseffel. A bécsi érsek látogatása az Egyesült Államok budapesti követségén (1963. április 18.)* in: Soós, Viktor Attila [ed.], *Isten szolgája. Emlékkonferencia Mindszenty József bíboros életéről és munkásságáról*, Antológia, Lakitelek 2010, 79–108.; CASAROLI, Agostino, *A türelem vértanúsága. A Szentszék és a kommunista államok (1963–1989)*, Szent István Társulat, Budapest 2001, 42–43.

establishment of relations took place shortly afterwards, when Archbishop Agostino Casaroli met Bishop Endre Hamvas of Csanád and the apostolic administrator of Eger, Pál Brezanóczy, in Vienna. After mutual briefings and the presentation of view points, ongoing negotiations began with a view to reaching some sort of agreement. The first phase of negotiations took place in Budapest between 7 and 9 May 1963. The mood of the negotiations was positively influenced by the Pope's encyclical *Pacem in Terris* 11 April, but the death of John XXIII in June could have blocked the continuation of the talks. Soon after his election, Pope Paul VI decided to continue the negotiations, which allowed the talks to resume in Rome between 1 and 6 October 1963. In the following year, after two rounds of negotiation (in Budapest, from 14 to 23 March 1964, and in Rome, from 9 to 14 June 1964), the representatives of the Holy See and the Hungarian People's Republic signed a partial agreement in Budapest on 15 September 1964.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Partial Agreement and its Impact**

The agreement is described as partial because the parties were only able to reach agreement on three of the issues covered by the negotiations. They agreed on the mechanism for the appointment of bishops, the issue of the oath of allegiance to the Hungarian People's Republic and its constitution, and the functioning of the Papal Hungarian Institute. The above issues were summarised and signed in a document (*atto*).

The unresolved issues and the bases for future negotiations were collected in a record (*protocollo*) and listed in twelve points the issues raised by the parties during the negotiation process but not resolved: the filling of the episcopal sees of dioceses and the method of appointing bishops; the personal status of certain bishops; the oath of allegiance to the Hungarian People's Republic and its constitution; freedom of action and limitations (the institution of a ministerial commissioner, the freedom of ordinaries to communicate with the Holy See); the case of arrested and suspended priests and monks; the question of seminaries for priests; the situation of the monastic orders and congregations; the ques-

<sup>17</sup> The partial agreement is published in Hungarian and Italian in: BALOGH, Margit–FEJÉRDY, András–SZABÓ, Csaba, *Az 1964-es magyar-szentszéki részleges megállapodás*, in: *Archívnet* 18(2018/6) URL: <https://www.archivnet.hu/az-1964-es-magyar-szentszeki-reszleges-megallapodas> Last download: 20.05.2025.; FEJÉRDY, András, *A Szentszék és a Magyarország közötti 1964. évi részleges megállapodás* in: BÁNKUTI, Gábor–BARÁTH, Magdolna–RAINER M., János [ed.], *Megértő történelem. Tanulmányok a hatvanéves Gyarmati György tiszteletére*, L'Harmattan, Budapest 2011, 195–209.; FEJÉRDY, András, *L'Intesa semplice del 1964 tra la Santa Sede e l'Ungheria* in: *Rivista di studi ungheresi* XI (2012/11), 96–111.

tion of religious education in schools; the freedom of pastoral care; the civil activity of the clergy; the problems of the Hungarian emigrant clergy and the question of the Pontifical Hungarian Ecclesiastical Institute; and finally, the “case” of Cardinal Archbishop József Mindszenty.<sup>18</sup> According to the (Western European Hungarian) Conference of Chief Pastors: “*the unresolved but on the record position of the Holy See is a quietly reiterated but essentially solemn protest against the unjust condemnation of József Mindszenty, the internment of bishops, the restriction of episcopal jurisdiction, unjust interference in the internal affairs of the church, the suppression of faith education, the maintenance of the clerical peace movement and other injustices.*”<sup>19</sup> From the topics discussed, it is clear that the Holy See had relevant information on the situation of the church in Hungary and sought to keep under the surface all issues that could improve the situation of the faithful in Hungary.

No clear answer can be given as to why the partial agreement was not made public. In fact, neither the document nor the record was officially published, so the public at the time did not have a clear picture of what exactly the representatives of the Hungarian state and the Holy See had agreed on, and only the fact of the agreement itself was known. This kind of ignorance certainly contributed greatly to the rather mixed perception of the partial agreement at the time. On 12 of September, 1964, three days before the signing, the Hungarian Telegraphic Office prepared a draft commentary, communiqué and information paper on the negotiations and the signed agreement, which was then published in the Hungarian press, essentially without any change.<sup>20</sup> For the contemporaries, the fact that the Holy See was negotiating with a country belonging to the Communist Bloc was already of great importance. Although the full text of the agreement was not made available to the public at the time, some information did reach the believers. For example, regarding the swearing in of bishops, Imre József Szigeti, a Dominican monk who himself had been released from prison in 1963<sup>21</sup>, considered it an achievement “... *that the agreement includes that bishops take the oath as it is proper for them to do, so it does not apply to practices contrary to the teaching of the church*”<sup>22</sup>,

<sup>18</sup> BALOGH, Margit – FEJÉRDY, András – SZABÓ, Csaba, *Az 1964-es magyar–szentszéki részleges megállapodás*, URL: <https://www.archivnet.hu/az-1964-es-magyar-szentszeki-reszleges-megallapodas> Last download: 20.05.2025.

<sup>19</sup> SZABÓ, Csaba, *A Szentszék és a Magyar Népköztársaság kapcsolatai a hatvanas években*, Szent István Társulat – Magyar Országos Levéltár, Budapest 2005, 226–230.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 202–204.

<sup>21</sup> SZAKOLCZAI, Attila, *Az amnesztia*, in: *Beszélő II* (2012/5) URL: <http://beszelo.c3.hu/cikkek/az-amnesztia> Last download: 20.05.2025.

<sup>22</sup> ÁLLAMBIZTONSÁGI SZOLGÁLATOK TÖRTÉNETI LEVÉLTÁRA, Hálózati, operatív és vizsgálati iratok (= 3.), a központi operatív nyilvántartást végző egységek által kezelt dossziék (= 3.1.), Munka dossziék (M-dossziék) (=3.1.2.) M-35968., 39. »Berényi«'s report, 18February 1965.

however, he realistically saw that “*the agreement therefore has no positive effect on exercising religious freedom. It is limited to such a narrow field that it has no practical significance at all.*”<sup>23</sup> The senior pastors working in the West, namely József Zágon (Rome), Miklós Pfeiffer (Fribourg), György Ádám (Munich), László P. Varga SJ (Brussels), József Vecsey (Paris) and Béla Ispánki (London), drew attention to the significance of the partial agreement in principle: “*The so-called agreement is of great importance in principle. The Hungarian government thereby recognised the jurisdiction of the Holy See in Hungarian ecclesiastical matters.*”<sup>24</sup>

For the Holy See, however, the undoubted success was the opportunity to settle the often unresolved diocesan governance after the break in formal diplomatic relations, as certain bishops had been obstructed, that is, removed by force (Bishops József Mindszenty of Esztergom, József Pétery of Vác and Bertalan Badalik of Veszprém), and the remaining elderly ordinaries were unable to run their dioceses effectively. The partial agreement brought about a fundamental change in this respect, with the compromise that the Holy See could only appoint a bishop against whose person the Hungarian state had no objections. This is how appointments of bishops and archbishops were made after the signing of the agreement. Pope Paul VI appointed Endre Hamvas archbishop of Kalocsa, the apostolic governor of Eger, Pál Brezanóczy as titular bishop of Rotaria, József Ijjas as apostolic governor of Csanád and titular bishop of Tagarata, József Cserháti as apostolic governor of Pécs and titular bishop of Melz and József Bánk as associate bishop of Győr and titular bishop of Materiana, as well as confirming the appointment of József Winkler as assistant bishop of Szombathely and titular bishop of Dadima. The consecration of the new bishops took place on 28 October 1964 in St. Stephen’s Basilica, Budapest.<sup>25</sup> Negotiations and the maintenance of relations made it possible to appoint ten new bishops and apostolic administrators in 1969, thus completing the Hungarian hierarchy, that is, filling all the episcopal sees, for the first time since 1945.

As a result of the partial agreement, the Papal Hungarian Institute was placed under the supervision and direction of the Hungarian episcopate, and thus, also for the first time after 1945, it became possible for Hungarian seminary students to travel to Rome to prepare and deepen their priestly vocation and theological knowledge. After nearly

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>24</sup> SZABÓ 241.

<sup>25</sup> SÁGI, György, *Ötös püspökszentelés Budapesten és Hamvas Endre érseki beiktatása Kalocsán (1964)* in: *Magyar Sion* 14(2020/1), 93–110.

two decades of isolation, the fact that Hungarian priests could gain insight into the life of the Universal Church through their studies abroad, and that the Hungarian Catholic Church and its followers could be integrated into the life of the Universal Church, held great potential. However, state surveillance wove a tight net around students studying in Rome, not only observing them, but forcing some of them to cooperate with the state security forces.<sup>26</sup>

### Continued Ecclesiastical Persecution

The agreement was not unanimously well received by the clergy and the faithful in the country, with many of them believing that it did not reduce the pressure on the church. This finding is supported by the fact that, looking at the 1960s, a new power was beginning to emerge. We can observe a more differentiated attitude of state power, not independently of the realistic party directives of 1958. Proceedings against clergymen continued. In 1963, the Cistercian monk Illés Horpácsi was convicted, and also had to serve his previous sentence. Ferenc Csonka, who was convicted in the “Black Ravens” case in 1961, was tried again in 1964, this time for illegal border crossing. These could be treated as isolated incidents, but less than three months after the signing of the partial agreement, news of the mass arrests of priests and monks exploded in the church community. Such a spectacular step had not been taken since the amnesty of 1963, and the newly signed agreement left many people puzzled. The priests of the Regnum Marianum movement and the Jesuit monks were brought to the spotlight at a symbolic moment, 8 December 1964.<sup>27</sup> This feast day held a special significance for the Catholic faithful (and particularly for those belonging to the Regnum), because on that day the Catholic Church celebrated the immaculate conception of Mary, and the Regnum people showed their devotion to God. The Regnum fathers did not risk meeting their communities on this day, so they alone made a secret pilgrimage to Máriaremete, where they prayed and celebrated together:

<sup>26</sup> FEJÉRDY, A., *Il regime comunista e il Pontificio Istituto Ecclesiastico Ungherese a Roma (1959–1975)* in: *Sacra Doctrina* 59(2014/2), 256–280.; FEJÉRDY, András, *Allam(biztonság)i játszmák a Pápai Magyar Intézet átvétele körül* in: SOÓS, Viktor Attila – SZABÓ, Csaba – SZIGETI, László [eds.], *Egyházüldözés és egyházüldözők a Kádár-korszakban*, Szent István Társulat – Luther Kiadó, Budapest 2010, 361–374.

<sup>27</sup> On that day, Fathers László Emódi, István Keglevich, László Rózsavölgyi, István Thiry, József Hagyó and Alajos Werner were arrested; Father Sándor Somogyi was arrested only on 26 January 1965. EMÓDI, László, *A Regnum Marianum története 1900–1970*, Regnum Marianum, Budapest 2016, 140.

“On 8 December, 1964, we met at 6 o’clock in the evening at the terminus of the tram station Húvösvölgy. It was dark. It was winter. Snow was falling. We went [on] “the lower road” in pairs. Not in a line, but rather separated. There must have been eight or ten of us. Not many; also, not few. We walked along talking quietly. The area around the church was deserted. We pulled up at the back entrance. Near the Sanctuary. We prayed the rosary. We sang *Our Lady of Mary*. We said goodbye to each other. [...] This day may have been our poorest Holiday. There was no light, no organ playing. There was no sermon. The wind blew and we prayed in the dark. [...] 8 December, 1964 was certainly the most glorious holiday in our history!”<sup>28</sup>, and it was the night-time house search and arrest that made the day a celebration, because it crowned the pastoral work with the youth that the priests of the Regnum had been undertaking relentlessly since their release in 1963.<sup>29</sup>

The news of the arrests reached some of the ecclesiastical public, so József Imre Szigeti also became aware of it and reported it in detail to a State Security agent.<sup>30</sup> The report mentions names (László Emődi, Alajos Werner, Elemér Rózsa SJ and József Dombi SJ) and numbers (thirty house searches) of people who were affected by the arrests and searches, but Szigeti asserted that the police action certainly reached a wider circle. The report is also interesting because the Secret Service officer’s assessment revealed that Szigeti’s apartment was bugged, and in this way not only the Dominican monk but also the agent were checked.<sup>31</sup> The general opinion of the arrests was that the aim was to intimidate people and to break down any optimism following the partial agreement.<sup>32</sup> The double standard towards the arrested priests was also described by the Benedictine monks Szigeti and Olofsson Placid, when they referred to the fact that the state did not consider priests or monks who did not have a clerical position as belonging to the Church, while the Holy See considered all ordained priests as members of the clerical order.<sup>33</sup> That is why the Communist Hungarian state did not report on church prisoners, and only on those imprisoned for political reasons.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*. 129.

<sup>29</sup> DOBSZAY, János, *Így – vagy sehogy! Fejezetek a Regnum Marianum életéből*, Regnum Marianum, Budapest 1991, 106.

<sup>30</sup> ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-35968. 39. »Berényi«’s report, 18February 1965.

<sup>31</sup> ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-35968. 41. »Berényi«’s report, 18February 1965.

<sup>32</sup> »Berényi«’s reports show that this view is also shared by Béla Haray, József Szigeti and Placid Olofsson. ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-35968. 33. »Berényi«’s report, 16February 1965; ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-35968. 39. »Berényi«’s report, 18February 1965; ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-35968. 66–73. »Berényi«’s report, 19March 1965.

<sup>33</sup> ÁBTL 3.1.9. V-151398/2. 48. Imre Szigeti’s suspect interrogation record, 4August 1965. p. 48.; ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-35968. 66–73. »Berényi«’s report, 19March 1965.

Nevertheless, the issue of arrested and imprisoned priests was constantly on the agenda of the negotiations between the Holy See and the Hungarian government.<sup>34</sup> Pastors in exile shared similar views, but stressed that “... *what this means in practice is shown by the recent fact that after the arrests in December, the Holy See asked the Hungarian envoy for clarification on the reasons for the arrests. The answer that those arrested were not “priests” because they did not have a licence to practise is of course unsatisfactory, but the fact that the Holy See is interested is a significant step. So far, this has not been possible.*”<sup>35</sup>

The year 1965 was of great importance, as in that year court proceedings were held against Jesuits (Elemér Rózsa and others), Dominicans (József Szigeti), Cistercians (Piusz Halász), and the fathers of the Regnum (László Emődi, István Keglevich, László Rózsavölgyi, István Thiry, József Hagyó, Alajos Werner and Sándor Somogyi). In 1966, Ödön Lénárd and Ágnes Tímár were arrested again and convicted. In 1971, the Regnum was prosecuted for the third time (Frigyes Hagemann, Lajos Túry, Sándor Somogyi, István Katona, Balázs Duskár and Veronika Hegyi). At the same time, the repressive measures were accompanied by an intensification of state security activities that permeated and disrupted communities, hidden from the public, and which ultimately undermined solidarity among members. During this period, visible measures of church policy were associated with the State Office for Church Affairs, but concrete decisions were made in continuous consultation with the state security forces.

### Summary

When examining the persecution of the Church during the Kádár era, several observations can be made. The most important of these is that, despite the partial agreement with the Vatican, the visible and most violent forms of persecution of the church did not abate. The state security forces deployed a wide range of intelligence tools and methods against clergymen who practised and expressed their faith, but in addition to the means of infiltration and disruption, litigation remained the dominant tool in the 1960s. Another important feature of the lawsuits is that among the persons brought to trial, we find only rarely, if at all, any who were convicted for

<sup>34</sup> BALOGH – FEJÉRDY – SZABÓ 2018.

<sup>35</sup> SZABÓ 241.

the first time by the regime. The majority of them were on trial for the second or third time, and thus they demonstrated the price of confessing their faith in a society that was doing its utmost to eradicate religious practice.

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## The Martyrdom of Saint John the Baptist according to the Gospel of Mark: Three Motifs

### 1. Introduction

In this study, I focus on the story of the martyrdom of Saint John the Baptist based on the Gospel of Mark (Mk 6:14-29). The literature on this section and its individual parts is extremely rich, so I will now focus my attention on only three selected motifs. The first is related to the identity of Jesus, the second is related to Herod's birthday feast, while the third takes into account the inter- and intratextual connections occurring in the text. First, I present the figure of Saint John the Baptist based on the teachings of the Holy Scriptures and the Catholic Church, then I examine the three motifs, and finally I summarize my work.<sup>1</sup>

The figure of Saint John the Baptist – as we will see – has an outstanding theological significance. In the Roman rite of the Catholic Church, we celebrate Saint John the Baptist on two days: on June 24, his birth is celebrated as Solemnity, while on August 29, his martyrdom is commemorated as an Obligatory Memorial<sup>2</sup>, and at every Mass, the priest presents the broken Host, referring to his words: “Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. (...)”<sup>3</sup> (cf. Jn 1:29). Furthermore, “it is generally and correctly believed that by recounting the death of Mark the Baptist, he refers to the death of Jesus”<sup>4</sup>. Yet, I have the impression that the person and teaching of the Baptist

<sup>1</sup> In my work, I use the Holy Scriptures available on the website of the United States Conference of Bishops (<https://bible.usccb.org/bible>), the Greek text is based on the Nestle-Aland Greek-Latin 28th critical edition, while the Latin text is based on the *Nova Vulgata* (hereinafter: NVg) available on the Vatican website ([https://www.vatican.va/archive/bible/nova\\_vulgata/documents/nova-vulgata\\_index\\_lt.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/bible/nova_vulgata/documents/nova-vulgata_index_lt.html)). For grammatical analyses, I used the website of the St. Jerome Catholic Bible Society presenting the Greek New Testament ([www.ujszov.hu](http://www.ujszov.hu)).

<sup>2</sup> [https://tar.liturgia.hu/Naptar/LN\\_2024-2025.pdf](https://tar.liturgia.hu/Naptar/LN_2024-2025.pdf) (last viewed: 01.04.2025).

<sup>3</sup> *The Order of Mass*, 39, <https://www.catholicbishops.ie/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Order-of-Mass.pdf> (last viewed: 23.01.2026).

<sup>4</sup> ΔόκA, Zoltán, *Márk evangéliuma*, Hévizgyörki Evangélikus Egyházközség, Veszprém 2005, 125.

are little present in theological research in the Hungarian language. I trust that my work can contribute somewhat to the “rediscovery” of Saint John the Baptist and, ultimately, to getting closer to the Lamb of God.

## 2. The Figure of Saint John the Baptist in Scripture and Catholic Theology

According to Zsigmond Varga’s Greek-Hungarian Dictionary of the New Testament, the name John (Ἰωάννης/Ἰωάνης) means: ’JHWH is gracious’<sup>5</sup>, while Herbert Haag translates the meaning of the name as ’Yahweh has mercy’<sup>6</sup>. Based on the Holy Scriptures, the life and work of John can be briefly summarized as follows<sup>7</sup>:

- 1) The angel Gabriel appeared to the priest Zechariah in the Temple in Jerusalem and announced the birth of a son. This was considered a miracle because both Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, were already old. According to the angel’s words, the son to be born would be a special person.<sup>8</sup> However, Zechariah was struck dumb because of his unbelief.
- 2) John met Jesus before his birth, when Mary visited Elizabeth.<sup>9</sup> On the eighth day after John’s birth, when they wanted to perform the circumcision ceremony, Elizabeth and Zechariah – according to the angel’s words – wanted to name their child John. At that time, “*immediately his [Zechariah’s] mouth was opened, his tongue freed, and he spoke blessing God*” (Lk 1:64) and prayed the *Benedictus* (Lk 1:68-79). After that, we have only brief information about John’s childhood.<sup>10</sup> Based on this, it can be assumed, but cannot be clearly proven, that John spent part or all of his childhood among the Qumran community.

<sup>5</sup> art. Ἰωάννης, ου, ό in: VARGA, Zsigmond J., *Újszövetségi görög-magyar szótár*, Református Zsinati Iroda Sajtóosztálya, Budapest 1992, 480.

<sup>6</sup> art. János in: HAAG, Herbert [ed.] *Bibliai lexikon*, Szent István Társulat, Budapest 1989, 783.

<sup>7</sup> KOCSSIS, Imre, *Bevezetés az Újszövetség könyveibe*, Szent István Kézikönyvek 18, Szent István Társulat, Budapest 2019, 74-75.

<sup>8</sup> „Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall name him John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of [the] Lord. He will drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will be filled with the holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb, and he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of fathers toward children and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to prepare a people fit for the Lord.” (Lk 1:13-17).

<sup>9</sup> „When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit” (Lk 1:41).

<sup>10</sup> „The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the desert until the day of his manifestation to Israel.” (Lk 1:80).

3) “Reference to John is the first point of convergence among the canonical Gospels, all of which give a somewhat similar account of his person, preaching, and activity, though varying in detail.”<sup>11</sup> The characteristics of John’s ministry include: a wilderness preaching that calls for repentance and conversion; a one-time, eschatological baptism in the Jordan and the formation of a circle of disciples (e.g. Mk 1:2-8; Mt 3:1-12; Lk 3:1-18; Jn 1:19-36). Based on John’s ministry, it is clear that he was not a member of the Essene community operating in Qumran, but a prophetic figure who was independent of them.

4) Herod the tetrarch imprisoned John (e.g. Lk 3:20) and had him beheaded (e.g. Mk 6:27).

5) According to the Acts of the Apostles, the circle of John’s disciples continued to function after John’s death (e.g. Acts 18:25). Within the contemporary Jewish religion, which had several schools of thought, the Baptist’s circle of disciples survived, continuing the work of the founder and believing that they recognized the promised Messiah in John.

The figure of Saint John the Baptist is also briefly dealt with in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (hereinafter: CCC). According to this, “*St. John the Baptist is the Lord’s immediate precursor or forerunner, sent to prepare his way. »Prophet of the Most High«, John surpasses all the prophets, of whom he is the last. He inaugurates the Gospel, already from his mother’s womb welcomes the coming of Christ, and rejoices in being »the friend of the bridegroom«, whom he points out as »the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world«. Going before Jesus »in the spirit and power of Elijah«, John bears witness to Christ in his preaching, by his Baptism of conversion, and through his martyrdom.*”<sup>12</sup> (CCC 523).

The role of John is indicated by the CCC in three words at the beginning of the brief summary of the teaching concerning him (CCC 717-720<sup>13</sup>): “precursor, proph-

<sup>11</sup> SHULER, Philip L., art. *John the Baptist* in: ACHTEMEIER, Paul J. [ed.], *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, Harper, San Francisco 1985, 501. „He [John] is identified with the beginning of Jesus’ ministry and understood as the forerunner to Jesus the Messiah.”

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_\\_\\_P1L.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P1L.HTM) (last viewed: 18.03.2025).

<sup>13</sup> „»There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.« John was »filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb« by Christ himself, whom the Virgin Mary had just conceived by the Holy Spirit. Mary’s visitation to Elizabeth thus became a visit from God to his people. (CCC 717). John is »Elijah (who) must come.« The fire of the Spirit dwells in him and makes him the forerunner of the coming Lord. In John, the precursor, the Holy Spirit completes the work of »[making] ready a people prepared for the Lord.« (CCC 718). John the Baptist is »more than a prophet.« In him, the Holy Spirit concludes his speaking through the prophets. John completes the cycle of prophets begun by Elijah. He proclaims the imminence

et, and baptist”<sup>14</sup>. John is inseparable from Jesus Christ, whose forerunner he is <sup>15</sup>. It is worth noting here that according to the Gospel of Matthew, the first sentence of John’s and Jesus’ preaching is exactly the same: “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!*” (Mt 3:2; 4:17). John’s prophetic character is revealed in his clothing (“*John was clothed in camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist.*” Mk 1:6) – which is reminiscent of Elijah (2Kgs 1:8) –, and in the content of his preaching (Mt 3:7-10).<sup>16</sup> The place of John’s ministry as a baptist can be determined based on the Gospel of John, when we read in connection with John’s testimony: “*This happened in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing*” (Jn 1:28). John probably performed the baptism here at a ford that had previously been used by the conquering Israelites (Jos 3-4), Elijah (2Kgs 2:1-3), and Elisha (2Kgs 2:15).<sup>17</sup>

### **3. Three Motifs in Connection with the Martyrdom of Saint John the Baptist (Mk 6:14-29)**

The account of the martyrdom of Saint John the Baptist is found in Chapter 6 of the Gospel of Mark. It is worth considering the structure of the chapter, that is, the canonical context that surrounds our passage.<sup>18</sup> This approach and aspect regularly appear in the

of the consolation of Israel; he is the »voice« of the Consoler who is coming. As the Spirit of truth will also do, John »came to bear witness to the light.« In John’s sight, the Spirit thus brings to completion the careful search of the prophets and fulfills the longing of the angels. »He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. and I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.... Behold, the Lamb of God.« (CCC 719). Finally, with John the Baptist, the Holy Spirit begins the restoration to man of »the divine likeness,« prefiguring what he would achieve with and in Christ. John’s baptism was for repentance; baptism in water and the Spirit will be a new birth.” (CCC 720). [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_\\_\\_P23.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P23.HTM) (last viewed: 18.03.2025).

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_\\_\\_P23.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P23.HTM) (last viewed: 18.03.2025).

<sup>15</sup> Herbert Haag notes that Zechariah saw his son John as the forerunner of the promised Savior. art. *Keresztelő János* in: HAAG, Herbert [ed.] *Bibliai lexikon*, Szent István Társulat, Budapest 1989, 953.

<sup>16</sup> BÜHLMANN, Walter, *Hogyan élt Jézus, A hét szabad művészet könyvtára*, Corvinus Kiadó, [no place] 1997<sup>2</sup>, 36.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 37.

<sup>18</sup> I present only two scholarly positions on the division of Mark 6. Simon T. László OSB’s division: (1) Mk 6:1-13 Jesus’ rejection and the selection (sending) of the Twelve; (2) Mk 6:14-29 John’s passion story; (3) Mk 6:30-44 the first multiplication of the loaves; (4) Mk 6:45-56 Jesus walks on water. Újszövetség, Pannonhalmi Főapátság, [no place] 2015<sup>3</sup>, 151. Levente Balázs Martos gives a similar, but slightly different, division of Mark 6. (1) Mk 6:1-6a Jesus in his own city; (2) Mk 6:6b-13 the sending out of the Twelve; (3) Mk 6:14-29 Herod, Jesus and the Baptist; (4) Mk 6:30-34 Jesus, the disciples and the crowd; (5) Mk 6:35-43 the multiplication of the loaves; (6) Mk 6:45-52 Jesus walks on water; (7) Mk 6:53-56 the actions of Jesus. MARTOS Levente Balázs, *Márk evangéliuma*, Szent István Bibliakommentárok 6, Szent István Társulat, Budapest 2014, 6.

relevant literature. Several scholarly solutions have been developed for the structural division of the Mark text describing the martyrdom of Saint John the Baptist.<sup>19</sup> Some authors discuss the passage of Mk 6:14-16 as separate from the section on the martyrdom of the Baptist,<sup>20</sup> while others include it together with it.<sup>21</sup>

According to Zoltán Dóka, the passage about the martyrdom of Saint John the Baptist (Mk 6:17-29) deserves attention from three perspectives. One of Mark's goals was to be able to express the time that passed between the sending of the disciples and their return, and to offer the right orientation regarding the identity of Christ, and finally to draw attention to the essential element of the Church's proclamation of faith after the resurrection.<sup>22</sup> This is the only passage in the second canonical gospel in which Jesus is not mentioned either by name or in fact.<sup>23</sup> Of course – as we will see – a close and clear theological connection can be observed between the pericope and the person of Jesus.<sup>24</sup>

A regularly recurring element in the literature is the connection and discrepancy between the gospel story about the martyrdom of Saint John the Baptist and the account of Flavius Josephus. The first-century Jewish historian, in his book *History of the Jews*, describes in XVIII 5 that a war broke out between Herod Antipas and Aretas because the Jewish ruler had rejected his wife, the daughter of Aretas, in order to marry Herodias. The armed conflict brought Aretas a complete victory, and Flavius mentions John in this connection.<sup>25</sup> According to the text of the martyrdom of Saint John the Baptist preserved in

<sup>19</sup> Below I present just three suggestions. **I.** Mk 6:14-16 transition; main part: (1) Mk 6:17-20 arrest and imprisonment of John; (2) Mk 6:21-28 Herod's birthday party; Mk 6:29 burial of John. MARCUS, Joel, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible 27, Doubleday, New York 2000, 398. **II.** Mk 6:14-16 introduction; Mk 6:17-20 The arrest and imprisonment of Saint John the Baptist: (1) Mk 6:17-18 The arrest of John; (2) Mk 6:19-20 The imprisonment of John; Mk 6:21-29 Herod's banquet and the execution of John: (1) Mk 6:21-22a Herod's banquet and the girl's dance; (2) Mk 6:22b-25 Herod's oath and Herodias/the girl's request; (3) Mk 6:26-28 John's execution in prison; Mk 6:29 John's burial (epilogue). GNILKA, Joachim, *Márk*, Agapé Kft., Szeged 2000, 331-332. **III.** Mk 6:14-16 introduction; Mk 6:17-20 arrest and imprisonment of John; Mk 6:21-26 Herod's party; Mk 6:27-29 death and burial of John. STEIN, Robert H., *Mark*, Baker Exegetical Commentar on the New Testament, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids 2008, 299.

<sup>20</sup> E.g. DÉR-JORSITS (2018); DÓKA (2005), who, however, notes that "this short passage is significant for its entire context. Therefore, we discuss it separately, although it is textually closely connected to the narrative of the death of the Baptist". DÓKA Zoltán, *Márk evangéliuma*, Hévízgyörki Evangélikus Egyházközség, Veszprém 2005, 125.

<sup>21</sup> E.g. Guelich (1989); Van Linden (1993); Miller (2004); Martos (2014); Simon (2015<sup>3</sup>).

<sup>22</sup> DÓKA 128.

<sup>23</sup> According to Robert H. Stein, even Mark 1:4-8 is like that. STEIN, Robert H., *Mark*, Baker Exegetical Commentar on the New Testament, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids 2008, 298.

<sup>24</sup> DÉR, Katalin-JORSITS, Attila, *Beavatás: Márk evangéliuma*, Kairosz Kiadó, Budapest 2018, 166.

<sup>25</sup> FLAVIUS, Josephus, *A zsidók története (XI.-XX. könyv)*, Gondolat, Budapest 1966 (ford.: Révay József), 393-395. „Now some of the Jews thought that the destruction of Herod's army came from God, and that very justly, as a punishment of what he did against John, that was called the Baptist: for Herod slew him, who was a good man (...). Now when [many] others came in crowds about him, for they were very greatly

the Gospel of Mark, Herod Antipas confronted John, who criticized his marriage to Herodias on religious grounds, while Flavius Josephus writes about purely technical reasons for power. Both approaches sought to record the motivation for Herod's actions regarding John. The interpretations of Mark and Josephus may in fact be valid at the same time, and we do not necessarily have to contrast them with each other.<sup>26</sup> Robert H. Stein draws attention to the fact that during the interrogations of Jesus and Paul, political accusations also appear after religious accusations.<sup>27</sup>

### 3.1. The Identity of Jesus<sup>28</sup>

Zoltán Dóka gives the section of Mk 6:14-16 the title "Who is Jesus?"<sup>29</sup>, which briefly and aptly expresses the true content of the text. According to Philip Van Linden, Mark might want to prepare the believers for the death of the Lord with this narrative, just as John the Baptist's first appearance in his work prepared the coming of Jesus Christ (Mk 1:2-11).<sup>30</sup>

The Herod mentioned in the Mark text is none other than one of the sons of Herod the Great, who was the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea between 4BC and 39AD. The designation "king" in the text can in no way be considered accurate historical data, since Herod Antipas could have ruled by the grace of the occupying Romans and was not a king. There may be two reasons why the text incorrectly calls Herod Antipas a king several times. One is that Mark simply does not know the exact title of the ruler, while the other is that Mark uses a title for Antipas that people used in everyday life for their ruler. In Mk 6:14 it is not entirely clear whether Herod heard about the miracles performed by

moved [or pleased] by hearing his words, Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion, [for they seemed ready to do any thing he should advise,] thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties, by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it would be too late. Accordingly he was sent a prisoner, out of Herod's suspicious temper, to Macherus, the castle I before mentioned, and was there put to death. Now the Jews had an opinion that the destruction of this army was sent as a punishment upon Herod, and a mark of God's displeasure to him" (XVIII 5, 2). <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2848/2848-h/2848-h.htm#link182HCH0005> (Last viewed: 22.01.2026).

<sup>26</sup> KOC SIS, Imre, *Bevezetés az Újszövetség könyveibe*, Szent István Kézikönyvek 18, Szent István Társulat, Budapest 2019, 74.

<sup>27</sup> STEIN 302, 3. footnote.

<sup>28</sup> „King Herod heard about it, for his fame had become widespread, and people were saying, »John the Baptist has been raised from the dead; that is why mighty powers are at work in him.« Others were saying, »He is Elijah«; still others, »He is a prophet like any of the prophets.« But when Herod learned of it, he said, »It is John whom I beheaded. He has been raised up.«" (Mk 6:14-16).

<sup>29</sup> DÓKA 124.

<sup>30</sup> VAN LINDEN, Philip, *Evangélium Szent Márk szerint: A Colledgeville-i Biblia Kommentár eredeti szövege magyar fordításban*, Szegedi Bibliakommentár-Újszövetség 2, Korda-Bencés Kiadó, Kecskemét-Pannonhalma 1993, 37.

Jesus or the activities of the disciples sent by Jesus? The current canonical text supports the latter.<sup>31</sup> The fact that Herod learns about the activities of the disciples and yet wonders about the identity of Jesus raises the possibility that our passage originally showed a more direct connection with Jesus. Of course, the activities of the disciples could be considered the activities of Jesus himself, since he was their master and he sent them.<sup>32</sup>

Herod Antipas encounters three opinions about who Jesus is. These considerations attempt to connect Jesus with the end times, but each point is inaccurate. The readers of the Gospel knew exactly that Jesus could not be the resurrected John, since they were contemporaries. At this point, Robert H. Stein asks the question: how could the opinion arise about Jesus that he was actually John who had returned from the dead? In search of an answer, the author refers to two scholarly opinions. One is that John's spirit descended on Jesus, just as Elijah's spirit descended on Elisha (France 2002). According to the other (Hooker 1991), "Herod was simply saying in exasperation, »This is John the Baptist all over again«"<sup>33</sup>. In Stein's opinion, it is worth mentioning the text of Mk 8:28 in this connection.<sup>34</sup> In any case, the theological aspects of Elijah are first implicitly (Mk 1:2-8) and then explicitly (Mk 9:11-13) linked to John. Jesus stretches the traditional biblical framework of prophecy, so that it is unable to express his person and work.<sup>35</sup>

The three aspects are therefore as follows:

1) »*John the Baptist has been raised from the dead; that is why mighty powers are at work in him.*« (Mk 6:14). There is no Gospel record of John the Baptist performing miracles. The appearance of miracle-working power in the supposed John can perhaps be interpreted as a consequence of his resurrection.<sup>36</sup> In this Christological interpretation, the figure of John the Baptist is actually the dominant one, on whom the person and work of Jesus depend.<sup>37</sup> According to Joachim Gnilka, the miracle-working Jesus presumably recalled the miracle-working John, who clearly made a deep impression on the masses of the Jewish people.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>31</sup> MARCUS, Joel, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible 27, Doubleday, New York 2000, 392.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 398.

<sup>33</sup> STEIN 301.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> MARCUS 399.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 393.

<sup>37</sup> DÓKA 126.

<sup>38</sup> GNILKA, Joachim, *Márk*, Agapé Kft., Szeged 2000, 333-334.

2) »*He is Elijah.*« (Mk 6:15). The early Church clearly identified John the Baptist with Elijah, but this conviction is not yet present in the opinion preserved in this verse. In this second opinion, Jesus also only has a secondary role, since Elijah really takes center stage.<sup>39</sup> The opinion itself goes back to the prophecy of the prophet Malachi. “*Now I am sending to you Elijah the prophet, Before the day of the LORD comes, the great and terrible day*” (Mal 3:23). The basis of this is of course the rapture of Elijah into heaven.<sup>40</sup>

3) »*He is a prophet like any of the prophets.*« (Mk 6:15). There were people of prophetic character in the time of Jesus, but in connection with him there is also a reference to the prophets sent by God in ancient times, “whose line was considered to have ceased, only to be renewed at the eschaton”.<sup>41, 42</sup>

The three contemporary views on the identity of Jesus reflect high estimation, but they do not come close to the conviction of the members of the early Church about Jesus Christ. According to Robert A. Guelich, these views “consistently point to the prophetic character of his [Jesus’s] ministry”<sup>43</sup>. In any case, Jesus straddles contemporary religious categories, and these three interpretations lack a messianic character.<sup>44</sup> “The lack of this possibility reveals the apolitical nature of Jesus’s ministry and suggests that up to this point Jesus had not revealed even to his disciples that he was the Christ (8:27-30).”<sup>45</sup>

The phrase at the end of the section (“*has been raised*”) is a *passivum divinum*, that is, a divine response to Herod’s sin. Joel Marcus clearly points out the essence of martyrdom when he refers to Peter’s words regarding Jesus: “*The author of life you put to death, but God raised him from the dead*” (Acts 3:15). Marcus also refers to Berger’s opinion, who sees in this text the Jewish belief in a prophet who appears in the end times, undergoes suffering, suffers death and finally rises.<sup>46</sup>

Zoltán Dóka sees the significance of this passage in that the development of the life of Saint John the Baptist is connected to Jesus Christ in terms of the future – since John was “the forerunner of the Crucified”<sup>47</sup> – and, in terms of the past, he

<sup>39</sup> DÓKA 126.

