

## AN UNDERGROUND CHURCH-RUN SCHOOL DURING THE COMMUNIST RULE IN HUNGARY (1948-1990)

*Una escuela clandestina de la Iglesia durante el gobierno  
comunista en Hungría (1948-1990)*

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**Abstract:** Denominational schools have played a fundamental role in Hungarian education for centuries. The relations between church and state were characterised by co-operation and a division of tasks. As a result of the Communist takeover, however, church schools were nationalised in 1948. Only 10 of them were allowed to exist within strict constraints. During the decades of communism they became from the asylum of the social groups deprived of their learning opportunities and forced into a marginal situation in the 1950s into partly elite schools by the 1980s. The transformation of the role of church-run schools determined how they sought their mission after the political transformation of 1989-90. Meanwhile, church policy started softening in parallel with the erosion of state socialism. The ideological and political loss of marginalised social strata was unimportant for the communist regime, but certain churches started to gain experience in working with those groups at that time, e.g. in Gypsy mission. During our research we collected archive documents, photographs and interviews.

The most important hypothesis was the existence of a so-called underground school that had operated at a Roma village in spite of the fact that no Greek Catholic schools were allowed to exist during the communist regime. The school was very successful in educating the highly marginalised Roma community, which lived under substandard conditions. The methodology of the school, fitted out in a chapel, foreshadowed what we call culturally responsive teaching today. In the first part of the study the political

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climate of religious education is presented during the communist regime in Hungary. In the second part, the first results of our empirical research about the underground church-run school during the time of the founder of the school (Sója Miklós) are presented.

**Keywords:** Communist dictatorship. Nationalisation of schools. Church-run and parochial schools. Marginalised pupils. Gypsy/Romani children.

**Resumen:** *Las escuelas confesionales han jugado un papel fundamental en la educación húngara durante siglos. Las relaciones entre la Iglesia y el Estado se caracterizaron por la cooperación y la división de tareas. Sin embargo, las escuelas de la Iglesia fueron nacionalizadas en 1948 a consecuencia de la toma del poder comunista. Sólo se autorizó la existencia de diez de ellas bajo estrictas restricciones. Durante las décadas del comunismo estas escuelas pasaron de refugio de los grupos sociales privados de oportunidades educativas y forzados a una situación marginal en los cincuenta a escuelas de élite del partido en los ochenta. La transformación del papel de las escuelas de la Iglesia determinó cómo esta encaró su misión tras el cambio político de 1989-90. Mientras tanto, la política de la Iglesia comenzó a suavizarse en paralelo con la erosión del socialismo de estado. La pérdida ideológica y política de los estratos sociales marginalizados carecía de importancia para el régimen comunista, pero algunas iglesias empezaron a ganar experiencia en esa época en el trabajo con estos grupos, por ejemplo en la misión gitana. Durante nuestra investigación hemos reunido documentos de archivo, fotografías y entrevistas. La hipótesis principal ha sido la existencia de una denominada escuela clandestina que operaba en un pueblo romaní a pesar de que durante el régimen comunista no se había autorizado el funcionamiento de ninguna escuela católica griega. La escuela tuvo mucho éxito a la hora de educar a la comunidad romaní, que vivía bajo condiciones marginales. La metodología de la escuela, instalada en una capilla, auguraba lo que hoy llamamos enseñanza culturalmente responsiva. En la primera parte de este estudio se presenta el clima político de la educación religiosa durante el régimen comunista en Hungría. En la segunda parte, se presentan los primeros resultados de nuestra investigación empírica sobre la escuela clandestina de la Iglesia en los años del fundador de la escuela (Sója Miklós).*

**Palabras clave:** *Dictadura comunista. Nacionalización escolar. Escuelas parroquiales y eclesíásticas. Alumnos marginados. Niños gitanos.*

## INTRODUCTION

The situation of denominational schools in today's Hungary cannot be understood without looking at the roles churches played in education in the past. There are two periods to be distinguished in this respect. Up to the eighteenth century churches had a monopoly on education. After that, however, the state appeared as a new actor there. As regards the role of the state in education, we can distinguish two periods again: (1) the era of absolutism and bourgeois states (1740-1945), when, although the state made increasing efforts to control and supervise education, no serious political force questioned the justification of denominational education and educational pluralism; (2) the period between 1945 and 1989, when the totalitarian rule of the communist party, which rose into power in a few years, completely transformed the character of the Hungarian state as well as the structure of the school system, trying to exclude churches from education and youth work. Our study focuses on a so far undisclosed episode of this era, which is still very relevant with respect to the social responsibility of churches. Our research is significant for two reasons. Firstly, we have discovered original sources on the underground educational activity of a denomination that was completely deprived of its right to run schools.

Secondly, we want to highlight that this particular activity was the education of Gypsy children, who were absolutely marginalised and deprived of all opportunities of institutional education during the communist era, which otherwise proclaimed social equality and justice.

The present article is subdivided in three parts. The first one presents the communist regime's policy on church-run education and the reaction of the denominations. The second chapter discusses the situation of the Greek Catholic Church during the communist dictatorship as well as the geographical and socio-economic background of the Greek Catholic community. The third chapter focuses on how the Greek Catholic Church was engaged in education alongside its missionary work in the most peripheral Gypsy communities in spite of its exclusion from school education. The sources used in our research were documents from the Episcopal Archive of Nyíregyháza, original letters, lectures, sermons published in the seminary newspaper at that time, photos depicting the

life of the Gypsy community in Hodász, as well as interviews with priests and members of the Gypsy parish. This time Nyíregyháza was the center of the Greek Catholic Church in Hungary and all the church related documents were stored here.

In addition, we drew on an interview with the bishop's secretary and a contemporary radio interview. The interviews made with priests are placed in the Episcopal Archive in Nyíregyháza.

## CHURCH-RUN EDUCATION WITHIN THE NATIONALISED SYSTEM OF EDUCATION IN HUNGARY

### **The Circumstances of the the Nationalisation of the Church schools in 1948**

There are markedly different views in literature on the nationalisation of church-run education. One of them looks upon it as an inevitable and favourable concomitant of the modernisation process, while the other claims it was nationalisation that brought modernisation to a halt. The former view highlights its continuity with former Hungarian education policy, while the latter regards it as integration into an entirely new and alien paradigm. Its reasons, whether ideological, power-related or political, as well as the responsible actors involved in its preparation and the inevitable or random nature of events, are still disputed.<sup>1</sup>

In our opinion, these events formed an organic part of the communists' strategy aiming to develop a monolithic power structure, and they cannot be treated separately from the processes of domestic and foreign politics, to which they were subordinated. Indisputably, owing to its Marxist convictions, the Hungarian communist party<sup>2</sup> held entirely communistic and anticlerical views, just as its model, the Stalinist Soviet Union, was based on the negation of liberal, democratic and pluralist ideas.

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriella Pusztai, *Iskola és közösség. Felekezeti középiskolások az ezredfordulón* (Budapest: Gondolat, 2004), 247.

<sup>2</sup> The name of the party changed several times: at the time of its foundation in 1918 it was called the Party of Communists in Hungary, in the period treated in this paper (1944-1948) Hungarian Communist Party, between 1948-1956 Hungarian Working People's Party, and between 1956-1989 Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party.

However, communist leaders always subordinated their ideological convictions to their current political purposes, focusing on the next step of seizing power.

Besides, the relationship between the Soviet Union and the western powers also determined their prevailing tactics and rhetoric. What we can observe in their ecclesiastical policy is analogous to their «salami tactics»,<sup>3</sup> mostly applied against parties.

For a few years after World War II, the communist party was not yet in a position to introduce overt dictatorship, so—in accordance with Stalin's orders—it formed a coalition with left-wing and centrist parties. At the end of 1944, all coalition parties' programmes contained the recognition of religious freedom. The draft programme of the Hungarian Communist Party drawn up in October 1944 wished to grant «free practice of every religion and denomination», «as long as it was not targeted against the Hungarian democratic People's Republic», declared «the complete separation of state and church economically, socially and culturally alike», and «in line with Hungarian democratic traditions, laid education on a new spiritual and ideological foundation».<sup>4</sup> However, the facts that the recognition of rights was subject to conditions, was formulated in an ambiguous way and even contained an implicit threat to churches and their schools, revealed the real stance of the programme's authors. Freedom of religion was already codified by the Provisional Government (in office between 1944 and 45) and was confirmed by Act 1 of 1946 and Act 18 of 1947. Moreover, it was included as part of the freedom of conscience in the Constitution accepted in August 1949 and it was on these grounds that the separation of state and church was declared. Within the legal system, socialist theory of law prioritised state law; thus human rights were degraded, or, in other words, «nationalised», into citizen rights.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The phrase was coined by communist party leader Mátyás Rákosi for the methodology used for the gradual elimination of his political opponents: there is always a target group to be labelled as the enemy, while the other forces, which are temporarily adopted as allies, are called upon to distance themselves from, and purge their ranks of, «reactionaries», which eventually leads to the weakening of the «allied» group as well.

<sup>4</sup> Jenő Gergely, Ferenc Glatz and Ferenc Pölöskei, *Magyarországi pártprogramok 1919- 1944* (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1991), 87-98.

