

Eötvös Loránd's University
Faculty of Arts
Doctorate School of History

Giczi Zsolt

**The main features of catholic-protestant relationships in the Hungary
of Horthy epoch**

Theses of PhD dissertation

Budapest

2009

1. Choice of subject and target

The number of works discussing the church history in Hungary has fortunately increased recently. The authors of them examined some parts of the theme in many ways. Doing that sometimes they dealt with certain questions of the relationship of different religious groups. However, nobody has attempted to create a comprehensive analysis of the relationships between the different groups of believers in the Trianon stricken Hungary. This dissertation is going to take a step in this direction. It would exceed the extent of a PhD thesis if I chose to elaborately analyse the relationship of all denominational aspects in Hungary during the chosen period. For this reason I chose 2 Christian tendencies which determined the religious face of the period concerning the number of their believers, institutions and social influence. Studying the behaviour of the catholic and protestants towards each other I focused on the catholics, protestans and evangelists. Even doing that, because of the manifold ramifications of their relationships, I had to decide: either to write a little of all elements of their relationship or to select the most important ones and analyse them thonoughly. I chose the latter procedure.

I endeavour to show the dual face of Catholic-Protestant church relationships between 1919 and 1945. This was made of the quarrels of the two sides on one hand and their reconciliatory attemps on the other. Amongst others I endeavour to demonstrate what expectations the state power had towards the formation of different church relathionships. It is important to clarify if the government intervened into the quarrels of Catholics and Protestants. If so, in what way and for what purpose? I should like to discover to what extent the various church leaders'emotions and attributes influenced the interchurch relationships. Finally I'd like to answer the question of how much the Catholics and Protestants took into account the much emphasized national interest.

2. Sources of the dissertation and methods of their elaboration

Archival sources were gathered by research work carried out in 3 sites. Primatial Archive in Esztergom, Synodical Archive of Hungarian Protestant Church and Evangelical National Archive have a lot of documents pertaining to the theme in question. I have chosen these institutions because in their own church they have the greatest - in fact, nationwide - collecting area.

In the printed material used in the course of construction I have to set off the two volumes of “The history and minutes of conferences of Hungarian Episcopal Body 1919-1944” (München-Budapest, 1992.). This source-material indispensable to studying the Catholic church history of the Horthy epoch provided many useful data. Similar to the above mentioned work the minutes of the National convents and the National Synodical Conferences are of the same importance. The documents of similar fundamental importance of the National Evangelical Conferences were found in archives.

I also rely on the journals of both the Upper House and the Lower House. Speeches and debates recorded in them in several cases contained facts pertaining to my research. The texts of statute laws in question are given on the ground of the adequate volumes of “Hungarian Corpus Juris”. Interesting contribution was found in the memoirs and diaries of the influential ecclesiastical and secular personalities of the epoch published in print. With adequate source criticism they were of good use. The Esztergom archbishop, Serédi Jusztinián’s memoranda, the Székesfehérvár Diocesan Bishop, Prohászka Ottokár’s diary notes, Chaplain-general to the forces, Zdravec István’s secret diary, Protestant Bishop, Ravasz László’s memoirs and Evangelist Bishop, Kapi Béla’s memoirs were also very useful. Regent Horthy Miklós’s memoirs and those of Hungarian Ambassador in Vatican, Barcza György also provided useful pieces of information.

The printed matter of the Horthy epoch made up another important group of my printed sources, as well. Of Catholic newspapers I studied as follows: Új Nemzedék (New Generation), Nemzeti Újság (National Newspaper), Magyar Kultúra (Hungarian Culture), Pannonhalmi Szemle (Pannonhalma Review), Katolikus Szemle (Catholic Review), Egyházi Lapok (Church Newspapers), Korunk Szava (Word of our Age), Az Egység Útja (Road of Unity). Of the printed matter of the Reformed: Lelkészegyesület (Priest society), Református Élet (Presbyterian Life), Kálvinista Szemle (Calvinist Review), Theologiai Szemle (Theological Review) were very useful. Of the printed matter of the smaller Hungarian Protestant Church: Evangélikus Élet (Evangelical Life), Harangszó (Sound of Bells), Evangélikusok Lapja (Evangelical Paper), Hegyen Épített Város (Town Built on the Mountain), Keresztyén Igazság (Christian Truth) are noteworthy. The Protestáns Szemle (Protestant Review) cannot be omitted on enumerating the printed matter studied. Of the secular printed matter the articles published in Magyar Szemle (Hungarian Review) were of special use to me.

