

Eötvös Loránd University Faculty of Humanities
Doctoral School of History
Program of Modern and Contemporary Hungarian History

PHD THESIS SUMMARY

Balázs Csíky

Justinian Cardinal Serédi, Prince Primate of Hungary

Supervisor:

† Jenő Gergely DSc

Margit Balogh CSc

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I. Choice of subject and methodological questions

Justinian Serédi was one of the most significant canonist of his age. From 1927 to his death he was cardinal and Prince Primate of Hungary. Serédi as Prince Primate, namely the head of the Hungarian Catholic Church determinantly influenced the Hungarian public life and policy in the inter-war period, therefore the analysis of his work can bring important results not only as far as church history is concerned, but also from the point of view of political and social history. Only a few biographies were prepared about the Horthy era's key figures. Also for this reason the writing of the biography of Justinian Cardinal Serédi is an important basic research in the 20th century Hungarian history. Because of the gigantic theme and the special research aspects (the analysis of a canonist's work requires profound canonical knowledge) I focus on Serédi's activity as Prince Primate (1927-1945). I only touch upon his path to the primacy of Esztergom to such an extent which is necessary for understanding his activity and personality.

During my work I had to clarify several methodological problems. The most important one was that I was writing a special biography examining such topics which are closely related to the Prince Primate. I was not able to examine every issue in connection with the church history of the Horthy era but this was not my task. I had to rely on the special literature but several basic researches are lacking, and paradoxically I was forced to return to the sources concerning those topics on which the most special material had been written. I applied a problem-focused approach, which means that I broke the chronological presentation but I did not reject it completely, so the study begins in this treatment and after the elaboration of the most important topics it returns to this. I thought that if I was going to present the whole material chronologically, I would break important connections, but this way the single problems can be traced in relation to the whole period.

II. Sources and special literature of the theme

The most important archival sources can be found in the Archives of Hungarian Primate in Esztergom. The significance of the material is increased by the fact that such documents are also available here which were destroyed elsewhere (e.g. documents of the Hungarian Ministry of Religion and Education) or only partially opened to consultation (documents of the Holy See). Unfortunately the papers of the Ministry of Religion and Education located in the National Archives of Hungary were largely destroyed in 1956, but in the fonds of the

Hungarian Embassy in Vatican City (K 105) and in the records of the Political Department of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (K 63, K 64) several relating documents can be found. From the sources preserved in the National Archives of Hungary the electronic database of the minutes of Hungarian Cabinet meetings and the complete copy published by the Hungarian News Agency in the inter-war period are available on Internet. The Saint Stephan Society preserves the records of Miklós Esty, one of Justinian Serédi's confidants. Beside the letters between the Prince Primate and his confidant, Esty's diary kept between 1932 and 1944 is remarkably interesting. The Archives of the Benedictine Archabbey of Pannonhalma preserves Justinian Serédi's notes of the sources of the Code of Canon Law, and also some of his letters to monks. Some letters and other documents relevant to Justinian Serédi are available in the Manuscript Collection of the National Széchényi Library and the Manuscript Collection of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

The documents of the Vatican Secret Archives, especially the fonds of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs and the Apostolic Nunciature of Hungary contain important informations to the theme. These documents partially opened to consultation (up to 1939). In the summer 2009 I had the opportunity to do research in the Vatican Secret Archives. Between 1965 and 1981 an 11-volume sourcebook was published from the papers of the Archives relating to World War II (which largely closed to consultation at present); these volumes contain sources relevant to Hungary, which was not used much by Hungarian historians so far.

From the printed sources the rich press material of the period, the minutes of the Upper House of Hungarian Parliament and two publications containing Justinian Serédi's speeches and declarations can be highlighted. As for the sourcebooks, the publication of the Prince Primate's three notes between 1941 and 1944, and the minutes of the Hungarian Catholic Bishops' Conference taken between 1919 and 1944 are very important. Many sources relating to the period of World War II, especially to the persecution of the Jews have been published. The majority of the published memoirs does not deal with Justinian Serédi, except the writings of György Barcza, Zoltán Nyisztor and Antal Ullein-Reviczky.