<sup>5</sup> Barna Mezey, *Magyar alkotmánytörténet* (Budapest: Osiris, 1995), 16-21.

Although they were listed at the end of the Constitution, they were not detailed by law, and they only had to be granted to «workers»,<sup>6</sup> so they are to be considered «fictive or unrealised» constitutional rights.<sup>7</sup> Act 32 of 1947 declared full equality of the recognised denominations which were classified into the categories «recognised» and «unrecognised».<sup>8</sup> The term was no more than part of the salami tactics scenario constructed by ecclesiastical policymakers.

In practice, churches were systematically forced into the background, the goal being the possible elimination of religion, which was labelled as «false consciousness». This was carried out in small steps rather than an overall attack. With the introduction of a one-chamber parliament in 1945, dignitaries of historical churches were left out of it; the abolition of «titles and ranks of feudal origin» undermined the public role and worldly prestige of mainly Catholic church leaders; the expulsion of the apostolic nuncio in 1945 broke diplomatic relations with the Vatican, and the land reform in the same year, contrary to previous promises, confiscated the majority of church property without any compensation, depriving the churches from their primary financial resources. Most estates served as functional property, providing the financial background of education, health care and social welfare institutions, the further operation of which now depended on arbitrary state aiding. The organisations labelled as fascist, counter-revolutionary or anti-Soviet were dissolved in several waves, bringing about the decline of church press and publishing, and the so-called «B-listing»<sup>9</sup> of many lay employees such as teachers. As a result, churches lost their organisational background and communication channels towards society.<sup>10</sup>

Respected church leaders were deprived of their positions and freedom, and were replaced with clergy members ready for compromise

<sup>6</sup> According to the communist constitution, the Hungarian People's Republic was a «state of the working people», who were entitled to have all rights; consequently, political, social and ideological opponents could be excluded.

<sup>7</sup> Mezey, *Magyar alkotmánytörténet*, 16-21.

<sup>8</sup> Zoltán Rajki, «Szabadegyházak helyzete Magyarországon 1945 és 1950 között», *Egyháztörténeti Szemle*, 2 (2011): 77-95.

<sup>9</sup> Public employees were screened, and those who were found politically inadequate were put on the so-called B-list, which resulted in dismissal from work and complete existential destruction.

<sup>10</sup> Gabriella Pusztai, «Kimaradt generációk», *Magyar Egyháztörténeti Vázlatok*, 3 (4), (1996): 155-167.

and collaboration with the regime.<sup>11</sup> The movement of «peace priests»<sup>12</sup> was intended to divide the church from inside, the priest trials were intended to intimidate it, and the State Office for Church Affairs served to keep it under control. With no relevant legislation, the churches' scope of action was marked out by bargains and agreements. The Reformed and Unitarian Churches were constrained to sign an agreement in the autumn of 1948, the Lutheran and Jewish denominations followed suit in winter, and the Roman Catholic Church on 30 August 1950. The state, however, did not adhere to the agreements later on. In this period of forced coexistence lasting for about twenty years the state was counting on the extinction of churches and did its best to hasten the process.

The year 1956 marked a new era in the history of communist dictatorship: having drawn the conclusions from the revolution and war of independence crushed by the Soviet army, János Kádár replaced the terror-based Stalinist dictatorship with a gradually softening post-Stalinist version, which resorted to terror less and less frequently and mainly as a threat.<sup>13</sup> During the consolidation of the Kádár era in the 1960s the regime attempted to use the churches for its own purposes and even made compromises, such as the partial agreement with the Vatican in 1964, to this end.

Church schools and religious upbringing were the major battlefields against the churches, as that was where young people could be won over in an ideological sense. Teachers were under enormous pressure from the very beginning: the Hungarian Communist Party, along with the teachers' trade union under its control, were willing to voice their justified complaints as an act of propaganda, but pay demands were always linked with meeting the party's expectations, exerting political and ideological influence, and existential threats. There were strictly supervised courses to provide «democratic further education» for teachers, where teachers from denominational and state schools took part together. Denominational teachers' associations and periodicals were banned. As a local paper in

<sup>11</sup> Rudolf Andorka, «A Magyarországi Evangélikus Egyház és az evangélikusok helyzete és problémái 1941-től», *Valóság*, 5 (1994): 32-46, Sándor Ladányi, «Vázlatos történeti áttekintés a magyarországi református egyház közelebbi múltjából», *Valóság*, 4 (1994): 3-31.

<sup>12</sup> The movement, launched everywhere in the socialist block, was organised in Hungary as from 1950 by the communists with the real purpose of getting rid of unreliable clergy members.

<sup>13</sup> Ignác Romsics, *Magyarország története a XX. században* (Budapest: Osiris, 1999), 34-37.

Debrecen aptly put it, there was a spring-cleaning going on in education<sup>14</sup> during which schoolbooks were reviewed and teachers screened. Plans to make compulsory religious education optional still failed in 1947, but in the summer of 1948, accompanied by a massive media campaign and the arousal of anti-clerical sentiments —exemplified by the Pócspetri case—<sup>15</sup> church schools, which made up of 45% of primary and 37% of secondary education institutions, were nationalised in the space of a few hours.<sup>16</sup> The preceding debate in parliament was not about a technical or political decision but about a measure thought to be necessary for the party on its way to achieve its ultimate goal, i.e. unlimited power.<sup>17</sup> In the following year religious education in schools became optional, and various administrative measures were subsequently taken to destroy it. In June 1950 monastic orders were dissolved and their members were interned. Afterwards, in accordance with an agreement with the Catholic Church, four colleges of theology and eight grammar schools (shrunk into four-year institutions) were returned to the Church, the latter ones to be run by the Benedictine, Piarist and Franciscan orders and the Poor School Sisters of Notre Dame.<sup>18</sup> The 1948 agreement allowed the Reformed Church to keep four colleges of theology, four boys' and two girls' grammar schools; the Lutheran Church and the Jewish denomination were each entitled to run a college of theology and a grammar school, but within a few years, with the exception of eight Roman Catholic, one Reformed and one Jewish grammar schools, all other church-run institutions of public education were abolished, partly on a «voluntary» basis. The remaining schools' supply of teachers was formally unresolved as all church-run teacher training institutions were nationalised. Teachers of the licensed denominational grammar schools as well as priests had to take an oath on the Hungarian People's Republic and its Constitution.

<sup>14</sup> Gabriella Pusztai, «Egy törvény és szelleme», *Valóság*, 6 (2000): 89-100.

<sup>15</sup> In the summer of 1948, a demonstration for the retention of the local church school in the small village of Pócspetri in Eastern Hungary was attempted to be dispersed by the police. One of the policemen accidentally shot himself dead with his own gun. The incident was turned into a large-scale conspiracy case by the secret police; several people were sentenced to death or long imprisonment, the village was given collective punishment and a nationwide anti-clerical campaign was launched.

<sup>16</sup> Pusztai, «Egy törvény és szelleme».

<sup>17</sup> Pusztai, «Egy törvény és szelleme».

<sup>18</sup> Jenő Gergely, *Az 1950-es egyezmény és a szerzetesrendek felszámolása Magyarországon* (Budapest: Vigília Kiadó, 1990), 46-57.



Grammar schools were allowed to start only two classes per year with a maximum of forty students; only 16 teaching posts were subsidised by the state and even the number of other school staff (cleaners, kitchen hands) was limited; they had to follow the state curriculum, use state textbooks and celebrate state holidays. It was theoretically possible for them to prepare their own notes under state supervision to explain the viewpoint of the church, but it was not done except for religious education.<sup>19</sup> However, supplementary materials were used in classes either in oral or manuscript form, and in that way alternative forms of erudition were built up. The everyday life, customs and culture of church schools were entirely different from those of state schools, which earned them a kind of recognition in spite of their marginal status.

### Religious Schools in the strict Dictatorship

During the decades of socialism the above ten schools continued to operate as enclosures within the Hungarian school system, under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture and the cultural departments of the county and Budapest councils. Catholic schools were supervised by the Catholic Secondary School Authority, founded in 1950.<sup>20</sup> Compared to state schools, denominational schools were granted some minor concessions: from the academic year 1950-51 monastic novices were given exemption from Marxist subjects at universities, secondary school teachers did not have to take part in compulsory ideological education, neither did they have to establish local organisations of the communist party and the Hungarian Young Communist League (KISZ), which were compulsorily set up at every school and workplace. Instead of the subject called «the basics of our ideology» and philosophy, church schools had two religious education lessons per week, yet students were not allowed to receive grades in RE and participation in the lessons could not be made compulsory. In accordance with an agreement in 1959, the schools were funded from state aid, the amount of which in the 1980s

<sup>19</sup> Péter Drahos, «Katolikus iskolák az államosítás után», *Educatio*, I (1992): 46-64.

<sup>20</sup> Its president was an archbishop or bishop appointed by the College of Bishops; its members were the superiors of the orders, its advisory body on educational and academic issues was the Catholic Board of Educational Affairs. The Catholic Secondary School Authority did not have a central executive body; that function was taken over, in a decentralised way, by police authorities.

no longer reached as much as 33% of teachers' salaries.<sup>21</sup> The rest was obtained from foreign donations, mainly from Caritas Internationalis on the Catholic side and through Dutch and German connections in the Reformed Church. Furthermore, the Catholic Church introduced an annual nationwide Sunday collection for the benefit of its schools in 1976, and the Reformed Church also received donations from its congregations for that purpose. Parents also made their contributions, depending on their means, to the maintenance of boarding schools.

