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A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE? THE BIBLE ON VIOLENCE, SUFFERING, AND HOPE

JOSEPH VERHEYDEN¹

Abstract. The essay explores the troubling yet central role of violence in the Bible. First, it outlines how violence appears across biblical narratives – ranging from personal to mass violence, both physical and psychological, and often with divine involvement. Four analytical axes are proposed: the phenomenology of violence, its spatial dimensions (human, divine, satanic), the agents/victims involved (including divine actors), and its ethical justifications or theological explanations. Special attention is given to the Book of Revelation. Its interpretations vary – from metaphorical and redemptive readings to critical and feminist critiques that view its message as tyrannical or dangerous. Despite its disturbing elements, Revelation is ultimately framed within the Christian drama of Christ’s sacrificial death, cosmic salvation, and eschatological hope.

Keywords: biblical violence, divine justice, theodicy, Revelation, apocalyptic literature, sacred texts and war, soteriology, eschatology.

It was in October 2006 that I first visited the Babeş-Bolyai University, the Faculty of Roman Catholic Theology in Cluj. I had passed by the city long before, in 1979, when traveling by train to Bucharest from Vienna. In 2006 I had been invited to give a lecture and to get to know the Centre for Biblical Studies in Cluj that had opened not long before. As it happened, my visit coincided with that of another New Testament scholar. Ulrich Luz, of the University of Bern, received an honorary doctorate from the Babeş-Bolyai University at the proposal of the

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This paper is a slightly revised version of the speech held on November 21, 2024, upon the conferral of an honorary doctorate from the Babeş-Bolyai University on the proposal of the Faculty of Roman Catholic Theology and the Centre for Biblical Studies.

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Faculty of Orthodox Theology. I was fortunate to attend the session without even dreaming that this honour would one day be bestowed upon me as well. Later on I returned to Cluj more than once for conferences and for meetings in the Centre for Biblical Studies. Some may consider the topic of my lecture perhaps rather inappropriate or at least unusual for this festive occasion. I do not think of myself as a violent man. The choice of my topic was inspired by that of the international colloquium that was held here in June which for health reasons I was forced to attend online.²

Books (like people) come with expectations. Sacred books come with high expectations about the message they bring and the characters that feature in it. It should then not be a surprise that so many – both faithful readers of such books who try to live by the rules and message they contain and those who are only vaguely familiar with their contents – are puzzled, or actually deeply troubled, by the fact that books considered to be sacred contain so many stories of utter violence. This is true for the Jewish and for the Christian Bible, but also for the Qur'an³ and for the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, the two great epics in Hindu

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- 2 *The Reception of Violent Biblical Texts Within and Beyond the Canon*, 26–28 June 2024, (WUNT), edited by Tobias NICKLAS – Dariya SYROID – Taras TYMO – Korinna ZAMFIR, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, forthcoming.
 - 3 See, by way of example, the famous Surat 47 (“Muhammad”), a most polemical text that is probably put together from different traditions. In Surat 47.4 scholars have read the call of the prophet mercilessly to massacre the unbelieving Meccans and in 47.35 a critique of those partisans of the prophet who looked for ways to appease the situation after the victory at Badr. For a short comment, see Paul NEUKIRCHEN, “Sourate 47 Muhammad (Muhammad)”, in Mohammad Ali AMIR-MOEZZI – Guillaume DYE (eds.), *Le Coran des historiens. III. Commentaire et analyse du texte coranique. Sourates 27 à 114*, Paris: Cerf, 2019, 1499–1509. From a (mostly) socio-political perspective, Donald HOLBROOK, “Using the Qu’ran to Justify Terrorist Violence: Analysing Selective Applications of the Qu’ran in English-Language Militant Islamist Discourse”, *Perspectives on Terrorism* 4 (2010) 15–28; Shannon DUNN – Rosemary B. KELLISON, “At the Intersection of Scripture and Law: Qu’ran 4:34 and Violence against Women”, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 26 (2010) 11–36; Hakan CORUH, “Refuting the Extremist Interpretations of the Text and the Prophetic Traditions: The Case of Qu’ran 2:256”, in Fethi MANSOURI – Zuleyha KESKIN (eds.), *Contesting the Theological Foundations of Islamism and Violent Extremism* (Middle East Today), London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, 35–51; Marc-Antoine PÉROSUE DE MONTCLOS – Camille NOÛS, “Écoles coraniques, djihad et violence ‘terroriste’ dans le nord du Nigeria”, *Cultures & Conflits* 117 (2020) 97–114; Kübra ÖZCAN, “Hermeneutical

tradition that both contain long sections about endless wars, in the former of the two a war between cousins.⁴ The presence of violent scenes and characters in sacred books has led some to conclude that violence is inherent to such literature and can best be countered by simply excluding such passages from these books.⁵ Limiting myself to the Christian Bible in what follows I will touch upon three aspects.

Defining violence

A complete library has been written on the topic of violence in the Bible, but only fairly recently biblical scholars have turned to other relevant disciplines to help define the notion of “violence”. In surveying the biblical evidence one is, I think, on the one hand, entitled to stretch the range of what qualifies as violent actions as broad as possible, in order not to underestimate its role in the book, and on the other, compelled to distinguish between several axes or levels on which violence is played out, in order to bring some structure in the amount of evidence that can be cited. Four such axes and their interaction should be mentioned.

A first way to organise the evidence is to construct a phenomenology of violence. The Bible tells of all sorts of violence. It speaks of historically

and Exegetical Approaches to the Concepts of Peace and Violence in the Qu’ran”, in Nina KÄSEHAGE (ed.), *Keeping Peace in Troubled Times: Perspectives from Different Disciplines on War and Peace* (Contributions to International Relations), Cham: Springer, 2024, 87–98.