From the books on the church history of the Horthy era, the works of Gabriel Adriányi, Andor Csizmadia, Jenő Gergely and Leslie László can be highlighted. Jenő Gergely was the most productive author in the theme of this dissertation, his books and studies count as standard works. Several brief biographical summaries were published about Justinian Serédi written by Antal Meszlényi, Jenő Gergely, Szilveszter Sóllymos, Péter Erdő and others.

The following topics closely relating to Justinian Serédi were already examined by the experts: József Bánk, Péter Erdő and Alexander Szentirmai published studies on Serédi's

work as canonist. Gábor Salacz and Andor Csizmadia dealt with Serédi's appointment to Archbishop of Esztergom. According to the Trianon Peace Treaty significant part of the territory of the Archdiocese of Esztergom was annexed to Czechoslovakia. This situation brought about several church governmental and property problems. Kálmán Rácz published studies on the dismembration of the Archdiocese of Esztergom, the property affairs of it in Czechoslovakia and the question of the Hungarian Catholic bishopric in Slovakia. He summarized his research results in PhD thesis. Gábor Salacz' monograph investigates (also) the church governmental and property issues of the territory of former Upper Hungary which became the part of Czechoslovakia. Miklós Szabó analysed the Jubilee Year of Saint Emeric in 1930 in his study on the anniversary celebrations of the Horthy regime. Jenő Gergely wrote a book on the 1938 International Eucharistic Congress in Budapest. Lately Lajos Olasz dealt with the issue of Miklós Horthy's succession elaborating also on the role of the Prince Primate in great detail. An endless number of books and studies have been written about the discrimination and persecution of the Jews, we wish to draw the attention only to few works. In 1947 a volume of studies was published, edited by Antal Meszlényi. It contains partly the recollections of eyewitnesses, and partly the studies of Meszlényi, the historian based on archival and printed sources. In three chapters he examined Justinian Cardinal Serédi's activity against the persecution of Jews. From the general works János Gyurgyák's book analysed the whole issue of the Hungarian situation of Jews, Randolph L. Braham dealt with the history of the Holocaust in his 2-volume work. From the works on the attitude of the Catholic Church at the time of the persecution of Jews two studies of Jenő Gergely can be highlighted. András Fejérdy's essay is the most thorough one among which on the Jewish Acts and the Catholic Church. From the foreign literature Gabriel Adriányi's essay on the same topic can be mentioned.

From the works on other subjects Asztrik Várszegi's biography of Krizosztom Kelemen must be highlighted. Margit Beke wrote the biography of Zoltán Meszlényi. The relationship between Catholics and Protestants in the Horthy era was researched by Zsolt Giczi. The history of the Hungarian Actio Catholica was elaborated by András Gianone. Margit Balogh wrote a monography on KALOT.

III. The structure and results of the dissertation

Beside the overview of the sources and historiography of the theme, the introduction of the dissertation also reveals that already in 1945 the idea of publishing all speeches of Justinian Cardinal Serédi arose. However, this was not realized due to political reasons, only a selection of his declarations in 1944-1945 was published in English.

The first chapter of the dissertation follows the life's path of Justinian Serédi (born as György Szapucsek) from his birth in 1884 in Deáki, Pozsony county (today Diakovce, on the territory of Slovakia), until his appointment to the Archbishop of Esztergom and Prince Primate. The main finding of the chapter is that on the basis of the analysis of sources of the Vatican Secret Archives it became obvious that at first – in contrast with the former assumption of historians – Pietro Gasparri, the Cardinal Secretary of State did not support the idea of Justinian Serédi becoming the Archbishop of Esztergom. The press and the apostolic nuncio in Budapest played an important role in the appointment.

Chapter 2 sums up the legal situation of Prince Primacy in Hungary. Separate subchapters deal with the changes of the primatial and metropolitan jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Esztergom in the inter-war period, and the constitutional role of the Prince Primate. In connection with the latter, the dissertation demonstrates the practical use of customary law by examples, which was not examined by the special literature so far.

