

Theses for doctoral (PhD) dissertation

Zoltán Sármasi

**Antal Schütz's
view of society and history
and its historical framework**

Pázmány Péter Catholic University
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Doctoral School of History

Head of the Doctoral School:

Dr. Sándor Óze DSc
university professor

Theme leaders: Dr. András Tamás Fejérdy PhD

Dr. Balázs Mihály Mezei DSc

2024

Objective

Antal Schütz (1880-1953), dogmatic theologian and Piarist monk, was one of the greatest figures in the history of the Church in the 20th century and of the Piarist Order in Hungary, but his life's work remained almost entirely unexplored due to the political circumstances of the decades following his death and the overshadowing of his theological views by the Second Vatican Council. Despite his importance in the history of the Church, the large format of his work, which was inextricably linked to several disciplines, and the approach with which he cultivated theology, dogmatics and philosophy, can in many ways be an example for scholars of our time. Although today it is mainly his monumental Dogmatics that is in the public consciousness, it is equally important to understand the social and historical approach that guided Antal Schütz's work and led him to address a wide range of young people on difficult subjects in a way that was accessible to them, and in a language that was not his mother tongue. Relatively little is known about this side of his life, as Cardinal, Primate and Archbishop László Lékai expressed in the foreword to his 1982 compilation *Deum docuit*, when he said that "it will be the task of posterity to write his biography and to celebrate his life."

The topic I chose for my doctoral thesis was to examine and present in the life and works of Antal Schütz the driving forces that shaped his approach to society and history, which enabled him to

address the masses of his time and to provide them with lasting value. Many of his books and essays, including his works for young people, which have been relegated to the depths of libraries and the Piarist archives, are full of timeless ideas that could form the basis of further research, many of which would merit a new edition, like his *Pedagogy*, published in 2010.

Although his theological position was in many respects related to earlier patterns, the presentation and publication of his worldview and his works of knowledge can be an important support for today, and it is worth dusting off this unique oeuvre, of which I have tried to make as much as possible in my work. This is a work that I have tried to bring out as much as possible of his work, which enriches today's society, by presenting previously unpublished details of his biography, the recollections of those who knew him personally, his thoughts on society and history, and the insights of some of his contemporaries.

Methodology

The essay is structured around four major themes. In the first, I provide a biographical overview, based primarily on Antal Schütz's autobiography, *My Life - Memoirs*, and mainly on archival sources, letters and reminiscences from the last years of his life. My aim was to present the rich life of Antal Schütz, which, on the basis of the

surviving memoirs, is clearly worthy of attention and recognition. On the other hand, apart from Schütz's autobiography, no other biographical work has been written on his life apart from a few glossaries, so I intended to fill a gap by presenting a more complete biography than the previous ones. Thirdly, I have also presented the influence of Antal Schütz on posterity by analysing the writings and commemorations about him, a significant part of which has not appeared in print, but is available in the Piarist archives thanks to the extensive collecting and processing work of István Előd. Due to the political circumstances of the period following Schütz's death, the exploration of this field has been undeservedly limited in comparison to his work, and I have endeavoured to broaden this field somewhat myself by preparing this dissertation.

In the second theme, I dealt at length with the influence of Ottokár Prohászka on the life-work of Schütz, focusing primarily on those works of Prohászka that can be paralleled in historical and social issues with the views of Antal Schütz, who had the opportunity to study and learn about Prohászka's life-work in detail while he was publishing the writings of Ottokár Prohászka.

In the third topic, related to the title of the dissertation, I explored Antal Schütz's theory of history and society by analysing Schütz's relevant works. Here, in addition to a few individual works, I discussed the papers and university lectures collected and published in several volumes, some of which are still relevant today, and therefore their focus is also of importance for today's scholarship.

Works such as the doctoral dissertation on theology entitled *Beginning and End in the World Process*, the essays published in the collected volumes *In the Service of the Word*, *Essays and Ideals*, and *The Guard: Age Questions and Orientations*, the essay on Pázmány the Educator of the Nation, and the volume of Schütz's lectures entitled *God in History* are included in the analysis. In these works, I discuss Antal Schütz's world view, his view of society, including his ideas on the characteristics of nation-building as a specific concept he used, the socially formative features of religion, and his view of history.