- 4 Cf. Tamar C. REICH, “Sacrificial Violence and Textual Battles: Intertextual Interpretation in the Sanskrit Mahabharata”, *History of Religions* 41 (2001) 142–169; Steven J. ROSEN (ed.), *Holy War: Violence and the Bhagavad Gita*, Hampton: Deepak, 2002; Raj BALKARAN – Walter A. DORN, “Violence in the ‘Valmiki Ramayana’: Just War Criteria in an Ancient Indian Epic”, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80 (2012) 659–690; Simon BRODBECK, “Violence and Peace in the Mahabharata and Ramayana,” in Maria POWER – Helen PAYNTER (eds.), *Violence and Peace in Sacred Texts: Interreligious Perspectives*, Cham: Springer, 2023, 9–28. Note also the connection with contemporary history in Roshni SENGUPTA, “Iconography of Violence in Televised Hinduism: The Politics of Images in the Mahabharata”, *Continuum* 31 (2017) 150–161.
- 5 See the argument in Jack NELSON-PALLMEYER, *Is Religion Killing Us? Violence in the Bible and the Qu’ran*, London: Continuum, 2005. The book was received with mixed feelings, as one can imagine.

documented events,⁶ (perceived) forms of violent acts,⁷ and imagined or

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- 6 Not necessarily as an historian would do. To mention just a few examples: The conquest of the Land of Israel did not happen in every respect as described in the Old Testament, but traces of the conflicts that it caused are met in the Mesha stone inscription (ca. 830 BCE) that begins with a reference by King Mesha (named in 2 Kings 3,4-5) on how he settled the power struggle with his Moabite kingdom in his favour; English translation in James B. PRITCHARD (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, ³1969, 320. The Assyrian king Sargon II (721–705) calls himself “conqueror of Samaria (*Sa-mir-i-na*) and of the entire (country) of Israel (*bit-hu-um-ri-a*)” (ibid., 284; cf. the reference to the conquest of Ashdod in Isa 20,1) and Sennacherib’s campaign against Hezekiah is related in some detail in his so-called Annals (ibid., 287–288; 2 Kings 18,13-37). Critical scholarship generally takes Luke 21,20-24 as a clear reference to the siege and destruction of Jerusalem during the first Jewish War.
- 7 The difficulty often is how to evaluate ancient texts speaking of persecution or other forms of harassment. There obviously were tensions between Jews and Christians in the first decades (and later), but it is not necessary to take all such passages at face value. Christian authors certainly also exploited the tensions in their favour, using them polemically. This is true of later authors (think of the famous debate about fact and fiction in Christian martyrdom texts) and no doubt also of first- or second-generation ones. Passages such as Matt 5,10-12 or 23,31-36 document these tensions, but also have “coloured” them. On the earliest references to “persecution” of Christians, see, e.g., Douglas R.A. HARE, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel according to Matthew* (SNTS MS, 6), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967; Schuyler BROWN, *Apostasy and Perseverance in the Theology of Luke* (AnBib 36), Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1969. On persecution and Christian martyrdom in the first centuries, see G.E.M. DE STE. CROIX, *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom and Orthodoxy*, eds. Joseph STREETER – Michael WHITBY, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006; Min Seok SHIN, *The Great Persecution: a Historical Re-examination* (Studia antiqua australiensia 8), Turnhout: Brepols, 2018; Daniel PHILPOTT – Timothy Samuel SHAH (eds.), *Under Caesar’s Sword: How Christians Respond to Persecution*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018; Aaltje HIDDING, *The Era of the Martyrs: Remembering the Great Persecution in Late Antique Egypt* (Millennium-Studien 87), Berlin – Boston: de Gruyter, 2020. For a deconstructionalist approach to the persecutions, see Candida R. Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom: Diverse Practices, Theologies and Traditions*, New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2012; Ead., *The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom*, New York: HarperOne, 2013. Later on, Christians themselves became persecutors of their own (dissident) members: one thinks above all of the “crusades” against the Cathars, but other groups were also targeted: see, e.g., Carl

“believed” ones.⁸ It mentions physical and psychological suffering, lethal and remediable acts, intended or gratuitous and occasional or systemic forms of violence, premeditated actions and emotional outbursts causing harm, material and human losses, and mass violence and personal sorrow. And it speaks of all of these types of violence in literal and in metaphorical ways, using a plethora of images and highly rhetorical language, including verbal abuse, negative stereotyping and mere slander. It would lead too far to cite illustrations for all of these types, but a couple of well-chosen examples may perhaps give an idea of what is found in biblical texts.

Murder is no doubt the most cruel violent act. The Bible contains, in the very first chapters, one of the most infamous cases of fratricide – Cain killing his

DIXON, *The Paulicians: Heresy, Persecution, and Warfare on the Byzantine Frontier, c. 750-880* (The Medieval Mediterranean 132), Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2022. Persecution and the acts of violence that come with it is a phenomenon of all ages and is as present today as it was in earlier times. For a truly encompassing survey, see the old but in some respect still readable book by Samuel CHANDLER, *The History of Persecution from the Patriarchal Age to the Reign of George II*. New edition by Charles ATMORE, Hull: [printed for the editor and J. Craggs], 1813. Cf. Christian GERLACH (ed.), *On the Social History of Persecution*, Munich: Oldenbourg, 2023. On current-day cases and situations, see, by way of example, Brian J. GRIM – Roger FINKE (eds.), *The Price of Freedom Denied: Religious Persecution and Conflict in the Twenty-First Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011; Massimo INTROVIGNE, *Inside the Church of the Almighty God: The Most Persecuted Religious Movement in China*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. Needless to recall the many acts of violence against Christians in the Near East in recent years, not all of which reached the Western media.

- 8 Cf. Wolfram BRANDES – Felicitas SCHMIEDER – Rebekka VOSS (eds.), *Peoples of the Apocalypse: Eschatological Beliefs and Political Scenarios* (Millennium-Studien 63), Berlin – Boston: de Gruyter, 2016; Emma WASSERMAN, *Apocalypse as Holy War: Divine Politics and Polemics in the Letters of Paul*, New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2018. See also the sociologically informed approach of Andrew J. WEIGERT, *Religious and Secular Views on Endtime*, Lewiston: NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004. No doubt most powerful is the “myth” of the apocalyptic war between good and evil; see Adela YARBRO COLLINS, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1976; Neil FORSYTH, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989; warlike and revolutionary dimensions are a core ingredient of such expectations in many a tradition: see Saïd Amir ARJOMAND, *Revolutions of the End of Time: Apocalypse, Revolution, and Reaction in the Persianate World*, Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2022.

brother Abel because God preferred the latter's sacrifice over his own (Gen 4,1-16).⁹ On the level of the characters involved, the story is a warning and a moral instruction. On a broader level, it probably echoes in a most dramatic way the eternal battle between nomadic and sedentary societies. The same book of Genesis also mentions two cases of a father, both times Abraham, ready to kill or to have his sons killed by preparing to sacrifice the one (Isaac) and by sending the other (Ismael) as a baby with his mother into the desert.¹⁰ Ultimately, both are saved by the Lord. Perhaps the most disturbing element in the former story, probably a critique of ancient practices of child sacrifice in neighbouring tribes, is that it was God who at first had ordered the sacrifice to test Abraham. The second story is an aetiology meant to explain the existence of the "Ishmaelites", later on sworn enemies of Israel, yet hailing from the same root. In 2 Kings, a case of parricide – the Assyrian king Sennacherib, who had threatened to capture Jerusalem, is killed by his two sons while praying in the Temple – is mentioned almost in passing, as if a mere trivia (2 Kings 19,37).¹¹ Again, God plays a role in the background, as the murder is implicitly meant as a punishment. Many more cases of murders can be added, murders involving individuals¹² and whole

9 In addition to the commentaries, see from a reception-historical perspective, Johanna ERZBERGER, *Kain, Abel und Israel: die Rezeption von Gen 4,1-16 in rabbinischen Midraschim* (BWANT 132), Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2011; John BYRON, *Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition: Jewish and Christian Interpretations of the First Sibling Rivalry* (Themes in Biblical Narrative 14), Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2011.