On using the sources I endeavoured to demonstrate impartially the Catholic and Protestant viewpoints relating to the questions dealt with in the dissertation. I strived to demonstrate the

hot debates or benevolent dialogues connecting organically the individual statements and answers to them. The complexity of theme studied made it impossible to take into account simultaneously every event without taking the risk of getting entangled in details. For this reason I followed the formation of the selected main elements of Catholic-Protestant relationships individually between 1919 and 1945. This resulted in the occurrence of some important events repeatedly. Even in those cases I endeavoured to escape the redundant reiterations.

3. Structure of the Dissertation and the main component parts

The dissertation is divided into two parts. The first part contains the introduction. The second unfolds the special literature and sources of the theme. The third deals with the characteristic features of position of Catholic, Reformed/Presbyterian and Evangelic Church in the Horthy epoch. Within this sphere the characteristics of the history between 1919 and 1945 of the three large church communities are going to be dealt with whose knowledge contributes to the adequate interpretation of events and processes later demonstrated in the dissertation. In unit four I am going to study what moments burdened the Catholic and Protestant relationships during the discussed period. Of the manifold phenomena leading to denominational debates I have selected 3 items that could give rise to most clashes.

In chapter 4 1. the development of mixed marriages and the question of *reverzális* (letter of mutual concession that children issuing from the marriage shall be brought up in the faith of the other partner) has been discussed. The origin of the problem was the *Codex Iuris Canonici*, the new statute book of Catholic church introduced in 1918. It decrees that a Catholic believer can get married legally only before his/her priest to a non Catholic partner. On this occasion the non Catholic believer had to give a “promissory note”, the so called “*reverzális*” which – as its name suggests – promised to bring up children in Catholic faith. The Protestants objected to this and they would have liked to reach that boys issuing from the marriage of parents of different churches shall be brought up in the faith of their fathers and girls in that of their mothers. That’s why they asked the state leadership to impress the Catholics over and over again to change their attitude to mixed marriages. On the other hand, in 1935 Serédi Jusztinián introduced a bill in which he initiated to cancel the compulsory civil registry of marriage. If the bill had passed it would have enhanced the influence of churches upon the marriages of their believers. The Esztergom archbishop would have liked to carry out perfectly the stipulations pertaining to Catholic marriage service. The Hungarian

governments failed to openly take sides. Thus the Serédi's bill never became a law. In turn, the Protestants also failed to reach the changing of catholic procedure concerning the mixed marriages.

In chapter 4 2. I investigated debates about state subsidy to churches and the ladder of success of people belonging to various denominations. The 1848. XX. article declares that the legally recognized denominations shall be given subvention by the government for performing their church and school duties.

The Protestants continuously emphasized that they should be given more subvention as they have less land propriety. In response to this the bishop of Csanád diocese Glattfelder Gyula made an account in 1926. In this he attempted to demonstrate that the Catholic church was not, in fact, so rich. Thus the state subsidy for the Catholic church should be increased. The statements of Glattfelder memorandum were fiercely refuted by the Protestants and Evangelists. However, the Ministry of Church and Education partly agreed with the bishop, and they increased the Catholic subsidy. Debates about this and the ladder of success continued in 1930-s even in early 1940-s, although in moderation during the II. World War. In the debates Catholics and Protestants mutually charged each other that the other side ousted them from lucrative posts as well as public and state offices. This part of sectarian conflicts failed to come to an end during the Horthy epoch.

In chapter 4 3. I am going to discuss the disagreements created by the collective religious activities of Catholic and Protestant priests in connection of great religious festivals. Codex Iuris Canonici prohibited Catholic priest from officiating at services if Protestant priests took actively part in secular programmes. Its aftermath was that on these occasions the representatives of the Protestant Church were disregarded. The Protestant believers considered this an insult and fiercely remonstrated. Csernoch János in 1926 tried to get compromise on this question. However, the request of Esztergom archbishop predisposed to Protestant cause was rejected in Rome. Thus this problem was left unsettled. The Protestant relationship towards the great Catholic festival series is going to be investigated separately. In our epoch there were three of them: Szent Imre (Saint Henry) jubilee year in 1930, Szent István jubilee year in 1938 as well as the XXXIV. International Eucharistical Congress. On these occasions the Protestant believers only passively look at the catholic religious movements although they had part in the state commemorations of King Stephen.