In the fourth theme, I placed Antal Schütz in the Catholic intellectual milieu of the period. Here I examined writings on similar themes by Schütz and other authors. In this section, the relevant works of János Dudek, Ákos Pauler, Sándor Horváth, Flóris Kúhár, Romano Guardini and Béla Bangha were discussed. All of them were contemporaries and personal acquaintances of Antal Schütz and were active in similar fields, either ecclesiastically or academically, as he was.

In my view, the unpublished elements of Antal Schütz's life's work preserved in archives also contain plenty of material worthy of further research, exploration, analysis and presentation, which may be suitable for future historians to enrich the scientific world and to draw lessons from them that can be used today. The series of lectures by Antal Schütz on *Religion and Faith* and on *Providence and Destiny*, as well as his prayer book for adults, adapted to the language of our

times, would be particularly worthwhile and useful. It might also be appropriate to present the human side of Schütz's life in a single volume, publishing the many reminiscences of his life that are preserved in the archives, which all bear witness to his human greatness and excellence.

Results

Be it the world, history, society, the first thing that can be said about Antal Schütz's thinking is that he is imbued with a need for systematisation, synthesis and a holistic approach, which in many ways puts him far ahead of his time. But he could also be called one of the last polyhistorians; not many people can be said to be able to create something lasting in such a wide range of disparate disciplines.

While he was clearly at the forefront of the sciences, he was not lacking in a general sense of world betterment, which pervades all his works, from describing the processes by which the world works to describing the nature of society to painting a happier vision of the future. Although, as a theologian, he gave pride of place to religion, and primarily to the Catholic faith, he was also able to see beyond religion to the factors that make up the whole before the eyes of the reader of Schütz's works.

Looking back on the life of Antal Schütz, and through a long series of memoirs and reminiscences, we see the figure of a true

scholar, who was one of the greatest of his time in every respect. His students, who are also no longer with us today, carried with them all their lives what they had learned from him and remembered him with grateful respect when, after his death, István Előd, who was his guardian, asked them to do so. His contemporaries acknowledged his high level of scholarship, which enabled him to develop an informed response to the challenge of the secular world from a Catholic perspective. His works were highly valued, he himself was regarded as an outstanding authority on the subject, and his efforts to offer modern responses to current social challenges on a Catholic basis, using the values of the Church, were fully recognised. His clarity of vision, which enabled him to look at the problems he examined from a perspective of superficiality, was highlighted. His literary style was recognised, enabling him to reach a wider audience. He was seen as a kind of watchdog who anticipated the social problems of the time, from secularisation to the rise of new political ideologies, and sought to prevent their unfolding through his responses.

His literary style has been recognised, making his writing accessible to a wider audience. He was seen as a kind of watchdog who anticipated the social problems of the time, from secularism to the rise of new political ideologies, and sought to prevent their unfolding through his responses. He was respected as a leading scholar who was also one of the finest human beings of his time and social milieu.

An important feature of his life was that he was primarily active within the walls of the university, seeking to contribute to national education by shaping the attitudes of students, not from the pulpit of the church or in the press. He wanted to influence those university students who, as an educated elite, he wanted to entrust with the management of society within a monarchical framework, to give them principles and a firm grip on the challenges of the times on which to build the society of the future.

Looking back at the period in which Antal Schütz and his contemporaries were active, we can see that this is when neotomism emerges, which from the end of the 19th century until World War II determined the thinking of the theologians and philosophers active in this period, in accordance with the social teaching of the Catholic Church. The principles laid down in *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno* clearly show the Church's desire to catch up with modern political ideas, refuting the assumptions that the Church was lagging behind, had no ideals and had nothing to do with solving the social problems that began to emerge in the second half of the 19th century. The awakening of national consciousness, the expansion of the working class and industrialisation are confronting world society as a whole with a series of new challenges which cry out for immediate solutions.

