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CATHOLIC EDUCATION UNDER THE COMMUNIST DICTATORSHIP IN HUNGARY -
A SOCIAL HISTORY OF CATHOLIC GRAMMAR SCHOOLS (1950-1990)

Theses for doctoral thesis (PhD)

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I. Background and objectives of the research

Since the change of regime in 1989-90, there has been a boom in Hungarian church history, as evidenced by a number of major studies and monographs, several of which deal with the history of the Catholic Church after 1945. Nevertheless, there are still a number of topics that need to be addressed, including the history of the monastic orders and their grammar schools that continued to function during the political dictatorship. My thesis was intended to approach the history of these grammar schools.

At the end of the Second World War, as a result of the communist persecution of religions in the states of Central and Eastern Europe, which came with the Soviet troops, religious schools could no longer function in the decades of occupation, with the exception of our country and Poland. The Polish Catholic high school diplomas were 'devalued' in the process of applying for higher education, and therefore an international comparison of my research was not possible. In Hungary, the nationalisation of religious schools (1948) and the reopening of four monastic orders (Benedictine, Franciscan, Piarist and Poor School Sisters) and their eight grammar schools (Pannonhalma, Győr, Esztergom, Szentendre, Budapest, Kecskemét and Debrecen) (1950) were the by-products of political games, and the operation of monastic education was characterised by a high degree of state control until the end of the Kádár era.

The history of the orders and their schools after 1945 was examined earliest by Jenő Gergely and István Mészáros. Edited by Csaba Szabó and László Szigeti, the volume dealt in detail with the nationalisation of schools, Csaba Borsodi with the dissolution of the monastic orders, Attila Horváth with the educational policies of the Soviet-style dictatorship and Bernadett Wirthné Diera with elite Catholic education. Gabriella Pusztai studied the Svetits Institute in Debrecen, Gábor Ágoston Barkó and Kelemen Sárai-Szabó the Benedictine secondary school in Győr, and Gábor Sz. Nagy and Orsolya Sz. Nagy-Ring studied the secondary school in Pannonhalma. Zsófia Eszter Tóth and Béla Szalai Tóth and Zsófia Szalai Szalai have presented the history of events concerning certain schools.

The primary aim of the research is to explore the social history of the eight Catholic grammar schools operating in Hungary during the political dictatorship. It seeks answers to questions such as how and to what extent the state controlled the functioning of these schools, their teachers, students and parents. What social backgrounds of parents enrolled their children in Catholic grammar schools. Can the influence of the state's efforts to dismantle the social structure of the Horthy era and to create a socialist social image of 'two classes, one layer' be

discerned. What motivated or 'forced' parents to choose these schools, and can this choice be seen as an expression of resistance.

What are the particularities of the school environment, and what kind of attractiveness has developed around the schools. In addition, I will draw on data to refute the perception-based hypothesis that even the children of party leaders attended Catholic grammar schools in the period under study. The political-historical background of the research, the persecution of the monastic orders, the 'agreement' between church and state, the differences between the Catholic education systems of the Horthy era and the party-state, and the Catholic High School Authority (KKF) are discussed. Separate chapters deal with the activities of the state security service targeting monks and the work of the State Ecclesiastical Office (ÁEH) 'managing' the orders and their education. The sixth chapter presents the institutional history of the grammar schools under study and the methodology of the thesis, followed by a presentation of the data obtained in the analysis as a separate unit. Finally, chapters supplementing the events through interviews and depicting the schools' catchment areas follow, before the conclusions of the dissertation.

II. Research sources and methodology

As the party leadership relied heavily on the work of the political police to carry out its will, the documents of the Historical Archives of the State Security Services (ÁBTL) provided an important source for my research, as they contain information on the surveillance of the orders and the influence they had on the atmosphere in schools. There are a good number of sources on the subject in the holdings of the ÁBTL, but the quantity varies from order to order. There is an abundance of material on the Benedictines, a smaller number on the Franciscans and Piarists, and scattered material on the school sisters. I have used case studies based on state security files to illustrate the life of the orders and their grammar schools. In selecting these sources, I have sought to understand the scale and impact of the extensive network of party-state pressures that permeated and influenced the daily life of the schools.