The Catholic-Protestant relationship of Horthy epoch consisted of not only debates. Endeavours to improve the relationship of the two great Christian sects ran through the epoch in question. These endeavours are being discussed in chapter V. Specifically in chapter V. 1.

attempts are looked over that happened to carry out the catholic and protestant cooperation. It has been stated that the relationship of the two Christian camps was most peaceful at the beginning of the decade. Its reason is that the disintegration of the historical Hungary, especially the Hunagarian Sovjet Republic or to be more exact the shock caused by them brought together the two main churches. To build and consolidate the Christian-national system it was indispensably necessary the collaboration – both political and public – of the christians. Of the leaders of Catholic church Prohászka Ottokár was especially hard at it likewise Csernoch János and other dignitaries of Church. Of Protestant leaders Petri Elek, Ravasz László, of Evangelic side Raffay Sándor and Kapi Béla – all bishops – declared similarly. As the economic and political position of Hungary was getting more and more secure and was diminishing the risk of a left-wing revolution the contradictions of the 2 Christian denominations were getting more and more manifest. Owing to this in the first half of 1920s gradually, from 1926 onward rapidly the intersect situation was going wrong. It was unfavourable from this viewpoint that in 1927 Serédi Jusztinián showing uncooperative attitude towards the Protestant believers became the Esztergom archbishop. The Catholic and Protestant relationship were considerably spoiled by the encyclical letter “Mortalium animos” published in 1928 by pope XI. Pius. In this encyclic letter the Pope was averse to oicumenic movement of Protestant believers which movement wanted to create the unity of Christian churches with the cooperation of co-equal partners. The Pope declared that unified Christianity could only be created by means of union that is by means of merging of all Christian sects into the Catholic religion. The viewpoint was attacked hard by the Protestant believers. The most slashing criticism was drawn up by Baltazár Dezső. In respons to this Serédi asked the Premier Bethlen István and regent Horthy Miklós to move Baltazár Dezső to exercise self-restraint. They fulfilled the Archbishop’s request. Although the Catholic and Protestant belivers invariably declared their principled inclination to create the denominational peace, their relationship reached in 1928-29 its nadir in the Horthy epoch.

In chapter V. 2. the gradual improvement of relationships of the 2 Hungarian Christian sects in the course of 1930s has been demonstrated. It was given a new impetus by the dialogue introduced a Jesuit monk Bangha Béla in early 1937 about a possible union of the Catholic and Protestant churches. One of motives of this conversation was the recognition that the antireligious Nazi and Soviet assaults could only be fended off together, with joined church forces. In accordance with it the goverment more and more expected the 2 main denominations to work together to create the national unity. This target was accepted and supported by every (contributing) speaker of union dialogue. They also agreed that the

theological and organizational union of Catholic and Protestant churches was unattainable in the foreseeable future. Independent of this they thought useful this debate as it encouraged the approach of Catholic and Protestant churches. In fact at the turning point of 1930-s and 1940s the Catholic and Protestant relationships became more and more well balanced. Besides began to appear the first results of practical cooperation.

In chapter V. 3. formation of church relationship and union dialogues has been reviewed in early 1940-s. On looking over the sources of this period it became manifest that even the Protestant leaders of the highest rank took part in the discussion about the national unity. Ravasz László and Révész Imre Jr. Protestant as well as Kapi Béla and Raffay Sándor Evangelic bishops expained their viewpoints concerning the question several times. On the Catholic side monks, mainly Jesuit, Franciscan and Benediktine as well as theological doctors explicated their opinion. Mostly the church dignataries just touched the question speaking of other subjects.

Therefore it is understable that the article of Kelemen Krizosztom the archabbat of Pannonhalma in Pester Lloyd at Xmas 1942 attracted great attention. In this article Kelemen Krizosztom unambiguously took a stand for the approach of Catholic and Protestant churches giving more impulsion to the dialogue. In January 1943 was launched the journal "Az Egység Útja" (Way of Unity) whose target was to assist the approach between the two sects. This publication - in circulation to November 1944 - was edited by Kőnig Kelemen (from 1945 onward Király) Kelemen Franciscan monk. During the short period of its existence it was a peculiar patch of colour in the home religious press. Because of the contradictions of the Catholic and Protestant standpoints about the way of Christian union the possibilities and practical results of the journal and the whole union dialogue were rather limited. We can attach great importance to them because they actually helped to improve the relationship between the Catholic and Protestant churches.