<sup>40</sup> GNILKA 334.

<sup>41</sup> MARCUS 393.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> GUELICH, Robert A., *Mark 1-8,26*, Word Biblical Commentary 34A, Thomas Nelson Publisher, [no place] 1989, 330.

<sup>44</sup> DÓKA 126-127.

<sup>45</sup> STEIN 301.

<sup>46</sup> MARCUS 393. In Dóka’s opinion, however, “the resurrection belief that appears here has no eschatological character”. DÓKA 126.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 127.

suggests that the mission of the disciples cannot yet have decisive weight at this time, since they cannot yet proclaim the crucified Jesus Christ.<sup>48</sup>

Herod Antipas finally identifies Jesus with Saint John the Baptist, thereby deciding and closing the question of Jesus' identity. "Herod's opinion sets the stage for the telling of the story of the Baptist's death (6:17-29) with themes that are repeated in Jesus' own passion story."<sup>49</sup>

### 3.2. Herod's Birthday Feast

According to the Gospel, Herod and Saint John the Baptist had an ambivalent relationship: the ruler imprisoned John, but at the same time honored him. His wife, Herodias, however, – apparently out of fear of power – attempted to kill John.<sup>50</sup>

According to Mk 6:21, "*she had an opportunity one day when Herod, on his birthday, gave a banquet for his courtiers, his military officers, and the leading men of Galilee.*" The original Greek text ("Καὶ γενομένης ἡμέρας εὐκαίρου") does not mention Herodias by name. Since the evangelist had already mentioned the woman's hatred of John earlier (Mk 6:19), the text clearly refers to her. Joachim Gnllka notes that if the story mentions an auspicious day, it can only be imagined from the king's perspective.<sup>51</sup> The celebration of birthdays was frowned upon by both Jewish and Christian thinkers in ancient times, because they associated this custom with paganism, among which idolatry was present. Thus, the Jews in ancient times did not celebrate their birthdays. At Herod's birthday feast, we see three groups. The first group consists of members from the court and political environment of the tetrarch, the second group is connected to the military leaders, while the third group represents the Galilean nobility.<sup>52</sup> Since Herod Antipas was also the leader of Perea, it can be assumed that Perea aristocrats also participated in the feast, but the evangelist does not specifically mention this.

When examining the Greek textual witnesses, it is not clear whose daughter is dancing at the feast, or what exactly she is called. According to some texts (e.g. *Codex Vaticanus*),

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 126.

<sup>49</sup> GUELICH 330.

<sup>50</sup> „Herod was the one who had John arrested and bound in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, whom he had married. John had said to Herod, »It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.« Herodias harbored a grudge against him and wanted to kill him but was unable to do so. Herod feared John, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man, and kept him in custody. When he heard him speak he was very much perplexed, yet he liked to listen to him." Mk 6:17-20.

<sup>51</sup> GNILKA 336.

<sup>52</sup> MARCUS 395-396.

Herod's daughter went in to dance, whose name was Herodias, just like her mother's.<sup>53</sup> We know from Flavius Josephus that the girl was called Salome. Joel Marcus draws attention to the fact that some scholars consider the part of the Gospel account that a girl could have danced in front of the ruler and his guests at a birthday feast to be unhistorical. This seems incompatible with good morals, but Herod Antipas and his family were not known for their morality, so this scholarly approach alone does not offer sufficient grounds for rejecting the historicity of the Markan narrative. The pleasure that Herod felt from the girl's dance is sexual in nature.<sup>54</sup> This, in my opinion, makes it clear that the girl is not his daughter, but Herodias's. According to Joachim Gnilka, a female member of the royal family dancing at a court party is practically unthinkable, as this activity was the responsibility of prostitutes.<sup>55</sup>

Joel Marcus refers to the view of Joachim Gnilka, who believes that the girl's entry, exit, and return to the hall dynamizes the banquet scene (Mk 6:22.24.25), and that the subject changes several times in these verses (Mk 6:21-28), which shows the following order: 1. Herod; 2. Salome; 3. Herodias; 4. Salome; 5. Herod; 6. executioner. Herodias' answer to her daughter's question is given without thinking, meaning that the woman may have been preparing to have John executed.<sup>56</sup> Robert H. Stein draws attention to the use of the verb θέλω in connection with Mk 6:19: “ἡ δὲ Ἡρωδιάς ἐνεῖχεν αὐτῷ καὶ ἤθελεν αὐτὸν ἀποκτεῖναι, καὶ οὐκ ἠδύνατο.”. The verb tense ἤθελεν (*activum praeteritum imperfectum* singular 3rd person<sup>57</sup>) expresses that Herodias wanted to achieve her goal, namely the killing of John, without interruption.<sup>58</sup> According to Flavius Josephus,

John was not executed in Galilee, but in Perea, in the castle of Machaerus. In Mark, on the other hand, the events seem to have taken place in Galilee.<sup>59</sup> Gundry draws attention to the discovery of Machaerus, which included a prison and two halls, which were used separately for meals by Herod and the men, and by Herodias and the ladies.

<sup>53</sup> „cumque introisset filia ipsius Herodiadis et saltasset”. NVg Mk 6:22.

<sup>54</sup> MARCUS 396.

<sup>55</sup> GNILKA 336.

<sup>56</sup> MARCUS 401-402.

<sup>57</sup> <https://ujszov.hu/text?corpus=2&book=202&chapter=6&verse=1#!2020060190000700> (last viewed: 31.03.2025).

<sup>58</sup> STEIN 304. The *activum praeteritum imperfectum* “mostly expresses a past state, actions that are ongoing, repetitive, or merely attempted but not completed”. BOLONYAI, Gábor-FORRÓ, Orsolya-KULIN, Veronika, *Bevezetés az ógörög nyelvbe*, Bölcsész Konzorcium, Budapest 2006, 62.

<sup>59</sup> DÓKA 128.

The former was larger than the latter.<sup>60</sup> Susan Miller refers to Corley's observation that "Mark's description reflects the practice of Greco-Roman banquets in which men dined apart from women"<sup>61</sup>. According to Corley, among the ancient Greeks, men and women did not eat together, but under Roman rule women were sometimes invited to official feasts.<sup>62</sup> In the Gospel of Mark, Herodias and the girl did not attend the feast.<sup>63</sup> Gnilka believes that the Markan account may have been influenced by the ancient custom – known to us from Herodotus – that it was proper to grant requests made at royal feasts. Herod's birthday feast and the events that took place there provide the climax of the Gospel narrative.<sup>64</sup>

According to Robert H. Stein, after Salome asked Herod for the head of John the Baptist, the course of events was fundamentally influenced by two aspects. One was the oath that Herod made. Breaking the oath seemed practically unthinkable at the time. The other was the guests attending the feast.<sup>65</sup> It is interesting that while Herod Antipas cannot be considered a religious Jew (e.g. he celebrates a birthday feast), he still wanted to keep the oath – for certain reasons. Incidentally, Herod's oath to the girl, that he is willing to give her even half of his kingdom, is obviously not a word and intention of a ruler that can be taken seriously, since Herod Antipas is not an autonomous political actor, but a protege of the Roman Empire.<sup>66</sup>

### 3.3. Inter- and Intratextual Connections

The Markan account of the martyrdom of Saint John the Baptist is extremely rich in inter- and intratextual connections. These cannot be explored in full depth within the framework of this study, but I would like to present some basic insights, which I will group around the four characters of the story.

The entire story is connected to the Book of Esther through several motifs (e.g. king, queen, offering half the empire). King Ahasuerus and Herod the tetrarch, as well as Queen Esther and Salome, show contrasting attitudes. The pagan ruler and the Jewish

<sup>60</sup> STEIN 305, 5. footnote.

<sup>61</sup> MILLER, Susan, *Women in Mark's Gospel*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 259, T. & T. Clark, London 2004, 77.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 19. footnote.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. 78.

<sup>64</sup> GNILKA 337.

<sup>65</sup> STEIN 306.

<sup>66</sup> DÉR, Katalin-JORSITS, Attila, *Beavatás: Márk evangéliuma*, Kairosz Kiadó, Budapest 2018, 167.

girl who has gone into the diaspora serve the good cause, while Herod and Salome are clearly on the other side. The book also shows a connection with the book of Judith, in which a beautiful widow saves the city of Bethulia from destruction by beheading the pagan leader of the enemy camp, Holofernes.<sup>67</sup>

Interestingly, there are grammatical parallels between the dialogue between Herod and the girl and the request of the sons of Zebedee (Mk 6:22.25; 10:35.37). Herod does not refuse the girl's request, but Jesus reminds the disciples that "*to sit at my right or at my left is not mine to give but is for those for whom it has been prepared*" (Mk 10:40). Herod, his wife, and Salome are not concerned with God's cause, but only and exclusively want to assert their own points of view.<sup>68</sup>

### 3.3.1. Herod

A point of connection between Herod and Jesus is that they both send, but while Herod wanted to arrest John, Jesus sent the apostles, "*so they went off and preached repentance. They drove out many demons, and they anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them*" (Mk 6:12-13).<sup>69</sup> A special point of connection between Herod and Jesus is the occurrence of the adjective περιλυπος ('deeply, completely sad'<sup>70</sup>). In relation to Herod, Mark uses it when he hears Salome's request (Mk 6:26), while in relation to Jesus, the Lord uses the word in the Garden of Gethsemane when he turns to his disciples before going to pray. "*περίλυπος ἐστὶν ἡ ψυχὴ μου ἕως θανάτου.*" (Mk 14:34).<sup>71</sup>

With his ambivalent attitude, "*Herod feared John, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man, and kept him in custody. When he heard him speak he was very much perplexed, yet he liked to listen to him*" (Mk 6:20), the tetrarch may recall the attitude of the Legion in the Gerasene Demoniac to Jesus. "*Catching sight of Jesus from a distance, he ran up and prostrated himself before him, crying out in a loud voice, »What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me!«*" (Mk 5:6-7).<sup>72</sup>

<sup>67</sup> MARCUS 401-402.

<sup>68</sup> MILLER 83.

<sup>69</sup> STEIN 302.

<sup>70</sup><https://ujsov.hu/text?corpus=2&book=202&chapter=14&verse=34#!2020140340000400>(last viewed: 01.04.2025).

<sup>71</sup> MILLER 82.

<sup>72</sup> MARCUS 401.

One of Herod Antipas' brothers was Archelaus, who became ruler of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea after Herod the Great. He was an extremely cruel ruler, who was finally exiled to Gaul by the Romans in 6AD.<sup>73</sup> His name is mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew, when the Holy Family returns from Egypt under the leadership of Saint Joseph.<sup>74</sup> Archelaus probably had such a bad reputation that Saint Joseph was afraid to go to his territory.<sup>75</sup> A warning received in a dream leads him and his entourage to Galilee, to the territory of Herod Antipas.

### 3.3.2. Herodias and her Daughter

“Just as some men follow Jesus and others reject him, some women accept and others oppose the gospel.”<sup>76</sup> In the Gospel of Mark, we encounter women and girls in both the chapters preceding and following the martyrdom of John the Baptist. The resurrection of Jairus' daughter and the woman with a hemorrhage (Mk 5:21-43), and the deliverance of the Syrophoenician woman's daughter from a demon (Mk 7:24-30) surround the story of Herodias and her daughter.<sup>77</sup>

A contrast can be observed between Herod's wife, Herodias, and Pilate's wife. The former seeks the life of the man of God and ultimately achieves his death, the latter intercedes for Jesus and acknowledges that he is righteous.<sup>78</sup> Interestingly, we do not first meet Herodias as Herod's wife, since John was imprisoned by Herod “διὰ Ἡρωδιάδα τὴν γυναῖκα Φιλίππου τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ αὐτοῦ” (Mk 6:17). The situation is similar with Simon's mother-in-law (Mk 1:30), “who is also described by her relationship to a man and in terms of her marriage”<sup>79</sup>. I would add to Miller's view that Peter's mother-in-law has another important character: her daughter, since she is connected to Peter through her.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>73</sup> KOC SIS, Imre, *Bevezetés az Újszövetség könyveibe*, Szent István Kézikönyvek 18, Szent István Társulat, Budapest 2019, 43-44.

<sup>74</sup> „But when he [Joseph] heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go back there. And because he had been warned in a dream, he departed for the region of Galilee.” (Mt 2:22).

<sup>75</sup> Cf. JAKUBINYI, György, *Máté evangéliuma*, Szent István Bibliakommentárok 3, Szent István Társulat, Budapest 2007<sup>2</sup>, 30.

<sup>76</sup> MILLER 73.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> „While he was still seated on the bench, his wife sent him a message, »Have nothing to do with that righteous man. I suffered much in a dream today because of him.«” Mt 27:19.

<sup>79</sup> MILLER 75.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

Herodias and Judas can also be linked through the motif of the opportune time for the implementation of their plan (Mk 6:21; 14:11).<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, Herodias, the woman with the issue of blood and the Syrophoenician woman “are depicted as persistent, and they act independently. (...) All three take initiative when an opportunity arises for their wishes to be realized”<sup>82</sup>. Herodias wants to kill John, while the chief priests use dishonest methods to achieve their goal.<sup>83</sup> According to Susan Miller, Herodias’ reaction to John’s criticism connects her with the chief priests and Pilate, who will react in the same way to the person and actions of Jesus.<sup>84</sup> Herodias brings to mind the figure of Jezebel from the Old Testament.<sup>85</sup>

Herodias’ daughter and Jairus’ daughter are both designated by the same word: κοράσιον (Mk 5:41-42; 6:22.28). Jairus’ daughter is 12 years old, which is the age of majority for women at that time, and in many cases the age of marriage. It can be assumed that Salome is also around 12 years old, and presumably unmarried at the time of the feast.<sup>86</sup>

Herodias’ daughter, Salome, in any case, plays a much more proactive role in the episode than Jairus’ or the Syrophoenician woman’s daughter in their respective stories, which is entirely understandable, since in those cases they are dealing with girls suffering from serious illnesses. Salome “breaks social boundaries”<sup>87</sup> like the woman with the flow of blood and the Syrophoenician woman. The girl’s appearance in the room filled with men at the banquet can be compared to the scene when a woman anointed Jesus’ head in the house of Simon the leper (Mk 14:3-9).<sup>88</sup>

In summary, we can conclude that the figures of Herodias and Salome are completely and unequivocally negative in Mark’s Gospel.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>81</sup> STEIN 305.

<sup>82</sup> MILLER 81.

<sup>83</sup> VAN LINDEN, Philip, *Evangélium Szent Márk szerint: A Colledgeville-i Biblia Kommentár eredeti szövege magyar fordításban*, Szegedi Bibliakommentár-Újszövetség 2, Korda-Bencés Kiadó, Kecskemét-Pannónia 1993, 37.

<sup>84</sup> MILLER 73.

<sup>85</sup> GNILKA 335.

<sup>86</sup> MILLER 77.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.* 81.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

### 3.3.3. John

The lives of John and Jesus show a contrasting movement. John comes from the territory of Herod the Great and Archelaus (south), but eventually dies in Galilee or Perea (north or west), in the territory of Herod Antipas. In contrast, Jesus spends the majority of his public ministry in the territory of Herod Antipas (north), but dies in Jerusalem (south).

The second canonical gospel clearly identifies John with Elijah (Mk 1:2-8; 9:11-13). John's criticism of Herod's marriage angered Herodias. By this behavior, John expressed his desire to enforce the divine will and came into conflict with the ruler's wife – just like Elijah. "John thus appears as an Elijah-like figure, zealous for the Lord and his Law."<sup>90</sup> John's most important points of connection are of course with Jesus, but the connection with this Old Testament prophet is also noteworthy.<sup>91</sup>

The verbs δέω and κρατέω used in John's passion are also used in Jesus' passion, the former in Mk 15:1, the latter in Mk 14:1.44.46.49.<sup>92</sup> Joel Marcus – citing Joachim Gnillka – points out that Jesus' teaching regarding John ("*they did to him whatever they pleased*" Mk 9:13) also holds true in relation to Jesus.<sup>93</sup>

Robert H. Stein identifies several points of similarity between John the Baptist's and Jesus' passion. Herod and Pontius Pilate initially do not want to condemn the accused, whose innocence they are convinced of, but in the end they give in to the unjust accuser(s). Furthermore, both decision-makers acknowledge the truthfulness of the accused.<sup>94</sup>

Endre Gánicz examines the section of Mark 6:6b-13(14-29) 30-31 in his doctoral thesis on intercalation structures in the Gospel of Mark.<sup>95</sup> From the perspective of our topic, I will highlight only one element of the author's insights, namely the one that deals with the points of connection between John and Jesus in this intercalation structure. Jesus appears as a distinctly active character, while John only speaks once in the section. The common motifs of their execution and death are:

<sup>90</sup> MARCUS 400.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> STEIN 302.

<sup>93</sup> MARCUS 400.

<sup>94</sup> STEIN 304.

<sup>95</sup> GÁNICZ, Endre Sándor, *A közbeiktatott szerkezetek helye és jelentősége Márk evangéliumában*, doktori disszertáció, Budapest 2023, 135-162. [https://real-phd.mtak.hu/1826/1/Ganicz\\_AkozbeiktatottszerkezetkDOI.pdf](https://real-phd.mtak.hu/1826/1/Ganicz_AkozbeiktatottszerkezetkDOI.pdf) (last viewed: 01.04.2025).

“the arrest and binding (cf. 6:17; 14:46), the fact that they wanted to kill him (cf. 6:19; 14:1), and the removal and burial of the body (cf. 6:29; 15:43-46). The mention of John’s head (cf. 6:24.25.27.28) also parallels the fact that a woman in Bethany poured oil on Jesus’ head (cf. 14:3), and then the soldiers beat Jesus on the head with a reed, who was condemned to death (cf. 15:19). These similarities indicate that the death of John the Baptist foreshadows the fate of Jesus”<sup>96</sup>.

Endre Gánicz also points out the differences here. Jesus had the opportunity to confront and negotiate with his accusers, while John did not. Another difference regarding their deaths is that while the location of Jesus’ tomb is known, John’s is not mentioned in the gospel.<sup>97</sup>

According to Philip Van Linden, there is a connection between John and Jesus through the motif of resurrection, but this shows a kind of opposite movement. Herod believes that John was resurrected, but this did not actually happen. In contrast, Jesus was truly resurrected on the third day. Furthermore, in the case of John and Jesus, the burial by the disciple(s) is a similar motif.<sup>98</sup> Mark also aims to show the culmination of Jesus’ future life on the cross in the development of John’s life, but at the same time he wants to encourage Christians to live in a way that Jesus himself can be recognized.<sup>99</sup>

The final events of Herod’s feast present a completely different picture than the next story in the gospel: the first multiplication of the loaves, which is a prefiguration of the Eucharistic feast. During this, Jesus gives bread and fish to the disciples, who distribute the food to the crowd. At the end of Herod’s feast, John’s head is placed on a platter, which the executioner gives first to the girl, and then to her mother. The two scenes and the two persons issuing the order: Herod and Jesus, are connected by the verb ἐπέταξεν (commanded; *activum indicativus aoristos* singular 3rd person<sup>100</sup>; Mk 6:27.39). According to Joel Marcus, the text about the martyrdom of St. John the Baptist is “a kind of demonic eucharist. That this interpretation is plausible is indicated by the medieval practice of venerating a devotional image of John’s head on a platter as a type of the

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. 160. [https://real-phd.mtak.hu/1826/1/Ganicz\\_AkozbeiktatottszerkezetekDOI.pdf](https://real-phd.mtak.hu/1826/1/Ganicz_AkozbeiktatottszerkezetekDOI.pdf) (last viewed: 01.04.2025).

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> VAN LINDEN 37-38.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. 38.

<sup>100</sup> <https://ujszov.hu/text?corpus=2&book=202&chapter=6&verse=27#!2020060270000700> (last viewed: 01.04.2025). <https://ujszov.hu/text?corpus=2&book=202&chapter=6&verse=39#!2020060390000200> (last viewed: 01.04.2025).

eucharist”<sup>101</sup>. According to Katalin Dér and Attila Jorsits, the “*pinax*, a device that is referred to as a *bowl*, is actually a flat tray, board, or table that was used in ancient cultures for offering sacrifices. The *pinax* replaces and indicates the altar, its horizontal surface”<sup>102</sup>. Thus, John can also be considered an Eucharistic prototype, furthermore, the person of Jesus is the answer to the questions regarding John’s sacrifice.<sup>103</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

The figure of Saint John the Baptist is of outstanding importance, as we have seen in the brief biblical and theological overview. John was a man of God, a forerunner of the Messiah. He also draws the attention of today’s followers of Jesus Christ to the Lamb of God and bears witness to him both by his life and by his death. “The ministry of John the Baptist, who preached repentance, preparing the way for Jesus was completed by his death as the herald of the Crucified One (cf. Mk 9:9-13!).”<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> MARCUS 403.

<sup>102</sup> DÉR, Katalin-JORSITS, Attila, *Beavatás: Márk evangéliuma*, Kairosz Kiadó, Budapest 2018, 170. Highlighting in the original.

<sup>103</sup> MARCUS 403-404.

<sup>104</sup> DÓKA, Zoltán, *Márk evangéliuma*, Hévízgyörki Evangélikus Egyházközség, Veszprém 2005, 126.

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## **Saint Birgitta of Sweden's Conversations with Saint Paul the Apostle and Deacon Saint Stephen**

### **Introduction**

In the mystical visions of Saint Birgitta of Sweden (1303-1373) her interlocutor is usually the Lord Jesus Christ or the Virgin Mary. This is the reason why these two interconnected texts selected for the lecture of the conference stand out from among the nearly seven hundred visions of her spiritual heritage. The story of the death of the first martyr from the perspective of the two main actors: Saint Stephen himself and Saint Paul as witness provide us a unique insight.

The Spanish bishop and confessor of Saint Birgitta, *Alfonso da Jaen* arranged Birgitta's visions into volumes.<sup>1</sup> Because of his editing work, we do not know the original order and exact timing of the visions – especially because Birgitta usually received her mystical experiences continuously in parts or recurrently with overlapping elements. Unlike her contemporary, Saint Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) who dictated her visions in real time, Saint Birgitta noted them afterwards using Swedish language. This is the reason why editorial work and translation into Latin were necessary already at Birgitta's time.

The stories of Saint Paul and Saint Stephen are connected in their contents and both were noted at the beginning of Saint Birgitta's years in Rome, in the 1350s. However, for some reason Bishop da Jaen placed them in separate volumes: Saint Paul's narrative is found in Book IV, Chapter 6 (hereinafter: Rev.IV/6) of the *Revelationes celestes* (hereinafter: *Revelationes*), while Saint Stephen's story is in Book VI, Chapter 108 (Rev.VI/108).

Regarding the circumstances, we can learn from the text that Saint Birgitta was praying at the tomb of Saint Stephen in the Church of Saint Paul Outside the Walls when the

<sup>1</sup> KŐRÖSINÉ MERKL, Hilda, *Szent Brigitta. Mennyei kinyilatkoztatások*, Kairosz Kiadó, Budapest, 2016, 128.

saint appeared to her and began to talk to her. Birgitta has not recorded any additional information about the circumstances of the other vision about Saint Paul.

The texts analysed in the lecture are extremely short ones, composed merely three paragraphs each, however both are rich in their contents and for this reason I will present them in details.

Considering that Saint Birgitta of Sweden's writings are not yet fully published in Hungarian, only some excerpts are available, I have translated the whole text at the lecture and I will use full text of the English version of this study as well. For processing the texts, I used the book titled: *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden* Volume 1-4., published by Oxford University Press between 2006 and 2015. This Oxford edition uses the Latin critical edition as basis. The translation was prepared by *Denis Searby* and explanations were added by a researcher of Saint Birgitta's life, *Bridget Morris*.

### **The Story of Deacon Saint Stephen**

The 14<sup>th</sup> century was the time of the Avignon papacy. Conditions in Rome were deteriorating, churches and shrines were abandoned and in ruins.<sup>2</sup> Birgitta's mission was to move from Sweden to Rome and to wait for the pope's return: „*Go to Rome and stay there until you see the pope and the emperor and deliver the message I will give you.*” – instructed the Lord Birgitta with these words in Chapter 8, point 1 of the *Extravagant revelationes*.<sup>3</sup> Morris believes this quote refers to the meeting of Pope Urban V and Emperor Charles IV in 1351.<sup>4</sup>

Historically, the work of convincing the pope to move back from Avignon to Rome is typically attributed to Saint Catharine of Siena. However, Birgitta also asked the popes several times to return. Some of her letters were addressed to them, for example to *Pope Clement* in Rev.IV/136, to *Pope Urban V* in Rev.IV/138., and to *Pope Gregory XI* in Rev. IV/140.

Birgitta spent the years of waiting for the pope on visiting churches and shrines all around Rome, and she prayed over the abandoned tombs of the saints. In Book VI of the *Revelationes*, Bishop Alfonso da Jaen ranked several visions one after the other. In these visions Birgitta talked to saints: in Chapter 103, Birgitta talked to *Sain Nicholas*.

<sup>2</sup> KÖRÖSINÉ, 123.

<sup>3</sup> MORRIS-SEARBY, Vol.4., 235.

<sup>4</sup> MORRIS-SEARBY, Vol.4., 235., footnote 2.

In Chapter 104, she meets with *Saint Anne*, who has even taught her a beautiful prayer.<sup>5</sup> One may find in this series of meetings a visit to the relics of *Saint Andreas* in Chapter 107, and finally the conversation with *Saint Stephen* in Chapter 108.

In connection to the main topic of this lecture, I would like to mention Chapter 105, in which vision Saint Birgitta receives an explicit permission from the Virgin Mary to visit holy places in Rome. This may be interesting for us in that respect that even a saint may have other duties than prayer. In Chapter 105, the Virgin warns Birgitta that her mini-pilgrimages in Rome should not compromise her studies in Latin and also reminds her to the importance of obedience:

*„You are given permission to visit these places with humility and devout reverence, for there are more indulgences in this city of Rome than people can believe. God’s saints succeeded in obtaining them from my Son through their own glorious bloodshed and their prayers. However, my daughter, do not neglect your grammar lessons or the holy obedience to your spiritual father because of this.”*<sup>6</sup>

This should remind us as well that duty have precedence even over holy acts, which is the exact opposite of what one might think about true Christian behaviour. Another good example of this is in Chapter 69 of *Extravagantes revelationes*, in which the Virgin Mary prioritized a real life act of love and duty over a blessed vision: *„But although you are enjoying speaking with me, go and sew your daughter’s dress.”*<sup>7</sup>

Regarding obedience, Chapter 111 also has an important message to us: *„What are you afraid of? Even if you eat ten times a day out of obedience, it would not be counted as a sin for you. Virginitly certainly deserves its reward and widowhood draws near to God, but obedience leads everyone into glory.”*<sup>8</sup> – warns her the Lord against extreme forms of ascetism.

Following this short introduction, let us start the detailed analyses of the two chapters. Saint Birgitta often starts her conversations with a song of praise, as we see in the first paragraph:

<sup>5</sup> „Blessed are you, Jesus, Son of God and Son of the Virgin, who chose a mother for yourself out of the marriage of Anne and Joachim! Through the prayers of Anne, have mercy on all married people that may bear fruit for God. Guide all those preparing for marriage so that God may be honored through them!” (Rev. VI/104. p. 4. in Morris-Searby Vol.3., 170).

<sup>6</sup> Rev.VI/105., point 2-3in MORRIS-SEARBY Vol.3., 170.

<sup>7</sup> MORRIS-SEARBY, Vol.4., 286.

<sup>8</sup> Rev.VI/111. point 1in MORRIS-SEARBY Vol.3., 174.

*„Blessed are you, St. Stephen, you share equal merit with St. Lawrence! Just as he preached to the pagans, so you preached to the Jews. Just as Lawrence joyfully endured death by fire, so too you endured death by stoning. You are rightfully praised as the first among the martyrs.”<sup>9</sup>*

The interesting part for us is the connection between the stoning of Saint Stephen with the story of Saint Lawrence martyred in 258.<sup>10</sup> According to researcher Bridget Morris, the two saints might have been linked together in the praising phrase for two reasons: firstly, they were both deacons, and secondly, they were both buried in the same church.<sup>11</sup>

Saint Stephen replies to her in a very personal manner in the second paragraph of the vision. This also contains many interesting details, so I will quote the whole text:

*„God was dear to me from my youth, for I had parents who were concerned about the salvation of my soul. When my Lord Jesus Christ became incarnate and began to preach, I listened to him with all my heart. After his ascension, I united myself with his apostles and served faithfully and humbly in the office appointed to me. When the Jews blasphemed Jesus my God, I joyfully took the occasion to speak with them steadfastly and rebuke their hardness of heart, ready to die on behalf of the truth and in imitation of my Lord.”<sup>12</sup>*

I would like to highlight the first sentence. The *Acts of the Apostles* do not deal with the childhood of Saint Stephen, so we have no other information about his parents and childhood than his own words about himself. We know for sure from the Bible that he was a follower of the apostles, as he was one of the seven deacons. Evangelist Luke calls him a man *filled with faith and Holy Spirit* (Acts 6:5; 6:8 and 6:10). The *Lives of Saints* also deals only with his adult life.<sup>13</sup> When he speaks to Birgitta about his firm speech and rebuke for the Jews' *hardness of heart* he is referring to his famous speech in Acts 7:2-53 in which he recounts the history of Israel and presents how the chosen people refused God throughout their history and did the same at the crucifixion of Jesus. However, we

<sup>9</sup> Rev. VI/108., point 1-2 in MORRIS-SEARBY, Vol.3., 172.

<sup>10</sup> DIÓS, István, Szentek élete II., Szent István Társulat, Budapest, 2009, 95.

<sup>11</sup> MORRIS-SEARBY, Vol.3., 172 footnote 2.

<sup>12</sup> Rev. VI/108. point 3-5., MORRIS-SEARBY, Vol.3., 173.

<sup>13</sup> DIÓS, 1036.

may notice new information: Stephen might have heard the teaching of Jesus during his lifetime. Even though the Acts does not specifically mention this detail, because its highlight is on Stephen's arrest and speech before the Sanhedrin in Acts 6:12, we might assume he had met with Jesus.

*István Diós* in *The Lives of Saints* places the martyrdom of Saint Stephen to the date 35AD.<sup>14</sup> *György Jakubinyi* on the other hand, places the event - and the conversion of Saint Paul - one year later, to 36AD, because due to the change in the governor's person, temporarily the Sanhedrin exercised the right to pass the death sentence instead of the Romans. At the trial of Jesus, three years earlier, we read that the Sanhedrin could not pass the death sentence (*"It is not lawful for us to put any man to death."* John 18:31), and, certainly, there was a strong reason why it was possible for them to do so in the case of Saint Stephen.<sup>15</sup>

The Acts of the Apostles does not mention that Stephen was explicitly ready for martyrdom, but we can assume it could be true because his sentences show similarities with those of Jesus. Let us see these twin phrases! „*Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit*” - quotes Luke Jesus' words on the cross (Luke 23:46), while Stephen says: „*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit*” (Acts 7:59). Stephen says the following in Acts 7:60: „*Lord, do not hold this sin against them*”, which echoes Jesus' words: „*Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they do*” (Luke 23:34). In this sense we can consider he wanted to imitate the Lord in his death, as he stated at the end of the paragraph.

The last paragraph's style is typical to Birgitta's way of writing: as it was customary in the Middle Ages, she ranges her messages around numbers:

*„Three things contributed to my glory and the crown I now enjoy. The first was my good intention. The second was the prayer of the apostles, my lords. The third was the passion and charity of my God. This is why I now possess a threefold good. First, I behold the face and glory of God without cease. Second, I can do whatever I want and I want nothing but what God wants. Third, my joy will have no end. And because you rejoice in my glory, my prayers will bring you to a greater knowledge of God, and God's Spirit will continue with you, and you will come to the place of my passion in Jerusalem.”<sup>16</sup>*

<sup>14</sup> Diós, 1036.

<sup>15</sup> JAKUBINYI, György, *Hirdesd az igét! Gondolatok a vasárnapi és ünnepnapj szentírási szakaszokhoz*, Szent István Társulat, Budapest, 2005, 100.

<sup>16</sup> Rev. VI/108. p. 6-8., MORRIS-SEARBY, Vol.3., 173.

In the first listing we see the path towards salvation: good will and humility. This can be sensed through the way he calls the apostles his masters. A recurring element of Birgitta's visions is the call to reflect on the passion and love of Christ. Saint Stephen states his salvation is a grace obtained through the merit of Jesus Christ, and not as a consequence of his own suffering. This is a correct teaching, since none of the humans can achieve salvation by their own efforts, not even through suffering or sacrifice. Humans become righteous because of the merits of Christ and God forgives our sins because of Him.<sup>17</sup>

The second half of the paragraph also resonates with the Church's teaching: those who reached salvation, live in the presence of God, and although their will remains free, they no longer want anything but God. They are in full compliance with God's will, and therefore they cannot sin anymore, and their joy never ends. The Church teaches us that the ones living in Heaven desire nothing else than God, nothing seems good for them but God, and therefore they remain in the love of God, because they necessarily want the highest good.<sup>18</sup>

At the end of the conversation there is a touching promise that Stephen will pray for Birgitta. The last phrase refers to Birgitta's pilgrimage to the Holy Land which took place some twenty years after the vision in 1372.<sup>19</sup> Even if she had visited the site of Stephen's martyrdom, she did not mention it in the Revelations. Her visions during that pilgrimage in Jerusalem were around major biblical events such as the birth of the Lord (Rev.VII/21, Rev.VII/22, Rev.VII/23 and Rev.VII/24), and His death on the Cross (Rev. VII/15). We can also find visions on the individual judgement of Birgitta's son, Karl, who suddenly died in a rapid illness while preparing for the journey of his mother to the Holy Land (Rev.VII/13).<sup>20</sup> However, she does not mention Saint Stephen's martyrdom again in connection with her pilgrimage.

<sup>17</sup> FILA Béla, *Krisztus kegyelme*, Budapesti Pázmány Péter Katolikus Hittudományi Akadémia, Budapest, 1992, 191.

<sup>18</sup> FILA Béla, *Dogmatikai előadások. A kegyelem beteljesedése (Eszkatológia)*, Budapesti Pázmány Péter Katolikus Hittudományi Akadémia, Budapest, 1992, 221-222.

<sup>19</sup> KŐRÖSINÉ, 124.

<sup>20</sup> KŐRÖSINÉ, 124.

### Saint Paul's Version of the Story

The second selected chapter for this lecture is Rev.IV/6. about Saint Paul. This description was also noted in the 1350s in Rome. Let us see this as well paragraph by paragraph:

*„St. Paul speaks to the bride of Christ, saying: 'My daughter, you compared me to a lion that was raised among wolves but was rescued from them in a wonderful way. I was indeed a greedy wolf, my daughter, but God made a lamb out of the wolf for two reasons. The first was because of his great love, for he makes the vessels of his grace out of unworthy materials, and he makes friends out of sinners. The second was because of the prayers of St. Stephen, the first martyr.'”<sup>21</sup>*

Unlike in the other vision on Saint Stephen, here we do not know much about the circumstances. Instead, we start right in the middle of the story where the Apostle Paul already addresses Birgitta. Christ used to call Birgitta as a bride from the very beginning when in Rev. I/2. He calls her as follows: *„I have chosen you and taken you as my bride in order to show you my secrets, because it pleases me to do so.”*<sup>22</sup>, and this is a consistently recurring use of the term by other heavenly speakers as well when addressing Saint Birgitta.

There are frequent references among the chapters back and forth; here too Saint Paul refers to an earlier conversation between them – which, however, cannot be identified. These cross-references between the different chapters show that the Revelations, even though composed of some seven hundred visions, still creates one connected teaching. Here lies the difficulty of handling and exploring it: the whole Bridgettine heritage should be tackled as one teaching in order to see the whole message, while the theological elements of one dogma under scrutiny might be mentioned across several dozen chapters with overlapping parts or enriched with new details.

The quoted paragraph refers to Saint Paul's radical turn in year 35 or 36 as mentioned earlier: he became a lamb from a wolf. The English translation uses the adjective „*greedy*” wolf, however it felt out of context, so I have cross-checked against

<sup>21</sup> Rev.IV/6. point 1-2, MORRIS-SEARBY, Vol.2., 35.

<sup>22</sup> Rev.I/2. point 3, MORRIS-SEARBY, Vol.1, 55.

the Latin original text, which says: „*Lupus rapax ego seram*”<sup>23</sup>, meaning „ravenous” wolf, which fits better into the context of the chapter.