10 Cf. Ed NOORT – Eibert TIGCHELAAR (eds.), *The Sacrifice of Isaac: the Aqedah (Genesis 22) and its Interpretations* (Themes of Biblical Narrative 4), Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2022; Albert VAN DER HEIDE, *"Now I know": Five Centuries of Aqedah Exegesis*, Cham: Springer, 2017; J. Richard MIDDLETON, *Abraham's Silence: the Binding of Isaac, the Suffering of Job, and How to Talk Back to God*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2021. Martin GOODMAN – George H. VAN KOOTEN – Jacques T.A.G.M. VAN RUITEN (eds.), *Abraham, the Nations, and the Hagarites: Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Perspectives on Kinship with Abraham* (Themes of Biblical Narrative 13), Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2010; Thomas RÖMER, "Isaac et Ismaël, concurrents ou cohéritiers de la promesse? Une lecture de Genèse 16", *Etudes théologiques et religieuses* 74 (1999) 161–172.

11 Cf. Isaac KALIMI – Seth RICHARDSON (eds.), *Sennacherib at the Gates of Jerusalem: Story, History and Historiography* (Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 71), Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2014.

12 David has the husband of his mistress sent into his death at the front (2 Sam 11–12), but also prophets – God's messengers – are killed (Isaiah, for one; see also Matt 23,37–39),

nations.¹³ But there is much more than murder. The Bible also speaks of the cruelties and consequences of war: the mass maiming of victims, deportations of whole peoples to be sold into slavery; persecutions of minorities; the way justice is upheld by cruel executions; the list is endless.¹⁴ In addition to these, there are countless instances of systemic violence that are perhaps not exclusively physical but also psychological. They have to do with social injustice (exploitation) in society as a whole, which is a constant topic of concern in many juridical texts but also in prophetic and Wisdom literature, in several gospel parables, and in Jesus' message as presented in the gospels, but they are also met in interhuman relations, not just slavery but also on the level of the family.¹⁵

and so is Jesus, believed to be the son of God in Christian tradition (Matt 3,17 et al.). Cf. Andreas KÄSER, *Literaturwissenschaftliche Interpretation und historische Exegese: die Erzählung von David und Batseba als Fallbeispiel* (BWANT 122), Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2016; Eryl W. DAVIES, *Narrative Ethics in the Bible: Moral Dilemmas in the Story of King David* (LHB/OTS 715), London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2022. Jonathan KNIGHT, *The Ascension of Isaiah*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995; Jan BREMMER et al. (eds.), *The Ascension of Isaiah* (Studies on Early Christian Apocrypha 11), Leuven: Peeters, 2016. Kenneth G.C. NEWPORT, *The Sources and Sitz im Leben of Matthew 23* (JSNT SS 117), Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995.

- 13 See esp. the conquest of the land and the wars brought upon Israel and Judea by foreign kings. Cf. Bob BECKING, *The Fall of Samaria: an Historical and Archaeological Study*, Leiden: Brill, 1992; Gary N. KNOPPERS, *Two Nations under God: the Deuteronomistic History of Solomon and the Dual Monarchies*, 2 (Harvard Semitic Monographs 53), Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994; Oded LIPSCHITS, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem: Judah under Babylonian Rule*, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005; Lester L. GRABBE (ed.), *Ahab Agonistes: the Rise and Fall of the Omri Dynasty* (LHB/OTS 421), London: T&T Clark, 2007. Old but still useful because of the double perspective, Theodore H. ROBINSON, *The Decline and Fall of the Hebrew Kingdoms: Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries BC*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1930. For a "modern" take on the conquest history and the issues involved, see Leo G. PERDUE – Warren CARTER – Coleman A. BAKER (ed.), *Israel and Empire: a Postcolonial History of Israel and Early Judaism*, London: Bloomsbury, 2015.
- 14 For a general approach that goes beyond the biblical sphere but stays focused on the connections between violence and global cruelty, see Sara E. BROWN and STEPHEN D. Smith (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Religion, Mass Atrocity, and Genocide*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2022.
- 15 Think of the position of women – wives and daughters – esp. in the middle and lower classes, but not only there. The Aqedah story has a most cruel counterpart in the story of

A second way to approach the question is through a spatial or spatiotemporal axis. Violence is met on earth, in heaven, and in the underworld/afterlife, – or, if you wish, on the human level, the divine, and the Satanic. If the first and third level probably need no further comment, it may be helpful to recall that the Bible also speaks of how Satan, the rebellious fallen angel, was expelled from heaven, which it regards as the start of an “eternal”, apocalyptic war that is fought on all fronts, including on earth, and is believed to end with a cataclysmic victory of the good forces.¹⁶

A third way is to look at the agents and victims involved. In an ancient world view, evil forces (led by Satan) are thought to be eager to harm people for no reason. It was a proven explanation for some types of illness. The exorcism stories in the New Testament function according to that principle. But human beings also kill or have others suffer. It is a disturbing but in a sense also a commonly known experience of which the Bible contains many examples. More puzzling still is that some of this violence is said in the Bible to be divinely sanctioned. In both the Old and the New Testament, God is presented as being involved in acts of harm and violence – towards Israel’s enemies, towards evil-doers, but once then also towards humankind as a whole.¹⁷ The violence may be regarded as a punishment for human disobedience – a frequently met explanation, or the

the sacrifice of Jephthah’s daughter, itself the biblical parallel to the Iphigenia traditions. Cf. Thomas RÖMER, “Why Would the Deuteronomists Tell about the Sacrifice of Jephthah’s Daughter?”, *JSOT* 77 (1998) 27–38. On violence against children in general in the Old Testament, see Andreas MICHEL, *Gott und Gewalt gegen Kinder im Alten Testament* (FAT 37), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003.