The changes in the number of students attending church schools reflect the changes in the state's ecclesiastical policy and the prevailing tendencies in Hungarian society's religiosity and attitudes towards the institutions of the church. The consolidation of the Kádár era, which brought about a relative increase in wealth, saw a gradual decline in institutional forms of religion, to be followed by a revival of collective religious practice (both in small and large communities) from the late 1970s.<sup>22</sup> In Catholic schools the number of students grew rapidly until it reached the permitted maximum in the middle of the 1950s, then it virtually stagnated until 1970, after which it started to fall, while corresponding figures in the state sector were growing because of demographic reasons and factors related to education policy. The number was the lowest in 1978, and afterwards it started to grow again.<sup>23</sup> Data on the Reformed Church show similar tendencies: the number of students in the Grammar School of the Reformed College of Debrecen was more or less steady in the 1950s, followed by some fluctuations but still dominated by continuity in the 1960s. The bottom was reached in the academic year 1977-78, giving way to gradually accelerating growth.<sup>24</sup>

There are no comprehensive studies on the academic performance of church-run schools at that time. There is one paper which examines Catholic schools in that respect, based on attrition and university admittance figures.<sup>25</sup> Until the early 70s attrition was lower in Catholic than in state schools —although there was some improvement in both

<sup>21</sup> László Kemenes, «A mai katolikus középiskolák», in *Magyar Katolikus Almanach II. köt.*, ed. László Turányi (Budapest: Szent István Társulat, 1988), 123-127.

<sup>22</sup> Miklós Tomka, «A felekezeti oktatásügy társadalmi megítélése», *Educatio*, 3 (2005): 492-501.

<sup>23</sup> Péter Drahos, «Katolikus iskolák az államosítás után».

<sup>24</sup> József Barcza, *A Debreceni Református Kollégium története* (Budapest: A Magyarországi Református Egyház Zsinati Irodájának Sajtóosztálya, 1988), 27-32.

<sup>25</sup> Drahos, «Katolikus iskolák az államosítás után».

sectors—, but then it turned the other way round. Péter Drahos attributes<sup>26</sup> the change to Catholic schools' higher discipline and adaptation standards, the difficulty of commuting, the state's schooling policy and the tendency for denominational students to take their matriculation exams in state schools in order to secure their admission into university.<sup>27</sup> The rate of intentions to continue studies in higher education was permanently high in Catholic schools; even during a slump in the 1960s nearly 50% of final-year students applied for admission to a university or college, but the rate was typically around 60-80%. The rate of accepted students, however, was much lower: in the 1960s it was around 20% of applicants; it reached 50% in 1980 and the national average only by the end of the 1980s.

The distribution of accepted church-school students by fields of study was also rather uneven: their chances were the highest in science and technical subjects and the lowest in humanities.<sup>28</sup> Another possible indicator of academic achievement was successful participation in national competitions.<sup>29</sup>

Another important issue is the social background and role of church-run schools during the decades of socialism. Its research started with the analysis of school registers<sup>30</sup> which revealed that in the 1950s denominational schools gave refuge to marginalised groups, which were also deprived of the opportunity to study.

The proportion of students belonging to the categories «X» or «other»<sup>31</sup> was over 50%, and that of children of intellectuals and peasants was also fairly high.<sup>32</sup> As one of our informants put it, «in those years the school

<sup>26</sup> Drahos, «Katolikus iskolák az államosítás után».

<sup>27</sup> At entrance exams students' personal documentation containing data on parents' family origins and political views as well as students' secondary schools and ideological views were thoroughly examined and it counted more than the applicant's knowledge. One of the escape routes for denominational students was to change schools for the final year.

<sup>28</sup> Drahos, «Katolikus iskolák az államosítás után».

<sup>29</sup> Kemenes, «A mai katolikus középiskolák», 123-127.

<sup>30</sup> Pusztai, «Kimaradt generációk».

<sup>31</sup> Between 1948 and 1963 school registers classified students according to parents' origins. The most detailed classification contained the following categories: worker, peasant, intellectual, other and X, which included «class enemies», i.e. the children of politically unreliable people.

<sup>32</sup> Szabolcs Csejoszki, «Katolikus nevelés a politikai diktatúra oktatási rendszerében – A Pannonhalmi Bencés Gimnázium oktatásszociológiai vizsgálata (1950–1990)», *Magyar Pedagógia*, (2012): 149–166.

carried out a rescue operation in a political, rather than a religious, sense». <sup>33</sup> The following decades preserved the dominance of intellectuals' children in denominational schools. According to summarised Catholic data this rate was 60%, and it was even higher in the Piarist Grammar School in Budapest. In the 1980s the proportion of entrepreneurs' (mainly in small-scale retail and industrial businesses) children was already 20%, whereas industrial and agricultural workers' children mainly attended boarding schools, making up no more than 20% of the students there. <sup>34</sup> In the Reformed grammar school, the proportion of the children of intellectuals was around 55-60%, half of them ministers' children. <sup>35</sup>

### Religious Schools in the eighties

As the so-called «Kádár system» was eroding, the state's educational policy softened. More emphasis was given to national unity, in which the state was now also willing to include the churches as «representatives of special cultural and social values», <sup>36</sup> with the purpose of making use of their activity in such fields where, because of the country's economic difficulties, there was an obvious crisis such as in the care of the disabled, the old and the deviant, and other forms of charity work.

Surrendering these peripheral groups to the churches did not matter to the system at all, and it could even be presented to Hungarian and western public opinion as a gesture or concession.

Yet churches were still emphatically expected to cooperate with the state in building up socialism and occupy only as much space as they were supposed to. Church leaders accepted this role in the name of the policy of small steps, the Catholic theology of cooperation and the theological principles of the narrow path and the serving church. This attitude did contribute to the improvement of relations between church and state first at leadership level and then, gradually at the level of parishes and congregations, while the official framework of the relationship remained unchanged.

<sup>33</sup> Puzsai, «Kimaradt generációk».

<sup>34</sup> Kemenes, «A mai katolikus középiskolák».

<sup>35</sup> József Barcza, *A Debreceni Református Kollégium története*.

<sup>36</sup> István Mészáros, *Kimaradt tananyag. I-III* (Budapest: Márton Áron Kiadó, 1993), 34-36.

The change became apparent when in 1981 a dialogue commenced between Marxist philosophers and Christian theologians. In 1986 a new order of nuns was founded to do social and nursing work. In March 1988 Catholic leaders raised the issue of increasing the number of students in church-run schools to Prime Minister Károly Grósz, and they received a positive reply. In August of the same year Hungary announced the invitation of Pope John Paul II, and in December an agreement was reached between the Reformed Church and the State Office for Church Affairs on the conditions of religious education in congregations and the clergy's oath to the state. It was in the academic year 1988-89 when denominational school teachers had to swear an oath on the Constitution of the Hungarian People's Republic for the last time. The law passed on the right of association in 1989 permitted the launch of several old and new associations, making possible the reorganisation of monastic orders as well.<sup>37</sup> In the summer of 1989 the State Office for Church Affairs ceased to exist without a legal successor, which virtually nullified the 1950 agreement (it was officially declared void in 1990). The government set up the Church Policy Secretariat of the Prime Minister's Office, but the real administrative tasks were allocated to the Department of Church Relations of the Ministry of Culture and Education. In the academic year 1989-90 an old and renowned Lutheran grammar school was restarted in Budapest in the presence of the Minister of Culture and Education, who used the occasion to announce the state's intention to give up its monopoly on education. This event virtually put an end to the era of communist dictatorship.

## THE SYSTEM OF EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN THE GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH

### The Greek Catholic Church

Before discussing the activity of the Greek Catholic Church during the era of state socialism, we find it necessary to give a short outline of the historical roots of this denomination. In Végheő's approach the self-identification of Hungarian Greek Catholics is grounded on three pillars: the Byzantine rite, the unity with the Holy See in Rome and Hungarian

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<sup>37</sup> It was officially stated in Legislative Decree no. 17 of 1989.

identity.<sup>38</sup> They define themselves as successors to that Byzantine Christian presence which has been part of Hungarian history since the foundation of the Hungarian state. In consequence of the East-West Schism of 1054, Eastern Christianity temporarily disappeared from the country almost entirely, and it returned and gained new momentum during the sixteenth century with the settlement of Orthodox Slavonic and Romanian-speaking population. As a result of the Union of Uzhhorod in 1646, these Slavonic and Romanian Orthodox Christians recognised the primacy of the Roman Catholic Church, but they preserved the eastern heritage in their rites and liturgical traditions. That is why Greek Catholics are also called Byzantine-rite Catholics.<sup>39</sup> The first moves which finally led to the foundation of the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church were made in the seventeenth century. The settlements organised in the eighteenth century after the Turks had been driven out brought further Greek Catholic communities to the north and east of Hungary. Their assimilation was so fast that by the nineteenth century there had already been liturgical books published in Hungarian, which was a definite sign of strengthening Hungarian identity. The year 1873 was a milestone, when the Eparchy of Munkács established an independent vicariate for 33 Hungarian-speaking parishes. It was in 1912 when the Eparchy of Hajdúdorog was established. During the last century the national composition of the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church's membership has undergone a significant change. On 8 June 1912, when Pope Saint Pius X's bull «Christifideles greci» canonised the foundation of the Eparchy of Hajdúdorog, which comprised 162 parishes and was the predecessor of the Archeparchy of Hajdúdorog.