Saint Paul never denied his past. In Galatians 1:13 he honestly confessed that he had *violently* persecuted the Church of God, and in 1:14 he declared himself an *extremely zealous* Jew. In Philippians he writes that he was a Pharisee and declared he was as *to zeal a persecutor* the Church of God (Phil 3:6).

It is not surprising he interprets his conversion as a sign of God’s love. However, it is a new information that Saint Paul attributes his conversion to the prayers of Saint Stephen deacon. We know Stephen’s words from the Acts of Apostles saying: „*Lord, do not hold this sin against them*” (Acts 7:60), but the Bible does not connect the two events together so clearly. This is Paul’s own subjective experience and interpretation of what happened.

The second paragraph is the most personal account by Saint Paul on his thoughts and feelings about Stephen’s martyrdom:

*„Let me describe how I was and what I had in mind at Stephen’s stoning and why I deserved his prayers. I neither rejoiced nor delighted in St. Stephen’s sufferings, nor did I envy his glory. Still I wanted him to die because, to my mind, I did not see him as having the true faith. When I saw his immense zeal and his patient endurance of suffering, I grieved terribly over his lack of faith – when in fact he was the truly faithful one and I altogether blind and faithless. Out of compassion for him I prayed and begged with my whole heart that his bitter sufferings might bring him to glory and reward.”*<sup>24</sup>

We can read in Paul statement that he agreed with Stephen’s stoning. This is consistent with the accounts of Acts 7:58 saying the witnesses laid their garments at the feet of a „*young man called Saul*”, and according to Acts 8:1 *Saul was consenting* to Stephen’s death.

According to *Imre Kocsis*, Paul’s anti-Christianity comes from his Pharisean origin. He may have thought that Christian teaching was in contradiction to the Torah.<sup>25</sup> In Birgitta’s vision an important piece of information for us is that Paul saw Stephen as *someone lacking faith*. With this knowledge it is the most beautiful act that he prayed for Stephen.

<sup>23</sup> Source: [https://riksarkivet.se/Media/pdf-filer/SanctaBirgitta\\_Reuelacionum\\_LiberQuartus.pdf](https://riksarkivet.se/Media/pdf-filer/SanctaBirgitta_Reuelacionum_LiberQuartus.pdf) Last accessed 23 May 2024.

<sup>24</sup> Rev. IV/6. point 3-6., MORRIS-SEARBY, Vol.2, 35.

<sup>25</sup> KOC SIS, Imre, *Bevezetés az Újszövetség könyveibe*, Szent István Társulat, Budapest, 2019, 372.

The Bible does not underpin this element, but considering Paul's character, this may be in line with that. In 2Corinthians 2:4 and Ephesians 1:16 there are passages where he prayed for the communities. Based on this, I see it founded that even though Paul agreed with Saint Stephen's punishment, he still prayed for him. I find this part of the text the most touching one: in that extremely tense and violent situation, the two of them prayed for one another, because both of them believed the other was wrong.

Saint Paul closes the conversation with the following thoughts:

*„Because of this, his prayers benefited me first of all, for, through them, I was rescued from the many wolves and made into a gentle lamb. This is why it is good to pray for everyone, because the prayer of the righteous benefits those who are closer and better prepared to receive grace. However, I now complain that this man who spoke so eloquently among the learned and was so patient before those who stoned him has been wholly forgotten in the hearts of many people and especially neglected by those who ought to serve him night and day. They bring him their broken and empty vessels, dirty and disgusting. Therefore, as it is written, they shall be clothed 'in double confusion and shame' and shall be thrown out of the houses of pleasure.”<sup>26</sup>*

Since Paul did not persecute Christians out of malice or bloodthirst (although according to the Acts he was *breathing threats*), but because - as a zealous Pharisee - he saw them as errant and having no faith, mutual prayer prepared him to receive divine grace. This corresponds to the teaching of the Church on the nature of grace: a just person can merit for others the same graces he or she could ask for themselves from God.<sup>27</sup>

At the end of the chapter Paul suddenly shifts to the actual time of their conversation. Such unexpected changes in time are common in Birgitta's texts linking past and present matters. Paul made a contrast between his praising words about Saint Stephen and the disrespectful behaviour of Birgitta's contemporaries. This rhetorical tool suggests that this conversation might as well have taken place at Saint Stephen's tomb at the Church of Saint Paul Outside the Walls.

<sup>26</sup> Rev.IV/6, point 7-9, MORRIS-SEARBY, Vol.2., 36.

<sup>27</sup> FILA, *Krisztus kegyelme*, 227.

According to Bridget Morris,<sup>28</sup> the Benedictines were in charge of that church at that time, so the criticism was certainly addressed to them. In footnote 4, Morris suggests as well that the quote on *double confusion and shame* might be a reference to Isaiah 61:7.

### Closing Remarks

For conclusion, I would like to emphasize that Birgitta's visions are private revelations by their nature, and not part of the official teaching of the Church. Still, as I have shown in this short analysis, her visions have correct biblical references and do not contradict the teachings of the Church. For this reason, reading the Revelations may lead a believer to better understand the teachings. The story of Deacon Saint Stephen and Saint Paul the Apostle presented above adds some details to know their personalities and understand their motivations without compromising the official teaching in the Acts.

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## The Veneration of Martyrs' Relics

### Martyrdom and veneration of martyrs' relics

At the beginning of this study, We consider it important to describe the Church's tradition regarding relics. In a broad sense, the remains, clothes and utensils of important religious figures are considered relics, which are treated with cultic respect. In the strict sense, objects related to Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary, or the earthly remains of the saints, as well as their personal belongings, can be included here. This is how the Hungarian Catholic Encyclopedia describes the veneration of relics: "According to the testimony of the history of religion, the basis of the veneration of relics, expressed in processions, touching, kissing, is the belief that the power of prophets, deliverers, heroes and other saints continues to operate after death; the aim is to share in this power."<sup>1</sup> According to the Catholic Tradition, the classification of relics is divided into: 1. a first class relic that is part of the body of a saint e.g. a piece of bone, a hair or a vial of blood. 2. a second class relic is the personal belongings of a saint, e.g. a book, a garment, instruments of torture, rosary, prayer book, diary.<sup>2</sup> We will see later that the touching of an object, such as a shawl, to the tomb of a saint or an image is also considered a relic. In many cases, we can speak of miracles<sup>3</sup>, of answers to prayers at the tomb of the martyr. When we talk about relics, we should mention those that are related to Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary. The Church considers them among the most important relics. One such relic for us is the relic of the Holy Cross - on which

<sup>1</sup> DIÓS, István – VICZIÁN, János, *Magyar Katolikus Lexikon* III. kötet, SzIT, Budapest 1997, 227.

<sup>2</sup> SZIMONIDESZ, Lajos, *Jézus és Mária ereklyéi*. Bauschmann Nyomda, Budapest, 1933, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> We cannot write in detail about miracles in this study, but the following essay contains a wealth of information on the subject: SZUROMI, Szabolcs Anzelm. *Csoda az egyházi szenttéavatási eljárás kikristályosodásának tükrében*, 1. Elhangzott a Csoda és tudomány a Pátriárkák korától napjainkig című konferencián (Országos Rabbiképző-Zsidó Egyetem, Budapest, 2015. november 23-án) és a Nemzetközi Kánonjogi Kutatóközpontban (Budapest). A kutatást az OTKA K106300 és a KAP-3.6-14/003 program támogatta, 1-10. <https://yerushaonline.com/content/?v=qv45dck24> Accessed: May 26, 2025.

Jesus gave his life for mankind and thereby won salvation for us - pieces of which can be found all over the world, as well as the icons of the Holy Virgin, which are also associated with significant miracles and answered prayers. Canon law also provides us with significant relating rules.

### **The Concept of Martyrdom from the Perspective of Faith**

In our thesis, we would like to briefly describe the development of the veneration of the martyrs, as this is essential for the veneration of relics. Relics, such as the relics of the martyrs, have always been highly revered and respected in the Church, as is reflected in the Vatican Council II document '*Sacrosanctum Concilium on the Sacred Liturgy*' and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Causes of Saints' '*Relics in the Church: Authenticity and Preservation*'<sup>4</sup>, is also taken from the introduction to the provision, which reads as follows: "The saints have been traditionally honored in the Church and their authentic relics and images held in veneration. For the feasts of the saints proclaim the wonderful works of Christ in His servants, and display to the faithful fitting examples for their imitation."<sup>5</sup>

The Catholic Church professes and teaches that God has called all people to holiness of life.<sup>6</sup> This means that each of us must be sanctified, become holy according to our own state of life. God has given each of us a personal vocation or calling. Vocation, profession and occupation are terms often used by people to refer to the activity they have chosen to get on in life. We all feel the truth that there is a difference in meaning between the two concepts, especially with regard to religious or any other perspective.

Everyone agrees that all activities must be carried out as a calling in a professional manner, which is also the duty of a believer in the state. People doing their job primarily work to earn a living and advance or achieve important positions. Of course, jobs can also be done professionally, as long as we do them out of love, with serving love, for the sake of pursuing a moral life, i.e. moral values, and not just to

<sup>4</sup> This instruction has also been published in book form cf. Congregazione per la Cause dei Santi, *Le Reliquie nella Chiesa: autenticità e conservazione*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Roma 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Ecumenical Council Vatican II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 4 December 1963, n. 111.

<sup>6</sup> For more on the above ideas, see my earlier paper: Lengyel, Zsolt, *The Process of Beatification and Canonization in the 21st century*, in LOVASSY, Attila [ed], *The Doctrine of End Times*, pp. 47-66.

achieve fame, wealth, success or position.<sup>7</sup> One of the main purposes of our life mission is to promote the common good of humanity and the service of the values of our culture through our activities.<sup>8</sup>

A Christian's vocation in life is to strive for perfection. Jesus Christ, the Son of God invites all of us to make a holy decision. According to Christian teaching, only God can be called perfect. A person can reach sanctity of life only with God's precious help. For believers the standard is Jesus Christ, whose personality and character are perfect.<sup>9</sup> This may deeply concern believers, for as we have seen before, mortals will never be as perfect as God. Yet, they are still called to conform to His image. Saints can be those individuals who were able to live the virtues of Christ's teaching in their everyday lives. As human beings, they are closer to their fellow men, so in a sense we can say that their example may be easier for (mortal) men to follow than that of the perfect Son of God - although the essence of the teaching, the ideal can be traced back to Him -, whom we worship as both the true God and (also) a man. Man is only a weak creature, subject to constant temptation by his tendency to sin, but sin is far from God. It cannot be identified with His essence, i.e., He is holy.

The saints who have gone before us, whom the Catholic Church has raised to the altar and venerates with regard to liturgical and daily life, have won the respect of humanity by the practice of virtuous living, by trying to embody Christ, to become his image.<sup>10</sup> They managed to achieve this by living a heroic and virtuous life. Plato linked the cardinal virtues to the parts of soul: rational, appetitive, and spirited. He categorized man's courage as a component of the appetitive part. The Greeks believed that the virtues could be learned, i.e., they belonged to the scope of knowledge.<sup>11</sup> In the Catholic moral theology, St. Thomas Aquinas adopted Aristotle's teaching and developed his theory of virtues using the word *habitus* (skill). According to St. Thomas, human nature (*natura humana*) can embrace the moral good (*bonum*) through the development of abilities. Action skills (*habitus*) can be deepened by the constant practice of the abilities we are born with. Virtue is a good skill or an aptitude for good.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> NOSZLOPI, László, *Megmentő és felemelő szeretet*. Ecclesia, Budapest, 1975., NOSZLOPI, László. A szeretet lélektana és bölcselete. Pantheon Kiadó, Budapest, 1944, pp. 132-139., KUMINETZ, Géza. *A boldoggá- és szenttéavatási eljárás kézikönyve*. SzIT, Budapest, 2012, p.19.

<sup>8</sup> KUMINETZ, Géza, *A boldoggá- és szenttéavatási eljárás kézikönyve*. SzIT, Budapest, 2012, pp. 19., 22.

<sup>9</sup> SCHÜTZ, Antal, *Krisztus*. SzIT, Budapest, 1944, p. 131., KUMINETZ, Géza. *A boldoggá- és szenttéavatási eljárás kézikönyve*, op. cit. p. 23.

<sup>10</sup> *A II. Vatikáni zsinat tanítása*, LG 50.

<sup>11</sup> DIÓS, István and VICZIÁN, János, op.cit. p. 232.

<sup>12</sup> BODA, László, *A keresztény nagykorúság erkölcssteológiája*. Ecclesia, Budapest, 1986, pp.3 90-395.

Virtues can be acquired by a Christian through the religious practice of good deeds. In his essay entitled ‘Love’, László Noszlopy reveals a classification of virtues, which includes patriotism as a value to be respected. Patriotism is reverence for a nation’s past, land, people, culture and ancestors<sup>13</sup>

The virtue of courage reminds us of the confessors. It also means vulnerability, because without it, courage has no meaning. This virtue relates to death and, in fact, opposes it. Courage means an aptitude that shows willingness to fall in a battle, to lose our lives. It most often appears in the willingness to act, that is, martyrdom. Courage, of course, does not mean blind forcefulness, which exposes itself to irresponsible and indiscriminate danger. Instead, it goes together with the virtue of prudence, because only a smart person can be brave; that is, without intelligence, courage cannot be real, true courage. Courage therefore requires a proper assessment of the situation to see what is put in danger, as well as an assessment of what is to be achieved or preserved by taking action. Martyrdom is the highest expression of courage.<sup>14</sup>

In his moral theology treatise, ‘*The Joy of Love*’, Renzo Gerardi discusses at length the concept of martyrdom in relation to the Christian virtue of spiritual fortitude. According to him, Christian strength takes over human courage, a quality that man possesses and, by grace, assimilates (merges) with weakness, the fear of death and other trials. The author quotes Saint Paul the Apostle in 2Cor 12:10. He identifies martyrdom as the highest act of the virtue of fortitude, that is, the acceptance of death, but in defence of the truth of faith and the moral good.<sup>15</sup> Strength makes us capable of becoming firm in virtue against dangers, including mortal dangers. Martyrdom in this respect is the supreme act of love and fortitude: “The martyrdom of everyday love and the martyrdom of blood are complementary and interdependent.”<sup>16</sup> According to Renzo, in the past, the Church attached more importance to the fact of martyrdom, and thus less importance to the virtue of fortitude in the area of daily life, because every Christian person must be ready to suffer and/or make serious sacrifices in everyday life. Every moral act implies a kind of virtual acceptance of martyrdom, because it is “the laying down of our

<sup>13</sup> NOSZLOPI, László, *Szeretet. Etikai tanulmány*. Sárkány Nyomda, Budapest, 1932, p.48.

<sup>14</sup> PIEPER, Josef, *A négy sarkalatos erény. Okosság, igazságosság, bátorság, tartás és mérték*. Vigilia, Budapest, 1996, pp. 115-121.

<sup>15</sup> AQUINÓI Szent Tamás, *Summa Theologiae (A teológia foglalatata) II-2, q, a.5.*, Gede Testvérek, Budapest, 2014. p.10., GERARDI, Renzo, *A szeretet öröme. A keresztény élet teológiája az Ordo Amoris fényében*, SzIT, Budapest 2024, pp.149-150.

<sup>16</sup> GERARDI, Renzo, *A szeretet öröme*, p.151.

own meaning at the feet of the Risen Crucified One, and the acceptance of a horizon of meaning which we cannot possess but into which we can only gain admission.”<sup>17</sup>

In the early church, the form of confession practised by Christians became almost commonplace. Those who were sacrificed for their faith gave their lives in the spirit of Jesus’ teaching. Christ did not just talk about self-sacrifice, for He himself gave his life for the redemption of humanity: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”<sup>18</sup> This is what inspired the martyrs to give their blood for their faith, for others, for a nobler and loftier cause, and for Christ himself.

## 1.2. The Biblical and Ecclesiastical Aspects of Relics

### 1.2.1. The Veneration of Relics in the Bible

In the Old Testament we encounter sacred buildings, liturgical objects surrounded by deep reverence from the chosen people. For example, the Temple in Jerusalem itself, which was the holy place of sacrifice, and the Ark of the Covenant containing the Ten Commandments, the dwelling place of God (Yahweh), was also kept here in the Holy of Holies. In the past, the Tent of Meeting and the holy vessels it contained were also highly revered. They were carefully guarded and placed in the temple.

The veneration of relics itself, the veneration of the bodies and personal objects of holy men, also appeared in the life of the Jewish people. Among other things, they took the bones of Moses with them on the Exodus from Egypt, which the children of Israel kept for hundreds of years. Elijah also leaves his mantle to his disciple, the prophet Elisha.<sup>19</sup>

On several occasions, God “honors” his people through the relics, by performing miracles through them. We read an example of this in the Book of 2Kings, when, while burying a man, they saw a Moabite raider nearby, were frightened, threw the dead man into Elisha's tomb and left him there. As soon as the body touched Elisha's bones, the man revived, that is, he became alive again.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Jn 15:13 (NRSV).

<sup>19</sup> Exod 13:19; 2Kings 2:1. Cf. Kiss, András, *Szentelek és ereklyék tiszteletének fejlődése a IV. és V. század folyamán. Egy fejezet a „Szentelek egyességének” dogmatörténetéhez*. Készült Dr. Artner Edgár prof. útmutatása alapján, laureátusi értekezés, Budapest, 1957, pp. 7.

<sup>20</sup> 2Kings 13:21.

In another scriptural passage, King Josiah, in order to renew religious life, removed the altars of pagan gods and idols in the Temple in Jerusalem, but left the tomb, the earthly remains, i.e. the bones, of a prophet who had previously prophesied the king's renewing acts.<sup>21</sup>

To this day, the Jewish people surround King David's tomb with great reverence, a place not for his intercession, but for the belief that the soul lives and that “the righteous men [tzaddikim, cedek, (צדק)] - including King David - cared for Jewish souls while they were alive, and even after their death they are able to feel the pain of their Jewish brothers and sisters and pray for them as if they were praying for themselves”.<sup>22</sup>

The veneration of relics is recognized in several places in the New Testament. By touching the garment of the Lord Jesus, a woman suffering from a flow of blood is healed.<sup>23</sup> In the events following Easter we read that the women went to anoint the body of Jesus. Embalming was an expression of respect and love for the deceased, which was in fact an attempt to protect the body from decay.<sup>24</sup> In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, we see that they tried to pay the dead the final respects they deserved. In the Book of Tobias, where his father Tobit asks Tobias to arrange his funeral in an appropriate manner.<sup>25</sup> In the New Testament we find that the burial of John the Baptist is also emphasized, and the body of St. Stephen, the first martyr, was also given final honors and mourned deeply.<sup>26</sup> Going back to the above, András Kiss writes the following about John 20:7: “The cloth that had been used to cover His head was found folded in Jesus’ tomb. We fold carefully what we value. If John the Evangelist notes this, then they must have been aware that the folded veil warned them to honor the clothes left behind, about which they would naturally have forgotten only because of the great surprise.”<sup>27</sup>

During St. Paul the Apostle's stay in Ephesus, shawls and aprons that had touched him were taken away with the intention of spreading them on the sick in case they would be cured. The sick recovered and the evil spirits left them (Acts 19:12).<sup>28</sup>

<sup>21</sup> 2Kings 23:16-18

<sup>22</sup> <https://zsido.com/david-kiraly-es-jeruzsalem/> (Accessed: May 202025.)

<sup>23</sup> Mt 9:20-22

<sup>24</sup> Explanation of Mk 16:1-8. Cf. MARTOS, Levente Balázs, Márk evangéliuma. Szent István Bibliakommentár, SzIT, Budapest 2014, p. 335.

<sup>25</sup> Tob 4:3, cf. Török, József, Az ereklyetisztelet története in Magyar Egyházzene 9(2003/2004) p. 254.

<sup>26</sup> Mt 14, 12, ApCsel 8,2., Kiss, András, *Szentek és ereklyék tiszteletének fejlődése*, pp.8. and TÖRÖK, József, *Az ereklyetisztelet története*, p. 254.

<sup>27</sup> Kiss, *Szentek és ereklyék tiszteletének fejlődése*, p.7.

<sup>28</sup> Kiss, *Szentek és ereklyék tiszteletének fejlődése*, p. 8.

In the Acts of the Apostles, we also read that the sick were brought into the streets of Jerusalem, on stretchers and on various beds, so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on them as he passed by (Acts 5:15). This action reveals the dual nature of religiosity, namely its spiritual and material dimensions.<sup>29</sup>

### 1.2.2. The Development of the Veneration of Relics in the Church

The emergence of the cult of the saints is paralleled by the veneration of their objects, the objects or remains of which are associated with significant religious figures. The veneration of relics has not only appeared in the life of the Catholic and Christian churches, but also in other cults. As part of the ancient Greek hero cult, the tombs of their heroes were hidden from the people, so that they would not be robbed. Buddhists distributed Buddha's ashes to eight noble families. These families kept the earthly remains of the founder of the religion in so-called stupas or reliquaries. Lamaists still keep the bones of the Dalai Lama to this day. Followers of Islam keep the hair from the beard of Muhammad in a glass case. The clothes and turbans of the saints are also venerated, and they are vowed at their graves.<sup>30</sup>

The custom of venerating relics was also established early on in the Catholic Church. A significant contribution to the development of this tradition was made by the discovery and transport of the Holy Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ, or the bodies of the martyrs.<sup>31</sup>

Martyrs were already held in high esteem in the first century, and initially the remains of martyrs were surrounded by great reverence in their immediate surroundings. Those who gave their lives for their faith, that is, who died as martyrs, were divided into three large groups: 1) professors (*professores*): those who voluntarily chose martyrdom; 2) confessors (*confessores*): those who suffered, but survived the trials; 3) martyrs (*martyres*): people who suffered for their faith and died as a result, or who survived torture and died in peace.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> TÖRÖK, *Az ereklyetisztelet története*, p.255.

<sup>30</sup> DIÓS, István and János VICZIÁN, *Magyar Katolikus Lexikon* III. SzIT, Budapest, 1997. p. 227.

<sup>31</sup> KISS, pp. 8. and 64. TÖRÖK József, *Az ereklyetisztelet története*, IN: CSÉFALVAY Pál – KONTSEK Ildikó [szerk.]: *Magyar szentek tisztelete és ereklyéi*, Novoprint, Esztergom 2000, pp. 19-20.

<sup>32</sup> KUMINETZ, Géza, "Az egyház megszentelő feladata IV. A megszentelés egyéb eszközei." *Bibliotheca Instituti Postgradualis Iuris Canonici, Institutiones* 6/1. SzIT, Budapest, 2005, p.50.

Christians regularly visited the graves of martyrs.<sup>33</sup> Soon, it became customary to decorate them and build chapels or churches near the graves, thus turning these places into sacred and venerable sites, i.e. places of pilgrimage. The day of the martyrs' death was commemorated with a holy mass, and funeral ceremonies were held at or near the graves of the deceased. Hymns were sung during Mass, and prayers were offered for the intercession of the saint.<sup>34</sup> According to the Law of the Twelve Tables, Romans had to be buried outside the city. Christians also followed this rule, and thanks to this, the Church acquired the right to purchase graves, meaning that it bought quite a few graves for its deceased members, especially for martyrs. The catacomb system had become a labyrinth. They purchased and acquired numerous catacomb tombs, which still bear the name of their original or former owners (e.g., the Praetextatus Catacombs). The graves were named after the founder or the martyr buried there.<sup>35</sup> During the persecution of Christians under Valerian and Diocletian, Christian cemeteries were confiscated, but after 313 they were returned to the Church.<sup>36</sup>

Around 150, the veneration of relics began to appear in the Roman catacombs. In 257, Valerian issued a decree banning visits to cemeteries, with the aim of eliminating the veneration of martyrs and their relics among Christians. Due to this, the faithful took a body part or piece of clothing with them at the martyrs' funerals. They wanted to have a little piece of it in their homes.<sup>37</sup> Here we must mention the truth written about by Lajos Szimonidesz – whose view we also share – that in the 3rd and 4th centuries, it was rare for the ashes of a burned martyr not to be buried, but rather scattered and kept by the people, or for a great saint not to be buried and his earthly remains kept among them. He also said that it was not typical for a body to be cut into pieces and its parts scattered all over the world. The natural object of worship is the undisturbed corpse buried in his tomb, or the place where he suffered martyrdom, provided that the place was owned by Christians.<sup>38</sup> There are records dating back to the early 4th century

<sup>33</sup> ERDŐ, Péter, *Die Reliquienverehrung im Kirchenrecht*, in *Folia Theologica* 9(1998) pp. 83-84.

<sup>34</sup> PUSKÁS, Attila, "A szenttéavatás dogmatikai alapjai." *A klerikusi életszentség bölcséleti, teológiai alapjai és kánonjogi garanciái. Teológiai tanulmányok*. Edited by Kuminetz, Géza. *Varia Theologica*. Vol. 1, SzIT, Budapest 2010, p.59. Cf. Török, *Az ereklyetisztelet története*, p. 20.

<sup>35</sup> MAZZEI, Barbara – SALVETTI, Carla, *Il sarcofago attico degli amorini a Pretestato. Restauro e nuove considerazioni iconografiche*, in *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana* 76(2000) pp. 217-218. See also DIÓS, István and VICZIÁN, János. *Magyar Katolikus Lexikon VI*. SzIT, Budapest, 2001. pp. 291-292.

<sup>36</sup> DIÓS -VICZIÁN, *Magyar Katolikus Lexikon VI*. p. 292.

<sup>37</sup> DIÓS -VICZIÁN, *Magyar Katolikus Lexikon III*. p. 227.

<sup>38</sup> SZIMONIDESZ, Lajos, *Jézus és Mária ereklyéi*, Buschmann F. Könyvnyomda, Budapest 1933, p. 23.

about the preservation of the body or body parts as relics. Roman law regulated the inviolability of graves, and Christian emperors expressly rose to protect Christian graves. The Church did not forbid the faithful from removing bones and remains from a saint's tomb.<sup>39</sup> Christians frequently bribed officials in order to obtain the holy body (corpse).<sup>40</sup> In the 4th century, Saint Jerome and other Church Fathers wrote about the veneration of relics, which served to strengthen reverence for the saints and faith.<sup>41</sup> The relics were directly connected to the saints, and the faithful believed that through their intercession they could obtain grace. From the 4th century onwards, Eastern Christians divided the bodies of saints into several parts, but this practice was strictly forbidden among Western Christians for a long time, i.e. it was not an accepted practice.<sup>42</sup>

In the 6th century, Masses celebrated in the catacombs came to an end. The relics and earthly remains of martyrs and saints were transferred (*translatio*) to churches and they were placed in altars (in the East: *antimension*<sup>43</sup>). This is how the faithful could visit the graves of the martyrs. In the past, shrouds (known as "*brandeum*"<sup>44</sup>) and clothes were placed on the graves of martyrs. They believed that this would allow them to share in (be communicated with) the martyr's holy power, and they carried these pieces of clothing around with them as relics.<sup>45</sup> After the relics of martyrs and saints were transferred to the church, the "*confessio*" and "*fenestella*" appeared.<sup>46</sup> The so-called "*confessio*" was a structure connecting the martyrs' tomb and the altar built above it. The aim was to make the martyr's tomb visible and accessible to the faithful, so the altar was not placed directly on the tomb, but on a wall built around it. They cut a recess or pit in the floor (known as a *fenestella*), through which they could reach the grave and retrieve personal items and cloths, which they could then take home after visiting the martyr's grave.

<sup>39</sup> DIÓS -VICZIÁN, *Magyar Katolikus Lexikon* III. p. 227.

<sup>40</sup> TÖRÖK, József, *Az ereklyetisztelet története*, p. 255.

<sup>41</sup> AIBEN, Máttyás, *A szent ereklyék tisztelet a katolikus Egyházban*, Pázmány Kiadó, Szatmár 1897, p. 84.

<sup>42</sup> ERDŐ, Péter, *Die Reliquienverehrung im Kirchenrecht*, in *Folia Theologica* 9(1998) pp. 84.

<sup>43</sup> The antimension is 'a square linen cloth bearing an image of the removal of Jesus from the cross or his burial, with a small reliquary pouch on the back; it is used in the Byzantine rite during Holy Mass.' (DIÓS -VICZIÁN, *Magyar Katolikus Lexikon* I. SzIT, Budapest 1993, p. 317.)

<sup>44</sup> The "brandeum" is a linen shroud of martyrs and saints, and the covering for their relics. The practice of covering the dead can be traced back to the Romans. Their aim in covering the deceased was to hide the dead from prying eyes and those who wished to pay their respects. (TÖRÖK, *Az ereklyetisztelet története*, p. 256. and DIÓS -VICZIÁN, *Magyar Katolikus Lexikon* II. SzIT, Budapest 1996, p. 30.)

<sup>45</sup> Szimonidesz Lajos, *Jézus és Mária ereklyéi*, p. 23.

<sup>46</sup> DIÓS -VICZIÁN, *Magyar Katolikus Lexikon* II. SzIT, Budapest 1996, p. 277.

In the Middle Ages, the *confessio* was enlarged: the floor level in front of the altar was lowered and a semicircular recess was created. We can see an example of this in the current St. Peter's Basilica.<sup>47</sup> Pope Honorius I (625-38) had the relics transferred to churches within the city in order to protect them from thieves. His successors did the same, carrying them to churches and basilicas in solemn processions. After a while, it was no longer safe to hold religious services outside the city, so it was advisable to remove the remains of the saints from the catacombs.<sup>48</sup> We find similar regulations in the rules of the Fifth Council of Carthage held in 398, although here it is more a matter of removing any altars erected in memory of martyrs in fields or along roads that do not contain martyr relics. This was considered another sign of respect for the remains of the saints.<sup>49</sup>

It is also important to mention that the distribution of the earthly remains of martyrs was not only motivated by commercial interests or the desire to take them home, but also to give relics of the martyrs to parishes that did not have their own martyrs in their diocese or city, as a sign of generosity.

From the middle of the 8th century, popes sent the bodies of saints to numerous churches in the Frankish Kingdom. From the 11th century onwards, the bodies of saints were also distributed in Rome. From the 12th century onwards, the main form of liturgical veneration of relics was to light candles in front of them, burn incense, hold vigils, carry them in processions, and kiss and bless them as a sign of reverence.<sup>50</sup>

The Catholic Church addressed the veneration of relics at three major councils: at the Second Council of Nicaea (787), the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), and the Council of Trent (1545-1563). All three councils affirm that veneration of relics is as old as the Church itself, and that anyone who rejects it must be excommunicated from the Church.<sup>51</sup>

The Council of Buda in Hungary in 1279 decreed that the relics of saints should be placed on public display, and that this could only be done with the permission of the Pope. If someone did not follow this rule, a clergyman would be suspended, and a believer would not be allowed to attend their parish church for a month.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>47</sup> DIÓS -VICZIÁN, *Magyar Katolikus Lexikon* III. SzIT, Budapest 1997, p. 593.

<sup>48</sup> DIÓS -VICZIÁN, *Magyar Katolikus Lexikon* VI. SzIT, Budapest 2001, p. 295.

<sup>49</sup> AIBEN, Mátyás, *A szent ereklyék tisztelete a katolikus Egyházban*, Pázmány Kiadó, Szatmár 1897. p. 89.

<sup>50</sup> ERDŐ, *Die Reliquienverehrung im Kirchenrecht*, pp. 82-84.

<sup>51</sup> GECSE, Gusztáv, *Szentelek, legendák, ereklyék*, Gondolat Kiadó, 1963. p.129. DH 342, 440, 679, 985. (DEINZINGER, Heinrich and Peter HÜNERMANN, editors. *Hitvallások és az Egyház Tanítóhivatalának megnyilatkozásai*. Bányterenyé-Budapest, Örökmécs-Szent István Társulat, 2004.)

<sup>52</sup> DIÓS -VICZIÁN, *Magyar Katolikus Lexikon* III. p. 229.

In the Middle Ages, ecclesiastical regulations sought to prevent abuses. The theft of relics was punished by excommunication, and it was forbidden to trade with them or to transfer them to another place of safekeeping without the permission of the bishops, the prince, or the council.<sup>53</sup> No relics were given from the bodies of Saints Peter, Paul, Lawrence, and Demetrius.

### 1.3. The 1917 Code of Canon Law and Current Regulations

In Part III of the CIC of 1917, under Title XVI, canons 1276 to 1289, we find provisions relating to the veneration of relics under the heading Saints, Images, and Relics. The first five canons deal with the veneration of saints and images depicting them. Can. 1281 expresses a specific prohibition against selling or transferring with the intention of permanent removal to another church, without the permission of the Holy See, relics of great value and renown which are venerated by the faithful in a particular church.<sup>54</sup> Can. 1289§ 1 also prohibits alienation, and this canon also specifies who is responsible for ensuring compliance with the prohibition on alienation of relics: local ordinaries (*vicarius*), deans, parish priests, and other pastors must ensure that, when distributing or auctioning off priestly estates, they do not leave the Catholic community and are not sold, with particular regard to the relic of the Holy Cross.<sup>55</sup> Special rules were established regarding the Holy Cross relic, according to which it could not be placed in the same reliquary as other relics for veneration.<sup>56</sup> In the current Code of Canon Law, there are only a few canons—two in total—related to the veneration of relics. §2 of canon 1190 states the following: *‘Relics of great significance and other relics honored with great reverence by the people cannot be alienated validly in any manner or transferred permanently without the permission of the Apostolic See.’*

<sup>53</sup> ERDŐ, *Die Reliquienverehrung im Kirchenrecht*, p. 84.

<sup>54</sup> „Insignes reliquiae aut imagines pretiosae itemque aliae reliquiae aut imagines quae in aliqua ecclesia magna populi veneratione honorentur, nequeunt valide alienari neque in aliam ecclesiam perpetuo transferri sine Apostolicae Sedis permissu.” (Can. 1281. §1.)

<sup>55</sup> BÁNK, József, *Kánoni jog* II. SzIT, Budapest 1963, p. 336. Cf. Can. 1289. §1. Sacras reliquias vendere nefas est; adeoque Ordinarii locorum, vicarii foranei, parochi aliive curam animarum habentes, sedulo caveant ne sacrae reliquiae, praesertim sanctissimae Crucis, occasione maxime hereditatum aut alienationis acervi bonorum, veneant, neve in acatholicorum manus transeant.

<sup>56</sup> REINHARDT, Heinrich J. F. in *Münsterischer Kommentar zum Codex Iuris Canonici unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Rechtslage in Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz*, Essen 1985ff., ad can. 1190/1., See also: Erdő, p. 86.

In the case of the Eastern Church, relics, icons, and images may be sold or transferred permanently to another church with the permission of the Holy See or the patriarch and with the consent of the Permanent Synod (Art. 5§3).<sup>57</sup>

In 2017, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints (henceforth referred to as the Congregation) issued a new document, an instruction entitled '*Le Reliquie nella Chiesa: autenticità e conservazione*'<sup>58</sup> (*Relics in the Church: authenticity and preservation*), whose aim was to ensure that the eparchs and those who are equivalent to them in law as well as the Servants of God and Venerables, participate in its proceedings, facilitate their participation in this special procedure and their work. This document replaces the appendix to the *Sanctorum Mater* instruction, as stated in its introduction.<sup>59</sup> The document (also) provides separate, detailed provisions on the method of alienation in Articles 5(1) to (4). It stipulates that if the diocesan bishop or eparch<sup>60</sup> wishes to permanently transfer ownership within the territory of his own diocese or eparchy, he must submit a written request to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints (cf. Art. 5.1).

Based on the above, as in the case of canonization, there is a Roman phase involving the transfer of relics, the collection of relics from the earthly remains of martyrs and saints, and their placement in reliquaries. As we have seen, the transfer of relics (*translatio*) requires the permission of the Congregation. The permission must be submitted in writing to the bishop, which must specify the exact location of the new resting place of the sacred earthly remains or relics, i.e. the name of the city, church, chapel, public or private cemetery, etc. where they intend to place them, and a plan must also be attached to this (Art. 3§2.). All procedures relating to relics or earthly remains shall be carried out by the diocesan bishop or eparch of the place of custody (Art. 1), who has obtained prior permission from the Congregation. When private individuals have a relic – as a result of inheritance – then, taking civil regulations into account, the ecclesiastical

<sup>57</sup> Cf. CCEO can. 887 and 888. Cf. *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium*, auctoritate Ioannis Pauli PP. II. promulgatus (18 Octobris 1990): AAS 82(1990), 1045-1363.

<sup>58</sup> Congregazione per la Cause des Santi, *Le Reliquie nella Chiesa: autenticità e conservazione*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Roma 2018. <https://www.causesanti.va/it/documenti/relics-in-the-church-authenticity-and-preservation.html> Accessed: May 31 2025.

<sup>59</sup> The document covers the following topics: Request of the Consent of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints (Artt. 1-5), Diocesan or Eparchial Phase of the possible specific procedures to perform (Artt. 6-12), Canonical Recognition (Artt. 13-20), Extraction of Fragments and Creation of Relics (Artt. 21-25) and Translation of the Urn and Alienation of Relics, transporting them on pilgrimages, i.e. transferring them from one place of safekeeping to another, e.g. on the occasion of a jubilee or a celebration.