- 16 See Isa 14,13-15; Ezek 28,16-28; Luke 10,18; Rev 12,7-9. Casting the devil in hell: Matt 25,41; 2 Pet 2,4. Cf. Hugh R. PAGE, *The Myth of Cosmic Rebellion: A Study of its Reflexes in Ugaritic and Biblical Literature* (SupplVT 65), Leiden: Brill, 1996; Angela K. HARKINS et al. (eds.), *The Fallen Angels Traditions: Second Temple Developments and Reception History* (CBQ MS 53), Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2014.
- 17 Most famous, of course, is the almost complete annihilation of humanity because of its sins as told in the Flood story, one of the most horrible stories in the whole of the Bible, one also in which God Himself is said to confess that this will never happen again. Cf. Alan DUNDES (ed.), *The Flood Myth*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988; P.J. HARLAND, *The Value of Human Life: a Study of the Story of the Flood (Genesis 6–9)* (SupplVT, 64), Leiden – New York: Brill, 1996; Norman COHN, *Noah’s Flood: the Genesis Story in Western Thought*, New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1996.

reasons may remain hidden – the “terrible” theodicy question.¹⁸ This brings me to the fourth axis.

The Bible lists many reasons and causes why people are committing or suffering violence. Some of these are in a way “explainable”, but others just leave us appalled. On an ethical level, a whole range of human vices can explain, though certainly not justify, why people behave violently. Self-defence may be an obvious explanation for turning to violence, but things are often more complicated and the lines truly blurred. The Bible contains stories in which the use of violence is justified in order to protect a nation’s honour or its sheer existence. Ancient Israel has fought several such wars, the Maccabean revolts being the most famous of these.¹⁹ Here God and his people are said to fight for the same good cause. Who can blame them? But then also, how far is one allowed to go? Using violence for punishment is an even more complicated case. It may have a pedagogical purpose, but all depends on who decides on what is a justified action and then acts upon it. In some situations, using violence as punishment was in a sense almost a “natural” expectation in ancient societies. The Bible contains several stories of kings – Jewish and others – behaving cruelly towards victims after a war; it can be a sign of power – that is how a king is supposed to behave, or of weakness – a way to appease the army and the allies. Things are more complicated still if that war is not one of liberation from an occupying power but of conquest of a land God is said to have had promised to his people. It is a most delicate situation as the ones who say they had received this promise are also those acting upon it, making God their ally. The force of

18 Cf. Johannes C. DE MOOR, *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, Leiden: Brill, 2003; Peter ADMIRAND, *Amidst Mass Atrocity and the Rubble of Theology: Searching for a Viable Theodicy*, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012; Beate Ego et al. (eds.), *Theodicy and Protest: Jewish and Christian Perspectives*, Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2018.

19 Cf. Elias J. BICKERMAN, *God of the Maccabees: Studies on the Meaning and Origin of the Maccabean Revolt* (Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity 32), Leiden: Brill, 1979; Jan Willem VAN HENTEN, *The Maccabean Martyrs as Saviours of the Jewish People: A Study of 2 and 4 Maccabees* (SupplJSJ 57), Leiden – Boston: Brill, 1997; Id. (ed.), *The Books of the Maccabees: Literary, Historical, and Religious Perspectives* (BETL 328), Leuven: Peeters, 2022. Resistance and revolt are of course universal phenomena: see John J. COLLINS – J.G. MANNING (eds.), *Revolt and Resistance in the Ancient Classical World and the Near East* (Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 85), Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2016; Paul J. KOSMIN – Ian S. MAYER (eds.), *Cultures of Resistance in the Hellenistic East*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022.

such claims can never be overestimated. It raises the whole question of the right and even the duty to fight a justified war – jihad or crusades.²⁰ But no doubt most difficult to grasp is violence that is explained as the result of God testing innocent people. Job is the prototypical example.²¹ It not only poses the immense problem of theodicy, mentioned above, with which humans have struggled since ever, but has us confront a potentially “evil” God. The solutions that have been proposed range from revolting and turning away from such a God to resignation and acceptance that God’s ways are inaccessible to humans and that it all belongs to the divine plan. In the middle of the second century, Marcion tried to do the first by cutting out the “horrifying” God of the Old Testament from Christian tradition, thereby ignoring the more nuanced views on God and violence that can also be found in Jewish tradition.²² At about the same time, other theologians as well as philosophers searched for ways to excuse God by assigning the creation of the world, and all it brought about in terms of human sinfulness and suffering, to a demiurge.²³

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- 20 Cf. Heath A. THOMAS – Jeremy EVANS – Paul COPAN, *Holy War in the Bible: Christian Morality and an Old Testament Problem*, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013; Reuven FIRESTONE, *Jihad: the Origin of Holy War in Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999; ID., *Holy War in Judaism: the Fall and Rise of a Controversial Idea*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012; Karen ARMSTRONG, *Holy War: the Crusades and their Impact on Today’s World*, London: Macmillan, 1988; Christopher TYERMAN, *Fighting for Christendom: Holy War and the Crusades*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- 21 Cf. Françoise Mies, *L’espérance de Job* (BETL 193), Leuven: Peeters, 2006; EAD., *Job ou sortir de la cendre: étude exégétique, littéraire, anthropologique et théologique de la mort dans le livre de Job* (BETL 324), Leuven: Peeters, 2022; Espen DAHL, *The Problem of Job and the Problem of Evil*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- 22 See the classical study by Adolf VON HARNACK, *Marcion: das Evangelium vom fremden Gott: eine Monographie zur Geschichte der Grundlegung der katholischen Kirche* (TU 45), Leipzig: Hinrichs, ²1924. Marcion has been the subject of a whole series of monographs and other studies, some of which are most disputed. Scholars have above all focused on his Bible and on how mainstream sources have shaped our largely negative view on Marcion: for the latter, see, e.g., Sebastian MOLL, *The Arch-Heretic Marcion* (WUNT 250), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010; Judith LIEU, *Marcion and the Making of a Heretic: God and Scripture in the Second Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- 23 Cf. Peter KOSŁOWSKI, *Gnosis und Theodizee: eine Studie über den leidenden Gott* (Philosophische Theologie 1), Wien: Passagen, 1993; Carl S. O’BRIEN, *The Demiurge in Ancient Thought: Secondary Gods and Divine Mediators*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015; Luc BRISSON – Seamus J. O’NEILL – Andrei TIMOTIN (eds.), *Neoplatonic*

The definitely much more demanding attitude is to accept human limitations in understanding or giving meaning to such profoundly existential questions and make this a core element of what believing in God is about.