In 2011 the second largest nationality was the Roma one with nearly 5%, but their real proportion is higher as part of them claims to be Hungarian in public. The next largest Greek Catholic community is the Ruthenian one (approximately 1%). Today, according to the 2011 census, there are 179,176 members of the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church (called Archeparchy of Hajdúdorog today) mainly in the socioeconomically most disadvantaged northern and eastern regions of Hungary.

<sup>38</sup> Tamás Végheő, «Út az egyházmegye felállításig: útkeresés és kálváriaut» *Byzantinohungarica* (2010) <http://byzantinohungarica.hu/node/56> (accessed March 25, 2015).

<sup>39</sup> Bertalan Pusztai B, «Discursive Tactics and Political Identity: Shaping Hungarian Greek Catholic Identity at the Turn of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries», in *National Identities* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 117-131.

Seventy-eight percent of church members are concentrated in three especially disadvantaged counties, namely Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén (N=34,816), Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg (N=73,419) and Hajdú-Bihar (N=32,359). Eleven percent live in the capital, 20% in towns with county rights and 71% in smaller towns or villages.

### **The Greek Catholic School System before the Totalitarian Regime and the Impact of Nationalisation**

Owing to the multinational composition of the Greek Catholic Church and the fact that half of the parishes and one third of the church members in the Eparchy of Hajdúdorog were attached to foreign countries in consequence of the Treaty of Trianon after World War I as well as the fact that a high proportion of Greek Catholics have a very low level of education, it has been in the focus of the church's mission since the beginning to promote institutional education, development and integration.

Janka highlights three facts that caused special difficulties to István Miklóssy, the first Greek Catholic bishop of Hajdúdorog in the interwar period: church members' social disadvantage, their poverty and the aversion of public opinion, as Greek Catholics were not considered to be Hungarians by many, although 97% of them identified themselves as Hungarians.<sup>40</sup>

On 25 march 1939 Pope Pius XII appointed Miklós Dudás, superior of the Order of Saint Basil the Great in Hungary, to succeed Miklóssy. He already pointed out in his ordination sermon that the most urgent task of the eparchy is the organisation of its education system. For that purpose, he immediately started negotiations with the Ministry of Religion and Public Education. In 1941 a folk high school was established in Hajdúdorog. The town supported its operation with 45 acres of land and school buildings. The bishop also launched the Primary Teacher Training Institute in 1942, which was expanded to run parallel girls' classes from the academic year 1944-45. Both the male and the female branches of the Order of Saint Basil the Great were actively involved in the work of the

<sup>40</sup> György Janka, *A 100 éves Hajdúdorogi Egyházmegye története* (Nyíregyháza: Hajdúdorogi Egyházmegye, 2012), 27.

institute. The next Greek Catholic institution of the town was the Saint Josaphat Dormitory, founded in 1943. In the year 1946 the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church ran 52 elementary and 81 primary schools as well as two kindergartens.<sup>41</sup> It was World War II and communist dictatorship that put an end to Bishop Dudás's activity as a founder of schools. In 1944 in the areas detached from Hungary the Russian occupiers started the systematic elimination of the Subcarpathian Greek Catholic Church and its incorporation into the Orthodox Church.<sup>42</sup> It was the *Subcarpathian Society of Sciences* that was first ceased: its entire property, including its printing press, was confiscated, which made its further activity impossible. Its leader János Harajda was arrested and died in prison two weeks later «under unknown circumstances». Archdeacon Sándor Illiczky was deported to Siberia in 1946 and died there a year later. In 1947 Greek Catholic bishop Tódor Romzsa fell victim to a «road accident», but in reality the bishop was assassinated.<sup>43</sup> In 1949, following the systematic elimination of the Greek Catholic Church, an additional 129 priests were taken for forced labour for clinging to their faith.

As from February 1949 another series of sentences were passed<sup>44</sup> in closed and accelerated trials by so-called «people's tribunals». The tribunals that dealt with war crime cases were in fact instruments of the communist parties in the Soviet zone.<sup>45</sup> If the accused admitted to being a Greek Catholic priest, he was sentenced to 10 or 25 years of forced labour, confiscation of property and deprivation of civil rights. All public religious activity was restricted, and Greek Catholic church buildings were handed over to the Orthodox Church. Those who refused to accept the abolition of their church and continued to confess their faith were prosecuted or even executed without a sentence.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>41</sup> János Soltész, «A görög katolikus egyház élete az elmúlt 10 évben», *Athanasiana*, 15 (2002): 103.

<sup>42</sup> Subcarpathia is situated in the area of four former counties in the northeast of historical Hungary. As from 1920, it belonged to Czechoslovakia, from 1939 to 1944 to Hungary, from 1944 to 1991 to the Soviet Union. Since then, it has been part of Ukraine with a Hungarian minority population of 150,000.

<sup>43</sup> László Puskás, *Megalkuvás nélkül, Romzsa Tódor élete és halála* (Budapest: Barbaföldi Gábor Archivum, 2001), 27.

<sup>44</sup> Diós and Viczián, *Magyar Katolikus Lexikon* (Budapest: Szent István Társulat, 2004), 102.

<sup>45</sup> Mária Palasik, *Üstökön ragadni a reakciót Az államrendőrség és a politikai rendőrség kezdetei* (Budapest: Beszel, 1999), 74.

<sup>46</sup> Andrea Szenyves «Kárpátaljai görög katolikusok az illegális éveikben», *Együtt Irodalom-Művészet-Kultúra*, (2007): 86-90.



After the Russian occupation of Hungary, the Greek Catholic population here expected to face their Subcarpathian brothers' fate. However, owing to the fact that there was no unified orthodox church in Hungary, Greek Catholics were treated in the same way as Roman Catholics were, except that all of their schools were nationalised and none of their education institutions were allowed to exist officially until 1989.

The social composition of the Greek Catholic population has been dominated by the rural element up to the very present. One third of them have only primary education (either the full 8 years or less), and hardly 8% have a higher education degree. After the political transformations of 1989 the establishment of the Greek Catholic school system was started again. In accordance with the territorial distribution of Greek Catholics, two of today's 15 schools are located in villages, seven in small towns and six in big cities.

### **The mission of the Greek Catholic Church in the totalitarian era: the concept of culturally responsive pastoral work as a source of culturally responsive teaching**

The atmosphere of anti-clericalism and intimidation that prevailed during the totalitarian era is well exemplified by the fact that the bishop's office was occupied by two ÁVO<sup>47</sup> officers and he was allowed to act only under their mediation and with their consent. The bishop always carried a small suitcase with himself in case he was displaced unexpectedly.<sup>48</sup> Fear also pervaded the life of Catholic communities. Tomka gives a detailed account of the secret orders of the political police aimed at disturbing parish life.<sup>49</sup> They often organised spectacular counter-events to undermine community life in the church. One after the other, Catholic associations and groups, religious young people's last strongholds disintegrated, were dissolved or temporarily paralysed. This is what happened to the National Association of Hungarian Greek Catholics, the National Association of Catholic Young Men's Societies, the Hungarian Greek Catholic Students' Association and the Congregation of Mary. In

<sup>47</sup> They were employees of the Hungarian State Police State Protection Department (AVO), a special unit of the dreaded political police of communist dictatorship.

<sup>48</sup> György Janka, *A 100 éves Hajdúdorogi Egyházmegye története*.

<sup>49</sup> Ferenc Tomka, «Hitre nevelés az ateista diktatúrában», *Új ember* (April 2003): 8.

the 1940s the estimated membership of various Catholic organisations was around 900,000, but all of them were dissolved in 1946 and their leaders had to suffer persecution.<sup>50</sup>

## AN UNDERGROUND GREEK CATHOLIC SCHOOL

### Research Questions and Methods; Interpretational Framework

With all the above background in mind, it is justified to ask (1) whether the Greek Catholic Church's education activity was really suspended under the communist regime, and (2) what kind of pedagogical experience there is behind the church's apparent mission in the 2010s to undertake the task of running schools in settlements with a Gypsy majority. Our paper presents the first results of a research project which intends to prove that in spite of the ban the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church attempted to continue its educational activity during the totalitarian era. Written sources and oral history have revealed, however, that this was not done within the traditional institutional framework, but by creating an idiosyncratic type of «institution», using sacred spaces as spaces for education. In the first phase we searched for written sources, but as it is characteristic of a dictatorship to examine or annihilate all clerical documents, there were only very few original sources at our disposal.