<sup>60</sup> In the following, we will only use the term bishop. Of course, in this case, we are also referring to the bishops (eparchs) of the Eastern Church and their dioceses (eparchates), and the instruction also applies to them.

authority shall endeavor to persuade the heir to donate his inheritance to the church, if possible (Art. 2). Transfer to another diocese must be preceded by the written consent of the receiving bishop, which must be submitted to the Congregation by the competent diocesan bishop, attached to his own request (Art. 5§4).

Once the Dicastery's approval has been received, the so-called diocesan phase can begin. As part of the preparations, the diocesan bishop establishes a commission, which is led by himself or by a priest appointed by him. The bishop or designated priest, the procurator who is the driving force behind the case, and the notary participate in the proceedings. The bishop calls upon a physician or medical expert, e.g. a pathologist, technical staff, and witnesses, who may be believers or priests, to sign the documents (Articles 6-10). All participants take an oath to maintain official secrecy and to perform their duties faithfully.

In the case of recognition of relics, the bishop or a person delegated by him, or the persons mentioned above, shall go to the place where the relics or earthly remains are kept (Art. 13§1). The bishop or the person representing the bishop may consent to or take other persons who may be present at the exhumation and identification of the revered person (Art. 13§2). Before removing the relics, if any, the authentic document relating to the last burial must be read aloud (Art. 14§2). The earthly remains are then placed on a dignified drape and cleaned by experts to remove dust and other contaminants. The experts' task is to examine the authenticity (Art. 16), analytically identify the body parts, and record their expert opinion in writing. Should treatment be necessary with regard to the "remains," the bishop's permission is required, and experts must use the most recognized techniques (Art. 17). If the procedure for recognition consists of several stages, the relics must be kept in a locked place, the key to which must be kept by the bishop or a designated person, a measure which excludes the possibility of theft or desecration, i.e. it may also prove to be a preventive precaution (Art. 18). This can also serve as a preventive measure (Art. 18). Once the examinations are complete, the body is dressed in new clothes, which should be of the same style as those worn previously, and then placed in a new urn or coffin. The bishop or delegate must ensure that nothing is taken from the urn and that nothing is placed in it (Art. 19§1-3). The previous urn or storage container must be retained or, alternatively, incinerated. All records must be certified by the bishop with his seal and placed in the urn. The sealed coffin and urn are usually tied with ribbon and sealed with a stamp.

According to CIC 1283§2 of 1917, in addition to the Pope, the following persons may authenticate relics: all cardinals, diocesan bishops, and all those who have received authorization from the Pope to do so. A specially authorized person may be, for example, the bishop's vicar, who can only authenticate relics with authorization.<sup>61</sup> A relic that has been approved by the church (*approbata*) is one that has been recognized as such by the competent ecclesiastical authority, which has prepared documentation to authenticate it. Non-authenticated (*non approbata*) relics may not be displayed or publicly venerated.<sup>62</sup> The regulation in force also designates the postulator of the case, which expands and broadens the scope of this role and competence to include persons other than the bishop.

This document sets out the two main reasons for extracting the fragment: 1. the person is on the verge of beatification, or 2. the bishop submits a request to the Holy See, more specifically to the Congregation. Small pieces or fragments that have come loose may be removed from the grave in accordance with the instructions of the medical examiner (Art. 21§1). The bishop decides on the place of safekeeping of relics and earthly remains after hearing the postulator of the cause (Art. 22). The bishop or the postulator of the cause is responsible for preparing the certificate of authenticity (Art. 23§1-2). Article 24 of the present instruction also confirms the provisions of previous church discipline, which prohibit the dismemberment of bodies—unless expressly authorized by the Congregation—the trade in relics, and their display in inappropriate places (Art. 25).<sup>63</sup> At the point of final transfer of relics and earthly remains, the guardian and protector of the relic shall be the bishop or a priest appointed by him, or a member of the Christian community, an ordained monk/nun, or a believer to act as Guardian-Porter. If they deem it appropriate, they may take photos or videos of the events. Minutes must be taken of all proceedings and, with the permission of the Congregation, these must be kept in the episcopal chancellery and a copy of everything must be sent to the Congregation (Art. 29§1-2).

<sup>61</sup> Acta Apostolicae Sedis 25(1933) p. 345.

<sup>62</sup> BÁNK, József, *Kánoni jog II.* SzIT, Budapest 1963, p. 334.

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.causesanti.va/it/documenti/relics-in-the-church-authenticity-and-preservation.html> Accessed: May 31 2025.

#### 1.4. Martyrs of the Present Age in the Hungarian Church

We see that suffering does not spare Christians in the present age either. According to the teachings of the Church, there are two types of martyrdom. One of them has already been discussed in detail above. This type of martyrdom is when someone gives their life for Christ. The other type of martyrdom is white martyrdom, when someone experiences inner torment and pain, and is able to accept and offer these with a strong spirit and faith, with hope in God and as a sacrifice for Him, as a sign of their love for the Lord.<sup>64</sup> Our Hungarian church and nation also have heroes who shed their blood for their faith, who can serve as examples for all of us, and whose lives can give us strength in our spiritual development. Let us remember the victims of communism, many of whom have already been beatified by the Church: Blessed János Brenner (1931-1957), a priest who had been called to the sick but was brutally stabbed<sup>65</sup> on the night of December 14-15 in 1957, and who, while being assaulted, protected the Blessed Sacrament with one hand and himself with the other. It is no coincidence that he is referred to as the Hungarian Tarsicius. Blessed Bishop Vilmos Apor (1892-1945), who suffered martyrdom on Good Friday defending the purity of young women and girls, was shot and died on Easter Monday<sup>66</sup>, and whose 80th anniversary of death was commemorated by our church on April 2, 2025. Prince Primate József Mindszenty, cardinal, archbishop<sup>67</sup>, who was brutally tortured at the State Protection Authority headquarters in Budapest. Also worthy of mention is Blessed Zoltán Lajos Meszlényi (1892-1951), auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Esztergom-Budapest, who was beaten to death in the Recsk forced labor camp<sup>68</sup> and the name of Blessed Tódor Romzsa (1911-1974), Greek Catholic bishop of Transcarpathia (Ukraine) whose horse-drawn carriage was run over by a military

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.vaticannews.va/hu/egyhazi/news/2023-05/mindszenty-biboros-konferencia-voros-es-feher-vertanuk-fabene.html> Accessed: May 25, 2025.

<sup>65</sup> <https://www.brennerjanos.hu/elete> Accessed: May 26, 2025.

<sup>66</sup> *Martyrologium Romanum*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2004, p. 115. TÓTH, Krisztina, Bódi Mária szent életű kortársai, in: Bódi Mária Magdolna öröksége, A Veszprémi Érseki Főiskolán azonos címmel 2024. április 12-én tartott konferencia előadásai, Veszprémi Főegyházmege, PremiumP-ack, Veszprém 2024, 102.

<sup>67</sup> MÉSZÁROS, István, *Mindszenty-mozaikok*, Ecclesia, Budapest 2002, p. 90. TÖRÖK, Csaba, *Mindszenty József, a lelkipásztor*, in: Mindszenty József és kortársai: vértanú és hitvalló püspökeink, A Mindszenty József születésének 120. évfordulója alkalmából a Központi Papnevelő Intézetben rendezett 2012. március 28-i teológiai konferencián elhangzott előadások, SzIT, Budapest, 2012, pp. 59-94. esp. pp. 72-74.

<sup>68</sup> MAGYAR, Erzsébet, *Ki volt Meszlényi Zoltán? Mozaikok egy vértanú püspök életéből*, SzIT, Budapest 2009, pp. 62-65. Cf. HETÉNYI, VARGA Károly, Papi sorsok a horogkereszt és a vörös csillag árnyékában III. Lámpás Kiadó, Abaliget 1996. p. 230.

vehicle and who was beaten to death along with his companions<sup>69</sup>, as well as Szilárd Bogdánffy (1911-1953)<sup>70</sup>. Here we must also mention Mária Magdolna Bódi beatified in September 20025. During the communist era, Russian soldiers stationed in Hungary pillaged villages and raped and dishonored women, young girls and nuns. Monsignor Angelo Rotta, then Apostolic Nuncio to Hungary, reports on this sad event in a letter to the Holy Father<sup>71</sup>. Men who tried to defend their wives or other women faced certain death. The same can be said about the women, nuns whom Russian soldiers singled out to rape. This was also the case with the young, pure-hearted girl, Mária Bódi, who felt the Lord's calling at a very young age and wanted to live a life devoted to God as a nun, but was unable to do so due to her family background.<sup>72</sup> A Russian soldier wanted to take her purity, but she refused to go along with it. She pulled a small pair of scissors from her pocket and wounded the violent soldier's eye, then ran out of the shelter. The soldier followed her and fired several bullets into Magdi, who cried out to her Lord with these words gave her soul back to her Creator: "Lord, my King, take me to you!"<sup>73</sup> The last bullet pierced her heart. Magdolna maintained a close relationship with the Holy Sacrament. She had the courage to face death if necessary. She was called "the Hungarian Maria Goretti" by her compatriots. The martyr mentioned above is associated with numerous prayers and miracles.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>69</sup> PUSKÁS, László, *Megalkuvás nélkül - Boldog Romzsa Tódor élete és vértanúhalála*, Don Bosco Kiadó, Budapest 2005. pp. 197-205.

<sup>70</sup> TEMPFLI, Imre, Boldog Bogdánffy Szilárd és a romániai egyházüldözés (1945–1953) in: Magyar Egyháztörténeti Vázlatok. Essays In Church History In Hungary (2012/1–2) Sigillum, Szeged 2000, pp. 101-110. cf. also: [https://ww.heh.hu/MEV\\_2012\\_1-2.szam.pdf](https://ww.heh.hu/MEV_2012_1-2.szam.pdf) Accessed: May 26, 2025. (Bishop Szilárd Bogdánffy was the Auxiliary Bishop of Oradea Mare of the Latins (Nagyvárad), ordained secretly in 1949amid communist persecution in Romania. Arrested shortly after for high treason, he endured brutal imprisonment, forced labor in mines and camps like Capul Midia, and died of untreated pneumonia on October 2, 1953, at age 42. Beatified by Pope Benedict XVI on October 30, 2010, he exemplified charity by hiding Jews during WWII and supporting the poor and oppressed.)

<sup>71</sup> MERINELLI, Cristina, *Vatikáni források Bódi Mária Magdolna boldoggá és szentté avatásának ügyében*, in: Bódi Mária Magdolna öröksége, A Veszprémi Érseki Főiskolán azonos címmel 2024. április 12-én tartott konferencia előadásai, Veszprémi Főegyházmegye, PremiumPack, Veszprém 2024, p. 64. Cf. La Sacra Congregazione degli Affari Ecclesiastici Straordinari, Archivio Storico della Segreteria di Stato - Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati e le Organizzazioni, Pio XII. Parte I. Serie Ungheria, Pos. 124.f.66.

<sup>72</sup> TEMESI, József, *Bódi Mária Magdolna. Tanúságtétel lilíommal, vérrel*, Veszprémi Főegyházmegye, PremiumPack, Veszprém 2025, p. 23.

<sup>73</sup> VARGA, Tibor József, „...sokszoros termést hoz.” Bódi Mária Magdolna élete, Veszprém Érsekség, PremiumPack, Veszprém 2025, pp. 43-44.

<sup>74</sup> Father József TEMESI SJ, who was the spiritual father of the martyr mentioned above, recounts such an experience. He prayed to Magdolna for the fulfillment of his vocation, and his prayer was answered. Parish priest László Markója recovered from his stomach problems after visiting Magdi's grave. Father Pál Fábos, who prayed to Magdi when he was arrested by the communists. He was released within a few hours, for reasons unknown. (NAGY, Brigitta, *Isten szolgálója vértanúságának és égi közbenjárásának híre és szemé-*

## Conclusion

Martyrdom is a special form of professing one's faith. Through it, the person concerned expresses his or her love for Christ and the Church. Martyrdom is the light of moral life and truth<sup>75</sup>, which awakens a sense of moral justice. We have seen that martyrs do not seek out situations where they might lose their lives, but rather that such situations always arise naturally. However, in order for someone to be worthy of martyrdom, it is necessary to live a life devoted to God while practicing love for one's fellow human beings, which prepares that person's soul to truly become worthy of this difficult and unexpected event, action and for the very act of devoting one's life. The world does not understand the faith of Christians, the death of martyrs, which is already described in The Scripture: "They seemed, in the view of the foolish, to be dead; and their passing away was thought an affliction and their going forth from us utter destruction. But they are in peace." (Wisdom 3:2-3NABRE) There is life after death for Christians, as in death they become like their Master. However, it is also true that God does not call everyone to martyrdom. In everyday life, everyone needs to make sacrifices for the benefit of those around them, which is not an easy task, but with the Lord's help and strength, everyone can become capable of doing so.

The present topic is diverse and very rich. This study was unable to cover all aspects of the topic; we were only able to present a fraction of it.

The veneration of relics is present in the Church, which is not a superstitious custom, but is closely linked to the tradition of the Church and expresses our reverence for the saints. Towards those who have gone before us on the path of holiness through the heroic practice of virtue, to which we are all called.

*lye tapasztalásai*, in Bódi Mária Magdolna öröksége, A Veszprémi Érseki Főiskolán azonos címmel 2024. április 12-én tartott konferencia előadásai, Veszprémi Főegyházmegye, PremiumPack, Veszprém 2024, pp. 71-79. especially p. 73.)

<sup>75</sup> POPE JOHN PAUL II. GENERAL AUDIENCE, 14 October 1998cf. [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/1998/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_aud\\_14101998.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/1998/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_14101998.html)

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## Was Jesus' Death Necessary for Redemption?

### *Saint Anselm of Canterbury's Doctrine of Redemption*

*Saint Anselm of Canterbury* (Aosta, 1033 – Canterbury, 1109) was a scholastic theologian, an Italian Benedictine monk and abbot, and Archbishop of Canterbury (1093–1109). Taking his treatise *Cur Deus Homo* (Why God Became Man) as our point of departure, this study asks in what sense Jesus' death was necessary for redemption. In his theology of grace and his Christology, Anselm builds his argument on the Church Fathers, especially Saint Augustine and Saint Irenaeus.

Anselm's aim is not to argue a reader into faith, but rather to make faith intelligible so that one may see its inner rationality and even take delight in it. Starting from faith, one may investigate with reasons.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, the Archbishop of Canterbury asks: what is the rational fittingness of God's taking on humanity?<sup>2</sup> With God's help and in prayer he seeks an answer to the mystery, while acknowledging that it remains inexhaustible in its depth.<sup>3</sup> Many approaches to redemption are possible, not only because its transcendent reality surpasses our grasp, but also because it can be described through various models: *atonement, satisfaction, redemption, sacrifice, substitution, solidarity, deification, kenosis, ransom, causal explanation, merit* etc.<sup>4</sup>

Contrasting the fall with redemption, Anselm states that death entered the world through disobedience, whereas new life comes through obedience. Sin comes from a woman (Eve), and likewise the Redeemer is born sinlessly from a woman (Mary).

<sup>1</sup> Cf. SAINT ANSELM, *Cur Deus Homo*, Wipf & Stock Publishers, Eugene, OR, USA 2020, 2,15.

<sup>2</sup> CDH 1,1.

<sup>3</sup> CDH 1,2.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 48 ("On the manner and effects of Christ's Passion"): a. 1 merit (*per modum meriti*); a. 2 satisfaction (*per modum satisfactionis*); a. 3 sacrifice (*per modum sacrificii*); aa. 4–5 redemption (*per modum redemptionis*); a. 6 efficient cause (*per modum efficientiae*). See also KERESZTY, Rókus –PUSKÁS, Attila, *Jézus Krisztus*, Szent István Társulat, Budapest 2015, 190–224; 278.

Sin was conceived in the enjoyment of the fruit of a tree; redemption from sin comes through suffering on a tree. Satan overcame the human being with ease; the New Man overcame the devil through grievous suffering.<sup>5</sup> God's work seemed to be lost through humanity's fall, yet it would not be fitting for the Lord's creation to fail to reach its goal and to be ruined utterly.<sup>6</sup> Only God can restore the human being; otherwise the human person would become the servant of whoever restored him. Therefore, the one who restores must be God.<sup>7</sup>

This raises a question: to whom did God owe satisfaction? From whose power did God have to release the human being? Was anything owed to Satan, to God's wrath, or to us?<sup>8</sup> Both Satan and the human being remain under God's authority, so God need not 'litigate' with Satan; at most, he may punish him for persuading humanity to rebel against God and to follow him.<sup>9</sup> In one sense Satan torments the human being justly, because the human being rebelled; in that respect Satan becomes an instrument of divine punishment. Yet Satan does not punish the human being 'justly' with respect to God, and thus God punishes Satan. In this connection Paul speaks of God cancelling the record that stood against us and nailing it to the cross.<sup>10</sup> In the incarnation (and in redemption) God owed nothing to anyone: not to Satan, not to the human being, and not even to himself, as though compelled. God willed the incarnation rationally, as he wills everything he does in a rational way. God took on humanity not by necessity but freely, and as man he obeyed the Father, an obedience that, precisely as human, he owed to the Father.<sup>11</sup> God showed mercy to the human being, without being obliged by anyone or anything.<sup>12</sup> God came to save without suspending the demands of rational fittingness.<sup>13</sup> In that sense, God owed the punishment of sin only to his own justice.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>5</sup> CDH 1,3;1,22.

<sup>6</sup> CDH 1,4; CDH 1,19 and 1,23; cf. CDH 2,4–5 and SAINT IRENAEUS, *Adversus haereses* 3.23.1. See below.

<sup>7</sup> CDH 1,5. For example, if God had created a sinless human being through whom he would redeem humanity.

<sup>8</sup> CDH 1,6. Cf. CDH 2,18 and CDH 2,19: "*It is also plain that God had no need of doing the thing spoken of, but eternal truth demanded it.*" Anselm continues by insisting that God owed the devil only punishment, and that whatever was demanded of human beings was owed to God, not to the devil.

<sup>9</sup> When speaking of the battle against Satan, we mean it only in the above sense. We do not speak of a direct struggle between God and the devil, since this would be a conflict between the Absolute and a creature, between whom there is an infinite distance.

<sup>10</sup> Col 2:14; CDH 1,7.

<sup>11</sup> CDH 1,9–10.

<sup>12</sup> Human suffering is not God's will, but the human being's.

<sup>13</sup> CDH 1,8.

<sup>14</sup> CDH 2,18.

By creation every human being ought (and does) owe obedience to the Father. It is sin when the human being does not render to God what follows from human nature as created. This is what happened when the first human pair sinned through disobedience, and therefore they died. If the human being had not sinned, he would not have had to die. For the same reason Christ did not have to die, since he never sinned; he could dispose of his life freely and offer it voluntarily. Although this belongs to the common and free decision of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, it was not a ‘duty’ imposed upon Jesus. Freedom does not mean that Jesus lacked a natural human desire for life; rather, he freely offered what he naturally desired, as his prayer shows “*My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.*”<sup>15</sup> That is, apart from the Father’s explicit will (and the aim of redeeming the human race), he would have chosen life. Likewise, the Father ‘willed’ the Son’s death in the sense that he affirmed the Son’s free act of redemption, since Jesus lays down his life of his own accord and has authority to take it up again “*I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.*”<sup>16</sup> Redemption, too, is thus a common and free decision of the Persons of the Holy Trinity.

If a human being commits sin, then in justice toward God he incurs a debt: he must return what he has taken from God and make reparation.<sup>17</sup> But someone who has committed no sin does not owe such a debt.<sup>18</sup> One may therefore ask: why, out of mercy, did God not restore with a mere ‘word’ what the human being had ruined?<sup>19</sup> Did he not want to? Then God would not be wise; yet the Lord is wise. Is not everything under God’s power? On what could his action depend, if not on himself? Or was redemption merely meant to display God’s love to human beings; yet then why not display it also to the angels?<sup>20</sup> To restore the damage ‘without consequences’ does not befit God, because such forgiveness would ignore the consequences and the penalty. When the human being sins, he disrupts God’s order and the harmony of creation. If God were to set aside satisfaction, he would not treat sin according to the right order and would leave in place

<sup>15</sup> Matt 26:42.

<sup>16</sup> John 10:17–18.

<sup>17</sup> CDH 1,11.

<sup>18</sup> By creatureliness the human being always owes God what is due to him; obedience toward God belongs to justice.

<sup>19</sup> CDH 1,12.

<sup>20</sup> CDH 1,6.

a reality that continues to undermine order. God would thereby permit disorder and leave sin unpunished. In that case he would treat the sinner and the sinless alike, which would be unjust; moreover, sin, an offence against God, would lose its gravity. Then ‘law’ itself would not exist, even though God has subjected the world to order. If God left wrongdoing without consequence, he would not even uphold due reverence for his own majesty; he would allow what is taken from him not to be returned, and all this would remain without consequence.<sup>21</sup> And would sinners, without suitable satisfaction, stand where the angels stand in heaven with God?<sup>22</sup> God does not put on public display a precious jewel dragged into the mud. It is not enough simply to ask for forgiveness in the Lord’s Prayer<sup>23</sup>; our debt must also be addressed. Therefore, either punishment or reparation is always required, and it does not befit the good and just God to leave sin in disorder.<sup>24</sup> If a human being accepts God’s will and submits to the world’s order, he preserves the world’s order and beauty; but if he sins, he disrupts order and harmony. By punishment or reparation God safeguards the world’s order and beauty, not his own dignity, which no human being can damage.<sup>25</sup>

Saint Anselm develops an Augustinian idea: God places saved human beings in the ‘places’ of the fallen angels,<sup>26</sup> not necessarily in the same number, but at least enough to fill what the demons have lost. Anselm stresses this because God, he argues, wants to restore what is lacking, having ‘counted on’ a perfect number.<sup>27</sup> Yet the Lord would have welcomed human beings into salvation even without the evil spirits, just as the Lord Jesus would have called the Gentiles even if the Jews had not rejected him. Likewise, even if Adam had not sinned, God would still wait so that the number of the saved might become as complete as possible.<sup>28</sup>

The fundamental question in the whole work (indeed, the starting point of redemption) is: what can the human being give God for sin? We sinners can give nothing,

<sup>21</sup> God cannot lose his honor: either the human being freely renders it, or God takes it from the sinner. If God takes it, that too serves God’s honor, since all things are subject to him. Yet the human being cannot change God’s dignity. (CDH 1,15.)

<sup>22</sup> CDH 1,19.

<sup>23</sup> Matt 6:12, Luke 11:4.

<sup>24</sup> CDH 1,13-15; 19.

<sup>25</sup> CDH 1,15.

<sup>26</sup> Enchiridion 9,29 and De civitate Dei 22,1. Cf. Wis 11:20c: “*you have arranged all things by measure and number and weight.*”

<sup>27</sup> CDH 1,16-17.

<sup>28</sup> CDH 1,18.

because we already owe obedience to God.<sup>29</sup> Thus we cannot repay our debt to God by virtues, since virtue itself is what we already owe.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, God requires satisfaction proportionate to the gravity of sin; and because by sin the human being has offended God, this is an infinitely great offence that calls for an infinitely great satisfaction. This is impossible for the human being as a finite creature; without satisfaction God cannot save him.<sup>31</sup> Nor can the human being simply receive satisfaction from God, as though God gave to himself what the human being owes:<sup>32</sup> that would be unjust, because then the human being would not truly pay the debt.<sup>33</sup> But an unjust person cannot reach eternal blessedness while remaining unjust. Hence the human being's sin can be set right only through Christ (the God-man), or not at all.<sup>34</sup>

Yet God willed to bring his original intention for humanity to completion, and in his goodness he freely bound himself to this.<sup>35</sup> That is, even if this were the only 'possible' way within the order of salvation, God would still carry it through. Saint Irenaeus articulates the idea that if God did not accomplish his original purpose, God would appear defeated and the serpent's malice would prevail over him.<sup>36</sup> This fits closely with Irenaeus' notion of '*recapitulatio*':<sup>37</sup> God 'sums up' his work, restores it, carries it through, and brings it to fulfilment. Building on this, Anselm holds that God's work would collapse into failure if he did not will to save in this manner. If God were to allow the human being to perish, either he would be unable to finish what he began, or he would regret creating; both options are absurd.<sup>38</sup>

The human being would not have died apart from sin; therefore, restoration must be applied to a human being without sin, and redemption must take place in the very body

<sup>29</sup> CDH 1,20.

<sup>30</sup> Note on CDH 1,20 regarding the salvation of the righteous before Christ: "*This is only said of those who either looked for Christ before his coming, or who believe in him since he has appeared.*" Nevertheless, "*But no soul, before the death of Christ, could enter the heavenly kingdom.*" (cf. CDH 2,16). Cf. *H. U. v. Balthasar*: salvation is possible before Jesus, but not independently of Jesus. BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2012, 160, 167–168; cf. 177. That is, salvation exists not only after Christ, but Christ is salvation, whether one lived before him or after him.

<sup>31</sup> CDH 1,21.

<sup>32</sup> CDH 1,23.

<sup>33</sup> CDH 1,24.

<sup>34</sup> CDH 1,25.

<sup>35</sup> CDH 2,5. Cf. BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von, *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics Vol. 2: Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles*. Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1984, 243–244; BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von, *Theo-Drama. Theological Dramatic Theory Vol. 4: The Action*, Ignatius Press San Francisco 1994, 258.

<sup>36</sup> *Adversus haereses* 3,23,1; cf. 3,18,1.

<sup>37</sup> *Adversus haereses* 3,23,1; cf. CDH 2,4–5.

<sup>38</sup> CDH 1,19 and 1,23.

in which the human being lives earthly life.<sup>39</sup> Yet the restoration of the sinful human being requires something greater than the human being's sin;<sup>40</sup> and only God can give something greater than human sin, and no one else. But the debt belongs to the human being, and only God can pay it; therefore the one who pays it must be the God-man.<sup>41</sup> God cannot be transformed into a human being, nor can a human being be transformed into God, nor can a third nature arise from the two; thus the one person who makes satisfaction must be fully God and fully human, while preserving both natures.<sup>42</sup> Only a divine Person can assume humanity, and it is fitting that the Son should assume it: as man he receives sonship. If the Father had assumed humanity, there would be two Sons in the Trinity; and the Son's humanity would then pray to the Father, not to himself.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the Redeemer must assume the same 'race' (the same human kind) as the one who committed the sin, that is, he must bear Adam's humanity and come from the human race.<sup>44</sup> The Redeemer can therefore exist only as one person: one subject must possess the full and real divine nature and the full human nature<sup>45</sup> in order to make satisfaction for sins.<sup>46</sup>

What can the God-man give the Father for humanity? Like every human being, he owes obedience, and he renders it; thus, he has no personal debt. Yet obedience cannot be satisfaction for humanity, because it is simply what any human creature owes. The only thing he can offer for human sins is his life, because he does not owe his life to the Father. The God-man does not have to die, since he has not sinned, and death is a consequence of sin.<sup>47</sup> Therefore

<sup>39</sup> CDH 2,2–5.

<sup>40</sup> CDH 2,6.

<sup>41</sup> Anselm thinks in terms of the universal redemption and salvation of humanity. R. J. De La Noval argues that from Anselm's logic of incarnation and satisfaction a kind of universality follows, tending toward the salvation of the whole human race, in which human fulfilment becomes necessary and genuine freedom of choice is undermined. DE LA NOVAL, Roberto J., *Anselmian apocatastasis: the fitting necessity of universal salvation in St Anselm's Cur Deus Homo* in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 71/2 (2018) 142–158; 142–143,145.

<sup>42</sup> CDH 2,7.

<sup>43</sup> CDH 2,9.

<sup>44</sup> CDH 2,8. God creates the human being in four ways: (1) from man without woman (Eve); (2) from man and woman (human beings in general); (3) without man and without woman (Adam); (4) from woman without man (Jesus Christ). The Messiah fittingly belonged to the fourth mode: born from a woman without a man. As sin originates from a woman, so redemption fittingly begins from a woman. And if the first woman who brought sin was a virgin, it was fitting that the new Eve, Mary, should also be a virgin.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. the Chalcedonian definition: DH 300–303. DENZINGER, Heinrich Joseph-HÜNERMANN, Peter, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum. Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals* (Latin–English), Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2012.

<sup>46</sup> CDH 2,9.

<sup>47</sup> CDH 2,10. The God-man does not die because he has sinned, for he did not sin. Yet in a sense he is both unable and able to sin: the Son of God is impeccable by nature, and yet Jesus possessed true freedom and the capacity for decision.

he can freely give his life to the Father; he can freely die because, by reason of his sinlessness, he does not have to die. The Son's life is of immense value, greater than every other value, and it is more than sufficient for the human being's otherwise enormous sin. The life of Jesus Christ is infinitely more loveable than all human sins are repulsive. Although he also taught by word and example, he could not make satisfaction by teaching as such.<sup>48</sup>

Mortality does not belong to human nature as such, since the immortal blessed still belong to the human race.<sup>49</sup> Death and mortality are consequences of sin. Saint Augustine distinguishes four states in which the human being relates to sin and death across salvation history: (1) before the fall, able to die (*posse mori*) and able to sin (*posse peccare*); (2) after the fall, not able not to die (*non posse non mori*; *mori debere*) and not able not to sin (*non posse non peccare*); (3) through Christ's redemption, able not to die (*posse non mori*) and, by Christ's grace, able not to sin (*posse non peccare*); (4) in final salvation, not able to die (*non posse mori*) and not able to sin (*non posse peccare*).<sup>50</sup>

In this way Jesus could make a satisfaction of appropriate 'weight', indeed an overflowing satisfaction, for human sins by freely surrendering his own life in death.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, the sin of those who killed him was committed in ignorance, and thus it too can be encompassed within Jesus' death; consequently, even those who killed him can be saved. This also makes clear that salvation is given only through Christ, and that outside Christ there is no salvation.

Saint Anselm holds that Christ must come from the presently sinful human race in order to raise humanity up,<sup>52</sup> but must be personally sinless so that he need not die. He does not claim that the Blessed Virgin was free from original sin from the first moment of her conception, as neither Saint Augustine earlier nor Saint Thomas Aquinas later did.<sup>53</sup> Rather, the Virgin was purified before Jesus' conception so that she could give birth without penalty; yet even her purity came from Christ, because of redemption, only 'beforehand', as it were.

<sup>48</sup> CDH 2,11; 2,14. CDH 2,13 states that there were no weaknesses or ignorance in Jesus. Saint Thomas Aquinas reasons similarly in *Summa Theologica* III, q.14, a.4. Cf. KERESZTY - PUSKÁS, *Jézus Krisztus* 278.

<sup>49</sup> CDH 2,11.

<sup>50</sup> De correptione et gratia 12,33–35 in SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Answer to the Pelagians IV*, [ed. John E. Rotelle], New City Press, Hyde Park, New York 1999, 132–133; De natura et gratia 49,57 in SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Answer to the Pelagians I*, New City Press, Hyde Park, New York 1997, 245; De civitate Dei 22,30,4 in AUGUSTINE, Aurelius, *The City of God* (11–22), Vol. I/7, New City Press, Hyde Park, New York 2013, 553.

<sup>51</sup> CDH 2,15.

<sup>52</sup> CDH 2,21.

<sup>53</sup> CDH 2,16.

The God-man freely gave his life to the Father for God's glory on behalf of human beings, something he did not owe, because by reason of his sinlessness he did not have to die.<sup>54</sup> He did this for human beings, who owed the Father satisfaction for their sins: either by their eternal punishment (damnation) or by a satisfaction surpassing their sins (the cross), which no mere human being can offer, but only the God-man. How does this become salvation for human beings?<sup>55</sup> The Son made man offered his life to the Father, and the Father willed to recompense this immense gift, since such a value cannot remain unrewarded. But what can the Father give in return to the Son, who owes nothing and lacks nothing? The gift must therefore be given to someone else, lest it be wasted. If the Son asks that it be given for human beings, can the Father refuse him, especially since the Father, together with the Son and the Holy Spirit, willed the incarnation from the beginning? The Father will evidently give the 'reward' to the Son for his 'kin' and 'brothers,' since the Son is truly human and has offered his life to the Father.

Father: "*Take my only begotten Son and make him an offering for yourself;*"

Son: "*Take me, and ransom your souls.*"<sup>56</sup>

Boso: "*For it seems to me that God can reject none who come to him in his name.*"

Anselm: "*Certainly not, if he come aright.*"<sup>57</sup>

A common critique of Anselm's argument is that he thinks in a juridical and/or feudal framework. In the thought of A. v. Harnack,<sup>58</sup> W. L. Craig<sup>59</sup> or D. H. Mahfood,<sup>60</sup> God is like an offended feudal lord who demands a satisfaction equal to the offence, and a third party may provide it. On this reading, Anselm's model depends too heavily on feudal structures. N. T. Wright<sup>61</sup> for his part, objects that the Archbishop works within

<sup>54</sup> Therefore God became incarnate to save the human being by paying the debt through his death. The human being could not make satisfaction; only the God-man could, through the voluntarily offered life. One and the same person had to be God and man, since only the value of God's life exceeds the sins of human beings committed against the infinite God. (CDH 2,18.)

<sup>55</sup> CDH 2,19.

<sup>56</sup> CDH 2,20.

<sup>57</sup> CDH 2,19.

<sup>58</sup> HARNACK, Adolf von, *History of Dogma* vol. 6, Williams & Norgate, London 1899, 76.

<sup>59</sup> CRAIG, William Lane, *Atonement and the Death of Christ: An Exegetical, Historical, and Philosophical Exploration*, Baylor University Press, Waco, Texas 2020, 114.

<sup>60</sup> MAHFOOD, David H, *Christus Satisfactor: An Anselmian Approach to the Doctrine of Atonement* (PhD diss.), Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX, 2017, 71.

<sup>61</sup> WRIGHT, Nicholas Thomas, *Justification: God's Plan & Paul's Vision*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois 2009, 45.

a legal framework that differs from traditional Hebrew and Greek modes of thought and thereby distorts them, deforming the image of God as well. *J. Ratzinger*<sup>62</sup> likewise warns against imagining redemption as a kind of legal compulsion. *G. O'Collins*<sup>63</sup> does not accept that the forgiveness of infinite sin necessarily requires satisfaction. In this interpretive line, Christ's role narrows to making satisfaction and does not reflect on deification. *K. Rahner*<sup>64</sup> objects that satisfaction seems to aim at making an angry God change his mind, an absurd idea.

In response, *J. Bayer*<sup>65</sup> argues that in *Cur Deus Homo* God's justice is not conformity to an external order; Anselm does not construct a distorted, feudal image of God, but one rooted in the theology of the Fathers and in monastic tradition. God is faithful to his own order, which is not simply a legal logic. The Father did not will the death of his Son as such, but that the Son should persevere in fidelity and obedience. God seeks a personal relationship; he does not aim merely to achieve something 'legally'. The goal is free obedience and reverence born of love, which stands close to personalist thought.

*R. Angelici*<sup>66</sup> emphasises that the Archbishop's work does not aim to present every aspect, since Anselm himself notes that he wrote it in haste. He does not set out the whole process of sanctification in the Western tradition in its fullness; yet from his writings one may infer a fuller picture, rather than seeing only a legal exchange on God's part. Thus Anselm speaks of the human response to God's free and sanctifying grace, namely love, whose dynamism fits within Western sacramental and Trinitarian thought, while the Lord calls all people to sanctification, not only monks. In harmony with this, and against Harnack's classic objection, *C. D. Gonet*<sup>67</sup> stresses that although the Archbishop indeed concentrates on Christ's death, he nonetheless clearly maintains that a sinless life of the God-man was a necessary precondition. Satisfaction is therefore more than a legal act: it is a restoration that God willed from the beginning and will also bring to completion.

<sup>62</sup> RATZINGER, Joseph, *Introduction to Christianity*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2004, 250-252.

<sup>63</sup> O'COLLINS, Gerald, *Jesus Our Redeemer: A Christian Approach to Salvation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007, 135-136.

<sup>64</sup> RAHNER, Karl, *The Christian Understanding of Redemption* in IMHOF, Paul [ed], *Theological Investigations*, vol. 21: *Science and Christian Faith*, ed., Crossroad, New York 1988, 239-254, 249.

<sup>65</sup> BAYER, John, *The Beauty of Obedience in Cur Deus homo* in *The Saint Anselm Journal* 19/2 (2024), 1-19, 1-3, 5, 8, 10, 18-19.

<sup>66</sup> ANGELICI, Ruben, *The love that pierces the heart: a critical analysis of the concept of sanctification in the writings of St Anselm of Canterbury* in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 72/1 (2019), 64-81, 72-76.

<sup>67</sup> GONET, Christina Diane, *No Salvation without Christ's Sinlessness: Revisiting Satisfaction in Cur Deus homo* in *The Saint Anselm Journal* 19/1 (2023), 109-125, 109-111, 122-125.