Coping with divine violence in the Bible: The case of Revelation

The Book of Revelation or the Apocalypse, the last book of the Bible, is particularly renowned for its many scenes of utter violence that involve divine action and affect human and apparently also supra-human beings (“the Beast”!). Critical scholarship has proposed several answers. A basic helpful distinction is between scholars who condemn the book as a morally highly problematic historical and cultural product and those who argue that the book and its author can nevertheless be salvaged by raising awareness that violence is not the book’s only message and by putting things in the right perspective. Above all, it is important to realise that at least part of the violence that is talked about is said not to be caused by human beings.²⁴

This initial basic distinction can perhaps be further diversified into four approaches. A number of scholars have argued that the violence scenes serve a purpose that goes beyond and indeed contradicts the impression that the author was a kind of sensationalist. Judgement scenes are meant to provoke repentance. God’s loyal followers may suffer violence but take no active part in it. Much of the scenes are to be taken metaphorically, as evocations of God’s fight against evil and of the latter’s self-destructive nature. Long ago, G.B. Caird combined with it a reading method based on substitution.²⁵ Whatever is said of God’s violent handling of enemies in the Old Testament is now rephrased and reshaped in terms of God conquering evil through Jesus’ (“the Lamb”) death on the cross. Richard Bauckham argues that the author of Revelation in part disconnects God from the violence

Demons and Angels (Studies in Platonism, Neoplatonism, and the Platonic Tradition 20), Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2018; Christoph MARKSCHIES – Einar THOMASSEN (eds.), *Valentinianism: New Studies* (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 96), Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2020.

24 The following section is inspired by Alexander STEWART who is currently finishing with me his PhD project entitled “The Rhetorical Use of Divine Threat in the Apocalypse of John and its Historical Context”.

25 *The Revelation of St. John* (Black’s New Testament Commentary 19), London: A&C Black, 1966; repr. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999, 74–75.

by using divine passives in order to re-orientate the reader towards God's salvific plan with humanity.²⁶ The purpose of such readings is to subvert the passages containing violent terminology by reading them in a more positive way within the framework of the Christian message. Revelation is not a call to start a war.

A quite different approach is to contextualise and explain such scenes historically and theologically. This can be done in various ways. A most interesting one is to read Revelation against the background of the great myth about the cosmic battle between good and evil. Divine violence is said to serve the higher purpose of protecting creation and destroying the adversary. Another approach is to recognise the violent scenes and imagery for what they are and to withhold from any conclusions about the author's (lack of) ethics. It is not about mitigating the violence, nor about condemning it, but about making sense of it as it stands. Matthew Streett helpfully cautions against making abstraction of the author's context and argues for distinguishing between immoral (murder and assault) and morally sanctioned forms of violence (self-defence, court decisions).²⁷

A perhaps more debatable, because potentially dangerous, approach consists of endorsing divine violence for the liberative power the proper use of a rhetoric of violence may produce. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza applies this (a bit too hastily) to the fight in support of oppressed minorities.²⁸ She reads Revelation as a call for action against abusive institutional powers. Largely making abstraction (too much, in my opinion) of the wording in Revelation, the systematic theologian Miroslav Volf explains divine violence as God's natural and expected reaction to all sorts of injustice and human violence.²⁹ God just cannot afford it not to be moved by the latter and to remain "neutral" or inactive. God's violence as presented in Revelation is not a call in turn to become violent, but a necessity in order to protect and save humanity. It is thought of as a "beneficial" type of violence.

The fourth approach is an open critique of the book itself and the way it is said to glorify violence for whatever purpose. Arguing for a resolutely feminist approach

26 "Judgment in the Book of Revelation", in Garrick V. ALLEN – Ian PAUL – Simon P. WOODMAN (eds.), *The Book of Revelation: Currents in British Research on the Apocalypse* (WUNT 2.411), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015, 55–79.

27 *Here Comes the Judge: Violent Pacifism in the Book of Revelation* (LNTS 462), London: T&T Clark, 2012.

28 *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, ²1998.

29 *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Idnetity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996.

that completely ignores the historical context of the book, Tina Pippin's strongly ideological reading leads her to conclude that the God of Revelation is above all a destructive factor.³⁰ Kimberly Stratton presents the author as a tyrant who forces his readers into submission with a flood of violent scenes and passages, in this way imitating imperial Rome's dictatorial grip on all inhabitants of the empire.³¹ David Frankfurter takes a rather different turn when arguing, in a sort of Nietzschean logic, that Revelation expresses the frustration of a subdued group that calls or hopes for a violent breakdown of the empire.³² Jan Willem van Henten, finally, remains a bit more down to earth and focuses on another aspect – the truth claims of the book, which he considers to be too absolute to be sound.³³

A message of hope, after all

Time does not allow me to go into more detail, but two comments might perhaps help explain where I stand in this forest of opinions on Revelation. First of all, some of the authors reviewed here rightly emphasise the importance of not giving up on an historical-critical approach, if only to avoid falling into the trap of using void rhetoric or getting lost in too adventurous forms of hermeneutics. Second, from this historical-critical basis one is entitled to look for ways to make the book meaningful for Christian readers through the ages. In my opinion, the best way forward in this respect is to read the book in light of three core notions of the Christian message as it had been developed at the turn of the first and the second century. In all three, violence plays a crucial role. The three have to do with Christology, soteriology, and eschatology. All three are conceived as part of a drama that is being played on a double level – a human/earthly and a cosmic one. The Lamb is slaughtered but also appears victorious in heaven. The Christological dimension of the imagery cannot be ignored, and neither can the message it conveys. Christ was put to death

30 *Death and Desire: The Rhetoric of Gender in the Apocalypse of John* (Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation), Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1992.

31 "The Eschatological Arena: Reinscribing Roman Violence in Fantasies of the End Times", *Biblical Interpretation* 17 (2009) 45–76.

32 "The Legacy of Sectarian Rage: Vengeance Fantasies in the New Testament", in David A. BERNAT – Jonathan KLAUANS (eds.), *Religion and Violence: The Biblical Heritage* (Recent Research in Biblical Studies 2), Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007, 114–128.