The primary sources used in our research were remaining relevant documents from the Episcopal Archive of Nyíregyháza, Miklós Sója's original letters, lectures and sermons, and photos depicting the life of the Roma community in Hodász, as well as interviews with Gypsy parish members, priests serving in the locality and the one-time bishop's secretary. We also analysed a radio interview from that time, given by Miklós Sója to the official Hungarian state radio.

Having concluded that the Greek Catholic Church continued its educational activity after church-run schools were closed down and having found evidence of the existence of the school chapel, we moved on to our second research question which was about what methods the underground school applied to work successfully among Roma groups

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<sup>50</sup> Linda Marshalkó, *Görögkatolikus Egyház a kommunista diktatúra idején* (Budapest: Pázmány Péter Katolikus Egyetem 2005), 15.

whose integration into school and society is still unresolved in the most disadvantaged regions of the country. We made an in-depth analysis of our written and oral sources to find out about the methods of the work done in the Roma community, which was left out of compulsory state education. We have not come to an unambiguous conclusion, as the appropriate parochial education method was to be developed at the meeting point of different cultures, and a lot depended on church members' voluntariness and commitment. The activity had to be concealed from the regime's state security bodies, since the Hungarian Communist Party, referring to the principle of workers' unity, used all possible means to prevent the dissemination of clerical behaviour patterns.<sup>51</sup> The documents of the Second Vatican Council—fundamental in the Catholic Church—clearly emphasised the necessity of turning to marginalised groups but they did not specify any pedagogical approach that can make the mission successful.<sup>52</sup>

The answer to our first research question, i.e. whether the Greek Catholic Church's education activity was really suspended under the communist regime is definitely negative. The case revealed in our research leads us to the conclusion that there must have been further hidden schools operating.

What we have found out on the basis of our sources is that in in the Gypsy neighbourhood of a village called Hodász in a peripheral north-eastern county Greek Catholic priest Miklós Sója ran an unofficial school for Gypsies between 1948 and 1981, where he did a wide range of education work from teaching literacy to health education. His mission, which started on the ditch bank, was carried out in Gypsy church members' homes between 1941 and 1948, and after 1948 it was completed with teaching in the «Gypsy chapel» building.

Trying to establish the answer to our second research question, we reconstructed the pedagogical attitude that characterised the work done in the Greek Catholic school chapel. Our earlier research led us to the conclusion that a denominational school works most efficiently if there

<sup>51</sup> *Pápai Néplap*, 1 (20), (9 September 1945), 2.

<sup>52</sup> Stephen J. Denig and C. M. Anthony J. Dosen «The Mission of the Catholic School in the Pre-Vatican II Era (1810-1962) and the Post-Vatican II Era (1965-1995): Insights and Observation for the New Millennium», *Catholic Education*, 13 (2009): 136. Consulted on January 21, 2015.

is harmony between the culture of the families and school culture, which we attributed to the impact of social capital accessible through cohesive relationship networks.<sup>53</sup>

The question to be answered now was what happens when families' culture is very far from the values and norms necessary for doing well at school and from the values of the church such as future-oriented behaviour and making daily sacrifices for the sake of learning.

Several pedagogical trends have evolved to remove cultural inequalities in the classroom alongside the development programmes launched by educational politics, and solutions are still being searched for. Why do cultural differences pose problems at schools? Culture is an important element of a community's identity; it is through culture that individuals identify themselves and communities preserve themselves. A country's education institutions can react to the cultural and ethnic diversity of a given region in different manners, either by suppressing their identity or by keeping it untouched, but what the education system of the communist regime aspired to was uniformity.

As we have mentioned, most Greek Catholics live in the most disadvantaged regions of the country and come from unfavourable sociocultural milieus, where the proportion of the Roma population is high. In those areas there is still an unbridgeable gap between mainstream school culture and students' home culture, which gives rise to problems of acculturation or deculturation, and the usual way out of the pressure of double socialisation is attrition. After World War II, about 70-80% of Gypsies in Hungary lived separately from society in their slum-like neighbourhoods. Itinerant Gypsies lived in tents; those who were settled lived in adobe huts. Their dwellings were characterised by

lots of infectious diseases such as dysentery, typhoid fever and epidemic hepatitis owing to the lack of healthy drinking water and lavatories, and litter scattered all around.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Gabriella Pusztai, *Iskola és közösség. Felekezeti középiskolások az ezredfordulón* (Budapest: Gondolat, 2004), 247.

<sup>54</sup> István Kemény, Kálmán Rupp, Zsolt Csalog and Gábor Havas, «Beszámoló a magyarországi cigányok helyzetével foglalkozó, 1971-ben végzett kutatásról», in *Amikor nem volt tiszta víz a cigánytelepeken*, ed. Hajnáczy Tamás (Budapest: MTA Szociológiai Intézetének kiadványai, 1976), 24.

As a result of the impatient interventions on behalf of the state to civilise them, Gypsies were frequently humiliated: they were washed and disinfected by force. In 1961 János Kádár, Chairman of the Council of Ministers overtly stated that Gypsies were not a nationality, and the strengthening of their language and culture would prevent them from assimilating into society.<sup>55</sup>

As for their participation in education, 40% of the Roma population over 14 years of age have never gone to school.<sup>56</sup> In the late 1950s 27% of enrolled Gypsy students dropped out because of permanent absence, and 60% did not complete more than 6 years.<sup>57</sup> A 1971 survey found that only 9% of Roma pupils completed all the eight years of primary school. Even at the turn of the millennium the parents of 95% of Roma schoolchildren were virtually illiterate.<sup>58</sup>

When reconstructing the life of the Greek Catholic underground school, we learnt that people had gone there voluntarily and with pleasure. The efficiency of the education was proved not only by our written and oral sources but also by contemporary snapshots of school life and environment. Sója's «development programme» involved children, families and adults alike. The available data led us to the conclusion that the success was due to culturally responsive and adequate teaching.<sup>59</sup>

The most often used terms in educational anthropology in the 1980s to describe similar strategies were cultural congruence<sup>60</sup>, cultural

<sup>55</sup> János Kádár, «A cigánység helyzetének megjavításával kapcsolatos egyes feladatokról Az MSZMP KB Politikai Bizottságának határozata», in *A magyarországi cigánykérdés dokumentumokban 1422-1985*, ed. Mezey Barna (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1986), 240.

<sup>56</sup> «Bevezetés a magyarországi nemzeti közösségek társadalomtörténetébe», [http://kisebbsztudomany.ektf.hu/tananyag/22\\_ciganyokromk.html](http://kisebbsztudomany.ektf.hu/tananyag/22_ciganyokromk.html) (accessed January 19, 2015).

<sup>57</sup> Mihály Andor, *Romák és oktatás* (Budapest: Iskolakultúra, 2001), 18.

<sup>58</sup> Andor, *Romák és oktatás*, 18.

<sup>59</sup> Ágnes Boreczky, «Kultúraazonos pedagógia. A differenciáláson innen és túl», *Új Pedagógiai Szemle* (July-August 2000). Consulted on January 14, 2015.

<sup>60</sup> G. Mohatt and F. Erickson, «Cultural Differences in Teaching Styles in an Odawa Shool: A sociolinguistic approach», in *Culture and the Bilingual Classroom Ethnography* (Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1981), 105-119. Cf. Ágnes Boreczky «Kultúraazonos pedagógia. A differenciáláson innen és túl». Consulted on January 14, 2015.

appropriateness and responsiveness<sup>61</sup> and cultural compatibility.<sup>62</sup> The concept of culturally responsive teaching was introduced by Geneva Gay in 2000: our analysis focuses on the characteristics of an education method —used in a Roma ethnic community— that shows the most important features of culturally responsive teaching.

### **The Birth of the School Chapel. Miklós Sója's Work**

The underground school in the focus of our study was founded by Miklós Sója, «Educator», «Encourager» and «Teacher» (as he spoke of his role himself) of the Gypsy parish in Hodász, alongside his liturgical service as a parish priest, during the era of communist dictatorship and overt persecution of the churches. He was born on 18 May 1912 in Timár in the north-east of Hungary and studied theology in Budapest between 1932 and 1937. He was consecrated on 19 September 1937 by bishop István Miklósy in Nyíregyháza. He was a parochial vicar in Nyíregyháza from 1937 to 1941, then a substitute priest and later parish priest in Hodász. The Greek Catholic church allows married men to be ordained, and thus Miklós Sója was also a father of three. As László Lakatos, the bishop's secretary pointed out in an interview, Sója as a priest led an immaculate life, serving as an example to his fellow-priests. Lakatos added that he, as head of the clerical district, always treated his subordinates with fatherly love and helped them with their work, even to write their sermons.

According to written records, the first registry entry regarding the Gypsy population in the Greek Catholic parish of Hodász was made on 30 September 1830. In 1941, about one fifth of the villagers were Gypsies. They lived in shacks next to the animal burial ground. Sándor Lakatos, one of his former Gypsy pupils, remembered Sója describing their situation: «the time will come when people in church will put their

<sup>61</sup> Courtney B. Cazden and Hellen L. Leggett, «Culturally responsive education: Recommendations for achieving LAU remedies», in *Culture and the bilingual classroom. Studies in classroom ethnography*, ed. Henry T. Trueba, Grace Pung Guthrie and Kathryn Hu-Pei Au (Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1981), 69-86. Cf. Christian M. Dallavis, *Extending theories of culturally responsive pedagogy: an ethnographic examination of catholic schooling in an immigrant community in Chicago* (University of Michigan, 2002), 31.