In this way we may accept that, freed from the narrow constraints of its own era, this model can be placed in a broader and more universal context, and it need not depend so strongly on its feudal background.<sup>68</sup> At the same time we may consider Saint Thomas Aquinas' position: because Christ, as God, assumed humanity, and thus each of his good acts has infinite value and meritorious power,<sup>69</sup> it was not strictly necessary for him to die in order to redeem humanity; he could have restored sinful humanity in another way,<sup>70</sup> provided he lived sinlessly. Yet if we reflect on the most fitting death, and on God's consistent self-giving according to the logic of kenosis,<sup>71</sup> then, while Jesus Christ's self-offering was not ontologically necessary, he nevertheless acted according to the inner logic of the Son, whose two high points are the incarnation and the cross. Saint Anselm of Canterbury has thus handed down to us a highly valuable model: although it is debatable whether Jesus 'had to' die in order to make adequate satisfaction for humanity, we may still affirm that God from eternity decided to preserve and carry through the humanity he created and that fell through its own sin, along a path that perfectly accords with the order of justice and most fully manifests mercy toward the sinner. God became man so as to offer himself as a sacrifice for the human being, and to raise us higher than we would have stood in an unfallen paradise. *O, felix culpa...*

<sup>68</sup> P. D. Langerman argues that Anselm's work, with its universal message, can also respond to contemporary technocratic thought. LANGERMAN, Peter David., *Cur Deus Homo vs Homo Deus and the evolution of humanity: Quo Vadis?* in *Acta Theologica* 44/2 (2024), 125-141, 133-134. See BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von, *Dare We Hope "That All Men Be Saved"?*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 2014.

<sup>69</sup> STh III, q.48, a.2.

<sup>70</sup> STh III, q.46, a.1-4.

<sup>71</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von, *Mysterium Paschale: The Mystery of Easter*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2012, 11, 12, 23, 31.

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## **The Martyr's Witness and the Church's Journey: A Unified Study of Suffering, Identity, and Continuity in the Coptic Christian Tradition<sup>1</sup>**

### **Introduction: The Paradox of Fidelity in Egyptian Christianity**

Christianity in Egypt embodies a living paradox. It represents one of the most ancient, unbroken Christian lineages, tracing its origins to the apostolic mission of St. Mark, yet its history is a chronicle of perpetual testing—through theological controversy, political marginalization, and violent persecution. For the Coptic tradition, encompassing the majority Orthodox and minority Catholic communities, the question of what it means to be a disciple of Christ has been answered not in the abstract realms of theory alone but in the tangible, often agonizing, realities of history. This faith has been inscribed in the blood of martyrs and negotiated in the slow, intricate processes of ecclesial dialogue and reunion. To understand the fullness of Coptic Christian witness, one must therefore hold together two seemingly distinct narratives: the vertical, transformative moment of martyrdom and the horizontal, generational journey of a church seeking to maintain its identity while healing ancient fractures.

This essay undertakes such a synthesis. Its first major arc explores the theology and history of martyrdom as the “seed of the Church” (Tertullian), a core element of Coptic identity. It moves from the foundational persecutions under Diocletian to the harrowing witness of twenty-one Coptic laborers on a Libyan beach in 2015, an event that crystallized the enduring power of this tradition for the modern world. The second arc traces the historical development of the Coptic Catholic Church, an Eastern Catholic community that emerged from centuries of post-Chalcedonian

<sup>1</sup> This study is the written version of the conference presentation, therefore does not include footnotes.

separation. Its story is one of intermittent contact, missionary zeal, political pragmatism, and eventual formal union with the See of Rome, all while striving to preserve its distinctive Alexandrian liturgical and spiritual heritage.

The central thesis of this study is that these two narratives—the martyr’s *ultimate sacrifice* and the ecclesial community’s *negotiated continuity*—are dialectically related expressions of a single Christian vocation: fidelity to Christ. The martyr’s witness provides the ecclesial community with a radical archetype of faithfulness, a touchstone of identity that transcends time. Conversely, the historical church provides the context, memory, and sustaining community that form individuals capable of such witness. By integrating these themes, we gain a more profound understanding of Coptic Christianity not as a static relic but as a dynamic tradition where suffering, memory, and hope are inextricably linked to the formation of identity. This analysis, situated at the intersection of historical theology, ecclesiology, and anthropological theology, seeks to contribute to a deeper appreciation of Eastern Christian resilience and its significance for the universal Church.

## **I. Historical Foundations: The Coptic Church from Apostolic Origins to the Chalcedonian Schism**

### **1.1 Apostolic Origins and Patristic Flourishing**

The term “Copt” is derived from the Greek *Aigyptios* (Αἰγύπτιος), meaning “Egyptian,” linguistically affirming the deep indigenous roots of this Christian community. Ecclesial tradition, supported by early sources like Eusebius of Caesarea, holds that the Evangelist St. Mark founded the Church in Alexandria around 42 CE, establishing one of Christianity’s five primal patriarchates. This apostolic foundation endowed the See of Alexandria with immense authority and theological prestige in the early centuries. During the patristic era, Alexandria emerged as a preeminent center of Christian thought and spirituality. Its catechetical school produced intellectual giants such as Clement, who sought harmony between faith and Hellenistic philosophy; Origen, whose speculative theology, though later controversial, shaped centuries of biblical exegesis; and Athanasius, the formidable defender of Nicene orthodoxy against Arianism. This theological vibrancy was matched by the rise of monasticism, pioneered in the Egyptian deserts by

figures like St. Anthony the Great (the father of eremitic monasticism) and St. Pachomius (the founder of cenobitic community life). These ascetics became living symbols of radical commitment to Christ, further defining the Egyptian Christian ethos.

Complementing this historical narrative is a profound biblical memory that sacralizes the land itself. The Coptic tradition cherishes the account of the Holy Family's flight into Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15), viewing their sojourn as a divine blessing that consecrated Egyptian soil. This narrative, deeply embedded in Coptic hymnography and iconography, transforms Egypt from a mere geographical location into a place of divine refuge and encounter, prefiguring its role as a bastion of faith.

### 1.2 The Council of Chalcedon (451 CE) and the Crystallization of Schism

The Council of Chalcedon, convened by Emperor Marcian in 451, proved to be the definitive watershed in the history of Eastern Christianity. The council sought to resolve Christological controversies by affirming the doctrine of dyophysitism: that Jesus Christ is one person (hypostasis) in two natures (physeis), divine and human, "without confusion, without change, without division, without separation." This formulation heavily relied on Pope Leo I's *Tome*, a doctrinal letter that articulated the Western position with clarity.

In Alexandria, however, the council's decrees were received with outrage. Patriarch Dioscorus, a staunch defender of the Cyrillian theology of his predecessor, St. Cyril of Alexandria, perceived the language of "two natures" as a revival of Nestorianism, which improperly divided Christ. Dioscorus was deposed by the council, an act that ignited immediate and violent unrest in Egypt. The indigenous, Coptic-speaking majority, whose Christological language emphasized the unity of Christ's incarnate nature (later formalized as Miaphysitism, from *mia physis*, "one nature"), saw Chalcedon as a betrayal of Cyril's authentic teaching. The installation of a pro-Chalcedonian patriarch, Protarius, was met with resistance, leading to his murder in 457 and the election of the Miaphysite Timothy II Aelurus.

Thus, the Church of Alexandria fractured. The majority coalesced around a non-Chalcedonian (Miaphysite) identity, becoming what is known today as the Coptic Orthodox Church. This community solidified as the national church of Egypt, institutionally separate from the imperial churches of Constantinople and Rome. A significant minority,

however, remained loyal to the Chalcedonian definition. This group, predominantly Greek-speaking and urban, maintained communion with Constantinople and, theoretically, with Rome. They were known as Melkites (from the Syriac *malkāyē*, meaning “royalists” or “the emperor’s men”). This distinction is paramount: the Melkites represented the continuous thread of Chalcedonian, and thus formally “Catholic,” presence in Egypt after 451. They are the direct historical precursors to the Catholic ecclesiastical structure in Egypt, though they are liturgically and ethnically distinct from the modern “Coptic Catholic” Church, which originates from the reunion of Miaphysite Copts with Rome.

### 1.3 Endurance under Islamic Rule

The Arab conquest of Egypt (639-642 CE) under the general Amr ibn al-As imposed a new political and religious framework. Both Miaphysite Copts and Chalcedonian Melkites became *dhimmi*, protected but subjugated non-Muslim communities living under the stipulations of the Pact of Umar. While the Melkites, due to their association with the Byzantine Empire, initially faced greater suspicion, the Coptic Orthodox majority also experienced cycles of tolerance and severe persecution under various Islamic dynasties. Despite this, the Coptic Church not only survived but maintained its liturgical language (Coptic, descended from ancient Egyptian), its theological heritage, and its ecclesiastical structures. The *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*, a vital internal chronicle, documents this story of resilience. Meanwhile, the Melkite community, though diminished, persisted as a bridge between the indigenous Christian world and the wider Chalcedonian communion, preserving a theological and institutional link that would later facilitate reunion efforts.

## II. The Theology of Martyrdom as the Cornerstone of Coptic Identity

### 2.1 “The Church of the Martyrs”: Historical and Liturgical Foundations

The Coptic Orthodox Church is often called “the Church of the Martyrs” (*Ecclesia Martyrum*), a title that is not merely honorific but descriptive of its foundational experience. The most potent symbol of this identity is the Coptic calendar itself, known as the “Calendar of the Martyrs” (*Anno Martyrum*). It begins its count in 284 CE, the year of Emperor Diocletian’s accession, whose reign inaugurated one of the most severe persecutions in

Christian history. This calendrical system is a profound act of historical theology, framing all of time within the narrative of witness and sacrifice. It declares that the Church's true history is measured not by imperial reigns but by the faithfulness of its saints.

This martyrdom consciousness permeates liturgical life. The annual celebration of the Coptic New Year (Nayrouz) in September incorporates the date palm as a multifaceted symbol. Its red outer husk signifies the blood shed by the martyrs; its white inner flesh represents their pure hearts; its hard, enduring seed symbolizes their unshakable faith. Such symbolism embeds the reality of martyrdom into the cyclical rhythms of worship and the agricultural life of the people, making it an accessible, tangible reality rather than a remote historical fact.

## 2.2 Theological Depth: Martyrdom as Participation in Christ

In Coptic theology, martyrdom is never reduced to mere suffering or passive victimhood. It is understood as the highest form of *imitatio Christi* and the ultimate act of love, perfectly embodying Christ's words: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). The martyr's death is a "baptism of blood," which, like sacramental baptism, effects purification and union with Christ. It is a participatory act – a sharing in the Lord's own passion and victory. This theology draws deeply from early Church Fathers, particularly Athanasius of Alexandria, whose incarnational theology emphasized that God, in Christ, entered fully into human suffering to redeem it. The martyr, therefore, does not merely point to Christ but actively completes "what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church" (Colossians 1:24) in a unique and exemplary way.

This perspective shapes the entire Coptic ethos, fostering a spirituality of *hypomone* (steadfast endurance). Suffering, when united to Christ's, is transfigured into a source of grace and a means of sanctification for the individual and the entire community. Hagiographical accounts of martyrs, from the early St. Menas to modern witnesses, are recounted not to glorify violence but to highlight the virtues manifested in extremity: humility before persecutors, forgiveness of enemies, and unshakeable trust in God's providence. These stories form a collective memory that nurtures a sense of belonging to a transhistorical "cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1), providing models of courage and reinforcing communal identity.

### 2.3 Sociopolitical Dimensions of Martyrial Witness

Historically, the witness of martyrs has also served as a form of social and political resilience. Under successive regimes – Roman, Byzantine, Islamic – the Coptic community’s refusal to apostatize, even at the cost of life, became a powerful assertion of identity against assimilationist pressures. Martyrdom functioned as a boundary-maintaining mechanism, solidifying in-group cohesion and differentiating the community from the ruling power. It transformed powerlessness into a paradoxical strength, asserting that the ultimate authority was not the emperor or caliph but God. This legacy continues to inform the Coptic experience as a religious minority in modern Egypt, where sporadic violence and discrimination persist. The memory of martyrdom provides a narrative framework through which contemporary hardships can be interpreted not as meaningless tragedies but as participations in a venerable and redemptive tradition of witness.

## III. The Libyan Martyrs of 2015: A Kairos of Modern Witness

### 3.1 The Event and Its Immediate Impact

On February 15, 2015, the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) released a video titled “A Message Signed with Blood to the Nation of the Cross.” It depicted the mass execution of twenty-one Coptic Christians, primarily migrant workers from Egypt, on a beach near Tripoli, Libya. The captives, dressed in orange jumpsuits, were beheaded. Their final words, as reported by witnesses and confirmed by the video’s audio, were invocations of “Ya Rabbi Yasou” (“My Lord Jesus”). These men, given the stark ultimatum to renounce their faith or die, unanimously chose martyrdom.

The global reaction was one of horror, grief, and admiration. The brutality of the act was shocking, yet the serene fidelity of the victims resonated powerfully across denominational and religious lines. For the Coptic community worldwide, it was a moment of profound sorrow and sober pride – a stark reminder of the cost of discipleship and a potent reaffirmation of their identity.

### 3.2 Formative Context: The Spirituality of Ordinary Lives

To comprehend the depth of their witness, one must examine the ordinary world from which these men came. They hailed from impoverished, rural villages in the governorates of Minya and Sohag in Upper Egypt, regions with a deep, largely agrarian Coptic heritage. These are communities where faith is not a private Sunday observance but woven into the fabric of daily life: the rhythm of work in the fields, the solidarity of large extended families, and the centrality of the village church.

Their faith formation was holistic and immersive. In Coptic households, children are raised on stories of saints and martyrs, recounted during evening prayers or family meals. The local church, often a simple structure adorned with icons of the Virgin Mary and St. George, serves as the true heart of the community. There, the Divine Liturgy – long, solemn, and richly symbolic – along with seasonal feasts and catechism classes, instills doctrinal truths and moral virtues. Community ties, reinforced by shared economic hardship and joyous celebrations, foster a collective piety that prioritizes the communal over the individual. These men were not theologians or monastics; they were farmers and laborers, driven by economic necessity to seek work in the perilous environment of war-torn Libya. Their spirituality was that of the lay faithful, nurtured in humility, simplicity, and a profound sense of belonging to the Body of Christ.

### 3.3 Ecclesial and Global Reception: Canonization and Communion

The Coptic Orthodox Church, under Pope Tawadros II, responded with swift and definitive action. In a remarkable display of the living tradition, the Synod officially recognized the twenty-one as saints of the Church, incorporating them into the Synaxarium (the book of saints) and establishing February 15 (or 8 Amshir in the Coptic calendar) as their feast day. A major church dedicated to “The Martyrs of Faith and Homeland” was built in their honor in the village of El-Aour, Minya, becoming a site of pilgrimage.

Their witness also sparked an unprecedented wave of ecumenical and interfaith solidarity. Pope Francis of the Roman Catholic Church repeatedly referenced their sacrifice, calling them “martyrs of our day.” Memorial services and vigils were held in Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox churches worldwide. The global media coverage, while focusing on the horror of ISIS, also inadvertently amplified a powerful Christian testimony.

The martyrs became a symbol of the persecution facing Christians in the Middle East, galvanizing advocacy for religious freedom. Their iconography spread rapidly—icons depicting them in white robes, bearing palms of martyrdom, their faces serene and determined. In their death, they achieved what centuries of theological dialogue often struggles to accomplish: they visibly united Christians across traditions in shared veneration and grief, embodying Tertullian’s ancient maxim in a 21st-century context.

#### **IV. The Historical Path to Communion: The Development of the Coptic Catholic Church (451–Present)**

##### **4.1 The Post-Chalcedonian Landscape and the Melkite Bridge (451–642 CE)**

Following the schism of 451, the ecclesiastical landscape of Egypt was bifurcated. The majority Miaphysite community, evolving into the Coptic Orthodox Church, had no structural or communion links with the See of Rome. The primary point of contact between Egypt and the Roman church was through the Chalcedonian Melkite patriarchate of Alexandria. While this patriarchate remained in theoretical communion with Rome (though strained at times by controversies like the Acacian Schism, 484-519), it was institutionally and culturally part of the Byzantine Commonwealth. Its faithful were Greek-speaking and its rites were Byzantine. Thus, for centuries after Chalcedon, there existed a “Catholic” presence in Egypt in the form of the Melkites, but not a “Coptic Catholic” one in the sense of an indigenous, Coptic-rite community in union with Rome.

##### **4.2 Sporadic Contacts under Islamic and Crusader Rule (642–1517)**

The Islamic conquest further isolated Egyptian Christians from the West, but it did not entirely sever links. Periods of theological dialogue occurred, often driven by Byzantine imperial policy aimed at reconciling non-Chalcedonians through compromises like Monothelitism in the 7th century. These efforts, involving figures like Pope Martin I and Coptic Patriarch Benjamin I, were typically political alliances against a common Constantinopolitan foe rather than genuine doctrinal reconciliation based on acceptance of Chalcedon.

The Crusades marked a significant shift. The establishment of Latin states in the Levant after 1099 re-opened direct Western contact with the East. Coptic patriarchs, seeing potential allies against restrictive Muslim rulers, engaged in diplomatic correspondence with Crusader kings and popes. These exchanges, documented in sources like the *History of the Patriarchs*, were pragmatic political overtures. The Coptic hierarchy sought relief from *jizya* (poll tax) burdens and social restrictions, not doctrinal union. There is no evidence from this period of a Coptic community submitting to Roman primacy.

A pivotal moment for future Catholic engagement was the mission of St. Francis of Assisi to Sultan al-Kamil at Damietta in 1219 during the Fifth Crusade. While focused on peacemaking, Francis's encounter with Egyptian Christians left a deep impression and inspired the subsequent establishment of Franciscan custodial houses in Cairo and other cities by the mid-13th century. This created a permanent Latin Catholic missionary presence in Egypt for the first time.

#### 4.3 The Council of Florence and Early Modern Missions (1438–1741)

The next major milestone was the Council of Florence (1438-1445), a grand but ultimately fragile effort to heal the East-West schism. A Coptic delegation attended and, in 1442, signed the decree *Cantate Domino*, which affirmed the Chalcedonian definition and papal primacy. However, this union was stillborn. Opposition from the Mamluk Sultanate in Egypt and a lack of support from the Coptic hierarchy and faithful at home prevented any implementation. It remained a paper union, yet it established a significant precedent and doctrinal formula for future discussions.

The period following the Council of Trent (1545-1563) saw a more systematic and sustained missionary effort by Catholic religious orders, particularly Franciscans, Jesuits, and later Capuchins. Pope Urban VIII formally established a Franciscan mission in Cairo in 1629. These missionaries focused on learning Arabic and Coptic, engaging in theological debates, and providing pastoral care. Their presence inevitably led to conversions from the Coptic Orthodox Church, creating small, scattered communities of Catholic-leaning Copts. Tensions were high; the Coptic Orthodox Synod of 1636 in Cairo explicitly condemned "Roman errors." Despite this, by the late 17th century, several hundred Coptic Catholics existed, shepherded by Latin or Syrian Catholic missionaries, lacking a formal hierarchy of their own.

#### 4.4 The Formal Establishment of a Uniate Church (1741–1895)

The modern Coptic Catholic Church as a distinct *sui iuris* (self-governing) church traces its institutional birth to 1741. In that year, a Coptic Orthodox Bishop of Jerusalem named Athanasius, through the mediation of the Franciscan mission, entered into communion with Rome. Pope Benedict XIV formally received him and appointed him as Vicar Apostolic for the Coptic faithful in Egypt, issuing the bull *Demandatam*. This act created the first formal structure for a Coptic Catholic community, numbering perhaps 2,000 souls. However, Athanasius's commitment wavered, and he later reverted to Orthodoxy, highlighting the instability of these early unions.

Nevertheless, the precedent held. Successors, such as the Capuchin missionary Giusto Marsghi (Vicar 1744-1764), worked to ordain native Coptic-rite priests and build a stable community. The 19th century, under the rule of Muhammad Ali and increased European influence, brought consolidation. Pope Gregory XVI elevated the vicariate to a titular Patriarchate of Alexandria of the Copts in 1824, appointing Anba Boutros (Peter) Paul as the first patriarch (1824-1829). Although the patriarchate lapsed after his death, it signaled Rome's commitment to an Eastern Catholic structure for the Copts. Key developments included obtaining Ottoman firmans to build churches, establishing St. Leo's Patriarchal Seminary in Cairo in 1866 for training a native clergy, and navigating the complex politics of European protection (often under France or Austria).

Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Orientalium dignitas* (1894), a magna carta for Eastern Catholicism, strongly advocated for the restoration of Eastern patriarchates. In 1895, he restored the Coptic Catholic Patriarchate, appointing Cyril II Makarios as Patriarch (1899-1908). Despite controversies during his reign, this restoration provided the stable hierarchical foundation the church needed. By the end of the 19th century, the community had grown to approximately 20,000 faithful.

#### 4.5 Modern Consolidation and Contemporary Reality (1895–Present)

The 20th and 21st centuries have been a period of institutional maturation and engagement with modern challenges. Patriarch Stephanos I Sidarouss (1947-1958, created cardinal in 1930) skillfully guided the church through the turbulent Nasser era, with its nationalization policies and rising Arab nationalism. The Second Vatican Council's

affirmation of Eastern Catholic churches (*Lumen Gentium, Orientalium Ecclesiarum*) and the promulgation of the *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* (1990) provided a robust canonical framework for self-governance.

Ecumenical relations with the Coptic Orthodox Church, once characterized by polemic, have warmed significantly. A landmark was the 2013 “Joint Declaration” signed in Cairo by Coptic Catholic Patriarch Antonios Naguib (2006-2013, cardinal 2010) and Coptic Orthodox Pope Tawadros II, committing both churches to greater dialogue and cooperation. The current patriarch, Ibrahim Isaac Sidrak (2013–present), oversees a church comprising the patriarchal eparchy of Alexandria (seat in Cairo) and eight suffragan eparchies within Egypt, plus a growing diaspora in Europe, North America, and Australia.

Today, the Coptic Catholic Church numbers around 250,000 faithful in Egypt (less than 1% of Christians in Egypt, who are themselves about 10% of the national population). It maintains a vibrant network of parishes, schools (notably emphasizing bilingual Arabic-Coptic education), healthcare facilities, and charitable organizations. Its witness is twofold: internally, as a fully Catholic church celebrating the ancient Alexandrian liturgy; externally, as a bridge church engaged in ecumenical dialogue with its Orthodox mother church and in constructive citizenship within a Muslim-majority society often marked by tension.

## **V. Theological and Ecclesiological Synthesis: Martyrdom and Communion as Dialectical Witness**

### **5.1 Two Modes of Fidelity: Kairos and Chronos**

The narratives of the Libyan martyrs and the Coptic Catholic Church, when held together, reveal two fundamental, complementary modes of Christian fidelity, corresponding to different conceptions of time. The martyr’s witness operates in *kairos*—a decisive, transformative moment where eternity intersects with history. It is an act of vertical transcendence, where the individual, through an ultimate choice, definitively configures his life to the pattern of Christ’s sacrifice. This witness is immediate, total, and eschatological. It speaks the language of finality: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7).

The historical journey of the Coptic Catholic Church, in contrast, unfolds in *chronos*–linear, successive, historical time. Its fidelity is expressed horizontally, through the patient endurance of a community across generations. It is a story of negotiation, ambiguity, setbacks, and gradual growth. Its virtues are perseverance, prudence, dialogue, and a commitment to maintaining both doctrinal truth and ecclesial unity amidst complex political and social pressures. This is the fidelity of the *ecclesia*, the assembly, navigating its pilgrimage through history.

## 5.2 Mutual Necessity and Enrichment

These two modes are not opposed but mutually necessary for a complete ecclesiology. The martyrdom tradition provides the ecclesial community with its most radical *raison d'être* and its ultimate criterion of faithfulness. The Libyan martyrs, for instance, offer a powerful critique of any Christianity that would compromise core belief for safety or social advantage. They remind the Coptic Catholic Church, and all churches, of the non-negotiable heart of the faith. Their witness provides a purifying memory that guards against the temptation of reducing ecclesial life to mere institutional maintenance or cultural preservation.

Conversely, the historical church provides the indispensable context that makes martyrdom possible and meaningful. The twenty-one Libyan martyrs did not emerge from a vacuum. They were products of the Coptic Orthodox Church's centuries-old formation – its liturgy, its sacraments, its community life, its stories of saints. Even the Coptic Catholic Church, though on a different ecclesial path, sustains a similar formative culture through its own preservation of the Alexandrian rite and Coptic spirituality. The church as institution and community is the nurturing matrix that shapes individuals capable of such extraordinary witness. Furthermore, it is the church that receives, interprets, commemorates, and draws ongoing strength from the martyr's act. The swift canonization by the Coptic Orthodox Church and the global veneration that followed are ecclesial acts that harvest the spiritual fruit of the martyrdom for the entire Body of Christ.

### 5.3 A Unified Theological Anthropology: The Human Person as Witness

At a deeper level, both narratives converge on a unified theological anthropology. They present the human person – and by extension, the ecclesial person – as fundamentally a *witness* (Greek: μάρτυς). Human existence is called to be a testimony to the transcendent, to the reality of God in Christ. This testimony can take the form of the final, bloody witness of martyrdom or the lifelong witness of fidelity within the communion of the Church. Both are expressions of self-gift, of offering one's life back to God. The martyr does this in a single, culminating act; the faithful community and its members do this through the continuous offering of its worship, its works of mercy, and its pursuit of unity.

This anthropology is profoundly incarnational and paschal. It accepts that suffering and contradiction are intrinsic to the human condition in a fallen world, but it refuses them the final word. In the martyr, suffering is embraced and transformed into victorious love. In the historical church, the sufferings of persecution, marginalization, and internal division are endured in hope, worked through in dialogue, and offered as part of the Church's share in the Cross, with eyes fixed on the resurrection and ultimate reconciliation.

## VI. Contemporary Implications and Concluding Reflections

### 6.1 For Ecumenical Dialogue

The integrated study of martyrdom and church history offers a fruitful path for ecumenism. Often, theological dialogues become stalled on ancient Christological formulations (e.g., the precise interpretation of “nature” and “hypostasis”). The shared veneration of modern martyrs like the Libyan twenty-one can create a powerful experiential common ground that transcends these dogmatic complexities. When both the Coptic Orthodox and the Catholic Church (including the Coptic Catholic Church) recognize the same individuals as glorious witnesses to Christ, they affirm a shared core of faith that is deeper than historical divisions. This does not eliminate the need for doctrinal clarification, but it reframes it within a context of proven, shared discipleship.

Furthermore, the history of the Coptic Catholic Church itself is a case study in the possibilities and pitfalls of seeking union. It demonstrates that sustainable communion cannot be based solely on political expediency or top-down decree (as with Florence),

but requires the slow, respectful work of missionary presence, cultural adaptation, formation of a native clergy, and the development of a lived, communal identity that is both authentically Coptic and fully Catholic. This has lessons for other ecumenical endeavors.

### 6.2 For the Global Church Facing Persecution

In an era where Christians in many parts of the world face increasing hostility, the Coptic tradition – in both its martyrial and ecclesial-historical dimensions—provides a profound resource. It offers a theology that dignifies suffering by linking it directly to the Cross and Resurrection. It provides a historical model of resilience that shows how a community can maintain its identity and hope across centuries of minority status. The global Church can draw courage and theological insight from this tradition, moving beyond a narrative of victimhood to one of active, hopeful witness.

### 6.3 For Theological Anthropology and Spirituality

Finally, this synthesis challenges comfortable, privatized versions of faith. The Coptic tradition, through its martyrs and its history, insists that Christian identity is inherently public and costly. It is formed in community, tested in conflict, and expressed in tangible choices. It calls believers to a spirituality that is both deeply rooted in a specific liturgical and cultural tradition (whether Orthodox or Catholic) and courageously open to the ultimate sacrifice. In a secularizing West, this witness is a prophetic reminder that faith, at its heart, is about fidelity to a person, Jesus Christ, a fidelity that may demand everything but in return promises participation in his eternal life.

## **Conclusion: Memory, Hope, and the Call to Communal Fidelity**

The story of Coptic Christianity is a rich tapestry where the crimson thread of martyrdom is interwoven with the golden thread of ecclesial continuity. The twenty-one Libyan martyrs and the centuries-long emergence of the Coptic Catholic Church are not disconnected tales but complementary manifestations of the same Holy Spirit working within a particular people. The martyrs represent the *peak* of Christian witness, the mo-

ment where faith shines with unsurpassed brilliance. The historical church represents the *plateau* of that witness, the sustained, collective life that makes such peaks possible and gives them enduring meaning.

Together, they present a holistic vision of the Christian life. It is a vision that embraces the *kairotic* moment of decisive choice and the *chronistic* journey of daily perseverance. It finds holiness both in the extraordinary courage of the martyr on the beach and in the ordinary fidelity of the faithful celebrating the liturgy, teaching their children, and seeking unity with separated brethren. This Coptic witness, forged in the crucible of history and sealed in blood, speaks powerfully to all Christians today. It calls us to a faith that is both courageous and patient, deeply rooted in tradition and boldly facing the challenges of the present. It reminds us that our ultimate hope lies not in the avoidance of suffering but in its transformation through love – a love demonstrated perfectly on the Cross, echoed in the martyrs' cry, and patiently embodied in the enduring journey of the Church, the community of hope traveling through time toward the fullness of communion.

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## **The Martyrdom of Vilmos Apor, Diocesan Bishop of Győr, Eighty Years ago**

### **Introduction**

Anniversaries provide us with an opportunity to remember. On the eightieth anniversary of 1945, we can all remember life-changing events, learn valuable lessons and draw strength from outstanding life examples in our everyday lives. The siege of Budapest in 1944–45, the conclusion of the armistice agreement, the Soviet occupation and thus the liberation from German occupation, the end of the Second World War, the death of Jusztinián Serédi, the Archbishop of Esztergom, the appointment of József Mindszenty as the Archbishop of Esztergom, the parliamentary elections and the forming of the new National Assembly are all events connected with and defining the year of 1945. The events of the Second World War represented suffering, sacrifice and great hardship for Hungarian society as a whole. There were numerous clergy and lay persons who sacrificed their lives and became martyrs in the final days of the war, during both the German and then the subsequent Soviet occupation. Among others, we have the examples of Gábor Ervin and Vilma Bernovits, both faith teachers, Blessed Sára Salkaházi of the Sisters of Social Service, Kornél Hummel and István Ruppert, both faith teachers, János Gáspár, the parish priest of Iszkaszentgyörgy, János Bergendy, the episcopal office director of Székesfehérvár, Mária Magdolna Bódi, a factory worker, P. Zénó Hajnal, a Franciscan monk and abbot, and principal of the monastery in Nagyatád, Pál Martincsevics, the parish priest of Gyékényes, Alajos Szalay, the chaplain of Győr-Nádorváros, József Zarka, the parish priest of Pakod, Sándor Padányi, the parish priest of Inke, and Vilmos Apor, who was later beatified.

In 2025, we commemorate the martyrdom of Vilmos Apor, the Diocesan Bishop of Győr, eighty years ago on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April, 1945. One hundred and ten years ago, in 1915, he was ordained as a priest to serve the Diocese of Nagyvárad (today Oradea in Romania). Vilmos Apor is one of the most important ecclesiastical figures in the history of the

Hungarian Roman Catholic Church, as well as in modern Hungarian history, who should be remembered not only because of his martyrdom, but also on account of his life of pastoral service, and particularly because of his episcopal activity. Although the party-state attempted to erase him from the historical consciousness of Hungary, his reputation, if only in a latent form, lived on in smaller church communities and in the civil society of Győr. The change of regime broke this earlier pattern of silence, bringing Apor official recognition, and his beatification provided an opportunity to assess the historical figure of the bishop from a historical perspective. The life of Vilmos Apor has been the subject of numerous studies and volumes<sup>1</sup>, and these will be used to present a summary of his life.

<sup>1</sup> The most important publications on the life and activities of Vilmos Apor include the following:  
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This study focuses on the martyrdom and life of Vilmos Apor, whose life example stands before us as a shining torch. What does the example of Apor's life tell us in 2025?

The chief shepherd, who supported the women and men hiding in the episcopal palace in Győr, was committed to the fallen, the persecuted and the disadvantaged throughout his life. Values such as the defence of innocence and respect for women were of extreme importance to him. His martyrdom was no accident. He consciously accepted the suffering, which was particularly evident in the days when he had to endure great hardship and pain as a result of the shots he had received. He bore the pain he suffered for days with heroism, offering everything for his diocese, his priests and his parishioners. Vilmos Apor was not just a martyr at the moment of his martyrdom, but a dedicated pastor throughout his life, determined to follow Christ, living and propagating the teachings of the Gospel.

I would like to highlight three of his activities in which the life of Vilmos Apor serves as an example to us: the importance he attributed to personal relationships, his social sensitivity, and his defence of the persecuted.

### The Life of Vilmos Apor

The marriage of Baron Gábor Apor of Altorja (1851–1898), Secretary of State of the Hungarian Royal Ministry of His Majesty's Person, and Countess Fidelia Pálffy of Erdőd (1863–1934) resulted in nine children. Of these children, one was stillborn, three died in infancy and five lived to adulthood, the third of whom was Vilmos Apor, born in Segesvár (today Sighișoara in Romania) on the 29<sup>th</sup> of February, 1892.<sup>2</sup> After a few years, the family moved to Vienna because of the father's work in the ministry. Vilmos was six years old when he lost his father in 1898, and was raised by his mother, Fidelia Pálffy. She paid particular attention to nurturing the character of her children. She often told them:

pok\_életenek\_kiemelkedo\_mozzanatai (2025)

Soós, Viktor Attila, *Apor Vilmos vértanúsága* [*The martyrdom of Vilmos Apor*], hitvallas.hu/#/hir/apor\_vilmos\_vertanusaga (2025)

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<sup>2</sup> Kőzi HORVÁTH, József, *Apor püspök élete és halála*. [*The life and death of Bishop Apor.*], Edited by: Soós, Viktor Attila, Kőzi Horváth József Népfőiskola, Agyagosszergény, 2022, pp. 19–20.

*“When faced with a choice, always choose the difficult path, for it is sure to be the right one. I have always kept this principle in mind and have never regretted it.”<sup>3</sup>*

Following in the footsteps of his two brothers, Vilmos completed the first five years of secondary school at the Austrian Kalksburg Jesuit Secondary Grammar School, and the final three at the Institute of the Hungarian Jesuits in Kalocsa. In both schools he was one of the most outstanding pupils. A student with exceptional academic achievement and a fervently religious young man, he also excelled in sports. He was an excellent swimmer and a good fencer, besides skilfully mastering pool and tennis, as well as being a horse rider and a keen hiker. He was also universally popular among his fellow students.

He showed an interest in the priesthood from a young age. While he was in primary school, he asked for a chalice as a Christmas present because he wanted to celebrate Mass.

At the age of fifteen or sixteen, he made it clear that he wished to become a priest. His mother, Fidelia Pálffy, was not opposed to her son’s decision, but she wanted to make sure he was serious. She wanted him to enrol in law school for a year after graduation or to serve his volunteer year, and if, after a year in the secular world, he persisted in his resolve, she would gladly give her blessing. Yet when the eighth-grader asked for the Christmas gift of becoming a candidate for priesthood immediately after graduation, she was deeply touched. Before she consented, she travelled to Kalocsa to seek the opinion of her son’s teachers. The Jesuit prelates were unanimous in asserting that, in their view, there was no point in delaying. In the light of this reassuring advice, Fidelia Pálffy happily gave her consent for her youngest son on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December, 1909.<sup>4</sup>

Vilmos Apor, who had obtained an excellent school-leaving certificate and maintained an exemplary moral record, applied for admission to the Diocese of Győr. Bishop Miklós Széchenyi, who was a relative of his, welcomed his application. At that time, the first seminary in Hungary with separate rooms was already under construction in the eastern bastion of the Püspökvár (Bishop’s Palace). However, his bishop did not leave the young seminarian adrift in Győr, sending him to the Nikolai House, a residence for theology students in Innsbruck. After two years, he moved to the new theological seminary, the so-called Canisianum, as the bishop had sent him to the University of

<sup>3</sup> KÖZI HORVÁTH, József, *Apor püspök élete és halála [The life and death of Bishop Apor]*, Edited by: Soós, Viktor Attila. Közi Horváth József Népfőiskola, Agyagosszergény, 2022, p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> KÖZI HORVÁTH, József, *Apor püspök élete és halála [The life and death of Bishop Apor]*, Edited by: Soós, Viktor Attila. Közi Horváth József Népfőiskola, Agyagosszergény, 2022., pp. 23–24.

Innsbruck to study theology. The seminary was run by Jesuits, and the teachers at the faculty of theology at the university were also Jesuits. The young seminarian, who spent five happy years in Innsbruck, enjoyed the international atmosphere of the seminary and the university. Open and direct, with a sense of humour and a perfect command of German, Vilmos had no difficulty in engaging with Hungarian fellow students or those of other nationalities. He was a prominent figure in the intellectual circles of the university. However, his first contact with the Diocese of Győr was severed after a year. Bishop Széchenyi, who had been transferred to Nagyvárad (Oradea), took his relative, the young seminarian, with him to his new diocese.

Sigismund Waitz, the Auxiliary Bishop of Brixen, ordained him as a priest in the presence of his relatives on the 24<sup>th</sup> of August, 1915. His first Mass was celebrated the following day without any particular solemnity. His brother Gábor was a soldier serving at the front and could not attend. His mother, together with her two daughters, Gizella and Henriette, nursed the wounded. In the difficult times of the First World War, a young priest's first Mass seemed more natural in a small family circle.