33 "Violence in Revelation", in Adela YARBRO COLLINS (ed.), *New Perspectives on the Book of Revelation* (BETL 291), Leuven: Peeters, 2017, 49–77.

and God allowed this to happen in order to conquer a greater evil. This brings me to the second aspect. Salvation comes at a price. Human beings cannot save themselves from their sinfulness. Divine intervention is needed and that process is said to be one of pain and suffering. Again, the drama that is played on earth also has a cosmic dimension. Saving humankind, liberating it from sin, means defeating the powers that had ruled over it. As John sees it, and this is the third aspect, that battle is still being fought, but those who believe in Christ know that its outcome is already decided on. That is where hope comes in sight. Ultimately, it is believed, good will conquer evil in a fierce war of apocalyptic grandeur. In the background stands the all-ancient idea of healing by simile. Suffering cannot be undone but by suffering. Salvation becomes possible through conquering death, as was the case with Jesus' death and his resurrection by God. This has opened a new era and ultimately will bring to completion the eternal war between good and evil. The imagery and language used in Revelation differs from that used by Paul and the gospels, but the essence of the message has not changed, and neither has the process by which the goal will be reached. Violence is a crucial ingredient of this story.

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LONGÉVITÉ ET VIE ÉTERNELLE

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Abstract. The essay proposes a concept of longevity that is conceivable not only at the level of the individual human being, but also of the human collectivity, notably in view of the critical situation in which our planet finds itself today. This is consistent with the principle of universality, which governs both the realisation of biblical *zôé* and of the *bios* as an object of scientific research. With an interdisciplinary approach, it is possible to work simultaneously on the longevity of a person and that of a habitable planet. Furthermore, eternal life, promised to all, is thus linked with conversion to the common good of the planet, aimed at the survival of the population of the world on a planet that will be habitable again in the future. This perspective matches the integral ecology advocated by Pope Francis in the encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

Keywords: longevity, eternal life, climate change, Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*.

Il faut avoir une certaine audace pour traiter des notions de longévité et de vie éternelle dans la même étude. Car la première signale un phénomène touchant un nombre croissant d'individus dans nos sociétés développées, grâce aux progrès de la recherche dans les sciences biologiques et médicales, alors que la seconde signifie ce qui est promis, selon la Bible, aux croyants après leur mort. La différence de registre entre ces deux notions s'exprime déjà dans les deux mots grecs désignant la vie: *bios* et *zôé*. *Bios* devait exprimer le phénomène rationnellement saisissable de la vie de tous les vivants, et *zôé*, terme préféré par les auteurs bibliques, désignait l'existence des créatures avant tout humaines de Dieu. Cette conception de la vie s'inscrit dans la conviction que Dieu, à l'image et à la ressemblance de qui l'homme est créé, est nommé le Vivant par excellence.

Comme chacune des deux notions est dominante dans son domaine propre et a ainsi fait histoire, *bios* dans les sciences de la biologie et de la médecine, *zôé* dans

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l'anthropologie théologique chrétienne, aussi par l'importance des débats actuels dans les deux domaines, il nous semble indispensable d'examiner les rapports qui existent ou non entre ces deux discours sur la vie.

Commençons par *zôé*, dont la signification théo-anthropologique semble, selon Xavier Léon-Dufour, tellement dominante dans le Nouveau Testament que l'exégète se croit autorisé à ne rien dire de la présence et de la signification de *bios* dans les écrits néotestamentaires. Nous lisons dans son *Dictionnaire*:

Dieu [...] est le Vivant par excellence; tandis que toute vie créée est fragile et périssable, quoique précieuse aux yeux de Dieu. Paul réinterprète la vie en fonction de celle que Jésus a reçue après sa mort lors de sa résurrection (cf. Rm 14, 9; 2Co 13, 4). Vivre, en définitive, [...] c'est donc se laisser envahir par la foi dans le Vivant, ne plus vivre pour soi-même mais appartenir pour toujours au Seigneur. Cette vie nouvelle, déjà commencée ici-bas, ne sera pourtant pleinement réalisée qu'avec la destruction du dernier ennemi, la Mort (cf. Rm 14, 7s).²

Il est possible que le lecteur critique trouve que cette conception pèche par excès de théologisation. L'énoncé «Dieu est le vivant par excellence», introduit un peu abruptement, pourrait être interprété en imaginant Dieu au sommet d'une pyramide de vivants, comme le plus vivant parmi d'autres vivants. Cela serait négliger le fait que nous sommes en présence d'une affirmation analogique, qui comporte à la fois une part de ressemblance et une part de dissemblance. Dans le cas présent, le langage biblique met souvent l'accent sur la ressemblance, et parfois même dans le sens d'une réciprocité. Car tout en professant, avec la Genèse, que l'homme fut créé à l'image et à la ressemblance de Dieu, les auteurs bibliques présentent un Dieu personnalisé, à l'image et à la ressemblance de l'homme. Un Dieu qui pense, qui parle, qui décide, qui aime, qui se comporte comme un père engendrant un fils. Ils n'hésitent même pas à lui attribuer des changements d'attitude. Dans le domaine de la vie, le langage biblique se montre moins anthropomorphe.

Selon ces textes, la vie divine, à la différence de la vie humaine, ne commence pas par une naissance et ne finit pas par une mort. Son existence ne dépend pas d'autrui, tout en le respectant et l'aimant. Elle jouit d'omniscience et de toute-puissance. Ceci étant, on comprend qu'un concept unilatéralement théocentrique de la vie

2 Xavier LÉON-DUFOUR, Article «Vie», in ID., *Dictionnaire du Nouveau Testament*, Paris: Seuil, ³1996, 551–552 (551).

soit exprimée uniquement par le terme *zôé*, et qu'on n'évoque qu'implicitement le *bios*, en parlant notamment de la fragilité et du caractère périssable de la «vie créée». Cela risque de paraître insuffisant, si on considère que c'est ce *bios* que Jésus a vécu, le faisant sien et le partageant avec ses congénères, en émancipant les femmes et en guérissant les malades. La vie du Jésus historique était ainsi faite d'une réunion de *bios* et de *zôé*, y compris sa vie nouvelle après sa mort, une mort accomplie dans toute sa réalité effroyablement biologique.

Mais avant de souffrir la passion, le martyr, dans son organisme, il mit toute son énergie physique et psychique au service de la vie d'autrui. Il l'a fait notamment en écoutant et guérissant ses prochains. Le geste de la multiplication des pains montre symboliquement que pour lui, non seulement la *zôé* mais aussi le *bios* de ses prochains avait de l'importance.