Compliance with the "operational principles" set by the party leadership was supervised by the State Office for Church Affairs (ÁEH), whose records are kept in the Hungarian National Archives - National Archives (MNL-OL). Of these, the general, presidential and secretly managed groups of documents have also proved to be an important source of information in my work. In my thesis, I have sought to sketch a comprehensive picture of the state management, perception and possibilities of the Catholic schools of the period with the help of several top secret reports from the 1970s. The successful educational work of the monastic grammar

schools, the reduction of the number of students, the broad social contacts of the institutions and the struggle against all this in the context of church politics provide the backbone of the documents presented.

In addition to the archival sources, the significant sources of the research are the grammar school registers, in which the personal data of the enrolled students, and later their school results, are recorded. During the research, I recorded in a database the occupation, place of residence and, where indicated, the noble title or academic degree of the parents of the first-year student. This work was carried out in several phases (2012, 2021, 2024) and the analysis was carried out during the writing of the dissertation. Given the length of the period under study, the registers were processed in five-year increments. Based on Zsuzsa Ferge's stratification model, the data extracted from them were grouped into work-related groups, which made it easier to depict the social background of the student population. In some institutions in the first half of the 1950s, the occupation of parents before and after 1945 was recorded, which provided an opportunity to study social changes (declassification, mobility, elite replacement) after the Second World War. In addition to Zsuzsa Ferge, Rudolf Andorka has also studied in detail the structural changes in Hungarian society in the decades of socialism, and his literature has provided a basis for analysing the data. Ferge's model, together with Andorka's research findings, proved to be suitable for the study.

I have also used the archives of the Pannonhalma Benedictine Archabbey, the Hungarian National Archives - Hajdú-Bihar County Archives and the archives of Győr-Moson-Sopron County Archives as additional sources. In addition, I supplemented the findings with interviews with monks and alumni, which means that the dissertation is mixed-method but essentially quantitative in nature.

III. Results of the research

1) The primary aim of my research was to map the history of the monastic grammar schools, and in particular the social background of their students. In this thesis, I have sought to present a broad perspective on the mechanisms of the party-state governance of the communities that functioned as teaching orders during this period. Accordingly, I aimed to present a synthesis of the available archival source material on the orders and their grammar schools, while at the same time processing the registers in order to provide a detailed analysis of the data and to make it accessible to the public. My objective was limited by the resources available, but it became clear that the party-state church policy wanted to treat the monastic grammar schools uniformly

and to act centrally against them, while at the same time the state security wanted to control and influence the maintaining orders to the greatest extent possible. Despite their similarities and differences, all eight institutions developed into model schools in the period. In my view, the functioning and educational activities of the orders had an impact on the faithful, the illegal monks, their students and their families. Their social and religious influence was slow to develop and varied in degree from order to order, depending on their habitus.

2) The evaluation of the data from the registers revealed that the social background of the students of the schools varies over time and between institutions, but the social background of the monastic grammar schools can be considered to be basically of skilled workers and intellectuals. In my opinion, this reflects the social changes of our decades of socialism; the emerging differences between social groups in the degree to which religiosity is manifested. The differences between institutions are due, on the one hand, to geographical differences and, on the other, to differences between orders and their schools.

3) The effects of the steps taken to dismantle the social structure of the Horthy era can be traced in the civil registers. The presence in schools of the large number of families that were declassified at the beginning of the period under study can be clearly illustrated, just as the social structural movements of the socialist era can be clearly detected by analysing the work groups. This confirms the large-scale social change that was previously revealed following the Second World War. However, the impact of state efforts to create a 'two classes, one layer' socialist social image is less evident.

4) The sources suggest that religious practice was a very important motivation for choosing a Catholic school. In many cases, it was the only way parents could hope to ensure their child's well-being, despite the disadvantages they faced. I have not been able to detect a motive of resistance to the party state in parents' decision to send their children to school, but awareness and sometimes compulsion, in the pursuit of higher education, have.

5) As for the milieu of the high schools, interviews revealed that the most recurring memories of the students and their teachers on most nights were the adjectives "intellectual", "protective", "point of reference" and "religious". The constant presence of the monks was similarly recurring in the interviews as a person who provided security for the student. The atmosphere of the college was characterised by the experience of 'living together'. The schools' catchment areas,

with the exception of the high school in Szentendre, were found to be national in scope, but the extent of this varied from high school to high school. The largest numbers of students attended monastic gymnasiums in Budapest, with a high proportion of students attending all the institutions studied.