Chapter 3 introduces Justinian Serédi, the human being. The first subchapter analyses his personality. The second one examines his personal network, including relationship with his family, his fellow Benedictines, his friends, confidants and fellow bishops. It also answers the question how Justinian Serédi's contacts were in the Vatican. The third subchapter presents his scientific work by emphasizing the fact that Serédi remained scientist during his activity as Prince Primate. His work was acknowledged with many honours, e.g. the University of Oxford conferred an honorary degree on him. This subchapter deals with the history of the Catholic Summer University in Esztergom, as well.

Chapter 4 examines Justinian Serédi's service as a prelate. The first subchapter, which analyses his pastoral work, also deals with the Synod of Archdiocese of Esztergom held in 1941. The second subchapter discusses at first the personnel policy of the Prince Primate and states that he took over the men of his predecessor, János Csernoch, which turned out to be good decision because he was satisfied with most of them. However, it can be stated that Endre Hamvas was discovered by Serédi. The subchapter also sums up the changes in the archdiocesan curia in this period. Besides the history of Hungarian *Actio Catholica* is briefly presented, analysing the Prince Primate's role in direction of the organization and examining

his relationship with the leading office-holders. The third subchapter discusses the relationship between the Protestant denominations and the Catholic Church and states that this relationship can be characterized as an opposition or in many cases as a rivalry and that Justinian Serédi represented a much more rigid attitude towards Protestants, than his predecessor, János Csernoch. Serédi strived for the strict, or rather stiff observation of the rules and the standpoint of the Holy See, and he was also wary of the Christian unity efforts that emerged at the end of the period. The subchapter investigates whether there was a „Protestant predominance” in the period or not and it sums up the debate issues between Catholics and Protestants. The fourth subchapter treats the story of Justinian Serédi’s marriage bill. This topic has not been covered by the special literature so far. The Prince Primate announced in 1934 that he would prepare a bill for the abolishment of the obligatory civil marriage and for the governmental recognition of church marriage. The government did not support the proposal handed over to the prime minister Gyula Gömbös in the next year, and a part of the public was also against it. The dissertation presents the arguments of the opposing parties. Justinian Serédi did never surrender his effort, although he could not realize it until the end of the period. This subchapter treats also the scandal which was provoked by a statement of Sándor Sztanyavszky, chairman of the House of Representatives, on mixed marriages at the end of 1936. The Sztranyavszky who was Lutheran offended the Catholic Church, and therefore, they wanted to force him to resign but did not manage to remove him. The analysis of this case is also a new result of this research.

By examining the cult of the Saints of the House of Árpád in the Horthy era, Chapter 5 highlights the celebration of two jubilee years. The first subchapter examines the Jubilee Year of Saint Emeric in 1930 by analysing the role of the Hungarian government and the sympathy of the papal legate, Luigi Cardinal Sincero towards Hungarians, on the basis of new sources. The second subchapter investigates two events which were in connection with each other: the Jubilee Year of Saint Stephan in 1938 and the International Eucharistic World Congress in Budapest. It is also a new result that Polish Catholics gave up to organize the 1938 Eucharistic Congress already in 1932, and they promised that if the Congress would be held in Budapest, they would take part in great numbers.

Chapter 6 deals with the church governmental and land property affairs of former Upper Hungary. The church governmental, pastoral and property problems of the territories of Northern Hungary which had been annexed to Czechoslovakia after the First World War (Upper Hungary and Sub-Carpathia) seriously concerned the Hungarian Catholic Church, and more precisely the archdiocese of Esztergom. On the other hand these problems were also political and minority questions. Serédi was affected by the affairs from many aspects,