In essence, all the authors quoted dedicate their lives to providing a Catholic response to the challenges of the times. Socialism, liberalism and with it capitalism, nationalism and, at a

higher level, rationalism and secularisation, which have explicitly challenged the Church's place in the world, challenge both the Church and society as a whole. The specific historical situation in Hungary, the search for a way forward after a defeated war and the tragedy of Trianon, to which Schütz and his contemporaries both seek to provide valid and practical solutions, contributes to all this.

Placing Antal Schütz in the Catholic intellectual milieu of the period, we see that the ideological and ideological basis is in fact common. The social teaching of the Church appears in him, and all of them see education, upbringing and, beyond that, popular education as the main means of promoting the values they prefer. We also see examples of the need to synthesise aspects of scientific development, the need to reconcile the old and the new, the teachings of ancient philosophers and modern scientific thought. What emerges from all this is a vision of a world that advocates progress in all areas, based on Christian values and aiming at absolute perfection, in which the trinity of consciousness, body-mind-spirit, plays a decisive role.

Among the contemporaries of Antal Schütz, the figure of Ottokár Prohászka, Bishop of Székesfehérvár, and his teaching deserve special mention. If we want to express in a single sentence the influence of Ottokár Prohászka on Antal Schütz's oeuvre, there can be no question that the latter's oeuvre would have been different without the former. It is perhaps less common in today's world for scholars to pay tribute to each other with the same enthusiastic enthusiasm with which Antal Schütz paid tribute to Prohászka's activities, whether in

the essay praising the bishop's career in all 25 volumes of Prohászka's works or in his speech at the Academy's General Assembly.

In his time, Ottokar Prohászka strove to build a better, more just and humane social system, which could serve as an example for the rest of the world, by responding to the social problems that arose. It is another question how realistic it was, under the given political circumstances, to translate the values he represented into action, but in any case Prohászka understood and felt the popular spirit that expected support and help from the Church, among others, after the horrors of World War I, in order to rebuild its wounded world on new foundations.

And Antal Schütz identified to a large extent with Prohászka's values, admired and respected him, which he always tried to express in all circumstances. He considered him to be one of the great men of history, who could not be traced from his ancestry, and so presumably had a divine purpose at work in him. What most united the two great thinkers was their examination of problems from a higher level: they sought to explain the difficulties of the times from a divine perspective, so to speak, and to understand the need for change in the world and to work out a solution in the light of Christian teachings. After the Second World War, both thinkers, but especially Antal Schütz, were forgotten in the changed political circumstances, so after the change of regime it was not easy to resume thinking about society where it had left off and to recognise who among the old

thinkers had such eternal ideas that could serve as a signpost and value transmitter for the people of today.

Reading through the works of Ottokar Prohászka, it is clear that many of the problems he discusses are still present in the world today, be it social inequalities, the unjust distribution of worldly goods, or wages that are insufficient to create a decent life. Or how the Church can offer solutions to those in need, how it can represent Christian values in today's fragmented world. A fragmented world that began to unfold in the time of Prohászka and Antal Schütz. The outcome of which we are still not sure, but the direction of which they both recognised at the time.

Ottokar Prohászka's views on the subject clearly influenced Antal Schütz and his view of the impact of the Catholic faith on history. Schütz himself edited Prohászka's works, including *Culture and Terror*, which was published by Stephaneum Publishers in Budapest at the end of 1927. In it, we read, among other things, that Christianity at the time was a mass movement, which, with its pure spiritual content, was above all other social, social and economic issues, precisely those issues that characterised Prohászka's (and Schütz's) time.

It is not difficult to see in this idea Schütz's point about the shortcomings of the history of ideas approach. Early Christianity at that time did not seek to abolish social differences, nor to solve the problem of poverty, nor to settle questions of power, but, as Prohászka quotes from St Paul, to let each man remain in his own vocation and

strive to achieve spiritual freedom. Christianity is thus superior to all other ideas that have ever had an impact on society, and does not incite rebellion, as did social democracy and Marxism, which dominated Prohászka's time. For Prohászka the task of Christian social thought, which was gaining momentum at the time, was to include technical progress and the solution of earthly problems in its programme alongside the unchanging fundamental values of Christianity.