Alors, dans quel sens les Évangiles utilisent-ils le terme *bios*? Citons seulement quelques exemples. *Mc* 12, 44 parle de la vieille femme pauvre mais généreuse, participant à la quête synagogale: «tous ont mis de leur superflu, mais elle, de son indigence, elle a mis tout ce qu'elle possédait, tout ce qu'elle avait pour vivre (*bios*)». Autre exemple en *Mc* 8, 43: «une femme, atteinte d'un flux de sang depuis douze années et qui dépensait tout son avoir (*bios*) en médecins, et que nul ne pouvait guérir.» La parabole du fils prodigue en *Lc* 15, 12: «le plus jeune dit à son père: Père, donne-moi la part de fortune qui me revient. Et le père leur partagea son bien (*bios*).» Suit la protestation du fils aîné: «Ton fils, que voici revenant après avoir dévoré ton bien (*bios*) avec des prostituées, tu fais tuer pour lui le veau gros».

Dans ces énoncés, le mot *bios* ne signifie pas directement la vie dans toute sa réalité, mais plutôt les moyens de vivre, ce qui rend possible d'exister correctement, par exemple le pain quotidien – et ce, sans évoquer qu'il est donné par Dieu. Il semble aussi que ce mot évoque moins l'être que l'avoir du vivant humain, de sorte qu'il ne s'applique pas aux vivants pré-humains, aux plantes et aux animaux, comme c'est le cas dans le langage de la science biologique. Dans les textes néo-testamentaires que nous avons cités, il ne s'agit sûrement pas de la vie humaine vécue dans son intégralité et dans son rapport avec le Créateur, comme le terme *zôé* peut l'exprimer. Dès lors, on comprend que pour Jésus, le pain, l'eau et les repas conviviaux servent de moyens d'évangélisation. La plupart des gestes narrés comme miraculeux dans le Nouveau Testament ont ainsi un caractère humanitaire. Ce caractère concret jette également une lumière sur le sens du dernier repas de Jésus, qui est à l'origine de notre sacrement eucharistique.

Il y a plus encore. Le *bios* est présent, même sans être nommé, dans les paroles du jugement dit dernier, en Mt 25. Le Christ dit aux justes, avant de les envoyer dans la vie éternelle: «j'avais faim et vous m'avez nourri; j'avais soif et vous m'avez donné à boire». Ces gestes qui sauvent des vies, qui permettent à nos frères et sœurs réduits à la misère de survivre, sont jugés par le Christ comme faits à Lui. Ici, l'amour du prochain s'avère bien biologique, tout en étant de l'ordre de la *zôé*.

Ces moyens de vivre et de faire vivre autrui se réalisent aussi dans les interventions médicales. A ce propos, évoquons le serment d'Hippocrate, attribué au grand médecin de l'Antiquité ayant vécu plus de quatre siècles avant le Christ. Ce serment a plusieurs versions. A la différence de celle que prêtent nos jeunes médecins actuels, la version originelle commence par une note religieuse: «Je jure par Apollon, médecin (...), par tous les dieux et toutes les déesses».³ Cela montre qu'à l'époque, l'art médical était loin d'être sécularisé, et d'autre part que cela n'empêche nullement les médecins de notre époque de prêter ce serment. La raison en est probablement son contenu clairement humaniste: le respect de la personne soignée, le refus de l'acharnement thérapeutique mais aussi l'interdiction de provoquer la mort, le secret médical, la disponibilité aux patients indigents, l'observation des lois naturelles.

En lisant ce texte, tant sous sa forme originale que sous sa forme moderne, une certaine proximité entre Hippocrate et Jésus peut ainsi apparaître. Les deux témoignent d'une très haute estime du *bios* humain, se manifestant par une réelle empathie.

Pour revenir au Nouveau Testament, on pourra dire que Jésus avait en vue la vie humaine à la fois comme *zôé* et *bios*: il guérissait les malades tout en les invitant à croire au règne de Dieu à venir. A nos yeux modernes, c'est ce fait qui est essentiel, quand ses actions miraculeuses sont l'accessoire. Cela peut nous rappeler les guérisons médicalement inexplicables de Lourdes. Significativement, le Moyen Âge chrétien parlait de *Christus medicus* et donnait aux hôpitaux, sans doute en référence à Mt 25, le nom d'«hôtel-Dieu». Par ailleurs, même dans une France très fortement laïcisée, les institutions hospitalières continuent de porter des noms de saints.

Après avoir montré ce que veut dire *zôé* mais aussi *bios* dans le Nouveau Testament, il convient de prendre connaissance de la description de la vie sous l'angle de la biologie moderne. Elle est à première vue très différente de la description biblique, d'abord par le fait qu'elle utilise le *bios* comme notion de base.

3 *Œuvres complètes d'Hippocrate. Tr. nouvelle avec le texte grec en regard*, IV, tr. Émile LITTRÉ, Paris-Londres: Baillière, 1844, 629.

Avec les généticiens et les biologistes moléculaire la vie devient un système codé d'information et de communication. Aujourd'hui, en considérant, en outre, que les êtres vivants appartiennent à des entités supérieures (les biocénoses), la vie apparaît comme un système complexe de réseaux hiérarchisés de molécules dont la dynamique dépend de flux d'énergie, de matière, d'information et de communication, et se transformant en fonction des conditions de l'évolution de la Terre. Apparu sur la Terre un milliard d'années après la formation de cette dernière, le processus s'est manifesté sous forme de programmes (diversités d'êtres vivants) réalisant de manière similaire, les conditions de leur expression et de leur reproduction dans le temps (ères géologiques) et dans l'espace (biosphère), en étroite interrelation avec l'atmosphère, l'hydrosphère et la lithosphère [...]. L'aspect le plus remarquable du système et qu'il aboutit à la création des êtres vivant [...] capables de créer de nouvelles conditions de l'évolution biologique [...].⁴

Alors que *zôé* est une notion anthropocentrique, ou théo-anthropocentrique, *bios* a une signification plus holistique: il s'applique à tous les êtres vivants, végétaux, animaux et humains. Ce qui est biologique est objet de connaissance empirique et rationnelle, par conséquent scientifique. Cette vie se laisse analyser et mesurer dans l'espace et le temps, ainsi dans le cas de la longévité. En ce qui concerne la vie terrestre, on en constate avant tout son caractère organique: le vivant vit grâce au bon fonctionnement de ses organes. Pour subsister dans son espace vital, il doit voir, entendre, sentir, se nourrir et échapper à la mort.

On reconnaît souvent que la relation réciproque entre vie et mort, s'exprimant par des rites funéraires dans la plupart des religions, représente un acquis culturel important dans le processus d'hominisation.⁵ Ce constat montre que la question

4 Pierre DE PUYTORAC, «Qu'est-ce que la vie?», *Revue des sciences naturelles d'Auvergne* 68 (2004) 13–22 (13–14, 20–21).