personally and through his dignity. On the one hand, he was born in Deáki village, which was annexed to Czechoslovakia. On the other hand, as the leader of the Hungarian Catholic Church and Archbishop of Esztergom he represented the interests of the Catholics in former Upper Hungary, the Hungarian minority and the ecclesiastical benefice holders against the anticlerical and anti-Hungarian, chauvinist Czechoslovakian (or Czech and Slovakian) interests, efforts and measures. The chapter presents the antecedents of these problems between 1918 and 1927 and then follows the changes in church governmental and landholding affairs until 1945. Although the special literature already examined the events up to 1938 but the dissertation provides new informations and also corrects some statements of the special literature. The presentation of the history of landholding affairs of Upper Hungary between 1938 and 1945 is a completely new finding of research. Although with the First Vienna Arbitral Award the Southern part of Upper Hungary were reannexed to Hungary, the Czechoslovakian and then the Slovakian state did not cease to exist, so the land property problems between Slovakian and Hungarian ecclesiastical benefice holders still remained. These problems could not be solved in the whole period because the Holy See did not assume the responsibility for the decision and the concerned bishops could not agree with each other. Chapter 7 analyses the attitude of Catholic benefice holders towards the land question. Although the land question, which was a serious social problem in the Horthy era, has been elaborated by the special literature, the dissertation produces new research results beside the general overview. It treats that Hungarian bishops received special authorization from the Holy See regarding the alienation of church properties. It also analyses the opinion of Catholic intellectuals about ecclesiastical large estates in the 1930s. The chapter discusses the attitude of Catholic benefice holders towards the settlement plan of the Gömbös government and later the land reform plans of the Imrédy government and the leasehold act. On the basis of the sources of Vatican Secret Archives the chapter examines the attitude of the Holy See regarding Hungarian church properties. It points out that Catholic benefice holders emphasized that they were ready to make sacrifices for the sake of the realization of the government's reform plans and that they did not want any preferential treatment. However, all of their demands were aimed at obtaining advantages. In the entire period it was a basic problem how the trust-like nature of church properties could be reconciled with social sensitivity.

Chapter 8 sums up the relationship between the church and state in the period. The first subchapter treats the general characteristics, on whose basis this relationship can be characterized a mutual advantageous cooperation. The second subchapter analyses the political relationships of the Prince Primate. It investigated the relationship between governor

Horthy and the Prince Primate, which has not yet been examined by the special literature in a comprehensive way. The new research result of the third subchapter is that it reveals that the relationship between the Catholic Church and the government was not constant in the period, but it was changing slowly, which meant that the power relations changed in favour of the government, and in the conflicts treatment the disagreements were undertaken instead of compromises, which moved the parties always further from each other. The fourth subchapter asks the question whether the political behaviour of Justinian Serédi in the early 1940s can be regarded as opposition behavior. The Prince Primate was in touch with both the right-wing opposition of the government and the members of the Catholic reform movement, however, he did not break off his relation with the government even in the last moments and he never criticized it openly. At the same time, the opposition behaviour then did not mainly mean opposing the governments, but the opposition with German orientation, Nazism and the extreme right. The most important new results of the subchapter: The speech of Justinian Serédi entitled "Man's Freedom in Canon Law", which triggered intense protest of German diplomacy, was published by the English press a bit "embroidered" by ascribing such statements to Serédi which had not even been spoke. The dissertation also presents and analyses the memorandum written by Christian intellectuals for the Prince Primate in 1943, whose text has not been known to the special literature so far.

Chapter 9 discusses the problems of governor Miklós Horthy's succession which emerged in 1941-42, by comparing and analysing the sources and the special literature.

Chapter 10 deals with the discrimination and persecution of the Jews. The first subchapter treats the relationship between the extreme right wing and the Catholic Church by disclosing several new research results: it investigates the trial of Fidél Pálffy, extreme right politician against Lajos Mezőgár, professor of theology, and examines Pálffy's ideology. It analyses the attitudes within the Catholic Church towards the extreme right, surveying unknown sources of Vatican Secret Archives. It throws a new light upon Ferenc Szálasi's relation with the Catholic Church. The second subchapter examines the so-called Jewish Acts introduced since 1938 and the attitudes of the Catholic Church in connection with them. As an introduction it points out that two versions of anti-Semitism can be distinguished in Hungary, which are different from each other in important features. The dissertation shows that – as opposed to the conclusions of the majority of the special literature – the Catholic bishops did not vote for the First Jewish Act. The Prince Primate separated the political, religious and moral sides of the second bill on the restriction of Jews. He did not intend to act against the former, because he thought that it would put the government in an awkward situation, however, he felt himself bound to emphasize the Christian point of view. Accordingly, he mainly criticized that the