Prohászka gave Christianity a prominent role in the development of the world, in so far as he placed it above all other ideas. We see the same in Antal Schütz, when he sets out a general guiding principle for the process of history to understand what it is that, in a series of ever-changing events, offers people a constant value for understanding the essence of change and of the process from beginning to end.

For his part, Antal Schütz, like Prohászka, clearly wanted to respond to the challenges of the times by developing a Catholic theory of history and society. He formulates his view of history in a positive tone, with which he wishes to help us understand the present and offer hope for a better future. It wants to offer guidance and encouragement to Hungarians after the loss of their historic territory, and especially to Catholics, who since the end of the 19th century have felt themselves in many ways at a loss, or at least in a defensive position, because of the advance of secularisation. History is presented as an evolving process with a beginning and an end. In this process, both in space and in time, there are rhythmic changes, periods, which return

from time to time in different forms. But even with the returns, there is a sense of meaning and progression in the process with respect to the greater whole. At a higher level, it responds to the question of the opposition between faith and reason, which arises through a rational approach to secularisation. He rejects the opposition and instead invites those who wish to think with him to understand the two as complementary features.

Antal Schütz's interpretation is best defined by placing the historical events in a general flow, following one another according to God's will, according to the needs of the journey to his kingdom, until the end, the Last Judgement. He seeks to transcend the traditional historical templates of his time, from political history to the history of ideas and cultural history, focusing on events as facts. In addition to rejecting historical epochal boundaries defined on the basis of subjective criteria, it recognises certain turning points in the development of history that shape the course of world history through recurrent phases linked to the celebrations of the Church Year.

As for the structure of space, an east-west flow emerges in Schütz's theory, whereby a unified world history was created from the ancient empires, starting with Rome, then Western Europe, to the Americas and finally the discovery of the whole Earth by the 19th century, in which each people, and indeed each individual in his or her place, has a decisive role in the development of the world. In this system, even the empires that existed before the age of discovery have a role to play, in so far as they are the seeds of the times when the

development that spreads out from Europe will reach them and, through their cultural heritage, will be incorporated into the process of development directed by God. The process of history is thus determined, according to Antal Schütz, by the relationship between the world and man, the main driving force of which is Christianity, including the Catholic tradition.

Schütz's social theory aims to respond to the issues raised by the above-mentioned trends. In this, subtle differences can be observed between him and the other authors studied. Prohászka, for example, is more open to the question of democracy, while Schütz is more in favour of monarchy. He apparently does not wish to leave the fundamental questions of society in the hands of the broad masses, preferring to rely on the educated elite in a more conservative manner than the advocates of democracy. He invokes the social teaching of the Church to meet the challenges of socialism and liberalism, and capitalism. It builds its healthy patriotism on Christian cultural and religious traditions as opposed to ethnic, racial nationalism, in which the nation can become part of a larger whole by incorporating its own unique values into the development of the world. He wants to transmit his ideas to society through national education.

Schütz considers the role of religion to be indispensable in solving the social challenges of our time. He presents the incorporation of Christian values into all aspects of everyday life as the only salutary solution to the problems of the present world, social difficulties and social inequalities.

Although there would have been time between the two world wars to translate Schütz's policy into action, the practice ended up taking humanity in a different direction, with the devastation of the Second World War as a consequence. This does not mean, however, that the theory was fundamentally flawed, but rather that the church lost the level of influence on society that was common before the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. The voice of the Church had become one voice among many and could no longer necessarily stand out from this chorus. Not to mention the fact that feudal societies had a number of problems in the past, just look at the inequality between the different classes, which the Church, with its much greater influence at the time, could not solve.

Antal Schütz is driven by the same driving forces as his esteemed predecessors, Péter Pázmány and Ottokar Prohászka. His thinking and his work place him among the great visionaries of the interwar period, and he was a worthy systematizer of Prohászka's oeuvre. Perhaps if he had risen to a higher level in ecclesiastical circles, he would have been better known, and thus remained in academic circles, where the ideological environment that followed him condemned most of his works, but also himself, to oblivion.