<sup>62</sup> Cathie Jordan, «Cultural compatibility and the education of ethnic minority children», *Educational Research Quarterly*, 8 (4), (1984): 59-71.

Easter breads next to one another, no matter whether they are Gypsies or not, but now they are still kept apart by the acrid stink».<sup>63</sup>

Children from the Gypsy neighbourhood did not go to school. The members of the Gypsy parish were further struck by the fact that it was pastoral activity outside the church building that state policy, aimed at weakening the churches and limiting missionary work, was at its strictest.<sup>64</sup> In Szántó's view the communist party state looked upon small religious communities as its greatest enemies, since they were capable of deepening people's faith. They were also dangerous because they existed illegally, so they could not be controlled efficiently. This was confirmed by István Zolcsák, priest of the neighbouring village, in an interview:

Religious teachers and non-party members were permanently observed and summoned to the party headquarters if any suspicion of religious activity arose. Priests were harassed if they were reported by informers to have violated the state's interests with their words. Schoolteachers made every effort to keep children away from church and to put an end to religious traditions such as Christmas carolling or nativity plays. They were eager to organise school events at the time of the Divine Liturgy.<sup>65</sup>

Zolcsák added that party members were forbidden to go to church, and non-party members were put under severe pressure at work if they turned out to be churchgoers. Éva Juhász quotes Miklós Sója's son as saying in an interview that political leaders always caused more trouble to the priest engaged in the Gypsy mission than Gypsies themselves did.

Once he was summoned by the authorities to appear at their headquarters the next morning, equipped with food for three days, because the State Protection Authority (ÁVH) intended to question him about the Gypsies. The evening before that day he once more visited the Gypsy community to celebrate a farewell mass, and told the people he might not come anymore because of what would happen. The next morning crowds of Gypsies

<sup>63</sup> Miklós Sója, «Cigány híveink katekézisének problémái és lehetőségei», in *Útkeresők*, ed. Éva Juhász (Nyíregyháza: Görögkatolikus Püspöki Levéltár és a Sója Miklós Alapítvány, 1979), 24.

<sup>64</sup> Szántó, *A kommunizmusnak sem sikerült* (Miskolc: Új Misszió Alapítvány, 1992), 18.

<sup>65</sup> Zolcsák, personal interview (made 21 April 2015).

gathered in front of the building to stand up for their priest. Officials told him «Reverend, please disperse the crowd and we'll not harass you anymore».<sup>66</sup>

Similar incidents were mentioned by Sója's one-time pupil in an interview: «The father was taken to Nyíregyháza (the county seat) by the authorities, because they could not understand what he was doing among the Gypsies». He replied, «If I am guilty of giving books and guitars in Gypsies' hands to teach them to pray, read and sing, then I do plead guilty». In spite of the promise, harassment continued because of his intensive community life with the Gypsies. At their request, he carried on with his pastoral and educational work even in the face of threats.

As Sándor Lakatos summarised his activity, «Miklós Sója was such a father who appeared as a teacher and educator among a nomadic people that was so poor that they could not even bury their dead».<sup>67</sup>

Next, we will look at how Sója's service can be described with the paradigm of culturally responsive teaching. We based our approach of Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices on Aceves and Orosco's studies.<sup>68</sup>

The following aspects of culturally responsive teaching practices were identified in the priest's educational practice: Social Justice, Instructional Engagement, Culture-Language and Racial Identity, High Expectations and Critical Thinking.<sup>69</sup>

We will analyse both his personality and the methodology he applied from the perspective of culturally responsive teaching.

Aceves and Orosco emphasise that culturally responsive include some strong and important social-justice component. Sója recognised that although the ideology of communist dictatorship proclaimed equality, Gypsies were marginalised by society and remained illiterate and uneducated. His basic educational principle —similar to that of culturally

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<sup>66</sup> Éva Juhász, «Elsők között a pasztorációban – in memoriam Sója Miklós (1912-1996)», in *Együtt az Isten tenyerén*, ed. Éva Juhász (Nyíregyháza: Hajdúdorogi Egyházmegye, 2013), 4.

<sup>67</sup> Sándor Lakatos, personal interview, May 15, 2015.

<sup>68</sup> Terese C. Aceves and Michael J. Orosco, «Culturally Responsive Teaching», *CEEDAR Document*, n.º IC-2 (2014), 7.

<sup>69</sup> Aceves and Orosco, «Culturally Responsive Teaching», 7.



responsive teaching— was that students' educational environment should be in harmony with their home environment so that they can acquire the basic skills and knowledge according to the logic of their own culture. Later on they will be able to apply these skills in other environments as well. Having realised that Gypsies were unable to persist in state schools owing to their lifestyle, customs and poverty, he created a learning environment for them near their own homes. The location was «under the stars» in the beginning, but later, mainly because of the ever increasing threat from outside, they moved into the chapel, where several generations had access to cultural goods. Béla Mosolygó, Sója's successor in Hodász said the following in an interview: «the chapel had a double function as the house of prayer and a school for adults, where even the old learnt how to read and write».

He started his educational work by creating the atmosphere of trust resulting from being together, which is another cornerstone of this pedagogical approach. Scarcella called attention to the fact that teachers should try to understand their own behavior and their student's behaviors to avoid stereotyping.<sup>70</sup> As a priest and teacher who looked upon Gypsies as God's creatures Sója was capable of this attitude. According to Martin a culturally responsive teacher has to recognise the differences between their own and their students' value systems and modify their teaching strategies accordingly.<sup>71</sup> Sója was able to develop his teaching strategy by first mixing with Gypsies very intensively to become familiar with their way of thinking, value preferences and norms of behaviour. Nieto and Bode point out that marginalised groups, as part of their culture, have their own, non-mainstream interpretation of the nature and causes of social inequality and the mechanisms of how society is organised and what the most desirable goals of life are.<sup>72</sup> «Having got to know these elements of the Gypsy way of thinking, he did not want to change these people but help them», Lakatos said, adding that «he did not ask questions

<sup>70</sup> Robin Scarcella, *Teaching Language Minority Students in Multicultural Classroom* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall Regent, 1990), cf. Brenda Martin, *Culturally Responsive Teaching* (EDEL/EDSE 501, 1997), 10.

<sup>71</sup> Martin, *Culturally Responsive Teaching*, 18.

<sup>72</sup> Sonia Nieto and Patty Bode, «School reform and student learning: A multicultural perspective», in *Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives*, eds. J. A. Banks and C. A. McGee Banks (Hoboken: Wiley and Sons, 2012), 395-415.

when confronted with their misery». As among Mexican Americans, it is family, community and ethnic identity that form the core of social relations and mutual trust among Gypsies in Hungary.<sup>73</sup> Accepting the dominant nature of family relationships among Gypsies in Hodász, Sója adapted to their social norms during his work and assumed the role of brother to them.

In order to descend to the depths of the Gypsy spirit, first I had to win them over. It was not at the altar or on the pulpit that I achieved that... I mingled with them, took all their troubles on my shoulders and was sincerely helpful to them in their difficulties.<sup>74</sup>

To establish even greater trust, he gave them help with their everyday life. Sándor Lakatos remembers Sója «saying that he would lift people up from misery, which is what is meant by development today». The next evidence for culturally responsive teaching is High Expectation. Not only did he firmly believe but he also let Gypsies know that marginalised people were also valuable individuals whose lives had a higher purpose. He explained that the only thing to do was to change their objective circumstances and opportunities in order to achieve their goals. That was why he decided to take Gypsy people's everyday problems on his shoulders to clear the way from at least part of the fundamental objective obstacles. It was especially the scarcity of material goods and office transactions that gave him the most work. Development programmes usually stop at this level of assistance, although they will never achieve their goals without presenting an alternative interpretation of society based on expectations, opportunities and objectives.

In the concept of culturally responsive teaching the teacher's Problem Solving Approach has a central role. Birdsell, Matsui and Solispoint out that the teacher has to always try to be open-minded and flexible to be able to meet the individual needs of each student, and avoid too heavily

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<sup>73</sup> Alfredo Castañeda, «The Educational Needs of Mexican Americans», in *The Educational Needs of Minority Groups* (Lincoln, NE: Professional Educators, 1974), 27-84.

<sup>74</sup> Miklós Sója, «Lelkipásztor a cigányok között», in *Küldetésben*, ed. Korzenszky (Miskolc: Teologia, 1987), 287-288.

on 'what ought to be.<sup>75</sup> Sója's service among Gypsies was characterised by a similarly flexible problem-solving approach.

He was there when

there was a petition to be written to the prison, some stationery had to be bought for schoolchildren, a building permit had to be obtained, a sick person needed medicine or a dead person, who often lay naked in the coffin, had to be dressed.<sup>76</sup>

Sándor Lakatos also remembers him arriving on his green bike. He says that Sója taught them a lot of things, such as eating with cutlery, that were supposed to have been taught by their parents. As an educator he realised that if he builds on the existing strong foundations of collective solidarity rather than individualism and competitiveness typical of mainstream schools, he can create the atmosphere of cooperativity. Their daily meetings were called «signing up», when the priest wrote in a notebook what each of them most needed. One of his former pupils recalled the «footnotebook», where the outline of every Gypsy's feet was drawn so that he could get them shoes. The purpose of their conversations was to strengthen their cultural identity. At the end, they always sang a Gypsy folk song with the priest singing along, so that they would be proud of being familiar with their own culture and regard it, compared to other cultures, as an equally viable system of behaviour.