Jewish Act qualified as Jews also those people who had been converted to the Christianity after 1919, thus doubting the validity and transforming power of baptism. The Catholic bishops had different opinions on the bill but they agreed with the discrimination of the Jews. Justinian Serédi only spoke for convert Jews. By referring to the principle of choosing the lesser of two evils the prelates passed the Second Jewish Act. The Prince Primate rejected the Third Jewish Act mainly because the Act indirectly posed impediments to church marriage. The subchapter also treats the attitude of the Holy See against discriminant acts. The third subchapter discusses the persecution of Jews starting from the German occupation of Hungary. There was a debate among Catholic bishops about which is the more effective way of protest against the measures and deportation which struck the Jews: negotiations with the government or public action. Justinian Serédi preferred negotiations, while among others Vilmos Apor, bishop of Győr and Angelo Rotta, apostolic nuncio in Budapest urged the issue of a Bishops' Conference pastoral letter. Finally also the Prince Primate agreed to issue the pastoral letter, but its distribution was prevented by the authorities. Afterwards negotiations began between the leaders of the Church and the government, in the course of which the prelates gave up the idea of publishing the pastoral letter in exchange for the government's promise that they would ease the regulations against the Jews and that they would suspend the deportation of the Jews in Budapest. The pastoral letter is very important also because it advocated not only the converts but all Hungarian citizens of Jewish origin.

The last chapter of the study treats the period of the Arrow Cross dictatorship and the end of the war. It states that the Prince Primate pointed out the unlawfulness of the Arrow Cross takeover and the rule of Ferenc Szálasi many times, however, in many cases he turned to the government in the defence of the persecuted people by asking for the stopping of injustices. Justinian Serédi was sorely tried throughout the war and the political situation also wore him out, his health was suffering. He died on 29th March 1945 from a heart failure.

IV. Publications of the doctoral candidate on the theme

- Serédi Jusztinián hercegprímás beszédei (Justinian Cardinal Serédi's Speeches). In: Angelika Molnár Nagyné/Márton Radnai (eds.): *Pro Scientia Aranyérmesek VIII. Konferenciája, Pécs, 2006. november 23-25. Előadások. (8th Conference of Pro Scientia Gold Medalists, Pécs, 23-25 November 2006. Lectures.)* (Budapest: Pro Scientia Aranyérmesek Társasága, n.d.), pp. 75-79
- A katolikus nagyjavadalmasok és a Gömbös-kormány telepítési tervei (The Catholic Benefice Holders and the Settlement Plan of the Gömbös Government). In: Csaba Szilágyi (ed.): *Szociális kérdések és mozgalmak Magyarországon 1919-1945 (Social Issues and Movements in Hungary between 1919 and 1945)*. (Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó/Barankovics István Alapítvány/Faludi Ferenc Akadémia, 2008), pp. 131-160
- Alkalmazható-e a „klerikális fasizmus” fogalma Magyarországgal kapcsolatban? Észrevételek Bodó Béla cikkéhez (Can the Concept of "Clerical Fascism" Be Used in Connection with Hungary? Remarks on Béla Bodó's Article). *Magyar Egyháztörténeti Vázlatok. Essays in Church History in Hungary*, 2008 Vol. 20, No. 1-2, pp. 77-85
- Egyházi házasság vagy polgári esküvő? (Church wedding or civil ceremony?). In: Bálint Szele (ed.): *Pro Scientia Aranyérmesek IX. Konferenciája. Kaposvár, 2008. október 2-4. (9th Conference of Pro Scientia Gold Medalists, Kaposvár, 2-4 October 2008. Lectures.)* (Budapest: Pro Scientia Aranyérmesek Társasága, n.d.), pp. 155-160
- Serédi Jusztinián házassági törvényjavaslata (The Marriage Bill of Justinian Cardinal Serédi). In: Jenő Gergely (chief ed.): *Fejezetek a tegnap világából. Tanulmányok a 19-20. század történelméből. (Chapters From Yesterday's World. Studies on the 19-20th Century Hungarian History)*. (Budapest: ELTE BTK, 2009), pp. 197-213