His bishop sent him to the then seat of Békés county, Gyula, as an assistant pastor, beside an excellent pastor, Bishop János Lindenberger.

He considered Confession to be one of the most important aspects of pastoral work, which is why, from the first day, he made himself available to the faithful every morning before Mass. His first pastorate in Gyula lasted only two years, half a year of which he spent as a military chaplain on a Red Cross hospital train, having been called up for military service.<sup>5</sup> During this period, one of his lasting achievements was the establishment of a social institution, the "Nővédő Iroda" (Women's Office), which after a year became the local branch of "Szociális Missziótársulat" (Social Missionary Society). In the autumn of 1917, Bishop Széchenyi ordered him to the diocesan headquarters in Nagyvárad (Oradea) and entrusted him with the supervision of studies in the seminary and the teaching of dogmatics at the College of Theology. This task lasted for one academic year, after which he returned to Gyula, since in August 1918 his bishop appointed him as a parish priest to succeed Lindenberger, who himself had been appointed as a vice-provost and canon in Debrecen. When Apor was appointed parish priest of Gyula, he was twenty-six and a

<sup>5</sup> For the first two years of Vilmos Apor's pastoral life, his time as a chaplain in Gyula and his pastoral ministry on the hospital train, see: *Apor Vilmos naplói I [Diaries of Vilmos Apor I]*. Published by: SOÓS, Viktor Attila, A Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár Kiadványai, Források, feldolgozások 2. [Publications of the Archives of the Diocese of Győr, Sources, Processings 2.], Győr 2005.

half years old, very young but not unqualified for the post. He knew the town of Gyula, which was divided along national and religious lines, but socially perhaps even more so. In addition to the Hungarian majority, there were significant German and Romanian minorities in the town of nearly 20,000, half of the population being Catholic and the other half Protestant, Greek Orthodox or Jewish. There were great cultural, social and societal differences between them, separating the county aristocracy as well as the community of clerks and teachers from each other, and all of these from the small tradesmen, shopkeepers, farmers, peasants, meat factory workers and agricultural workers.

He was aware of the problems posed by these distinctions, and returned to Gyula with the determination that, in addition to pastoral work in the narrow sense, he would also make it his task to bridge these divides.

Vilmos Apor was a young, gentle and pious priest, but when God, the faithful, or the cause of his suffering fellow human beings so required, he could be a resolute man who spared no personal sacrifice. A characteristic example of this is that during the Soviet Republic of 1919, the Communist directorate of Békés County forbade the teaching of religious education in schools. However, they could not enforce this decree. Apor gathered his parishioners in such large crowds in front of the County Hall that the alarmed Communist leaders allowed religious education to resume in the city centre school.

During the Romanian occupation, he displayed his determination and courage. The town's military commander took hostages from the civilian population. The parish priest approached the commander and asked for the release of his fellow citizens. His appeal, however, was rejected. Apor could not accept this response. He travelled to Bucharest and asked for an audience with British-born Queen Mary to try to obtain their release. After a few days, the commander received orders from the highest authority to free the hostages in Gyula.<sup>6</sup>

The Treaty of Trianon also affected Vilmos Apor personally. Transylvania, and with it his homeland, the former county of Háromszék, also fell into Romanian hands. The eastern half of the Diocese of Nagyvárad (which became Oradea), including the seat, was also taken over. The economic life of Gyula also suffered from the fact that it became a border town, cut off from several of its economic, cultural and social contacts.

<sup>6</sup> KÖZI HORVÁTH, József, *Apor püspök élete és halála [The life and death of Bishop Apor]*, Edited by: Soós, Viktor Attila, Közi Horváth József Népfőiskola, Agyagosszergény, 2022, p. 32.

Catholic religious and social associations served the purpose of training the faithful, as well as recruiting lay workers. From male and female intellectuals to tradesmen and farm workers, every cultural and occupational group found a community with an appropriate composition and level.

In 1922, in order to deepen the desire for Christian renewal that was flaring up with elemental force after the First World War, he organised a popular mission that mobilised the entire Catholic population of the city and proved to be extremely effective. A prominent event of the period between the two world wars was the Third Catholic General Assembly of the Great Plain in Gyula, which took place between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> of August, 1924. Parish Priest Vilmos Apor was the soul of the organisation work, and the event was attended by a large crowd, including the Apostolic Nuncio Lorenzo Schioppa, the Bishop of Csanád Gyula Glattfelder, the Bishop of Székesfehérvár Ottokár Prohászka, the Vicar General and Auxiliary Bishop of Kalocsa Győző Horváth, as well as Jenő Czettler, an economist, university professor, and director of the Hungarian Farmers' Association. The Bishop of Székesfehérvár, Ottokár Prohászka, was the keynote speaker of the meeting.<sup>7</sup>

There was significant spiritual life in Gyula, and in the 1920s Apor organised several pastorates, whose work was supported by four chaplains and a religious education teacher. No new parishes were founded in the town during this period, but several pastorates were initiated. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of September, 1932, Apor led nearly five hundred pilgrims to Máriaradna (today Radna in Romania), for the first time since the First World War. In 1930, the care of patients in the József Sanatorium was taken over by the Sisters of the Annunciation of Szombathely. He invited Salesian monks to Gyula to run a boys' college. To care for the poor, he invited the Franciscan Sisters for the Care of the Poor working according to the Eger norm, and they began their work in December 1934. Gyula also had a Catholic primary school and a secondary school, which were also placed under the pastoral care of Apor. In 1929, he was appointed as the titular abbot of Csolt (today Ciolt in Romania) by his former superior, the apostolic governor of Debrecen, János Lindenberger. Among the religious associations of the time, the local branch of Actio Catholica (AC) was founded in February 1934 in Gyula. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of February, 1935, AC organised a Catholic Day in the town, which was attended by such renowned speakers as P. Béla Bangha, a Jesuit monk, former Prime Minister Károly Huszár, the Premonstratensian monk P. Róbert,

<sup>7</sup> *A Gyulán 1924. V. 15–17-én végbement alföldi katolikus nagygyűlés emlékkönyve* [Commemorative book of the Catholic General Assembly of the Great Plain held in Gyula on 15–17 May 1924], Compiled by: APOR, Vilmos and MEGYESY, Ágoston, Gyula 1925.

Béla Horváth, Count János Zichy, Frida Stadler and József Zahoray, the parish priest of Csorvás. The National Body of Catholic Agricultural Youth Associations (KALOT) was organised in Gyula in October 1935. In Máriafalva (today Lărguța in Romania) the parish built a day care centre for the faithful. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, 1937, the first parish nurse started working in the village. In preparation for the World Eucharistic Congress, a Eucharistic Day had been held on the 14<sup>th</sup> of November the previous year, and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July, 1938, the Holy Right Hand of St. István (Stephen) also visited Gyula. A large number of the faithful of Gyula, led by their parish priest, attended the Eucharistic Congress in Budapest. In September 1938, construction began on a day-care centre for the faithful of Galbácskert and Krinolinkert, which was consecrated in January 1941.

Apor endeavoured to integrate his parish and its parishioners into the life-stream of the great Hungarian Catholic community. He participated in the Catholic Great Assemblies, the jubilee celebrations in memory of St. Imre (Emeric) of Hungary and St. István, as well as the World Eucharistic Congress in Budapest with groups of various sizes. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July, 1938, he was happy to welcome the Holy Right Hand of St. István, which was taken to Gyula on the so-called “Golden Train”.

As the parish priest of the county seat, he was also a member of the town’s representative body and the Békés County legislative committee. However, he avoided day-to-day politics in both settings. He spoke up and took a stand only when the issue on the agenda had pastoral, moral or social implications.

Since his first Holy Mass, he considered worship and the administration of the sacraments to be the most important aspects of his priestly work. He celebrated the eight-o’clock Mass every weekday morning, but he was in the Confessional long before that. During the Advent period, he would already be there at half past five, before the Rorate Mass, when people came to confess. Afterwards, he used to walk until it was time for him to celebrate his own Mass “to clear his head”. After his short breakfast, when he had no pastoral work to perform outside the house, he was readily available for meeting the faithful throughout the day.

Given his tireless apostolic work and his impeccable personality, it goes without saying that his chaplains and the priests of the city and the surrounding area saw in him an ideal, despite the fact that he demanded work and he did not overlook mistakes. He was never high-handed with his subordinates, preferring to make requests rather than issue orders, and he always praised a job well done.

Vilmos Apor was appointed Bishop of Győr by Pope Pius XII in January 1941, so the duration of his activity as a bishop coincided almost entirely with the Hungarian participation in the Second World War.<sup>8</sup>

In his episcopal position, Apor remained what he had been as a parish priest: first and foremost a pastor, only at a higher level, with a wider scope and greater responsibility. In his first circular letter he outlined his pastoral programme thus:

*“It is the work for souls, the love and ardour for souls, the desire to be all things to all people, that makes the priestly life beautiful and worthy of all sacrifices. It is in this sublime vocation that the priesthood of the archpastor and the priesthood of the diocese are united in a holy and intimate union. May the love of which we are the proclaimers bind our priestly hearts to one another above all.”*<sup>9</sup>

The bishop knew the problems of the village and he believed that the future of the country depended on their solution. He unreservedly endorsed the decision of the Hungarian Episcopal Conference, which had been taken years earlier, that the Church would not seek preferential treatment in the implementation of the land reform. With all the means at his disposal, he highly appreciated and supported the Catholic agrarian youth movement (KALOT), which had been initiated by Jesuit Father Jenő Kerkai and which had spread throughout the country within a few years with its local organisations, and which had been exemplary in providing religious, cultural, professional and political education, and had achieved unprecedented results.<sup>10</sup> He also gave a significant amount of financial support to the movement’s community college in Egyházásfalú, Sopron County, which he inaugurated in person.

Vilmos Apor visited industrial sites, factories and mines, talking to the workers and miners, trying to familiarise himself with their feelings and their problems. He also gave financial support to Christian workers’ organisations and was happy to participate in

<sup>8</sup> *Apor Vilmos püspöki iratai* [Episcopal documents of Vilmos Apor], Published by: Soós, Viktor Attila. A Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár Kiadványai, Források, feldolgozások 7. [Publications of the Archives of the Diocese of Győr, Sources, Processings 7.], Győr 2009.

<sup>9</sup> *Apor Vilmos püspöki körlevelei 447. sz* [Episcopal circular letters of Vilmos Apor No. 447]. 1941. Published in: *Apor Vilmos püspöki iratai* [Episcopal documents of Apor Vilmos], Published by: Soós, Viktor Attila, A Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár Kiadványai, Források, feldolgozások 7. [Publications of the Archives of the Diocese of Győr, Sources, Processings 7.], Győr 2009, p. 25.

<sup>10</sup> TÓTH, Imre, *KALOT képeskönyv* [KALOT Picture Book], Szombathely, Sylvester Nyomda, private publication, 1989; BALOGH, Margit, *A KALOT és a katolikus társadalompolitika 1935–1946* [KALOT and Catholic social policy 1935–1946], MTA Történettudományi Intézete, Budapest 1998.

the celebrations and entertainments of the workers' associations. He was also concerned about the issues of young workers nationwide. The Bishops' Conference had entrusted him with the patronage of two Catholic youth organisations, namely the National Union of Catholic Tradesmen and Workers (KIOE) and the Working Girls (DL). He took this responsibility, like all his other tasks, very seriously. He was their patron not just formally but with all his heart and moral and financial support. He was extremely interested in the plight of young workers. In his diocese, he drew the attention of his priests to the importance of the KIOE and the DL in a special circular letter and urged the formation of local groups in workers' parishes.

### Vilmos Apor and the Hungarian Holy Cross Association

The Magyar Szent Kereszt Egyesület (Hungarian Holy Cross Association) played a special role in the history of the rescue of Jews in Hungary, but no detailed analysis of the organisation has been conducted to date; only attempts have been made to highlight its role.<sup>11</sup> The beginnings of the association date back to the spring of 1939, when it was founded at the initiative of Móricz Kornfeld. Kornfeld himself was a convert, and his family had strong family and business ties to the Weiss and Mauthner families, a group of Jewish capitalists who were pioneers in the development of Hungarian capitalism at the time.<sup>12</sup>

The aim of the Hungarian Holy Cross Association was to protect Catholics who were subject to the Jewish Laws. This protection meant that the Catholic Church did not intend to apply the Jewish Laws within its own denomination, or at least wished to remedy the violations of rights resulting from these laws. The association was founded on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February, 1939, but its inaugural meeting was only held some days later, on the

<sup>11</sup> GERGELY, Jenő, *A Magyar Katolikus Püspöki Kar, az Apostoli Szentszék és a Soá* [*The Hungarian Catholic Episcopal Conference, the Holy See and the Shoah*], In: HAMP, Gábor, HORÁNYI, Özséb, and RÁBAI, László (eds.): *Magyar megfontolások a Soáról* [*Hungarian reflections on the Shoah*], Balassi Kiadó–Magyar Pax Romana Fórum–Pannonhalmi Főapátság, Budapest–Pannonhalma 1999. Cf. BALOGH, Gábor, *A Magyar Szent Kereszt Egyesület dokumentumaiból* [*From the documents of the Hungarian Holy Cross Association*], In: *Vigilia* 2014/10, pp. 777–785. Cf. BALOGH, Gábor, *A küzdő egyház képe 1939–1945 között a Magyar Szent Kereszt Egyesület példáján* [*The image of the struggling church between 1939–1945, using the example of the Hungarian Holy Cross Association*], Budapest 2014. [https://adoc.pub/a-kzd-egyhazi-kepe-kztt-a-magyar-szent-kereszt-egyeslet-pelda.html#google\\_vignette](https://adoc.pub/a-kzd-egyhazi-kepe-kztt-a-magyar-szent-kereszt-egyeslet-pelda.html#google_vignette)

<sup>12</sup> GERGELY, Jenő, *A püspöki kar, a szentszék és a magyarországi Holocaust* [*The episcopate, the Holy See and the Holocaust in Hungary*], *Mozgó Világ* 1999/4, p. 90. Cf. BALOGH, Gábor, *A Római Katolikus Egyház és a nemzetiszocialisták Magyarországon* [*The Roman Catholic Church and the National Socialists in Hungary*], L'Harmattan, Budapest 2015, pp. 174–176.

5<sup>th</sup> of March, 1939. Initially, ecclesiastical and secular approval was sought for naming it the St. Paul Association, but in July a minor change was made and the name as it is known today became the official name of the association. The reference to St. Paul would have sent a perfectly clear and decodable message, since the conversion of the Jewish persecutor of Christians who began his career as Saul was a well-known story, not only in ecclesiastical circles. The more neutral name of the Holy Cross was probably intended to mitigate this clear association, since it was to be expected that the association would have to operate in a strong headwind, and the somewhat provocative name was not intended to provide a clear target for the expansive pro-German ideology. The statutes were approved by the Archbishop of Esztergom, Cardinal Jusztinián Serédi, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of August, 1939, and the Ministry of the Interior authorised the operation of the association on the 5<sup>th</sup> of January, 1940.<sup>13</sup> Serédi gave an account of the association at the meeting of the Hungarian Catholic Episcopal Conference on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October, 1939:

*“The Episcopal Conference’s attention is drawn to the Jews who have converted to Catholicism and who, as a result of the Jewish Law, are in a worse situation than the [other] Jews. They are not cared for, while those who remain Jews are supported by the Jews of the world through effective action. The association sees a need for a committee of ecclesiastical and secular men to be set up to give moral protection in the first place to Catholics affected by the Jewish Law. The authority and effectiveness of this committee would undoubtedly be assured if a member of the Episcopal Conference would be gracious enough to undertake to form and chair it. For the implementation of the measures of this committee and for the management of the administrative work, perhaps the Holy Cross Association would be suitable, whose members are voluntary converts, and whose president is Dr. József Almásy, vice-rector of the Central Seminary, on commission of the Prince Primate.”<sup>14</sup>*

<sup>13</sup> *A kereszt erősíti a gyengét. Boldog Apor Vilmos tevékenysége az üldözöttek védelmében* [The cross strengthens the weak. Blessed Vilmos Apor’s activity in defence of the persecuted], Published by: Soós, Viktor Attila, A Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár Kiadványai, Források, feldolgozások 21. [Publications of the Archives of the Diocese of Győr, Sources, Processings 21.], Győr 2015. No. 3. documents 36–67.

<sup>14</sup> Minutes of the Episcopal Conference meeting of the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October, 1939, item 19. Published in: GERGELY, Jenő, (ed.) *A Püspöki Kar Tanácskozásai. A magyar katolikus püspökök konferenciáinak jegyzőkönyveiből 1919–1944* [Meetings of the Episcopal Conference. From the minutes of the conferences of Hungarian Catholic bishops 1919–1944], Budapest 1984, p. 265, and BEKE, Margit (compilation), *A Magyar Katolikus Püspökkari tanácskozások története ÉS jegyzőkönyvei 1919–1944 között. II. kötet* [The history and minutes of the Hungarian Catholic Episcopal Conference meetings between 1919–1944. Volume II], (Dissertationes Hungaricae ex historia Ecclesiae XII–XIII), Munich–Budapest 1992, p. 227.

The main patron of the association was Gyula Zichy, the Archbishop of Kalocsa, who was at the head of the institution until his death in the spring of 1942.<sup>15</sup> József Almásy, a priest of the Diocese of Esztergom, was the ecclesiastical president, and from February 1943 he was succeeded by the Jesuit monk P. József Jánosi.<sup>16</sup> The lay president of the Hungarian Holy Cross Association was József Cavallier, a well-known figure in Catholic public life and journalism at the time. To protect the association, Serédi also established an episcopal commission to provide a framework for its day-to-day operation. The members of the committee were József Almásy, Bertalan Badalik O.P., a provincial superior, Jusztin Baranyay, a Cistercian university professor, Balázs Bíró, a judge of the administrative court, Mária Blaskó, József Cavallier, Sándor Eckhardt, a university professor, P. József Jánosi S.J., Jenő Katona, a journalist and editor, Countess József Károlyi, Géza Kiss, a former financial councillor, Baron István Kray, Mihály Marczell, János Mészáros, a former Deputy Archbishop of Budapest, Kálmán Molnár, a university professor, Ferenc Ripka, a former mayor of Budapest, Margit Slachta, Pál Schrotty OFM, József Tiefenthaler, Béla Varga and Tibor Zsitvay.<sup>17</sup>

The newly elected Bishop of Győr was already familiar with the work of the Hungarian Holy Cross Association, as he was a member of the Episcopal Conference and had the opportunity to follow the founding process. However, József Cavallier and József Almásy reported to Apor on the initial results of their work as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> of March, 1942:

*“The main task of the association is to care for the Christian Catholic faithful whose existence is threatened by Act IV of 1939 and the decrees issued as a consequence. This means mainly the deepening and self-awareness of their Catholic worldview and religious*

<sup>15</sup> Minutes of the Episcopal Conference meeting of the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October, 1939, item 19. Published in: GERGELY, Jenő, (ed.) *A Püspöki Kar Tanácskozásai. A magyar katolikus püspökök konferenciáinak jegyzőkönyveiből 1919–1944* [Meetings of the Episcopal Conference. From the minutes of the conferences of Hungarian Catholic bishops 1919–1944], Budapest 1984, p. 265, and BEKE, Margit (compilation), *A Magyar Katolikus Püspökkari tanácskozások története ÉS jegyzőkönyvei 1919–1944 között. II. kötet* [The history and minutes of the Hungarian Catholic Episcopal Conference meetings between 1919–1944. Volume II], (Dissertationes Hungaricae ex historia Ecclesiae XII–XIII), Munich–Budapest 1992, p. 227.

<sup>16</sup> LÁSZLÓ, T. László, *Az egyházak szerepe a zsidómentésben Magyarországon* [The role of the churches in saving the Jews in Hungary], *Katolikus Szemle* 1979/2, p. 162.

<sup>17</sup> Minutes of the Episcopal Conference meeting of the 13<sup>th</sup> of March, 1940, item 30. Published in: GERGELY, Jenő, (ed.) *A Püspöki Kar Tanácskozásai. A magyar katolikus püspökök konferenciáinak jegyzőkönyveiből 1919–1944* [Meetings of the Episcopal Conference. From the minutes of the conferences of Hungarian Catholic bishops 1919–1944], Budapest 1984, pp. 270–271, and BEKE, Margit (compilation), *A Magyar Katolikus Püspökkari tanácskozások története ÉS jegyzőkönyvei 1919–1944 között. II. kötet* [The history and minutes of the Hungarian Catholic Episcopal Conference meetings between 1919–1944. Volume II], (Dissertationes Hungaricae ex historia Ecclesiae XII–XIII). Munich–Budapest 1992, pp. 244.

*faith, fostering Catholic solidarity and practising brotherly love through cultural, social and charitable activities. The association currently has nearly 2,500 members, of whom about one fifth live in the countryside. This circumstance imposes on our association the duty of gathering and organising the Catholic convert brothers and sisters living together in groups of various sizes in rural centres, and of providing them with the necessary ecclesiastical leadership and guidance in the service of the aforementioned objective.*<sup>18</sup>

Vilmos Apor formally joined the association on the 17<sup>th</sup> of August, 1942, when Serédi asked him to be its patron following the death of Gyula Zichy.<sup>19</sup> Apor was willing to comply with Serédi's request, but asked for time, as he wrote:

*"(...) in principle, I do not refuse accepting the presidency of the Hungarian Holy Cross Association, although I know it will be a burdensome task. However, before I take a final position, I would like to find out more about the work of the association so far. May I ask Your Eminence to put the matter on hold until I have been properly informed."*<sup>20</sup>

Finally, Apor agreed and accepted the patronage<sup>21</sup>, which was acknowledged by the Episcopal Conference.<sup>22</sup> From that point on, he was formally active in the leadership

<sup>18</sup> Győr Diocesan Archives Episcopal Archives Church government documents (GyEL PL Egyházkorm.) 650/1942. Published in: *A kereszt erősíti a gyengét. Boldog Apor Vilmos tevékenysége az üldözöttek védelmében* [The cross strengthens the weak. Blessed Vilmos Apor's activity in defence of the persecuted]. Published by: Soós, Viktor Attila, A Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár Kiadványai, Források, feldolgozások 21. [Publications of the Archives of the Diocese of Győr, Sources, Processings 21.], Győr 2015. Document No. 3a. 36–37.

<sup>19</sup> Archives of the Primate, Archives of the Church Government, Church Government documents of Jusztinián Serédi (PL EL Serédi Jusztinián) 6406/1944; GyEL PL Church Government documents 650/1942. Published in: *A kereszt erősíti a gyengét. Boldog Apor Vilmos tevékenysége az üldözöttek védelmében* [The cross strengthens the weak. Blessed Vilmos Apor's activity in defence of the persecuted], Published by: Soós, Viktor Attila, A Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár Kiadványai, Források, feldolgozások 21. [Publications of the Archives of the Diocese of Győr, Sources, Processings 21.], Győr 2015. Document No. 3j, p. 59.

<sup>20</sup> PL EL SERÉDI Jusztinián 6406/1944. Published in: *A kereszt erősíti a gyengét. Boldog Apor Vilmos tevékenysége az üldözöttek védelmében* [The cross strengthens the weak. Blessed Vilmos Apor's activity in defence of the persecuted], Published by: Soós, Viktor Attila, A Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár Kiadványai, Források, feldolgozások 21. [Publications of the Archives of the Diocese of Győr, Sources, Processings 21.], Győr 2015. Document No. 3l, pp. 60–61.

<sup>21</sup> The minutes of the meeting of the Hungarian Catholic Episcopal Conference held in Budapest on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October, 1942, item 14: "On this matter, already during the summer, br. Vilmos Apor, Bishop of Győr, was addressed who kept his reply pending until he had been informed. Baron Bishop Vilmos Apor announced that he had been informed, and he would chair the committee. The Episcopal Conference is pleased to note this." GERGELY, Jenő (ed.) *A Püspöki Kar Tanácskozásai. A magyar katolikus püspökök konferenciáinak jegyzőkönyveiből 1919–1944* [Meetings of the Episcopal Conference. From the minutes of the conferences of Hungarian Catholic bishops 1919–1944], Budapest 1984, and БЕКЕ, Margit (compilation), *A Magyar Katolikus Püspökkari tanácskozások története és jegyzőkönyvei 1919–1944 között. II. kötet* [The history and minutes of the Hungarian Catholic Episcopal Conference meetings between 1919–1944. Volume II], (Dissertationes Hungaricae ex historia Ecclesiae XII–XIII.) Munich–Budapest 1992, p. 351; and PL EL Jusztinián Serédi 7018/1942.

<sup>22</sup> GyEL PL Egyházkorm. 650/1942. Published in: *A kereszt erősíti a gyengét. Boldog Apor Vilmos tevékenysége az üldözöttek védelmében* [The cross strengthens the weak. Blessed Vilmos Apor's activity in defence of the

of the association, and did his utmost to ensure that the community of persecuted Jews who had become Catholic would survive the discriminatory measures with as little loss as possible. At the same time, it should be mentioned that Apor did not speak out solely in defence of the members of the Roman Catholic Church, but in defence of all those who were persecuted. In his usual Christmas messages, which the authorities refused to allow to be published in the press after 1942,<sup>23</sup> he always spoke out in defence of vulnerable people, and he did so in a completely non-denominational manner. Apor's Christmas messages left no doubt about the Bishop's philanthropic intentions and humanitarianism:

*“We follow the teachings of our Lord Christ, who proclaimed against narrow-minded and selfish pharisees that He came down from heaven to earth for all men, and shed His precious blood on the cross for each one of them. We are with the Mother Church, which proclaims Christ's teaching to all peoples, shares grace with all, and considers as believers and children all those who, by the sacrament of baptism and by confession of faith, enter into the communion of the Catholic Church. (...) There are many who, immediately after their birth, were baptised, received a Christian education, and did not know until they were adults that they could not be considered full Hungarians because of the blood of one of their grandparents. Many of them set an outstanding example of religious life and practised the virtues of selfless sacrifice heroically for as long as they were able. The feast of the Holy Christmas calls us all to increased love and charity. Let us do good to our fellow believers who are especially in need of our help today.”<sup>24</sup>*

In addition to their charitable activities, Apor and his associates also ran a legal aid service, that is, they provided legal advice on how to evade the Jewish Laws, and also gave concrete financial assistance to those in need, even trying to solve housing problems when necessary<sup>25</sup>

*persecuted*], Published by: Soós, Viktor Attila, A Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár Kiadványai, Források, feldolgozások 21. [Publications of the Archives of the Diocese of Győr, Sources, Processings 21.], Győr 2015. Documents No. 3, pp. 36–67.

<sup>23</sup> GyEL PL Egyházkorm. 3077/1942. Published in: *A kereszt erősíti a gyengét. Boldog Apor Vilmos tevékenysége az üldözöttek védelmében* [The cross strengthens the weak. Blessed Vilmos Apor's activity in defence of the persecuted], Published by: Soós, Viktor Attila, A Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár Kiadványai, Források, feldolgozások 21. [Publications of the Archives of the Diocese of Győr, Sources, Processings 21.], Győr 2015. Documents No. 5b. and 5c, pp. 71–72.

<sup>24</sup> GyEL PL Egyházkorm. 3077/1942. Published in: *A kereszt erősíti a gyengét. Boldog Apor Vilmos tevékenysége az üldözöttek védelmében* [The cross strengthens the weak. Blessed Vilmos Apor's activity in defence of the persecuted], Published by: Soós, Viktor Attila, A Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár Kiadványai, Források, feldolgozások 21. [Publications of the Archives of the Diocese of Győr, Sources, Processings 21.], Győr 2015. Documents No. 5a, pp. 69–70.

<sup>25</sup> Appeal to the Hungarian Catholic society by Vilmos Apor, bishop of Győr, published on the occasion of Christmas 1943, via Magyar Kurir. Published in: *A kereszt erősíti a gyengét. Boldog Apor Vilmos tevékenysége az üldözöttek védelmében* [The cross strengthens the weak. Blessed Vilmos Apor's activity in defence of the persecuted], Published by: Soós, Viktor Attila, A Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár Kiadványai, Források,

However, life was not easy for Apor and his association. Their financial resources were limited, so they did their utmost to encourage their fellow members and supporters to donate.<sup>26</sup> Apor was also outspoken about those conscripted into forced labour. Since the conscripts were not equipped with uniforms, they had to provide their own clothing, which in many cases proved totally unsuitable for front-line conditions. In this respect, too, Apor sought to arouse charitable feelings among his followers:

*“Catholic forced labourers have to provide their own clothing and equipment, but many of them are not in a position to buy the necessary clothing and suffer in the cold winter. Their assistance is undertaken by the Hungarian Holy Cross Association (Budapest, VIII, Múzeum körút 10), of which I am the patron by order of the Bishops’ Conference. The association asks for donations of clothing and money for the above purpose. If anyone can donate clothing (blankets, fur vests, knitted underwear, etc.), please send your donation directly to the above address. In addition, I order that from the collection boxes of Saint Anthony in the churches, by the 1<sup>st</sup> of February, everyone should send in the appropriate amount on the check of the Diocesan Office, with the minimum donation being three pengős.”<sup>27</sup>*

If one looks at the membership of the Holy Cross Association, a slow but steady increase could be seen. Initially, in 1939, there were only 114 members, but by 1940 there were 897, almost tenfold. In 1941, the number of members doubled to 2,110, and in 1942 it doubled again to 4,378, before rising to 6,168 in 1943 and 7,301 in 1944.<sup>28</sup> Overall, the association’s membership was modest, but it grew dynamically. Moreover, its activities became increasingly necessary, as the situation of the Hun-

feldolgozások 21. [Publications of the Archives of the Diocese of Győr, Sources, Processings 21.], Győr 2015. Document No. 6, pp. 72–73.

<sup>26</sup> GyEL PL Egyházakorm. 3077/1942. Published in: *A kereszt erősíti a gyengét. Boldog Apor Vilmos tevékenysége az üldözöttek védelmében* [The cross strengthens the weak. Blessed Vilmos Apor’s activity in defence of the persecuted], Published by: Soós, Viktor Attila, A Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár Kiadványai, Források, feldolgozások 21. [Publications of the Archives of the Diocese of Győr, Sources, Processings 21.], Győr 2015. Document No. 5a, pp. 69–70.

<sup>27</sup> Apor Vilmos püspöki körlevelei 1943. 179. sz. [Episcopal circulars of Vilmos Apor 1943. No. 179] Published in: *Apor Vilmos püspöki iratai* [Episcopal Documents of Vilmos Apor], Published by: Soós, Viktor Attila, A Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár Kiadványai, Források, feldolgozások 7. [Publications of the Archives of the Diocese of Győr, Sources, Processings 7.], Győr 2009, p. 94.

<sup>28</sup> BALOGH, GÁBOR, *A küzdő egyház képe 1939–1945 között a Magyar Szent Kereszt Egyesület példáján* [The image of the struggling church between 1939–1945, using the example of the Hungarian Holy Cross Association], Budapest 2014. [https://adoc.pub/a-kzd-egyhz-kepe-kztt-a-magyar-szent-kereszt-egyeslet-pelda.html#google\\_vignette](https://adoc.pub/a-kzd-egyhz-kepe-kztt-a-magyar-szent-kereszt-egyeslet-pelda.html#google_vignette)

garian Jewish community became more and more precarious as the war progressed. By the end of 1944, the association had been disbanded. According to some sources, its activities were banned by the Arrow Cross regime on the 13<sup>th</sup> of October, 1944, and on the 17<sup>th</sup> of November, 1944 a special squad stormed its headquarters, manhandling the occupants.<sup>29</sup>

In the Episcopal Conference meetings and in his letters to Jusztinián Serédi Archbishop of Esztergom, Apor urged the bishops to take a clear and unequivocal stand on the issue of persecution before the faithful and the clergy. “*I am well aware,*” wrote Apor, “*that such a step could have various consequences: problems with the press, slander against the clergy, material damage, seizures, restrictions in schools and associations, possibly arrests and torture. But I am convinced that we must take all these risks.*”<sup>30</sup>

In his diocesan circular of the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January, 1943, Apor, as the bishop patron of the Hungarian Holy Cross Association, called for the attention of the faithful and the clergy and stated that it was their duty to help Jews who were conscripted for forced labour service.<sup>31</sup>

### Vilmos Apor and the Catholic Social Movements

Perhaps the most interesting episode of Catholic intellectual life during the Second World War took place in Győr on the 26<sup>th</sup> of August, 1943.<sup>32</sup> It was at this time that Apor invited the socially open members of Christian intellectual society to the Püspökvár for an exchange of ideas. The subject to be discussed was very topical and perturbing: the fate of post-war Hungary was to be the subject of a meaningful debate, about which, however, nothing concrete was known at the time. Apor and his associates were ab-

<sup>29</sup> BALOGH, Gábor, *A Római Katolikus Egyház és a nemzetiszocialisták Magyarországon* [The Roman Catholic Church and the National Socialists in Hungary], L'Harmattan, Budapest 2015, p. 176.

<sup>30</sup> LÉVAI, Jenő, *Geheime Reichssache, Papst Pius XII. hat nicht geschwiegen* [Secret imperial matter, Pope Pius XII did not remain silent], Verlag Wort und Werk GMBH, Köln-Müngersdorf 1966, p. 75.

<sup>31</sup> Apor Vilmos püspöki körlevelei 1943. 179. sz. [Episcopal circulars of Vilmos Apor 1943. No. 179]. Published in: *Apor Vilmos püspöki iratai* [Episcopal documents of Vilmos Apor], Published by: Soós, Viktor Attila, A Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár Kiadványai, Források, feldolgozások 7. [Publications of the Archives of the Diocese of Győr, Sources, Processings 7.], Győr 2009, p. 94.

<sup>32</sup> KLESTENITZ, Tibor, PETRÁS, Éva and Soós, Viktor Attila: *Az 1943. augusztus 26-i győri találkozó – A Katolikus Szociális Népmozgalom létrejötte* [The meeting of 26 August 1943 in Győr – The birth of the Catholic Social Movement] – In: *Útkeresés két korszak határán. A Katolikus Szociális Népmozgalom 75. évfordulójára* [Finding the way between two eras. On the 75th anniversary of the Catholic Social People's Movement]. Edited by: KLESTENITZ, Tibor, PETRÁS, Éva and Soós, Viktor Attila, Közi Horváth József Népfőiskola, Agya-gosszergény 2019, pp. 11–18.

solutely certain of one thing: Germany could not win the war, and the new order in Europe would not bring about the completion of the Nazi Pax Germanica, but most probably the expansion of the Soviet Union. Of course, they could not have been aware of the proportions, but they could see quite well that the new social order would be based on a social turnaround.

Another aim was to integrate the Catholic Social People's Movement, which by then had already been institutionalised, into a party, and which would break with the authoritarian politics of the Christian parties of the time and be able to present a modern, socially sensitive programme: in other words, Apor and his associates would also seek to provide a competitor for parties that aimed to solve the workers' issues in accordance with Marxist principles in the event of an imminent turn to the political left.<sup>33</sup>

As far as we know, twenty-three church-associated individuals attended the meeting, including Jenő Kerkai SJ (KALOT), Béla Kovrig, a university professor, Count József Pálffy, Miklós Beresztóczy, the head of Catholic Class I of the Ministry of Religion and Public Education, Zsigmond Mihalovics (Actio Catholica), József Mindszenty (at that time still a parish priest in Zalaegerszeg), József Közi Horváth (Member of Parliament for Győr), Béla Varga, Brunó Balassa OCist, Szaléz Kiss OFM and Miklós Pfeiffer. In addition, the leaders of the Parish Workers' Divisions (EMSZO) were also present, such as József Freesz, Sándor Meggyesi and Imre Sándor, representing Áron Márton.<sup>34</sup>

The meeting was based on the probability of an impending German defeat, and it was decided that the Catholic reform organisations, operating in various structural frameworks, would form a federation under the name of Katolikus Szociális Népmozgalom (Catholic Social Popular Movement). It is important to emphasise that the umbrella organisation thus created was not yet officially a party, but merely a social organisation. However, its creation was explicitly motivated by the need to form a party, and the germ of party-style functioning could be detected in the movement it-

<sup>33</sup> SZOLNOKY, Erzsébet, *Fellebbezés helyett. Apor Vilmos püspök élete és vértanúsága* [Instead of an appeal. The life and martyrdom of Bishop Vilmos Apor], Szent Gellért Egyházi Kiadó, Szeged 1990, p. 121.