One of the cornerstones of efficient culturally responsive teaching is the question of cultural identity. Sója realised that the core of Gypsy culture is their attachment to religion, which the school system of the party state just wished to eradicate from people's lives. He also noticed very soon that the Roma people of his parish were religious in a way that was different from other Hungarians' faith.

As Smith and Dallavis put it what somebody thinks about religion is really central to what he/she thinks about life and the universe as a whole

<sup>75</sup> Jo Birdsell, Bruce Matsui and Carol Solis, *Meeting the Needs of LEP Students California School Leadership Academy*. Los Angeles: LA County Office of Education, 1992), 27-57, cf. Martin, *Culturally Responsive Teaching*, 16.

<sup>76</sup> Éva Juhász, «Elsők között a pasztorációban – in memoriam Sója Miklós (1912-1996)», in *Együtt az Isten tenyerén*, ed. Éva Juhász (Nyíregyháza, Hajdúdorogi Egyházmegye, 2013), 5.

and for these people, religion provides that the key to the meaning that one can find in his/her existence.<sup>77</sup>

Sója's education programme looked upon Gypsies' religious faith as a resource, realising that it is a suitable channel for conveying norms that can promote their social integration.

The candies and ribbons I used to win them over with as children, have transformed into a close spiritual bond with the church, which is now their source of pride and delight.<sup>78</sup>

As Gerlóczy points out in his analysis of Gypsies' faith in God, there is no dogmatic Gypsy religion, but there are several types of Gypsy popular religion that bear traces of what they have incorporated from their surroundings throughout their history.<sup>79</sup> Sója emphasises in his writings (1988) that Gypsies' religion is strongly permeated by the fear of God and the cult of Mary, which connects them to Máriapócs, the spiritual centre of Greek Catholicism with the icon of Mary shedding tears, a symbol they can easily grasp. Gerlóczy states it is generally believed that Roma people's faith in Mary is even stronger than their attachment to Jesus.<sup>80</sup> They pray to Jesus so that he can obtain some help to them from Mary. The author presumes this might go back to the traditional problem-solving role of Gypsy women. Studying Roma people's school careers in Hungary, several researchers have registered a similar dynamising role of women.<sup>81</sup> Sója gave high priority to Gypsies being able to pray in their mother tongue, so he gradually introduced Roma-language prayers. It was in a number of steps that Racial Identity and consciousness was developed in the community with his help. First only a few hymns were

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<sup>77</sup> Willfred Cantwell Smith, *The meaning and the end of religion: New approach to the religious traditions of mankind* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1991), 98-137; cf. Christian M. Dallavis, *Extending theories of culturally responsive pedagogy: an ethnographic examination of catholic schooling in an immigrant community in Chicago*. Ph.D., University of Michigan, 2008.

<sup>78</sup> Miklós Sója, «Cigány híveink katekizésének problémái és lehetőségei», in *Útkeresők*, ed. Éva Juhász (Nyíregyháza: Görögkatolikus Püspöki Levéltár és a Sója Miklós Alapítvány, 1979), 21.

<sup>79</sup> Ferenc Gerlóczy, «Roma katolikusok. A cigányság és vallásosság», *Heti Világgazdaság*, 23 (2001): 81-84; <http://www.gerlo.hu/gerloczy/romavall.html> (accessed January 17, 2015).

<sup>80</sup> Gerlóczy, «Roma katolikusok. A cigányság és vallásosság».

<sup>81</sup> Katalin Forray, «A cigányság oktatásának egyes kérdései Európában», *Magyar Pedagógia*, 98 (1998): 3-16.

sung in Romani, then the entire liturgy was performed in their language<sup>82</sup> after Sója himself translated the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom. Before the wooden church building was completed in 1948, church services were held on the ditch bank or at Gypsy families'. Gypsies in Hodász learnt to read with the help of liturgical hymns and Gospel texts. Erickson and Borecky highlight that education becomes successful if the language and communication used at school is somehow connected to the given community's and families' linguistic and communication patterns.<sup>83</sup> It was a well-devised step on Sója's part to teach literacy to the members of his parish through their religious faith, incorporating their own language into the holy texts.

When the first Romani-language prayer was said in what was to be their church later, this is how the people there reacted:

the way the Romani language entered the liturgy was so beautiful and moving as if we ourselves had entered a royal palace dressed as a king.<sup>84</sup>

Sója remembers the first time Romani hymns had been sung:

There were even tears in their eyes. What they had in mind—as they later told me—was that their language was despised as the language of swearing and vulgarity by Hungarians and themselves alike, and, behold, it was a language that could be used to celebrate the liturgy.<sup>85</sup>

The first person to pass the reading test was a young woman called Zági, who learnt to read as an adult. Her exam task was to read out the Gospel in church.

<sup>82</sup> Regarding language use, Roma people in Hungary can be classified into several groups. By the late 20<sup>th</sup> century the majority's native language was Hungarian. Still, there are some groups that speak a Romani vernacular alongside Hungarian, while others use the language of one of their former homelands as well as Hungarian.

<sup>83</sup> Frederick Erickson, «Transformation and school success. The politics and culture of educational achievement», *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 18 (1987): 335-356; cf. Ágnes Boreczky, «Kultúraazonos pedagógia – A differenciáláson innen és túl». Consulted on January 14, 2015.

<sup>84</sup> Miklós Sója, «Lelkipásztor a cigányok között», 295.

<sup>85</sup> Miklós Sója, «Lelkipásztor a cigányok között», 295.

The next step of the implementation of culturally responsive teaching was to help Gypsies have their own collective space which was suitable for not only performing the Divine Liturgy but also for educational purposes adequate to the identity of the community. Miklós Sója was absolutely aware of their miserable poverty and the constant humiliation, the disdainful and prejudiced treatment they had to experience from their peer group and adults alike, which kept them away from the social context of state education fostering uniformity, and left them feeling

as if they were the meanest people in the world, who deserved only contempt and avoidance. They all suffered from depressing inferiority complexes, and no matter what offence or abuse they faced, they were unable to express any self-confidence and self-awareness by uttering the sentence: I object.<sup>86</sup>

Overwhelmed with this painful inferiority complex they did not only keep away from school but they did not dare to go to the village church and sit next to Hungarians there, either. Urged by his Gypsy parish members, Miklós Sója turned to bishop Miklós Dudás regarding the issue of the Gypsy chapel in Hodász on 15 July 1948. He asked for his permission to hold regular masses and other church services in the empty and vacant 6 or 7-year-old house, which was in a perfect condition and was intended to be bought by the Gypsy community.

In the letter he wrote at the Gypsies' request, Sója, using current communist terminology and argumentation, emphasised that «this would not mean the separation of the masses on any grounds of ethnicity or social disadvantage, which is contrary to real democratic spirit».<sup>87</sup>

He argued that this would be the only way for the underdeveloped masses to catch up with «more civilised communities, who lived a moral and spiritual life».<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Miklós Sója, «Cigány híveink katekézisének problémái és lehetőségei», in 30.

<sup>87</sup> Correspondance between Dudás bishop and Miklós Sója about the ordination of a chapel (Archive of the Eparchy of Hajdúdorog, 2212 ltsz).

<sup>88</sup> Correspondance between Dudás bishop and Miklós Sója about the ordination of a chapel (Archive of the Eparchy of Hajdúdorog, 2212 ltsz).

In the third and fourth parts of his letter he elaborated on the fact that the chapel would not only serve Gypsies' interests but it would also be open to other poor people in the neighbourhood. He reminded that his non-Gypsy parish members were also delighted to participate in great numbers in Gypsies' rosary prayers or other forms of worship on the ditch bank. In his response of 19 July 1948, bishop Miklós Dudás gave his permission to hold church services in the chapel «for the people of the neighbourhood, regardless of ethnicity».<sup>89</sup>

On 9 August 1948 Ferenc Karosi, dean of the Hodász parish, after surveying the location, confirmed in his report submitted to the bishop that the house to be purchased was suitable for holding masses. He also added that he found masses in the house necessary because there were over 200 Greek Catholic people in the neighbourhood

who, lacking proper clothing, were unable to attend masses at church, but they would do so in their own surroundings. In this way, the priest would have an opportunity to convalidate their marriages.<sup>90</sup>

On 27 August Sója already reported to the bishop on the preparation details of the consecration of the chapel in September.

Choosing the patron saint of the chapel was an important milestone on the way to culturally responsive teaching. Miklós Sója realised that the question of Gypsy girls' chastity was a crucial one, as it was a general tendency in the Roma population for school-age minors to have children out of wedlock, which only led to young girls' dropping out of school and the next generation's financial uncertainty and disordered family relations. Sója won the bishop's approval for choosing Maria Goretti as patron saint, who was canonised in 1950 as the patroness of female chastity. Although it is alien to Greek Catholic tradition to choose a Roman Catholic patron saint, Sója's priority was that the Gypsy community should think of her as their own. The introduction of the cult of a saint who was the symbol of female chastity threw a new light on their prevailing behaviour patterns.