Unit VI. Contains the recapitulation and unit VII. Contains the list of sources and literature employed.

4. The scientific results of the dissertation and the possibilities of its further investigation

This dissertation undertook the task of a scientific investigation of the theme for the first time. In the course of the research work the work hopefully demonstrated the duality which characterized the Catholic-Protestant relationship in the Horthy period. One of its component

parts was the almost anachronistically intensified intersect struggle. On studying the 3 questions selected from them it appeared that none of disputers were able to exclusively enforce their attitude to them. The unfruitful intersect struggle consumed a lot of energy, although this energy should have been applied for solving serious social problems. The government pronounced in favour of intersect peace during the whole period. Referring to the necessity of national unity all governments incited both Catholic and Protestant believers for peaceful cooperation. The governments rarely go beyond conceptual declarations and only on rare occasions interfered into intersect struggles. Even then not of their own accord but at the request of church leaders. The ministers of Education made up the only exception in this field. They, that is to say, by virtue of their official position played the part of go-betweens between the debators. The research work for the dissertation made it clear that the mentality of the church leadership considerably influenced the intersect relationship. The fundamental contradiction was created not by them and they couldn't terminate them.

However their attitude could improve or impair the intersect relations. In public every church personality stated that he and his church were willing to cooperate and were ready for reconciliation in favour of reinforcement a Christian Hungary. They thought important to serve to the advantage of national interests but they tried to convince each other that it could be done exclusively in the way hit upon by them.

Relying on the results of the dissertation the research work can be carried on in several directions. Intersect contradictions left unscrutinized in this analysis can be further studied. Another possibility is the initiation of sects now left uninvestigated into the analysis of interconfessional relationships. The most interesting maybe making progress in time. That is to investigate the formation of relationships of Christian, Protestant and Evangelic churches in Hungary of post-war years.

5. Other publications of the author in the subject-matter of the dissertation

Egy eszmecsere és előzményei. Vélemények a katolikus-protestáns egység megvalósításának lehetőségeiről a Magyar Szemle és a Protestáns Szemle 1937-1938-as évfolyamaiban. (A conversation and its antecedent. Opinions about the possibilities of Catholic-Protestant unity in 1937-1938 volumes of Hungarian Review and Protestant Review). = Acta Universitatis Szegediensis de Attila József nominatae. Acta Historica, tomus CVIII. Szeged, 1999.p 65-83

„A magyarság lelki egysége felé.” A katolikus-protestáns egységtörekvések Horthy-korszakbeli történetéhez. („Towards the unity of the Hungarians”. Contribution to the history of Catholic-Protestant unity endeavours in the Horthy epoch.) = Credo. A Magyarországi Evangélikus Egyház folyóirata. (Journal of Evangelic church in Hungary.) Szerk.: (Editor).Mányoki János. 2000/1-2. szám, p 17-24

König Kelemen és Az Egység Útja című folyóirat indulása. (Start of the „Way of Unity” and König Kelemen.) = Acta Universitatis Szegediensis. Acta Historica, tomus CXIV. Szeged, 2002. p 99-114

Katolikus-evangélikus egyházi kapcsolatok a Horthy-korszak Magyarorszáján.(Catholic-evangelic relationships in Hungary in the Horthy epoch. = Keresztyén Igazság. (Christian Truth.) Az Ordass Lajos Baráti Kör folyóirata (Journal of Friendly Society of Ordass Lajos) 2004. nyár (summer) p 13-28

„Meg kell értenünk az igazságot, hogy csak együtt tölthetjük be szent elhivatásunkat.” Katolikus és protestáns állásfoglalások a magyarországi keresztény felekezetek közeledésének lehetőségeiről az 1930-as és 1940-es évek fordulóján.(„We must understand the truth that we can only serve our holy destination together”. Catholic and Protestant attitudes concerning the possibilities of approach of Hungarian Christian Churches at the turning-point of 1930s and 1940s.) In: Il ruolo delle religioni e delle chiese nella formazione delle società in Europa e nel Nuovo Mondo. Felelős kiadó: Eördögh István. (Responsible publisher) Felelős szerk.: Zsoldos Sándor. (Responsible editor.) Egyház- és Vallástörténeti Akadémia Közhasznú Alapítvány, (Academy of history and religion. Foundation of Publicuse.) Szeged, 2005. p 385-402