6) I have been able to disprove the notion that the children of the party leaders attended Catholic high school between 1950 and 1990 by examining their birth records. No children of party leaders were included in the sample, the largest group of leaders being families that had been declassified in the early years of the period.

7) As with the archival sources, my essay has had the least to say about the nuns' schools. However, it is important to point out that before 1945 they had a significant number of nuns and played a significant role in society, religiously, socially and educationally. After 1950, only two secondary schools for girls were run by women, reflecting the fact that the greatest victims of the party-state dictatorship's persecution of the church were the women monastic orders.

IV. Publications on the topic of the dissertation

- Egyházüldözés a politikai diktatúrában papi életútinterjúk tükrében. In: Kegyesné Szekeres Erika, Fekete Sándor (szerk.): Tehetséggondozó műhely füzetek. 41-48. (2010)
- A „visszakapott” Pannonhalmi Bencés Gimnázium diákságának oktatásszociológiai vizsgálata (1950–1964) In: Juhász Erika, Chrappán Magdolna (szerk.): Tanulás és művelődés. 61-67. (2012)
- Katolikus nevelés a politikai diktatúra oktatási rendszerében – A Pannonhalmi Bencés Gimnázium oktatásszociológiai vizsgálata (1950-1990). In: Magyar Pedagógia. 3. 149-166. (2012)
- „Az egyházi iskolák jó hírének ma is van alapja” – Adalékok a hazai katolikus gimnáziumok történetéhez az Állami Egyházügyi Hivatal dokumentumai alapján (1962–1963). In: ARCHIVNET 21. 2. (2021)
- Katholische Erziehung im Bildungssystem der politischen Diktatur: Eine sozialgeschichtliche Betrachtung des Gymnasiums der Benediktiner in Pannonhalma 1950-1990. In: Historia Ecclesiastica. (SK) 2. 173-194. (2021)

- Catholic High Schools in Hungary during the Political Dictatorship based on the Documents of the State Office of Church Affairs. In: Berek Patrícia; Fodor Krisztina Dóra (szerk.): *Ab ovo usque ad mala – Selected studies from the „destinies and processes” conference.* 111-122. (2023)

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Reviews

- A New Approach to the History of the Peoples of Visegrád. Ádám Somorjai: *A visegrádi népek történelmi morfológiájához.* In: *Ephemeris Hungarologica* 4. 89-92. (2024)
- Secrets of the West about Cardinal Mindszenty. Ádám Somorjai: *Az Amerikai levéltárak titkai.* In: *Ephemeris Hungarologica* 2. 115-118. (2022)
- Mindszenty, Tomek, Barankovics. Kálmán Peregrin: *Mindszenty, Tomek, Barankovics: Arcvonások és fordulópontok a keleti politika világában.* In: *Egyháztörténeti Szemle* 2. 168-170. (2021)

Other publications

- Felekezeti felsőoktatás belső strukturáltsága az intézményi és felvételi statisztikák tükrében. In: Zsolnai, Anikó; Kasik, László (szerk.) *A tanulás és nevelés interdiszciplináris megközelítése.* 56-58. (2016)
- Nevelési értékek megjelenése a felekezeti iskolák fenntartóinak pedagógiai dokumentumaiban. In: Tóth, Péter; Holik, Ildikó; Tordai, Zita (szerk.) *Pedagógusok, tanulók, iskolák - az értékformálás, az értékközvetítés és az értékteremtés világa.* 28-29. (2015)
- Az iskolai hiányzások "rejtett" aspektusai. In: *Tanít-tani online*, április 22. (2015)
- Egyházi szerepvállalás – Iskolaátadások a Csereháton In: Buda, András; Kiss, Endre (szerk.) *Interdiszciplináris pedagógia és a felsőoktatás alakváltozásai.* 130-137. (2012)
- Anyák az egyetemen – A női szerepek változásának tettenérése. Engler Ágnes: *Kisgyermekes nők a felsőoktatásban.* In: *Belvedere Meridionale* 1. 155-157. (2012)
- Játék és tanulás: In: *A kisgyermek.* 5. 23-28. (2011)