<sup>89</sup> Correspondance between Dudás bishop and Miklós Sója about the ordination of a chapel (Archive of the Eparchy of Hajdúdorog, 2212 ltsz).

<sup>90</sup> Correspondance between Dudas bishop and the dean of the region, Karosi (Archive of the Eparchy of Hajdúdorog, 2212 ltsz).

It was a significant step towards one of the key elements of culturally responsive teaching, which, as Aceves and Orosco put it, teaches «how to become critical thinkers by integrating their cultural and linguistic experiences involving higher order thinking and inquiry».<sup>91</sup>

Minority students' conditions for learning are favourable if they experience that the atmosphere of teaching is consistent with their style and culture of learning, and the teachers' style of teaching is consistent with their culture and family background.<sup>92</sup> The introduction of the Romani-language Liturgy was an organic part of Sója's teaching activity. It was also aimed at maintaining Gypsy culture and identity, and it was into this culturally appropriate liturgical space that he placed the space of education.

When describing the chapel, Sója stressed that there was only one altarpiece for one and a half decades after the consecration, and the surrounding walls were full of wooden alphabet boards donated to the parish by a local couple, both teachers.<sup>93</sup> The boards displayed printed small-case letters, written capital letters and there were some summarising boards as well.

Sója remembers that «there was a black pointing stick lying at the bottom of the wall, with the help of which all the letters could be reached».<sup>94</sup> He puts his experience into the following words:

Mary, patroness of the country, did not reign, perhaps for the first time in two thousand years, among the angels but among the letters «i» and «a», which, rather than lift her royal throne, lifted the Gypsies, these people coming from the stables, to the throne of human dignity.<sup>95</sup>

The learning environment was really motivating for Gypsy people, and it was not only because a lot of their problems were addressed, but

<sup>91</sup> Aceves and Orosco, «Culturally Responsive Teaching», 11.

<sup>92</sup> James A. Banks, *Integrating the Curriculum with Ethnic Content*, in *Multicultural Education* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1989), 189-207; cf. Boreczky, «Kultúraazonos pedagógia – A differenciáláson innen és túl». Consulted on 14 January 2015.

<sup>93</sup> Miklós Sója, in Éva Juhász, *Sója Miklós öröksége Hodászon* (Debrecen, 2003), 15.

<sup>94</sup> Miklós Sója, in Juhász, *Sója Miklós öröksége Hodászon*, 14.

<sup>95</sup> Miklós Sója, in Juhász, *Sója Miklós öröksége Hodászon*, 12.



also because they were reminded of their precious culture and human dignity. This is how their Instructional Engagement was realised. Orosco and O'Connor observe how efficient it is if instructional engagement approaches, such as some connection between student's cultural and linguistic knowledge and lessons are used during the teaching of reading and writing.<sup>96</sup> Thanks to his friendship with the headmaster of the village school, Sója acquired school desks and a big blackboard for the chapel. Later on, owing to the growing interest, one of the schoolteachers helped out from time to time to teach literacy to adults.

Apart from being the venue of education, the chapel also housed a library for Gypsies opposite the iconostas. As his former pupil recalls, Sója was even held accountable by the authorities as to how he dared to found a library for Gypsies.

He also mentions that Sója did not mind the books becoming greasy or getting lost, because it meant at least one Gypsy child had been reading them. At first the library contained only religious books, but by visiting publishers one after the other and asking them for donations, he increased the collection to several hundreds of volumes.

In 1987 he wrote:

I found it worthwhile to flood them with books by the basketful hoping that if only one of them read one and developed a liking to books, the sacrifice would yield a substantial return.<sup>97</sup>

And the chapel had even more to offer. The Gypsy community, the culture of which was based on oral tradition and personal contacts, was open to simple school plays. Sója prepared them to stage self-written Romani-language plays. He is said to have had the costumes sewn himself so that they could perform a play on the life of the Indian politician Indira Ghandi, who even received favourable judgement from official party state opinion.

Another play was about Gypsies' heroism in Hungary's war of independence in the eighteenth century, written with healthy but

<sup>96</sup> Aceves and Orosco, «Culturally Responsive Teaching», 29.

<sup>97</sup> Miklós Sója, «Lelkipásztor a cigányok között», 297.

affectionate humour, which disclosed Gypsies' characteristic weaknesses. This approach had a positive effect on their self-critical thinking and helped them «view this knowledge as capital to build upon rather than as a barrier to learning».<sup>98</sup>

During our research we attempted to map the influence of Sója's work in Hodász to find out whether it was a unique educational experiment in the Greek Catholic Church during the era of dictatorship. Sója's successor, Béla Mosolygó, founded a folk high school in the village to promote Gypsies' learning. Next to the chapel, which is still in use, a new community centre was consecrated in 1995 by Gábor Gelsei, later parish priest. It houses several development programmes even today. Quite a few Gypsies from the neighbourhood completed their primary education or acquired a vocational qualification there. In 2000 the Saint Elijah Nursing Home was established, which also includes a temporary home for crisis-stricken families. Mostly local skilled Gypsy workers were employed for the construction. There was an after-school educational development programme running between 2006 and 2009 with the help of volunteers, teachers, priests, theologians and college students, helping yet a further generation of Gypsy children achieve better at school. Besides, the Greek Catholic Church runs a kindergarten called «Angels' Garden» and a social care network to cater for its members in Hodász. After a lot of difficulties, a Gypsy parish was founded in the neighbouring village of Kántorjánosi, too, as it was recalled by its priest István Zolcsák in an interview: «It was so moving to see elderly Gypsies get married in church and adults receive their first Communion». Following the example of Hodász, they first gathered to pray in homes, and later, on the local Gypsy community's initiative, a new church was built for them. This is how Zolcsák describes the atmosphere of the Gypsy church:

They regarded it as their own home. They could sing, pray, receive guests and study with great enthusiasm there. They no longer felt they were on sufferance. They could spend unlimited time in church, as long as they wished. It also warned them of their duties, namely the maintenance and cleaning of the church.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Aceves and Orosco, «Culturally Responsive Teaching», 7.

<sup>99</sup> Zolcsák, personal interview with the author (May 17, 2015).

Influenced by all the above activities they gradually adopted a different view on the upbringing of the next generations. Since then, a school whose mission is to provide support to Gypsy children on the basis of culturally responsive teaching, has been named after Miklós Sója.

## SUMMARY

Our study focused on the role of the churches in education during the decades of communist dictatorship. The narrowing scope of both formal and informal education did not only become manifest in the drastic cut in the size of the denominational school system but also in the general repressive atmosphere and the pressure of political control. Eastern and Central Europe underwent secularisation imposed on the people by force under the influence of party-state dictatorships. The phenomenon was spectacularly reflected by statistics on religious practice in the 1970s. In Hungary, denominational education was seemingly successfully restricted to ten secondary schools, but after the political transformation in 1989, there was enormous social demand for the services of church-run schools, and, consequently, the number and proportion of denominational schools are still on the increase a quarter of a century after the fall of the totalitarian system.

Our first research question was whether the churches that were deprived of all their education institutions gave up their educational activity entirely. Our first results showed that it was not given up but continued underground. The Greek Catholic Church, which is concentrated in the most disadvantaged regions of Hungary, was engaged in the education of Gypsy/Roma people in one of the villages. Having been shown behaviour patterns that promote school career, those who were marginalised from the mainstream of society and left out of the official school system were given the chance to experience successful learning.

Our second research question was what methods the underground school applied to work successfully among Roma groups whose integration into school and society is still unresolved in the most disadvantaged regions of the country. We undertook the reconstruction of this pedagogical approach with the help of archive documents, memoirs and oral history resources. We pointed out that the educational concept and working methods implemented in the Gypsy settlement between

1941 and 1981 displayed features of what was later defined as culturally responsive teaching.

We identified five main dimensions of culturally responsive teaching during the study of priest and teacher Miklós Sója's school chapel. The strength of the concept lay in its emerging from the triangle of Gypsy/Roma identity, the educational principles of the Greek Catholic Church and those of school education. Supporting one another, these three pillars combined to form a system. We assume that similar schools may have been run by the priests or ministers of other denominations in other places, even if few of the clergy dared to defy the totalitarian system in this respect. The regime, which showed no mercy when it came to punishing priests who organised small youth communities, tolerated Miklós Sója's work with Gypsies living under substandard conditions, because it found it hopeless to integrate them from their segregation and deep poverty into society, and had long since given up on this group. Research on the history of education cannot ignore this phenomenon, as it is also an evidence of the hypocrisy of the education system of the party state, which is grounded in Marxist ideology and the proclamation of equality. Our findings are also relevant to the fact that Greek Catholic education, while it was forced to be officially suspended during the communist dictatorship, by developing educational concepts and practices during its work with Gypsies on the periphery of society, was able to prepare for the role it would play in its twenty first century schools founded right in the middle of Gypsy settlements or in areas with a sizeable Gypsy population. ■

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