<sup>34</sup> KÖZI HORVÁTH, József, *Apor püspök élete és halála* [The life and death of Bishop Apor], Edited by: SOÓS, Viktor Attila, Közi Horváth József Népfőiskola, Agyagosszergény 2022, pp. 78–81; KOVRIG, Béla, *Katolikus demokratikus és szociális reformmozgalmak Magyarországon* [Catholic democratic and social reform movements in Hungary], Edited and annotated by: PETRÁS, Éva, Budapest, Gondolat Kiadó 2019; *Útkeresés két korszak határán. A Katolikus Szociális Népmozgalom 75. évfordulójára* [Finding the way between two eras. On the 75th anniversary of the Catholic Social Movement], Edited by: KLESTENITZ, Tibor, PETRÁS, Éva and SOÓS, Viktor Attila, Közi Horváth József Népfőiskola, Agyagosszergény 2019.

self.<sup>35</sup> The ecclesiastical patron of the association was Apor himself, while the secular president was Béla Kovrig, a university professor who had developed Pál Teleki's social ideas.<sup>36</sup>

Apor had an extremely important role to play in gaining acceptance for the movement: it was he who won the support of Jusztinián Serédi for the people's movement, and for the Christian Democratic People's Party that grew out of it, which was officially founded on the 13<sup>th</sup> of October, 1944, two days before the Arrow Cross coup. However, the party was actually operating underground, since the Hungarist takeover under Ferenc Szálasi had made any legal framework for the new Christian politics impossible.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of October, 1943, Vilmos Apor indicated at a meeting of the Episcopal Conference that the Church would have to change direction in the near future, precisely because of the above-mentioned processes.<sup>37</sup> Although the Archbishop of Esztergom agreed with this in theory, he warned the Episcopal Conference to be more cautious, and initially he thought of working out the details of the change of direction with serious background work and the utmost secrecy.<sup>38</sup> To this end, he persuaded Apor and

<sup>35</sup> JEZSÓ, Ákos, *Amikor az egyház (még) politizált* [When the church was (still) political], *Evangelikus Élet*, 2005/02.

<sup>36</sup> KÖZI HORVÁTH, József, *Apor püspök élete és halála* [The life and death of Bishop Apor], Edited by: SOÓS, Viktor Attila, Közi Horváth József Népfőiskola, Agyagosszergény 2022, pp. 80–81; KOVRIG, Béla, *Katolikus demokratikus és szociális reformmozgalmak Magyarországon* [Catholic democratic and social reform movements in Hungary], Edited and annotated by: PETRÁS, Éva, Budapest, Gondolat Kiadó 2019; PETRÁS, Éva, „Totális állam és keresztény álláspont összeférhetetlen” – Kovrig Béla nézetrendszere és tevékenysége a totalitarizmusok szorításában [“The totalitarian state and the Christian position are incompatible” – Béla Kovrig's views and activities in the grip of totalitarianism], In: *Útkeresés két korszak határán. A Katolikus Szociális Népmozgalom 75. évfordulójára* [Finding the way between two eras. On the 75th anniversary of the Catholic Social People's Movement], Edited by: KLESTENITZ, Tibor, PETRÁS, Éva and SOÓS, Viktor Attila, Közi Horváth József Népfőiskola, Agyagosszergény 2019, pp. 85–96.

<sup>37</sup> “There is a great lack of knowledge among the clergy on these issues, and a certain tendency to radicalism, especially on property policy issues. It would be important for them to know the boundaries to be maintained between left-wing and right-wing parties, and how to preserve the Catholic character of our institutions and associations. Guidance would be needed in the event of possible war complications. In the national question, guidelines are expected, while in social ideas, clarification of certain questions in principle.” Minutes of the meeting of the 6<sup>th</sup> of October, 1943 meeting of the Episcopal Conference, item 11. GERGELY, Jenő (ed.), *A Püspöki Kar Tanácskozásai. A magyar katolikus püspökök konferenciáinak jegyzőkönyveiből 1919–1944* [Meetings of the Episcopal Conference. From the minutes of the conferences of Hungarian Catholic bishops 1919–1944], Budapest, 1984, p. 309, and BEKE, Margit (compilation), *A Magyar Katolikus Püspökkari tanácskozások története és jegyzőkönyvei 1919–1944 között, II. kötet* [The history and minutes of the Hungarian Catholic Episcopal Conference meetings between 1919–1944. Volume II], (Dissertationes Hungaricae ex historia Ecclesiae XII–XIII), Munich–Budapest 1992, pp. 391–392.

<sup>38</sup> “His Eminence deems it dangerous for the Episcopal Conference to give political direction in the public eye. Otherwise, partly in personal contacts and partly in connection with certain cases that have arisen, he himself and the Episcopal Conference have outlined their position. He considers it possible for some members of the Episcopal Conference to draw up certain guidelines and to bring them to the attention of the deans so that they can be used in the course of their deliberations.” GERGELY, Jenő (ed.), *A Püspöki Kar Tanácskozásai. A magyar katolikus püspökök konferenciáinak jegyzőkönyveiből 1919–1944* [Meetings of the Episcopal Conference. From the minutes of the conferences of Hungarian Catholic bishops 1919–1944], Buda-

Lajos Shvoy Bishop of Székesfehérvár, to start discussing the details.<sup>39</sup> Events, however, radically accelerated. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of March, 1944, German troops invaded Hungary and the era of open persecution of Jews began. Apor faced a crisis that he had never faced before: he had to organise the actual rescue of people.

### **The Year of the Ordeal: from the 19<sup>th</sup> of March, 1944 to the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April, 1945**

Nazi Germany invaded Hungary on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March, 1944, and a few weeks later the ghettoisation and deportation of Hungarian Jews began. The German occupation marked a turning point in the history of Hungary: although the Hungarian governments were forced to work within a radically narrowed international space, the country managed to preserve its distinct identity within the German alliance. In domestic policy matters, although it tried to respect the Third Reich's sometimes open and sometimes tacit expectations, it was able to manage its affairs as it saw fit. Yet the events of the 19<sup>th</sup> of March changed everything. Prime Minister Miklós Kállay, who wished to implement his secret policy of withdrawing from the war, was forced into hiding, and anti-German Hungarian government circles were arrested by the occupying authorities. Under the leadership of Döme Sztójay, a far-right political group of the Hungarian political elite linked to Béla Imrédy, deliberately distancing itself from the Arrow Cross, came to power for the first time. Soon the Anglo-Saxon powers started bombing Hungarian targets, which did not spare the city of Győr. Since the city was also an important centre of the arms industry (remember that it was here that Kálmán Darányi announced his larger-than-ever economic development plan, the so-called Győr Programme, in 1938) the Allies carried out a devastating bombing raid on the 13<sup>th</sup> of April, 1944, which destroyed approximately 80% of the MÁVAG factory in the city. The almost two dozens of air raids that followed killed hundreds of people, and the effect of the bombing on the civilian population was profoundly demoralising.

Even in these inhuman times, Vilmos Apor did his best to visit his parishioners and the suffering population in general. He personally visited almost every bomb site and

pest 1984, p. 309, and BEKE, Margit (compilation), *A Magyar Katolikus Püspökkari tanácskozások története és jegyzőkönyvei 1919–1944 között. II. kötet* [*The history and minutes of the Hungarian Catholic Episcopal Conference meetings between 1919–1944. Volume II*], (Dissertationes Hungaricae ex historia Ecclesiae XII–XIII). Munich–Budapest 1992, pp. 391–392.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

tried to bring encouragement to those in despair. On his pastoral visits to the rural communities of his diocese, he always sought out the victims of the war and tried to comfort them.

Although the devastation of the war also caused great confusion in Western Hungary, in the spring of 1944 something considerably more serious and shameful began: the ghettoisation of the Hungarian Jewish society, followed by the deportation and murder of Jews in German death camps. The German special unit that arrived in Hungary under the leadership of Adolf Eichmann numbered around two hundred, but extreme right-wing members of the Hungarian authorities and administration explicitly aided the German occupiers, and in less than two months they succeeded in deporting approximately half a million Hungarian citizens, mostly women and children, since many of the men were called up for forced labour, which surprised even the Germans in the final phase of the war.

Apor did his utmost to protect the persecuted: in addition to his patronage of the Hungarian Holy Cross Association, which tried to help the needy regardless of denomination, he also urged the publication of a common pastoral letter in which the Catholic clergy could jointly condemn the inhuman ideas and measures. To this end, he wrote several letters to Jusztinián Serédi Archbishop of Esztergom, who, however, committed himself to a more cautious tactic in the form of background talks with the Hungarian government.

The working relationship between Apor and Serédi deepened considerably during these fateful months, despite the fact that the Archbishop of Esztergom was already ill at the time. In his letter of the 27<sup>th</sup> of April, Apor explicitly requested that Serédi formally stand up for all his baptised parishioners.<sup>40</sup> Finally, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of April, 1944, a meeting was arranged between Serédi and Döme Sztójay, but it did not lead to any substantial result.<sup>41</sup>

In May, what was called the Auschwitz Protocol, in which two Slovak refugees gave an account of their suffering, was published in Hungary, and was made available to leading Hungarian government officials.<sup>42</sup> Subsequently, József Éliás, a Reformed pastor and secretary of the Good Shepherd Committee and József Cavallier visited Apor in

<sup>40</sup> GyEL PL Egyházkorm. 164/1944.

<sup>41</sup> Csíky, Balázs, *Szerédi Jusztinián, Magyarország hercegprímása [Jusztinián Serédi, Prince Primate of Hungary]*, MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont Történettudományi Intézet, MTA–PPKE Fraknói Vilmos Római Történelmi Kutatócsoport, Budapest 2018, p. 405.

<sup>42</sup> *Akik mertek bátrak lenni. Embermentők [Those who dared to be brave. Rescuers]*, Edited by: SCHMIDT, Mária, Közép- és Kelet-Európai Történelem és Társadalom Kutatásáért Közalapítvány, Budapest 2013, pp. 25–26.

Győr, where they called for joint action by the churches, which Apor fully supported.<sup>43</sup> In the same spirit, the next day he wrote a letter to the Archbishop of Esztergom, encouraging him to join the organisation.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of May, 1944, Serédi informed the bishops about the meagre results of the talks,<sup>45</sup> and in response Apor expressed regret for the lack of open condemnation of the persecution of Jews.<sup>46</sup> Although the episcopal circular was finally issued at the end of June, following increasing encouragement by Apor and others, including Apostolic Nuncio Angelo Rotta, it was not made public (its contents were only made known to the faithful in a few churches in the country), due to the government's promises and threats of resignation. On the part of the Protestant churches, the possibility of a joint Christian stand for the persecuted was raised, which was supported by the Catholic side including József Mindszenty, but the joint protest was eventually dropped due to the opposition of Serédi.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of May, 1944, at the Pentecost High Mass, Apor, having learned from a local newspaper about the order to establish a ghetto in Győr, condemned the inhumanities in the strongest possible terms in front of his followers. In the Cathedral of Győr, he passionately expressed his thoughts to the congregation:

*“Whoever denies the fundamental Christian law of love, and claims that there are people or groups and races that are allowed to be hated, and proclaims that people are allowed to be tortured, whether they be black people or Jews, however much he may boast that he is a Christian, he is like a heathen and a public sinner, for the Lord Jesus said, ‘He who*

<sup>43</sup> SZOLNOKY, Erzsébet, *Fellebbezés helyett. Apor Vilmos püspök élete és vértanúsága* [Instead of an appeal. The life and martyrdom of Bishop Vilmos Apor], Szent Gellért Egyházi Kiadó, Szeged 1990, pp. 140–141.

<sup>44</sup> SZOLNOKY, Erzsébet, *Fellebbezés helyett. Apor Vilmos püspök élete és vértanúsága* [Instead of an appeal. The life and martyrdom of Bishop Vilmos Apor], Szent Gellért Egyházi Kiadó, Szeged 1990, pp. 141–142.

<sup>45</sup> Circular letter of Cardinal Jusztinián Serédi, Prince Primate to the members of the Hungarian Catholic Conference PL EL Serédi Jusztinián 3795/1944. Published by: БЕКЕ, Margit (compilation), *A Magyar Katolikus Püspökkari tanácskozások története és jegyzőkönyvei 1919–1944 között. II* [The history and minutes of the Hungarian Catholic Episcopal Conference meetings between 1919–1944. Volume II], (Dissertationes Hungaricae ex historia Ecclesiae XII–XIII). Munich–Budapest, 1992, pp. 431–438; Published in: *A kereszt erősíti a gyengét. Boldog Apor Vilmos tevékenysége az üldözöttek védelmében* [The cross strengthens the weak. Blessed Vilmos Apor's activity in defence of the persecuted], Published by: SOÓS, Viktor Attila, *A Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár Kiadványai, Források, feldolgozások 21.* [Publications of the Archives of the Diocese of Győr, Sources, Processings 21.], Győr 2015, pp. 125–134.

<sup>46</sup> Letter of Vilmos Apor to Prince Primate Jusztinián Serédi concerning a common Episcopal Conference pastoral letter. Győr, the 27<sup>th</sup> of May, 1944. Published in: *A kereszt erősíti a gyengét. Boldog Apor Vilmos tevékenysége az üldözöttek védelmében* [The cross strengthens the weak. Blessed Vilmos Apor's activity in defence of the persecuted], Published by: SOÓS, Viktor Attila, *A Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár Kiadványai, Források, feldolgozások 21.* [Publications of the Archives of the Diocese of Győr, Sources, Processings 21.], Győr 2015, pp. 134–135.

*does not obey the church shall be to you like a heathen. And whosoever shall approve of such torments, and shall take part in them, committeth a grievous sin, and shall not be absolved until he shall have atoned for this great sin.*<sup>47</sup>

The audience was shocked by the sermon, but Apor did not stop there, also going on to officially ask Andor Jaross Minister of the Interior, to stop the deportations and the creation of the Győr ghetto:

*“Against this measure, which is contrary to all humanity and Christian spirit, which punishes the innocent and even children incapable of crime without just and objective judgment, I, as the Bishop of the ancient city of Győr, raise my voice of protest and hold you, Minister, responsible before God and before Hungarian and world history for all the sickness and death, for all the contempt and condemnation which will follow in the wake of this measure. [...] In the name of this deeply religious population of Győr, I therefore ask you, Minister, to revoke your decree and, at the last moment, to avert further dangers from this people.”*<sup>48</sup>

Allegedly, Jaross even threatened the bishop with deportation, to which Apor merely replied: *“I am ready!”*<sup>49</sup>

This was the same tone the bishop used when he had a meeting with his former friend, Lord Lieutenant Richárd Kászonyi. The bishop’s office director, József Zágon, recalled that Apor, seeing the rejection, warned Kászonyi that as a Catholic he could not advocate inhuman ideas, but since Kászonyi could not make any concessions to the bishop, Apor rebuked him, exclaiming: *“If you profess to be a Catholic, you must think and act as your bishop does!”*<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Sermon by Vilmos Apor on the 28<sup>th</sup> of May, 1944. Published in: *A kereszt erősíti a gyengét. Boldog Apor Vilmos tevékenysége az üldözöttek védelmében* [The cross strengthens the weak. Blessed Vilmos Apor’s activity in defence of the persecuted], Published by: Soós, Viktor Attila, A Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár Kiadványai, Források, feldolgozások 21. [Publications of the Archives of the Diocese of Győr, Sources, Processings 21.], Győr 2015, pp. 140–141.

<sup>48</sup> SZOLNOKY, Erzsébet, *Fellebbezés helyett. Apor Vilmos püspök élete és vértanúsága* [Instead of an appeal. The life and martyrdom of Bishop Vilmos Apor], Szent Gellért Egyházi Kiadó, Szeged 1990, pp. 137–138; GyEL Vilmos Apor collection. Published by: Soós, Viktor Attila, *A kereszt erősíti a gyengét. Boldog Apor Vilmos tevékenysége az üldözöttek védelmében* [The cross strengthens the weak. Blessed Vilmos Apor’s activity in defence of the persecuted], A Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár Kiadványai, Források, feldolgozások 21. [Publications of the Archives of the Diocese of Győr, Sources, Processings 21.], Győr 2015. document No. 35, pp. 141–142.

<sup>49</sup> KÖZI HORVÁTH, József, *Apor püspök élete és halála* [The life and death of Bishop Apor], Edited by: Soós, Viktor Attila, Közi Horváth József Népfőiskola, Agyagosszergény 2022, p. 85.

<sup>50</sup> KÖZI HORVÁTH, József, *Apor püspök élete és halála* [The life and death of Bishop Apor], Edited by: Soós, Viktor Attila. Közi Horváth József Népfőiskola, Agyagosszergény 2022, p. 87.

After their placement in the ghettos, the deportation of Jews to Germany began. The deportees' route, on its last section in Hungary, led through the Diocese of Győr. For the bishop, the most painful experience was the liquidation of the ghetto of the Győr Jews, who were crowded together in the Budai Road barracks. He knew and respected several of his prisoners personally. He wanted to give them at least some spiritual consolation. Since he had not received permission from the camp commander or his superior in Hatvan, he appealed to Prime Minister Sztójay on the 13<sup>th</sup> of June, 1944, and at the same time approached the Minister of the Interior. Jaross allowed a priest into the ghetto, but not the bishop.<sup>51</sup> After receiving the notification, Apor took his hat and, accompanied by Office Director Zágón, visited the Gestapo headquarters in Győr. He was met by two young officers who, after listening to his request, informed him that the Führer had ordered that no priest should cross the threshold of the ghetto. The bishop took note of the information and in return asked them to convey the message of the Bishop of Győr to their supreme warlord. The message, in a boldly courageous tone, read: *"The Führer is also bound by the law of God. The time will come when he will have to answer for his deeds before the world and before the judgment of God."*<sup>52</sup> Immediately afterwards, Apor telegraphed the Minister of the Interior that the Gestapo was preventing him from using the permit he had granted. Jaross again allowed a priest to visit. In response, Apor sent Canon Ignác Prosztt in his own car to the gates of the ghetto, but to no avail. After being kept waiting for three hours, he was informed that Under-Secretary László Baký had annulled the permission of his Minister, and forbidden the visit.<sup>53</sup>

*"Bishop Apor,"* reads the International Red Cross report, *"was not only aware of the dire situation of the deportees, but also did his utmost to alleviate the plight of the unfortunate. He organised a collection for our benefit and instructed the parish priests of the parishes along the route to help the deportees who were passing through."* He even included in his relief efforts those who were not his inferiors. For example, he asked the steward of Gyulamajor, near Győr, which was owned by Count Héderváry, to distribute the food and wine secretly brought there to the members of the starving columns.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> *A kereszt erősíti a gyengét. Boldog Apor Vilmos tevékenysége az üldözöttek védelmében* [The cross strengthens the weak. Blessed Vilmos Apor's activity in defence of the persecuted], Published by: Soós, Viktor Attila, A Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár Kiadványai, Források, feldolgozások 21. [Publications of the Archives of the Diocese of Győr, Sources, Processings 21.], Győr 2015, pp. 149–154.

<sup>52</sup> KÖZI HORVÁTH, József, *Apor püspök élete és halála* [The life and death of Bishop Apor], Edited by: Soós, Viktor Attila, Közi Horváth József Népfőiskola, Agyagosszergény 2022, pp. 87–88.

<sup>53</sup> KÖZI HORVÁTH, József, *Apor püspök élete és halála* [The life and death of Bishop Apor], Edited by: Soós, Viktor Attila, Közi Horváth József Népfőiskola, Agyagosszergény 2022, pp. 87–88.

<sup>54</sup> KÖZI HORVÁTH, József, *Apor püspök élete és halála* [The life and death of Bishop Apor], Edited by: Soós, Viktor Attila, Közi Horváth József Népfőiskola, Agyagosszergény 2022, p. 87.

Apor attempted to provide personal assistance to those imprisoned in the ghetto, and applied for a permit to the local authorities, the local bodies of the Gestapo and Prime Minister Sztójay to provide pastoral care for the Catholic faithful. However, the authorities refused to allow him or his fellow priests to enter the ghetto. After the Arrow Cross takeover, Apor played an active role in the distribution of protective letters and rescued dozens of people from death marches to the West. Furthermore, to alleviate the suffering of the persecuted, he later instructed his parishioners, among others, to help the deportees who were crammed into cattle wagons passing through the diocese.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of June, 1944, Apor wrote a letter to Serédi in which he demanded a firm position from the archbishop:

*“Before the usual procedure of locking the Jews into ghettos in Budapest, which will end in deportation and physical or moral mass death, I appeal to Your Eminence once again to use the last resort against the government.*

*We are now at a point where the Reformed Church has already anticipated us and has already decided to take decisive action.*

*How will we stand before history if we remain in apparent agreement and courtesy with a government which, with the utmost cruelty, tortures hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people throughout the country, depriving them of all their human rights and assisting to their deportation to slavery and death? (...)*

*I implore Your Eminence to have the grace to join the movement of Christians of other religions expressed in the memorandum, or at least at the same time to give the government an ultimatum in a similar tone, the negative result of which would be followed by a decisive action by the whole Episcopal Conference.”<sup>55</sup>*

Apor, and in this he was more consistent than some of his fellow bishops, not only spoke out in favour of Jews who had converted to Catholicism, but condemned all forms of antisemitism.

<sup>55</sup> Published in: HETÉNYI VARGA, Károly, *Papi sorsok a horogkereszt és a vörös csillag árnyékában I [Priestly destinies in the shadow of the swastika and the red star I]*, Lámpás Kiadó, Abaliget 1992, pp. 298–299; 2nd improved and extended edition: Márton Áron – Új Ember Kiadó, Budapest 2004. Publisher’s staff in the edition: FEJÉRDY, András, FEJÉRDY Gergely and Soós, Viktor Attila, p. 383; Published in: *A kereszt erősíti a gyengét. Boldog Apor Vilmos tevékenysége az üldözöttek védelmében [The cross strengthens the weak. Blessed Vilmos Apor’s activity in defence of the persecuted]*, Published by: Soós, Viktor Attila. A Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár Kiadványai, Források, feldolgozások 21. [Publications of the Archives of the Diocese of Győr, Sources, Processings 21.]. Győr, 2015. Document No. 42, pp. 155–156.

*“This antisemitism cannot be condoned. It must be condemned by every priest from the Pope down to the last bishop. So, we must not only pity the persecuted and the victims of assorted cruelties, but we must give voice to the principle that we cannot punish anyone for blood alone. We cannot condemn anyone without a just determination of the individual offence; everyone has the right to life, property, family, freedom and work. It is only on the basis of a legal judgment that such deprivations of rights can be imposed on the guilty. What happened to the Jews was genocide, and anyone who approves of it must not say a word if other social classes, perhaps even the Church, are subjected to similar deprivation of rights.”<sup>56</sup>*

Apor took resolute measures to facilitate the reception of converts to Catholicism in his diocese, thus giving the persecuted some minimum protection. To this end, he delineated precise guidelines on the conditions of admission, which he facilitated almost to the point of extreme simplicity.<sup>57</sup>

On the 29<sup>th</sup> of August, 1944, Governor Miklós Horthy dismissed Sztójay and entrusted one of his confidants, General Géza Lakatos, with the formation of the new government. The main task of the Lakatos government was to prepare Hungary’s exit from the war.

The last stage of Vilmos Apor’s life began on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October, 1944, the day on which Horthy proclaimed the country’s withdrawal from the German alliance and the war. However, after the failure of this attempt to break away, the far right in Hungary came to power, for the second time since the 19<sup>th</sup> of March, in the person of Ferenc Szálasi, who began to build his Hungarist state based on confused ideas. After the failed attempt to withdraw on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October, power was handed over, with Hitler’s assent, to Szálasi, the leader of the Hungarian National Socialists, who called themselves the Arrow Cross Party. Szálasi exercised the powers of both the head of state and the prime minister under the title of the “Leader of the Nation”. Jenő Szöllösi and Ferenc Rajniss were appointed as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Religion and Education, respectively.

<sup>56</sup> Document published by: SZOLNOKY, Erzsébet, *Fellebbezés helyett. Apor Vilmos püspök élete és vértanúsága* [Instead of an appeal. The life and martyrdom of Bishop Vilmos Apor], Szent Gellért Egyházi Kiadó, Szeged 1990, pp. 143–144.

<sup>57</sup> Apor Vilmos’s circular V of 1944. No. 1492. *Felnöttek megkeresztelése, Liber catechumenorum* [Baptism of adults, Liber catechumenorum], Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár. Published in: *Apor Vilmos püspöki iratai* [Vilmos Apor’s episcopal documents], Published by: Soós, Viktor Attila, A Győri Egyházmegyei Levéltár Kiadványai, Források, feldolgozások 7. [Publications of the Archives of the Diocese of Győr, Sources, Processings 7.]. Győr 2009, p. 155.

“Leader of the Nation” Szálasi paid an introductory visit to Cardinal Serédi on the 24<sup>th</sup> of October, 1944. However, the meeting did not lead to any tangible results, as the cardinal stated that he did not recognise Szálasi as a legitimate leader, and did not give in to his blackmail.<sup>58</sup> During the two-and-a-quarter-hour hearing, the cardinal told him in no uncertain terms that he considered Szálasi’s rise to power and the measures he had taken since his “de facto” rule to be unconstitutional. He also firmly condemned the Arrow Cross propaganda for the continuation of the war. The slogan “*We will win because we want to win*”, he said, was not enough to win the war. He also denounced the renewed persecution of Jews and the taking of hostages after the Arrow Cross takeover. In further talks, the Primate asked Szálasi to declare Budapest and Esztergom, the country’s secular and ecclesiastical capitals, open cities. He repeated this request in writing on the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> of November. He also requested the help of the German ambassador Veessenmayer to protect the two cities. His request was ignored by both of them. The German command, under Hitler’s express orders, was determined to protect Budapest and its environs, as they represented an important transport hub.

In order to provide more effective defence, the military command planned to evacuate the civilian population of the capital and its surroundings to Germany. Szálasi asked Serédi to ask the clergy to set a good example to the reluctant faithful. Serédi refused this request and called on his fellow bishops and pastors to stay in their places without fail. The request was followed by a threat, but again to no avail. The Primate declared that he would “*not give in to terror, and he would do his duty, which requires him to stay*”.

The Arrow Cross government also failed in its attempt to use the clergy in the service of National Socialist propaganda. Interior Minister Gábor Vajna issued a decree calling on the clergy to support propaganda against the Soviet Union. The decree was ignored by both the bishops and the lower clergy. Seeing this, the minister appealed to the Prince Primate, but he received a firm refusal from him as well. Cardinal Serédi told him that he did not consider “*sermons along these lines to be in the interests of the nation*”.

An interesting report on the attitude of the Hungarian Catholic clergy towards National Socialism was prepared by the Arrow Cross authority, the “National Office of Accountability”, for the “Leader of the Nation” (Szálasi) and the Minister of Culture. According to the report, which is considered a historical document, “*the clergy is not*

<sup>58</sup> TELEKI, Éva, *Nyilas uralom Magyarországon [Arrow Cross rule in Hungary]*, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest 1974, p. 160.

*in sympathy with the present system. The Roman Catholic clergy is internationally based. It never associates itself in any form with the present regime, and in its sermons to the faithful it makes no mention of the present life-and-death struggle of the Hungarian nation, nor of the Hungarist idea, nor of the Leader of the Nation. The number of priests with right-wing leanings is negligible. The behaviour of the clergy, which is incompatible with the present system, is dangerous and harmful, because they hold the masses under their influence as spiritual leaders. It is very difficult to defend against them, because their propaganda consists not in deeds but in being dead silent about the present system and its objectives, and in emphasising the international character of religion.”<sup>59</sup>*

Szálasi also negotiated with the Papal Nuncio after the takeover. He did not find a favourable response from him either. Pius XII’s envoy to Budapest, Angelo Rotta, who was well acquainted with Hungarian conditions, explicitly approved of the attitude of the Prince Primate, the Episcopal Conference and the clergy towards the German invaders and the Arrow Cross government they had helped to take power. As the head of the diplomatic corps, he, in agreement with the Swedish, Swiss, Spanish and Portuguese ambassadors, spoke out strongly on several occasions against the deportations, which were reintroduced after the 15<sup>th</sup> of October and implemented with inhuman cruelty. In addition to protests, he saved many thousands of persecuted Jews from certain death by issuing Vatican protective letters, creating shelters and forming aid groups to accompany the deportees’ columns. In addition to his verbal and written protests and relief actions, he also expressed his criticism of the Arrow Cross government by not following the “Leader of the Nation” when he established his headquarters in Vas County, leaving Budapest, which was under siege. The Vatican diplomat, aged over seventy, shared the plight of the capital’s population and survived the terrible weeks of the siege in the nunciature building in the Castle District.<sup>60</sup>

Outraged by the behaviour of the Hungarian Catholic Church and the papal envoy, Szálasi told Minister of Culture Rajniss that he wished to break off diplomatic relations with the Holy See.<sup>61</sup> He later amended his first statement of anger to the effect that in April 1945 he would write a letter to the Pope in which he said, “*I want to express the*

<sup>59</sup> TELEKI Éva, *Nyilas uralom Magyarországon [Arrow Cross rule in Hungary]*, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest 1974, p. 161.

<sup>60</sup> KÖZI HORVÁTH, József, *Apor püspök élete és halála [The life and death of Bishop Apor]*, Közi Horváth József Népfőiskola, Agyagosszergény 2022, p. 92.

<sup>61</sup> KÖZI HORVÁTH, József, *Apor püspök élete és halála [The life and death of Bishop Apor]*, Közi Horváth József Népfőiskola, Agyagosszergény 2022, p. 92.

*relationship of the Hungarist world view to the Church... In this letter I want to make concrete proposals, in particular I want to lay down the principles of a new concordat for the Hungarist national leadership. And in May," he continued, "I shall take action with regard to the Roman Catholic Church and its priests in Hungary."<sup>62</sup>*

Of all the bishops of the Transdanubian region, which was occupied by the Germans, terrorised by the Arrow Cross and threatened by the Russians, Apor was in the most difficult situation. His seat, Győr, an important military and industrial centre and railway junction, was increasingly targeted by enemy bombers after the Arrow Cross takeover.

Yet even in the midst of the most severe ordeals, he did not think of moving his household temporarily to one of the more peaceful rural bishop's palaces, where he housed people persecuted by the regime who had fled to him. The best known of these was the historian Gyula Szekfű, who was given refuge in the bishop's summer house in Szany with his wife of non-Aryan origin. The bishop's residence itself was full of persecuted people. There were even some staying in the attic of the cathedral.<sup>63</sup>

To illustrate that Bishop Apor bravely and sacrificially helped those condemned to deportation even in the extremely dangerous circumstances after the Arrow Cross coup, here is a quote from a letter of a Jewish-born but Catholic official in Budapest:

*"After I managed to escape from the deportation column directed towards the Austrian border, I visited several old, dear friends in Győr. All of them welcomed me with open arms, but none of them dared to hide me. They advised me, however, to contact the bishop; perhaps he would be able to help me. I hurried up to the Castle with concern, for I did not know the bishop. The secretary announced me without question. The bishop welcomed me with love. When I mentioned the monks' grammar school where I had studied and the names of my former teachers whom he knew, and asked for his patronage, he looked at me and said emphatically: 'You are István Kovács, [a] refugee teacher from Kiskunfélegyháza. You stay here. Then we'll see what we can do.' For two weeks I hid in the Püspökvár (Bishop's Palace) in Győr. Then Lazarist monk Father Köhler, blessed be his memory, who led one of the rescue missions of the Papal Nuncio, Angelo Rotta, took me back by car to Pest, where I also managed to survive the terrible times through a series of miracles."<sup>64</sup>*

<sup>62</sup> TELEKI, Éva, *Nyilas uralom Magyarországon [Arrow Cross rule in Hungary]*, Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest 1974, pp. 161–162.

<sup>63</sup> KÖZI HORVÁTH, József, *Apor püspök élete és halála [The life and death of Bishop Apor]*, Közi Horváth József Népfőiskola, Agyagosszergény 2022, p. 93.

<sup>64</sup> KÖZI HORVÁTH, József, *Apor püspök élete és halála [The life and death of Bishop Apor]*, Közi Horváth József Népfőiskola, Agyagosszergény 2022, pp. 93–94.

There are a number of similar cases. The bishop never turned away a single persecuted person fleeing to him. His colleagues, friends and relatives admired not only his good heart and courage, but also his practicality and ingenuity.

For example, he saved one of his priests, Antal Somogyi, a renowned ecclesiastical writer wanted by the Gestapo, from deportation by having him hospitalised under an alias with the help of a doctor friend.<sup>65</sup>

In these troubled times, József Mindszenty, the Bishop of Veszprém, also took action, and drafted a memorandum in which the bishops of Transdanubia spoke out in favour of sparing the region.<sup>66</sup> The two heads of neighbouring dioceses, Vilmos Apor and József Mindszenty, the youngest members of the Episcopal Conference, differed not only in their origins but also in their physical and mental abilities, yet found a common voice and were able to cooperate on difficult and important issues, based on mutual respect and esteem. This mutual respect and esteem developed into close friendship and cooperation during the German occupation, the Arrow Cross regime and the armed Communist threat.

The result of this friendly cooperation was the document known in history as the *“Memorandum of the bishops of Transdanubia”*. The initiative was started by the Bishop of Veszprém. Mindszenty, seeing the unstoppable advance of the Red Army, drafted a memorandum in which the bishops of the still free Transdanubian region would ask *“the present administrators of Hungary’s fate”* not to *“abandon the still intact Transdanubian region to the spoils of retreating armies, for this would destroy the last piece of the Hungarian homeland and with it the last hope for the future and recovery of Hungary.”* *“If the question were to be asked,”* the draft continued, *“from where we derive the right to speak out, we would answer with our heads held high: we are Hungarians, we have lived and want to live in an inseparable community of destiny with the nation. We are God’s appointed agents in the legislature and in the governance of the country”*, the bishop added, referring to his membership of the Upper House of Parliament. Then, with regard to the ecclesiastical office of the persons to be invited to sign, he concluded: *“The life-and-death question that has arisen is no longer a political, but a moral one above all else, and therefore we not only have a right to speak, but also have*

<sup>65</sup> KÖZI HORVÁTH, József, *Apor püspök élete és halála [The life and death of Bishop Apor]*, Közi Horváth József Népfőiskola, Agyagosszergény 2022, pp. 94–95.

<sup>66</sup> MINDSZENTY, József, *Emlékirataim [My memoirs]*, Szent István Társulat, Budapest 1989, pp. 39; Helikon Kiadó, Budapest 2015. Edited by: KOVÁCS, Attila Zoltán and SOÓS, Viktor Attila, pp. 52–55.

*a duty to point out our responsibility before the tribunal of conscience and history and the judgment of God on behalf of the three and a half million people of Transdanubia.”*

It would have gone without saying that the author would take the draft to the Primate first. However, having heard that Serédi was seriously ill, the first person he contacted was his “good friend”, Vilmos Apor. “Bishop Apor,” we read in the Primate’s Memoirs, “believed, together with me that we would hardly achieve any results with the Arrow Cross leaders, obsessed by their fanatical ideals, yet we found that we had to assume our historical responsibility to defend the nation and its believers. The two of us were the first to sign the memorandum.” They were willingly joined by Lajos Shvoy Bishop of Székesfehérvár, and Krizosztom Kelemen Abbot of Pannonhalma. The cautious Bishop of Szombathely Sándor Kovács, did not sign it, and the Bishop of Pécs was not available because Baranya County was already a theatre of war. Mindszenty handed the memorandum personally to Deputy Prime Minister Szöllösi in Buda on the 13<sup>th</sup> of November, 1944.<sup>67</sup>

Two weeks after the handing over of the memorandum, Mindszenty, together with several priests and his seminarians, was arrested on trumped-up charges by Ferenc Schiberna Lord Lieutenant of Veszprém, who had been given the role of government commissioner for military operations. The imprisoned bishop was later transferred from Veszprém to the prison in Sopronkőhida, and from there to Sopron, to the rooms of the Daughters of the Divine Redeemer Motherhouse, which had been requisitioned for the purpose of a prison.

His fellow prisoner in Kőhida and Sopron was also Bishop of Székesfehérvár Shvoy, who was also deprived of his freedom by the Arrow Cross.

<sup>67</sup> The full text of the memorandum was published in: *Mindszenty Okmánytár, első kötet, Mindszenty tanítása* [Mindszenty Document Library, Volume I, The Teachings of Mindszenty], Munich 1957, Prepared for publication by: VECSEY, József, pp. 20–21; MÉSZÁROS, István, *Prímások, pártok, politikusok 1944–1945. Adalékok a magyar katolikus egyház XX. századi történetéhez* [Primates, parties and politicians 1944–1945. Additions to the history of the Hungarian Catholic Church in the 20th century], Szent István Társulat, Budapest 2005, pp. 65–70; BALOGH, Margit, *Mindszenty József 1892–1975) I–II. kötet* [József Mindszenty (1892–1975) Volume I–II], MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont, Budapest 2015, pp. 354–359; MÓZESSY, Gergely, *Katolikus püspökök a nyilasok fogságában – Mindszenty József és Shvoy Lajos elhurcolása* [Catholic bishops in Arrow Cross captivity–The deportation of József Mindszenty and Lajos Shvoy], In: *Megyetörténet. Egyház- és igazgatástörténeti tanulmányok a veszprémi püspökség 1009. évi adománylevele tiszteletére* [County history. Studies on the history of the church and administration in honour of the donation letter of the Bishopric of Veszprém in 1009], Edited by: HERMANN, István, and KARLINSZKY, Balázs, Veszprémi Érseki és Főkapitányi Levéltár [Archbishop and Cathedral Chapter Archives of Veszprém] – Veszprém Megyei Levéltár [Veszprém County Archives], Veszprém 2010, pp. 257–274; Soós, Viktor Attila: *Apor Vilmos és Mindszenty József kapcsolata*. [The relationship between Vilmos Apor and József Mindszenty]. In: *In labore fructus. Jubileumi tanulmányok Győregyházmegye történetéből* [In labore fructus. Jubilee studies from the history of the Diocese of Győr], Edited by: NEMES, Gábor and VAJK, Ádám. Egyházmegyei Levéltár [Diocesan Archives], Győr 2011, pp. 375–387.