In his thinking, Antal Schütz was both conservative, in that he was committed to representing and preserving Christian values, and progressive, in that he used the results of modern science to update old values. Compared to his predecessor, János Dudek, he was certainly more progressive in spirit, but he was more cautious than Prohászka,

on the one hand, he was clearly in favour of monarchy in the question of the form of government, and on the other hand, it was Prohászka's indexing that encouraged him to formulate his work more carefully.

For the most part, his findings are still valid today, and are suitable for further research and comparative analysis, whether we are looking at the workings of the world, the course of history, or the structure and structural changes of society. Many of his values seem to have been lost in the century since his time, and it may be important to rediscover them and to carry his ideas forward. The work of national education, which he considered so important, may also be worthy of further research and elaboration.

Overall, the values that Antal Schütz represented and passed on to his students should be an example for people today. Today, when the oeuvre of Antal Schütz is largely gathering dust in libraries, including hard-to-reach storerooms, or in the Piarist archives, and few people pick up his works, it is imperative to draw attention to him and to present him as a great figure of the last century, comparable to Péter Pázmány and Ottokár Prohászka, whose teaching and synthesising work created a lasting value that must not be forgotten. His words should be taken out, re-read, updated if necessary, and used to create a new, better and more beautiful world around us, based on the values he represented, which will never fade away. Today, at a time when the Catholic Church is undergoing enormous changes, the moderate forward-looking and traditionalist retrospective of Antal Schütz, the high degree of unity of these two attitudes, is particularly worthy of

reflection, since this attitude, whether in theology in the strict sense, in ecclesiology or in the evaluation of the results of the disciplines, is capable of both embracing the new and of linking it organically with the old. The loss of this synthesizing attitude is a danger that can be assessed by studying Antal Schütz and avoided by understanding and applying his thought.

My publications

Studies

The flow of history as interpreted by Antal Schütz. In András Döbör - Péter Miklós - Ferenc Zeman (eds.): Approaches to Modern Hungarian History. Emlékpont Books 16. Hódmezővásárhely, 2020. 44-52.

The life of Antal Schütz in the light of his autobiography. In: Egyháztörténeti Szemle 2020/1. 87-96.

Ottokár Prohászka as a guiding role model for Antal Schütz. In: Egyháztörténeti Szemle 2020/4. 131-158.

St Anselm of Canterbury as seen by Antal Schütz and two of his contemporaries. In Péter Miklós (ed.): Era, Fates, Aspirations.

Chapters from the educational, cultural and social life of twentieth century Hungary. Radnóti Szeged Heritage Foundation Szeged, 2021. 122-132.

Religion and religious studies as interpreted by Antal Schütz. In Zsuzsanna Szugyiczki – Krisztina Barcsa – Tiffany Fülöp (eds.): Selected papers from the lectures of the IV Interdisciplinary Religious Studies Student Conference. University of Szeged, Faculty of Religious Studies Szeged, 2023. 117-123.

The life of Sándor Sík and his relationship with Antal Schütz. In: Péter Miklós (ed.): "What no one has ever sung about" - Writings about Sándor Sík. Radnóti Szeged Heritage Foundation Szeged, 2024. 53-58.

Antal Schütz on national education. In Péter Miklós (ed.): Forms of memory. Foundation for the Intellectual Heritage of Sándor Bálint Szeged, 2024. 29-33.

Review

Zoltán Frenyó (ed.): Conservative portraits (review). In: Egyháztörténeti Szemle 2022/1. 146-148.

Conference presentations

The flow of history as interpreted by Antal Schütz. IV History of Hungary from the Early Modern Period to the Modern Age - scientific conference for PhD students and doctoral candidates. Emlékpont, Hódmezővásárhely, 13 June 2019.

Religion and religious studies in the approach of Antal Schütz. IV Interdisciplinary Religious Studies Student Conference. Faculty of Humanities, Szeged, 22-23 April 2022.

Dissemination

Antal Schütz, theologian and Piarist monk teacher, was born 140 years ago. Christian Life, 25 October 2020, 4.