*"I was not allowed to receive visitors in Veszprém," Mindszenty writes, "even though already on the second day of my arrest Bishop Apor and Archabbot Kelemen were there to express their solidarity and thus make the Szálasi government aware that they too undertake responsibility for the memorandum presented to Szöllösi on the 13<sup>th</sup> of November."*<sup>68</sup> Mindszenty's claim was based on misinformation. According to the testimony of his closest associates, the Bishop of Győr was not in Veszprém at the time. He attempted to enter the prison in Kőhida, but was refused permission. He only managed to meet his two fellow priests much later in Sopron, when they were already imprisoned in the motherhouse of the Daughters of the Divine Redeemer.

That the two priests were able to leave the prison, which was crowded with common criminals and political prisoners, and enter the loving care of the sisters in Sopron, was due to the tireless and energetic intercession of Bishop Apor.

Since he himself was not allowed to visit, he asked the parish priest of Sopron, Kálmán Papp, who was also a member of the Upper House, to try to gain access to the prison. Papp managed to convey his bishop's greetings to the two imprisoned church leaders on Christmas afternoon.

The chaplain of the prison, who was under the jurisdiction of the Church, was also obliged to take special care of the two bishops and the priests and seminarians in prison with them. He also instructed the steward of the episcopal manor on the outskirts of the neighbouring village of Fertőrákos to provide other bishops with everything possible to alleviate their plight.<sup>69</sup>

He made a repeated attempt to the Hungarian authorities to have his fellow bishops released from prison. If not, they should at least be detained on church premises. When he saw that he would receive no meaningful response and that they would drag their feet, he made a bold decision to request an audience with the German envoy Veessenmayer, who was then living in the nearby village of Hédervár, in the count's castle there. Hitler's envoy and chief envoy to Hungary received the famously anti-Nazi bishop with cordial courtesy. He hurried to the park and personally ushered him into the building. When the bishop explained the purpose of his visit, he replied that, as it was an internal Hungarian matter, he could not take direct action, but he would ask Szálasi to release the bishops from prison.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>68</sup> MINDSZENTY, József, *Emlékirataim [My memoirs]*, Szent István Társulat, Budapest 1989, p. 49; Helikon Kiadó, Budapest 2015. Edited by: KOVÁCS, Attila Zoltán and SOÓS, Viktor Attila.

<sup>69</sup> KÖZI HORVÁTH, József, *Apor püspök élete és halála [The life and death of Bishop Apor]*, Közi Horváth József Népfőiskola, Agyagosszergény 2022, p. 98.

<sup>70</sup> KÖZI HORVÁTH, József, *Apor püspök élete és halála [The life and death of Bishop Apor]*, Közi Horváth

As a result of Bishop Apor's intervention with the German ambassador and that of the German ambassador with Szálasi, the two prisoners were transferred from the prison in Kőhida to the convent in Sopron.

However, there was to be a sequel. The "Leader of the Nation" did not dare contradict the German envoy, but he wanted to make his disapproval known to Apor. Accordingly, he sent the Minister for Religion and Education, Ferenc Rajniss, to him with instructions to reprimand the bishop.<sup>71</sup>

Rajniss arrived early in Győr from the Kőszeg area because of the bombing raids that were already on the agenda, where Szálasi and his government, who had fled Budapest, had established a temporary home.

The bishop, who had given his own suite to the refugees, received the Arrow Cross minister in his secretary's room. Rajniss, who was notoriously conceited and arrogant, began his speech in a loud voice. Apor, however, resented his tone.<sup>72</sup>

"If you want to talk to me honestly," he said, "do it in a decent way." The uninvited guest, subdued by the reprimand, then told his host in a polite tone that the "Leader of the Nation" had taken it amiss that he had appealed to a foreign authority and abused his powers as a primate. Then, on behalf of his client, he demanded that the bishop break off relations with Archbishop Angelo Rotta, the Papal Nuncio, who had not been on friendly terms with the Arrow Cross government.<sup>73</sup>

As the war drew to a close, the German and Arrow Cross troops were pushed westwards out of the country, while the Red Army, and the Hungarian troops fighting in its ranks, also pushed westwards. Apor was active in these days, too, and a letter dated the 14<sup>th</sup> of February, 1945 survived in which he asked the Interior Minister of the Szálasi government to abolish the decree on the automatic dissolution of marriages between Jews and non-Jews.<sup>74</sup>

József Népfőiskola, Agyagosszergény 2022, pp. 98–99.

<sup>71</sup> KÖZI HORVÁTH, József, *Apor püspök élete és halála* [*The life and death of Bishop Apor*], Közi Horváth József Népfőiskola, Agyagosszergény 2022, p. 99.

<sup>72</sup> KÖZI HORVÁTH, József, *Apor püspök élete és halála* [*The life and death of Bishop Apor*], Közi Horváth József Népfőiskola, Agyagosszergény 2022, p. 99.

<sup>73</sup> KÖZI HORVÁTH, József, *Apor püspök élete és halála* [*The life and death of Bishop Apor*], Közi Horváth József Népfőiskola, Agyagosszergény 2022, p. 99.

<sup>74</sup> BALOGH, Gábor, *A Római Katolikus Egyház és a nemzetiszocialisták Magyarországon* [*The Roman Catholic Church and the National Socialists in Hungary*], L'Harmattan, Budapest 2015, p. 235.

### The Martyrdom of Vilmos Apor

Vilmos Apor lived to see the end of the German occupation. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of March, 1945, the Soviet troops reached Győr. The number of refugees in the cellars of the bishopric of Győr was growing, with approximately three or four hundred people staying there, and hence the cellars were full. The first Russian soldiers came to the cellars of the Püspökvár (Bishop's Palace) only after dark. During the following days they visited the Püspökvár increasingly often. Bishop Apor personally received all the Russian soldiers at the entrance to the cellar, and despite those around him asking him to rest at least during the day, he did not sleep at all until the evening of Good Friday, saying, *"I must be awake in case something happens"*.<sup>75</sup>

The behaviour of the Russians varied greatly. Sometimes they knelt down and kissed his ring, but there were also instances when they wanted to pull it off or frisked him, looking for weapons.

On the morning of the 29<sup>th</sup> of March, Maundy Thursday, German troops bombarded the Püspökvár from their positions on the other side of the River Rába, directly opposite, after having blown up all the bridges the previous day, including the bridge over the Rába near the Püspökvár. On the same Thursday, the Püspökvár was hit by several mortar attacks. The Germans used incendiary shells to set fire to the tower and roof of the cathedral adjacent to the Püspökvár, as well as the tower of the nearby Carmelite church. Apor was deeply saddened by the sight of the burning churches.

On Maundy Thursday, he celebrated his last Mass in the cellar. Good Friday arrived. He was unable to hold the service that was regularly celebrated at such times, but he read the Passion of Jesus.

The immediate fighting in the city had ceased. Soviet soldiers roamed around the town looking for Germans. Several groups looked into the cellar of the Püspökvár. Apor recognised the approaching danger. He sent two of his priests to the Russian headquarters in the town hall for help, but it was in vain. Nor did they succeed in placing a military guard at the entrance to the cellar. The Russian soldiers visited the cellar of the Püspökvár increasingly frequently, more or less noisily. The situation was

<sup>75</sup> KÖZI HORVÁTH, József, *Apor püspök élete és halála* [*The life and death of Bishop Apor*], Közi Horváth József Népfőiskola, Agyagosszergény 2022, p. 104.

becoming more and more dangerous. Unfortunately, there was no good interpreter available; a doctor who spoke poor Slovak had to suffice.

On that Good Friday afternoon, Apor openly called on the men present, and especially the medical interpreter, to help him if he had to take a strong stand, because, as he explained, "*one must die sometime, so it is better to sacrifice one's life at such a time*". It is clear from his words that he was determined to protect, even at the cost of his life, all those under his protection.

Soviet soldiers searched the cellar of the Püspökvár for German soldiers and booty, such as watches. The young women were disguised as old ladies, in order to prevent the Soviet soldiers taking an interest in them. As the Soviet soldiers searched for the watches on people's wrists, they could see from the women's hands that they were not as elderly as their faces showed. As they tore the shawls from the young women's heads, they saw and shouted: "Nyet mamka, nyet mamka, babka, babka" ("Not a mum, not a mum, not a granny, not a granny"). The soldiers also discovered the food stores and the wine cellar, after which they left peacefully. Late in the afternoon, some of them who had visited the morning returned in an excited state, and asked for people to peel potatoes. Apor asked the elderly men and women to volunteer to peel potatoes, while the young people were hiding. Old men and women came forward en masse. However, the soldiers refused to accept any volunteers to help in the kitchen and insisted on having the young women. Apor pushed the Russian soldiers up the cellar stairs, shouting "Hinaus! Hinaus! Get out! Get out!" to tell the soldiers to leave. Some of Russian soldiers wanted to tear off the cross from Apor's breast, but the bishop did not allow it. A scuffle broke out, and a clash of arms ensued. Sándor Pálffy, the bishop's nephew, who was seventeen at the time, jumped in front of his uncle and was shot three times. The bishop was also hit by three bullets, one grazing his forehead, the second piercing the cuff of his shirt and his right arm, and the third, fatal bullet, entering his abdomen. The bishop collapsed after the shots.

On arrival at the hospital, he was operated on immediately. There was not a whimper from his lips, although the doctors said that the damage to the stomach and intestines was one of the most painful wounds, and could not be relieved with painkillers. He was in considerable pain and had to endure great suffering.

At the dawn of Easter Sunday, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of April, 1945, the Bishop of Győr went home to eternity.

His words were already the sigh of the bishop and father taking his final farewell:

*“Once again I hail my priesthood,” he said. “Thank you for your loving affection and please keep me in your memory. May you be faithful to the Church, may you preach the Gospel with courage. Help us to rebuild our miserable Hungarian homeland from its ruins and lead our poor misguided people back to the true path. It is now half past midnight. The last minutes have come.”*

*“My God, my Father,” he sighed, “I commend my body and soul into Your hands.*

*Jesus, Mary, Saint Joseph, be with me now and at the hour of my death.*

*Sacred Heart of Jesus, I trust You!*

*I offer all my sufferings as atonement for my own sins, but I also offer them for my priests, for my faithful, for the leaders of the country and for my enemies. I ask God not to impute to them the sin of their blindness against the Church.*

*I offer my sufferings for the sake of the sweet Hungarian homeland and the whole world.*

*Saint István, pray for the poor Hungarians.”*

At one o'clock in the morning on Easter Monday, Bishop Apor placed his life as a beautiful sacrificial gift before the throne of the Lamb.<sup>76</sup>

The news of his death was a great personal shock to many citizens of the bomb-hit city. His death also put an end to the myth that the Soviet military leadership wanted to protect or spare the lives of church-associated people and institutions. The hospital's medical staff, his sisters and staff escorted the dead bishop to the gate. There his priests took the stretcher and carried him towards the Káptalándomb (Chapel Hill).

### **The Funeral(s) of Vilmos Apor**

Vilmos Apor had been dead for two days, but his funeral had to wait. It could not take place in the cathedral with its burnt-down roof, so his body was laid out in the Gothic chapel of the Püspökvár, in front of the altar of Magyarok Nagyasszonya (Our Lady of the Hungarians). The idea that in better times he would be laid to rest in the Héderváry Chapel of the cathedral had already been conceived, as was the idea that he should rest temporarily in the crypt of the nearby Carmelite church. The forensic judge Dr. Andor Weisz offered a tomb that was pre-saved for his own purpose. But as there was no coffin, the funeral had to wait. The funeral parlours were not in operation. They could not find a coffin of the right size for the tall, broad-shouldered priest. Young priests undertook to

<sup>76</sup> KÖZI HORVÁTH, József, *Apor püspök élete és halála* [The life and death of Bishop Apor], Közi Horváth József Népfőiskola, Agyagosszergény 2022, p. 112.

find a carpenter. They relied primarily on the help of a master craftsman from the other side of the Rába, but the bridges had been blown up by the fleeing Germans. In the end, the coffin arrived by boat, not without any degree of risk.

On Wednesday, the 4<sup>th</sup> of April, 1945, the procession marched down the deserted street from Káptalandomb to the Carmelites. The mourning, with its lack of ostentation, was more poignant than any pomp, and the simplicity of the service was no less so. Miklós Pokorny, the canonical abbot and vicar capitular, buried him, and there were ten or twelve in the procession. It all befitted the simplicity of Vilmos Apor.

In November 1946, Kálmán Papp, the succeeding county bishop, appointed a court to officially start the beatification proceedings of the former Bishop of Győr, Vilmos Apor.

The martyred bishop's body continued to rest in the Carmelite crypt. Already at the time of his death, plans had been made for his final resting place to be the Chapel of St. László in the cathedral. Impoverished by the war, the clergy and the faithful raised the vast sum of one hundred and twenty thousand forints to cover the cost of the tomb that would have been his resting place.

Pope Pius XII appointed Kálmán Papp, the parish priest of Sopron, to succeed Apor as Bishop of Győr on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May, 1946. He was consecrated as a bishop by Archbishop of Esztergom József Mindszenty on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June in the Church of St. Michael in Sopron, assisted by Archbishop of Kalocsa József Grósz and Auxiliary Bishop Zoltán Meszlényi of Esztergom. Kálmán Papp initiated the reburial of his predecessor, Vilmos Apor, for which he received permission. The Bishop decreed:

*“On Tuesday the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November, 1948, at 5 p.m. and on Wednesday the 24<sup>th</sup> of November, 1948, at 10 a.m., all the bells of the diocese shall ring for a quarter of an hour. In this regard I am pleased to inform my Reverends and the Faithful that Bishop Vilmos's ornate tomb in the Chapel of St. László in the cathedral has been completed. I thank you all very much for your helpful contributions and I cordially invite my Reverends and the Faithful to the solemn funeral of Bishop Vilmos on Wednesday the 24<sup>th</sup> of this month at 10 a.m.*

*Order of the funeral service: on Tuesday the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November at 5 p.m., the body of our bishop will be brought to the Dóczy Chapel of Püspökvár with a solemn funeral service. A vigil will be held around the coffin by the diocesan clergy throughout the night. On Wednesday, the 24<sup>th</sup> of November, at 10 a.m., he will be transferred to the Cathedral, where, after a priestly funeral Mass and burial service, he will be laid to rest in the tomb in the chapel of St. László until the Resurrection.”*

Several believers, priests and worshippers were expected to attend the funeral, and the entire Hungarian Episcopal Conference, headed by Cardinal József Mindszenty, announced its intention to attend. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of November, however, the Diocesan Authority sent out a terse notice signed by Bishop Kálmán Papp: *“I hereby inform you that the funeral of Bishop of Győr Baron Vilmos Apor of blessed memory, scheduled for the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of November, has been cancelled.”*

What happened was that on the evening of Saturday, the 20<sup>th</sup> of November, a colonel of the political police and representatives of the Ministry of the Interior, who also brought the lord lieutenant of Győr with them, appeared at Püspökvár and handed the bishop the mayor’s decision prohibiting the exhumation. The transfer was suspended, and the bishop was ordered to inform those invited that the funeral would not take place, because *“the planned funeral of Vilmos Apor would be detrimental to the foreign policy interests of the country.”*

The strong protests of Kálmán Papp did not achieve any results. That very night the Interior Ministry informed the bishop and the parish priests that the funeral would not take place.

*“The Interior Ministry authorities, by then fully in Communist hands, fearing the protest action of the faithful outraged by the ban, imposed extraordinary regulations on the planned date of the transfer and the funeral. The Győr police force was reinforced by two hundred officers and the fire brigade [was also] mobilised. All night, secret police officers surrounded the Church of the Carmelites and mounted police patrolled the city centre to prevent black reactionaries from stealing the body. The roads leading to the Carmelite church and the cathedral were blocked with barricades. Workers were assigned to the street between the two churches to break up the paving. The people of Győr, who were trapped outside the barricades, acknowledged the intention disguised as road repair with mocking remarks and bitter smiles.”*

Equally crude and ridiculous means were used to prevent the people coming from the countryside from taking part in the final tribute to Apor. The police checked everyone approaching Győr that day by train, car, bicycle, on foot or by boat. Only those who could prove that they were working there were allowed to enter the city. The political police even forbade the printing of photographs of the gravestone and the commemorative picture of the deceased.

### Quietly, without pomp—the reburial of Vilmos Apor

Antal Horváth, Győr-Sopron County Secretary of the State Office for Church Affairs, wrote the following in his report for 1986, dated 15 January 1987: *“The measure affecting the Catholic church was that, after the consent of the national and county authorities, the ashes of Bishop of Győr Vilmos Apor, who died in 1945 in an accident, were moved from the Carmelite church to the ornate tomb in the cathedral on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May, 1986. This both resolved a situation that had previously been the cause of many malicious attacks, and also served the recognition of the church leadership both abroad and at home.”*

This short extract from the report reflects the atmosphere of the second half of the 1980s. Vilmos Apor did not die in an accident. In a report by the county department of the State Office for Church Affairs, the organisation that controls and supervises the churches of the party state, the church secretary of the Executive Committee of the Győr–Sopron County Council admitted that Apor’s temporary accommodation was inadequate. The party-state used everything to positively adjust its own situation; everything was subordinated to church politics, including Apor’s reburial. The reburial was carried out quietly, without any pomp, in the presence of County Bishop Kornél Pataky and a few canons. It was more unbecoming and less dignified than in 1945, when the war was the reason for any such events. In 1948, the party-state banned the already permitted reburial, fearing József Mindszenty and the large body of believers.

What exactly happened, how can one reconstruct these events? Kornél Pataky Auxiliary Bishop of Szeged, was appointed as Apostolic Governor of Győr by the Holy See in 1975 and was consecrated as a bishop in 1976, becoming the County Bishop of Győr. He seized the initiative and took cautious steps, to organise the reburial of Vilmos Apor. On behalf of the bishop, the diocesan authorities took the initiative to ask permission from the city of Győr for the reburial of Vilmos Apor. Although the city did not object to the transfer of the ashes from the Carmelite church to the cathedral, strict conditions were imposed. They allowed the bishop’s tomb to be opened and his remains placed in a new coffin, which could be transferred to the cathedral for reburial, but this had to be done in complete privacy: not only in private, but also in absolute secrecy.

In silence, without pomp, and in complete secrecy, the reburial took place and Apor was laid to rest in the Héderváry Chapel of the Cathedral of the Assumption of Our Lady in Győr. The reburial was scheduled for Friday the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May, 1986.

Lengthy preparations, obtaining permits and technical work were necessary, not only to keep it a secret, but also to prepare the final resting place of Vilmos Apor.

The funeral was attended by the Bishop of the Diocese of Győr, Dr. Kornél Pataky, his secretary, Ferenc Benkovich, Sándor Cseh and three canons, as well as Ferenc Németh, the chief medical officer of the county town of Győr and the staff of the Győr–Sopron County Funeral Home. When the coffin was removed from the crypt of the Carmelite church, it was completely intact. It was taken to the cathedral, where Apor's body was consecrated by County Bishop Kornél Pataky.

After the ceremony, the participants undertook a two-year confidentiality agreement not to mention what had happened or what they had been involved in.

The martyrdom of Vilmos Apor, his secret burial, the banning of his reburial and his quiet, unostentatious reburial in 1986 represent a peculiar feature of the party-state period, of the Communist dictatorship. This process contributed to bringing about his beatification, but it was his exemplary, committed life, his help for the fallen, the persecuted and the hard-pressed characterising his gospel-based life that qualified him for this recognition. His martyrdom was the crowning of his whole exemplary life.

After a long wait, the martyred Bishop Vilmos Apor was beatified by Pope John Paul II on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November, 1997.

Besides his heroic mission, the martyrdom of Vilmos Apor distinguishes him from other Roman Catholic bishops of the 20th century, although he is by no means alone in terms of both heroism and martyrdom. Yet, it is his entire life, especially his activity in defence of his persecuted Jewish compatriots, that places him in the national pantheon of Hungarian history.

Both his ecclesiastical recognition with his beatification in 1997 and his secular recognition and veneration illustrate that not only at the moment of his martyrdom, but throughout his life, he lived and worked as a priest, doing his work by listening to the people who came into contact with him and helping them in their trials and difficulties.

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## **Martyrs and Confessors of the Faith Associated with the Vác Seminary**

The Foundation of the Seminary and its Buildings After the Turkish occupation, the canonical foundation of the Vác Seminary took place in 1720.<sup>1</sup> However, the building of the seminary is not the same as the one we are in now. The current college, the former seminary, was started in 1777. The institution I have just mentioned began its work on this site in 1780. It also had a chapel, of course.<sup>2</sup>

The left wing of the present building was built between 1919 and 1929. It was the chapel of the newly built Grand Seminary, now Pope John Paul II Hall, under which the library of the institution was located on the ground floor. There was also another chapel in this part of the building, as Salvatorian Sisters were in charge of the kitchen and other domestic activities. The seminary, which existed from 1880, had its own chapel in the old part of the building. In 1948, due to the nationalisation of church schools, County Bishop József Pétery founded a private grammar school, which was attended only by seminarians, as the bishop did not want to allow them to attend a state grammar school. At the same time, the two seminaries, one of which was the Tarsitius Institute, were merged. Tibor Korompay (b. 1911, ord. 1934, Innsbruck) became the director of the institute and József Brusznay the prefect. The Vác Seminary education ended in 1952, when the institution was nationalised due to anti-clerical measures.<sup>3</sup> The chapel and the library below remained in place for many years, only in the 1970s did the altar and pews have to be removed.

<sup>1</sup> VARGA, Lajos, *A Váci Szeminárium kánonjogi megalapítása 1720-ban*. In: *A Váci Egyházmegye név- és címtára*. Váci Egyházmegye, Vác, 2018. 13-27.

<sup>2</sup> CHOBOT, Ferenc, *A Váci Egyházmegye történeti névtára I. Az intézmények története*. Dercsényi Dezső Vállalata, Vác, 1915. 96-100.

<sup>3</sup> Váci Püspöki és Káptalani Levéltár [VPKL, Vác Bishopric and Chapter Archives] Szemináriumi Levéltár [Seminary Archives], Box 1.: *Historia Domuses 1780-1950, Historia Domus Seminarium Vaciensis Minoris ab anno MCMIL-L.*- About the presence of the Salvatorian Sisters: *Schematismus cleri Dioecesis Vaciensis pro anno a Christo nato 1943*. Kapisztrán Nyomda, Vác, 1943. 13.

## Liturgical History

During the existence of the seminary in Vác, the seminarians took the so-called minor orders before ordination, and later the major orders. The minor orders are: ostiarius or doorkeeper; lector or reader; exorcist; acolytus or candle-bearer, who in the old rite also gives the wine and water to the priest at Mass. Even before the minor orders, tonsure was worn, which gave the novices clerical status in canon law. The major orders were subdiaconus, diaconus, presbyteratus, the latter of which we call priest. A novice was thus ordained to the priesthood after the seventh degree.<sup>4</sup> The minor orders listed here and the tonsure preceding them were conferred in the seminary chapel, but the major orders, by which we mean subdiaconatus, diaconatus and presbyteratus, were conferred at least partly in the cathedral.

In chronological order, I would like to speak only of the eminent personalities of the 20th century, and of these only those who were ordained according to the liturgical order before Vatican Council II.

## Persons

József Pétery Bishop of Vác (1942-1967) and Persons Connected with Him Of all the people of faith associated with the history of the building, I would like to highlight József Pétery. Two events in his life are linked to the present John Paul II Hall, the former chapel of the Grand Seminary. The Bishop of Vác was privileged to have a pallium. Since political circumstances prevented the Bishop from going to Rome, and the customary way of presenting the pallium was for the Pope to give it personally to the Metropolitan or to the person who was entitled to wear it as a privilege, it was presented by Cardinal Mindszenty, in the presence of the Chapter, among others, in 1946 in the chapel of the Grand Seminary, according to the *Pontificale Romanum* ceremony. Afterwards, they went to the cathedral, where Mindszenty preached a sermon in the presence of a huge congregation.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Pontificale Romanum summorum pontificum jussu editum a Benedicto XIV. et Leone XIII. Max. recognitum et castigatum. Pars prima*, Pustet, Ratisbonae-Neo Eboraci et Cincinnati, 1888. See: *De ordinibus conferendis*, pp. 25-61.

<sup>5</sup> *A Váci Egyházmegye Körlevele [Circular letter of the Vác Bishopric] 1946/IV. 59/2118*. The Diocese of Vác received the privilege from Pope Pius X by his breviary of 9 March 1906.

Bishop József Pétery refused to accept the peace priesthood established by the party-state in 1950 to serve political ends, and was finally placed under house arrest in 1951 at the same time as the Grósz trial began.<sup>6</sup> Cardinal József Mindszenty, Archbishop of Esztergom, was considered an enemy of the party state because of his communion with the Archbishop of Esztergom. This may have been one of the reasons why the seminary building was nationalised in 1952. Before the building was emptied, Bishop József Pétery himself came to the seminary and the sanctuary lamp was extinguished in the chapel in the presence of ordinands with shaking hearts.<sup>7</sup>

Bishop Pétery was closely associated with the person of Kálmán Széll, official (b. 1888, ord. 1911, Innsbruck) and rector of the seminary, and Dr. József Brusznai (b. 1922, ord. 1945, Pázmáneum), notary of the Holy See. The latter was a teacher at the Lyceum Episcopale (College of the Episcopate), which operated in the seminary.

In 1950, when Bishop Pétery tried to prevent the formation of a peace priesthood in his diocese, he asked members of the bishop's court to interrogate the peace priests concerned. They were immediately interned to the internment camp in Kistarcsa, where Canon Széll Kálmán died. József Brusznai, released from the internment camp, which was closed after Stalin's death in 1953, became a regular TSZ [*termelőszövetkezet*, collective farm, kolkhoz] worker for a time. Frigyes Pálos (b. 1924, ord. 1947, Vác), who on behalf of Bishop Pétery had visited the parishes in the area of Kecskemét to keep the clergy away from the peace priesthood, was sent to Tereske, one of the smallest parishes in the diocese. He had been a student at the Vác Seminary.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, the appointment of the so-called vicarius substitutes is linked to the person of Bishop Pétery. There are several types of vicars now, and were so in the legal system of the time. Since the communist persecution of the church threatened the functioning of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, e.g. in Albania all churches were taken away and the ecclesiastical hierarchy was almost completely wiped out, a possible occurrence of this had to be reckoned with in Hungary. If the bishop was imprisoned or killed, the life of the diocese was still under control. Thank God that did not happen; József Pétery was

<sup>6</sup> ÁBTL [The Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security] 3.1.9. V-238 „Széll Kálmán és társai” investigation file. – GYARMATI, György, *A hivatalos áldozat és a hivatalos hóhér*. In: *Szívvél és tettel: Tanulmányok Á. Varga László tiszteletére*. Nógrád Megyei Levéltár, Budapest-Salgótarján, 2008. 383.

<sup>7</sup> Recollections of former students.

<sup>8</sup> PETRÓCI, Sándor, *Emlékek Pétery József püspökről*. SZIT, Budapest, 1997. - I know the events concerning Frigyes Pálos from Frigyes Pálos himself. The rest of the information is kept in the private files of the persons concerned.

transferred from house arrest in Vác to Hejce in 1953, but from then on his church governmental activities were hampered. The two vicarius substitutus (deputy vicars) were Tibor Királymezey (b. 1888, ord. 1911) and Mátyás Herrhof (b. 1891, ord. 1915, Vác). In 1960, following the revolution of 1956, both had to be retired because of the persecution of the church by the party state. Mátyás Herrhof's place of residence became the pastorate of the Parish of Hétkápolna, since it is now on the outskirts of the town. He had been a student at the Vác Seminary.<sup>9</sup> The period from 1958 to 1961 was a particularly turbulent one, as the retirement of the two deputy vicars indicates.

### **Martyrs of the Soviet Republic and the Communist persecution of the Church**

The two martyrs of Jászkarajenő are linked to the seminary of Vác. They are József Kósa (b. 1878, ord. 1900, Vác) and Károly Hornyik (b. 1888, ord. 1911, Vác). József Kósa was born in 1878, became a student at the seminary in 1896 and was ordained a priest in 1900. At the turbulent time of the Romanian invasion in 1919 he was the parish priest in Jászkarajenő. According to surviving documents, the parish priest and the chaplain made their confessions shortly before their expected deaths, which suggests that they were consciously preparing for their eventual deaths. József Kósa's grave is in the Szentháromság Cemetery in Kecskemét.<sup>10</sup>

A document found in the Vác Bishopric Archives describes the sad event as follows.

"With reference to your inquiry No. 212/1921, I inform you that Károly Hornyik, a chaplain first in Kóka, later in Jászkarajenő, together with his parish priest became a victim of Bolshevik terrorists on May 4, 1919, who shot them both without any trial in the parish office because they were Catholic priests."<sup>11</sup> Károly Hornyik was born on 25 January 1889 in Csongrád and was ordained a priest on 15 December 1915.

<sup>9</sup> VPKL private files. There are no records of the appointment of the two deputy vicars, because they were made in secret. Oral tradition and the documents preserved in the Historical Archives of the State Security Services suggest that oral tradition is plausible.

<sup>10</sup> *Jászkarajenő egyháztörténete és vértanú papjai*. Kucsák Nyomda, Vác, 1996 – *A 150 éves jászkarajenői római katolikus egyházközség története* (compiled by Erdeiné Tóth Klára). Jászkarajenő, 2014. 38-51. *Testimoni della fede : Esperienze personali e collettive dei cattolici in Europa centro-orientale aotto il regime comunista a cura Jan MIKRUT*. Gabriellieditori, Verona, 2017. Károly Hornyik p. 1070, Lajos Kenyeres pp. 111-1116, József Kósa pp. 164-1065, 1070. – VARGA, Lajos, *A két jászkarajenői pap meggyilkolása 1919-ben*. In: Rott Nándor és kora. *A katolikus egyház 1918-1919-ben és a veszprémi püspökség a két világháború között. A veszprémi Szaléziánumban 2019. március 21-pn és augusztus 29-én rendezett konferenciák előadásai* (eds.: KARLINSZKY, Balázs-VARGA, Tibor László). (*A veszprémi egyházmegye múltjából* 36) pp. 217-229

<sup>11</sup> VPKL Privata Hornyik Caroli 3388/1921 reply to the request of Frigyes Siebig, parish priest.

Lajos Kenyeres (b. 1908, ord. 1930, Vác) was martyred in 1957. He was interested in religious education and the conscientious pastoral care of the faithful, and therefore he also produced books on the faith and other religious literature. His letter to Andropov, Soviet ambassador to Hungary, written in connection with the events of the 1956 revolution, is not known to have reached its addressee. Other letters relating to 1956 have survived. On 28 February 1957, he set off from the Vezensy church by bicycle on the Tisza dam, where he was stopped on his way. He tried to defend himself against the enemy, but was shot in the back of the head. Of course, the murderer was not found, as revealing the real facts would not have been good for the party state under the communist regime. The following year his bicycle was found and his body was recovered at Marfű. His grave is in the cemetery in Rákóczifalva.<sup>12</sup>

### Our persecuted priests

Both national socialism and the communist movement were anti-clerical. Under communism, there was freedom of worship in Hungary, but there was no freedom of religion in the sense of international law. Community meetings were therefore classified as anti-state agitation or conspiracy against the state. Religious education was only possible as authorised by the state. The nationalisation of church schools gave rise to serious controversy. In the following, we remember those who bravely opposed Nazism or the Communist persecution of the Church.

Károly Hetényi Varga, in his book *Priestly Fates in the Shadow of the Swastika and the Red Star*, mentions 53 politically persecuted persons from the Diocese of Vác. His notes are very valuable, but in many cases he based his memorials on his own or others' narratives, so his writing would require further historical research, which no one has yet done. For this reason and because of the shortness of time, I would like to highlight only a few individuals.<sup>13</sup>

First of all I would like to mention László Bisztrai (b. 1920, ord. 1943, Vác), who organised a community at the same time as Barcza Barna, diocesan priest of Vác. Even-

<sup>12</sup> VPL privata - Published documents: *Dokumentumok Kenyeres Lajos vértanúságának történetéhez*. In: *Vigília*, 73 (2008/11) pp. 867-871.

<sup>13</sup> HETÉNYI VARGA, Károly, *Papi sorsok a horogkereszt és a vörös csillag árnyékában I. Az esztergomi győri pécsi székesfehérvári szombathelyi váci veszprémi munkácsi (G. K.) eperjesi (G. K.) hajdúdorogi (G. K.) egyházmegyék üldözött papjai*. Lämpás Kiadó, Abaliget, 1992. pp. 397-429.

tually they both became members of the so-called "Bokor community". At a closed trial on 8 January 1954, László Bisztrai was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment for his activities in the conspiracy. On 15 September 1956, the Presidential Council remitted the remainder of his sentence. Despite his membership of the "Bokor" community, he had no doctrinal decline. By nature he was an extremely calm and kind man. He was also fondly remembered by the people of Vác. His personality is associated with the Vác Seminary.<sup>14</sup>

Attila György Dr. (b. 1926, ord. 1951, Vác, ordination: Soroksár) was ordained in 1951 by József Pétery. He was released until the main trial, but was regularly summoned to Gyorskocsi Street for interrogation. At his trial in 1968, he was sentenced to a year and a half in prison for incitement, because he had been sending his sermons and teaching notes to 80 of his fellow priests for 15 years. After the change of regime, he had the opportunity to publish his catechetical works and sermons in print.<sup>15</sup>

Ferenc Himfy (b. 1914, ord. 1940, Vác): in the evening of 19 March 1958, six civilian policemen escorted him by car to a private house behind János Hospital. There they began to question him about the whereabouts of piarist monks György Bulányi and Miklós Juhász. As he confessed nothing, he was so badly beaten that he fell off his chair and the blow left him without hearing in his right ear for over a month. At dawn, he was taken to Fő Street and held there in remand for 8 months. He was accused of anti-state organisation, but was eventually interned in Tököl without trial. Before his arrest, the secret police tried several times to recruit him as an agent against Bishop Radó Polikárp, Sándor Sík and Mihály Endrey (b. 1905, ord. 1928). All this was very important for the Ministry of the Interior's Department III/III, because from 1948 onwards Bishop Mihály Endrey, together with the aforementioned, organised the so-called "cell movement", which today is called the small group movement. His personality is linked to the Vác Seminary.<sup>16</sup>

Antal Polesso (b. 1908, ord. 1933, Vác) was arrested on 28 June 1948 together with the piarist monk Ödön Lénárd and others. As is known, the nationalisation of schools took place in 1948, during which he also expressed his protest. On Pentecost Sunday, Antal Polesso, "a 4th degree prisoner, proclaimed the call of the episcopate to protest against the nationalisation of schools, and commented on it in his own words. He sent

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. HETÉNYI Varga, Károly p. 402.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. HETÉNYI Varga, Károly p. 407.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. HETÉNYI Varga, Károly pp. 407-408 - ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-11959/1 "Lombardists" 18.

a telegram of protest to the Minister of Religion and Public Education. [...] On 23 May, during Holy Mass, he proclaimed a circular letter of excommunication against those who supported nationalisation, and justified it by saying that he did not see the free proclamation of religion and truth guaranteed after the loss of the church schools..." (Excerpt from Dr. György Sárkány, People's Prosecutor, 7 July 1948) His character is linked to the Vác Seminary.<sup>17</sup>

József Varga Remig (b. 1900, ord. 1923, Vác): as a parish priest in Szendehely, he was persecuted by the local Volksbund and the Gestapo for his anti-Nazi attitude as early as 1944. He was arrested again in 1948 "for severely denigrating the institutions of the Hungarian state, railing against democracy in church on 28 May, and on 6 June reading the bishop's circular against the nationalisation of schools in church, adding his own comments for about an hour while holding a reactionary press conference." (Magyar Nemzet, 13 June 1948) József Varga Remig was imprisoned, where he was disfigured and later had to undergo surgery, performed by a believing doctor, to whom he later gave up the sacrament. The Evva family of Vác kept a small statue of Mary, given to him by István Horthy for his opposition to the Nazis. The statuette was given by me to the Diocesan Museum.<sup>18</sup>

### A Victim of Nazism: Béla Gusztáv

He is linked to the Seminary in that his induction into the ranks of the clergy took place in this building. Béla Gusztáv, dr. (b. 1916, ord. 1939, Pázmáneum) was a student at Pázmáneum. He was awarded the tonsure in 1937. On 14 August 1944, he was transferred to the Holy Cross Society by his bishop. He was serving his own people when he was shot dead.<sup>19</sup> According to other sources, he was abducted.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. HETÉNYI Varga, Károly pp. 417-418.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. HETÉNYI Varga, Károly p. 422. - *On József Remig Varga*, see also: HETÉNYI VARGA Károly: *Akiket üldöztek az igazságért: Papi sorsok a horogkereszt és nyilaskereszt árnyékában*. Ecclesia, Budapest, 1985. 575-576.

<sup>19</sup> HETÉNYI VARGA, Károly, *Akiket üldöztek az igazságért*. pp. 521-522. - *Magyar katolikus lexikon IV*. SzIT, Budapest, 1998. 255. - VPKL Privata Gusztáv Belae 4797/1944.

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ÁBTL Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára [The Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security]

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