5 Julien BARRY, *Neurobiologie de la pensée*, Lille: Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1995, 300. Henry de Lumley regarde l'Aven des ossements dans la Sierra d'Atapuerca en Espagne, la Sima de los Huesos, «le plus ancien témoignage d'un rituel funéraire connu dans le monde, une nouvelle étape dans le développement de la pensée symbolique et l'approche de la transcendance». Henry DE LUMLEY, «La Sima de los Huesos. Les premiers rites funéraires», in ID. (coord.), *Le Symbolique, le Sacré et l'Homme. Émergence de la transcendance*, Paris: CNRS, 2019. Voir aussi Eudald CARBONELL *et al.*, «Les premiers comportements funéraires auraient-ils pris place à Atapuerca, il y a 350.000 ans?», *L'Anthropologie* 107 (2003) 1–14.

d'une vie nouvelle après la mort reste ouverte dans le dialogue actuel entre théologiens et biologistes.

Ceci dit, il convient de lire plus précisément la description du phénomène de la vie:

Chaque être vivant [...] est issu du grand arbre du vivant, depuis l'apparition de la vie il y a environ 4 milliards d'années, à travers l'évolution des espèces [...] En ce sens, les êtres vivants ont en commun les mêmes éléments fondamentaux de la vie, les gènes, [...] porteurs de toutes les informations biologiques caractérisant une espèce: son patrimoine génétique. Ces données sont contenues dans la molécule universelle du vivant, l'ADN [...].⁶

Trois grandes fonctions semblent a priori fondamentales : 1. autoconservation ou autoconstruction. La possibilité de se maintenir en vie, avec les phénomènes de nutrition, [...] l'assimilation caractérise le vivant et le différencie de l'inerte [...] 2. autoreproduction. La possibilité de propager la vie, c'est-à-dire la reproduction ou auto-reproduction. [...] 3. autorégulation La possibilité de conduire soi-même ses diverses activités, ce qui indique coordination et synchronisation, régulation et contrôles de ces activités ou réactions entre les divers éléments; cette fonction est habituellement désignée sous le nom d'auto-régulation.⁷

La zôé néo-testamentaire n'est-elle pas fort éloignée de cette description à la fois holistique et empirique? Ce n'est pas si tranché. Même le champion de la zôé, l'évangéliste Jean, a pu écrire: «le Verbe s'est fait chair», «*sarx egeneto*». En cela, il reconnaît que l'unique Engendré, Fils éternel et cocréateur de Dieu, a assumé pleinement le *bios* humain, y compris sa fragilité et sa mortalité. Le mot *bios* ne figure pas dans l'énoncé; il est remplacé par «*sarx*», la chair, mais la réalité biologique de Jésus est thématifiée dans tous les récits de son histoire de vie, de sa naissance à son agonie.

Si nous nous tournons vers l'histoire des sciences médicales, nous sommes frappés des progrès qui les ont fait passer d'un état pré-scientifique à un état de plus en plus technicien. Ce sont ces progrès qui ont favorisé le phénomène actuel de la longévité. L'objectivité nous oblige à nous rendre compte du caractère

6 Pascal BOUAZIZ, *Science, éthique et société*, Rosny: Bréal, 2006, 20.

7 Jacques GOLDBERG, *Fondements biologiques des sciences humaines. Évolution et complexification des êtres vivants*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1992, 21.

ambivalent de ce phénomène. D'une part, nous éprouvons le bonheur de vivre plus longtemps, surtout là où les conditions d'existence sont satisfaisantes pour les seniors, et là où ils peuvent avoir le sentiment d'être encore utiles à autrui. Cela est sans doute favorisé par des mesures d'autodiscipline prise par les intéressés: bonne alimentation, promenade quotidienne et surtout, faire travailler son intellect, ne pas se laisser tomber en solitude. De l'autre côté, il y a les expériences inévitablement négatives du grand âge: insuffisance cardiaque, essoufflement, dégénérescence maculaire, incontinence, hypersensibilité, insomnie, douleurs diverses, etc. Il y a aussi l'éventualité d'être atteint de démence sénile, horreur des intellectuels, et la maladie d'Alzheimer, encore incurable. Ces faits négatifs provoquent parfois des états dépressifs, qui font regretter à certains de vivre si longtemps et peuvent susciter le désir d'être euthanasié.

Cette ambivalence de la longévité concerne évidemment les croyants tout autant que les non-croyants. Pour eux aussi, la foi en la vie éternelle risque de faire problème, et pour cette raison les pasteurs d'âmes tâcheront de faire preuve de discernement et de sens psychologique, de même que les responsables d'EHPAD (Établissement d'hébergement pour personnes âgées dépendantes).

Malgré cette coexistence d'aspects positifs et négatifs dans la longévité vécue, personne ne conteste qu'elle est une conquête de la recherche en biologie et de la médecine des temps modernes. En tant que telle, elle ne peut qu'être saluée par les représentants de l'anthropologie théologique, tout en sachant que la longévité retarde mais n'élimine pas la mort.⁸ C'est là que le mystère de la vie éternelle, qui échappe à toute rationalité scientifique, devient le sujet.

Ce mystère nous concerne tous et toutes, d'abord en tant qu'il est l'expression d'une expérience à portée universelle, communautaire, et non seulement individuelle. Pour cette raison, le croyant chrétien ne se contente pas d'espérer voir Dieu que personne n'a vu, et de jouir pour lui-même de la «vision béatifique», qui ressemblerait, à la limite, à la perception d'un spectacle passivement subi. Si, au contraire, on considère la vie éternelle comme la perpétuation d'un amour actif du prochain, ce qui est pensable à partir de *Mt 25* et de l'idée de la «communio des saints» (que Calvin traduisait d'ailleurs par «communication des saints»), nous pouvons aboutir à une idée universelle de la vie éternelle, où l'amour du prochain continue à animer pour toujours la vie d'autrui. Plus qu'une vision qui me béatifie,

8 Brice DE MALHERBE, «Quelle immortalité ? Un regard théologique», *Gérontologie et société* 38.3 (2016) 171–181.

moi, c'est une béatitude dont je fais profiter mes frères et sœurs vivants ou décédés. La vie éternelle est éternellement altruiste.

Quelle conséquence peut-on tirer de cette conception, concernant la longévité? Sa réalisation est-elle pensable non seulement au plan du vivant humain individuel, mais aussi au plan de la collectivité humaine? Vu la situation devenue critique dans laquelle se trouve aujourd'hui notre planète, la réponse devrait être positive, et cela par une application conséquente du principe d'universalité. Ce principe commande à la fois la réalisation de la *zôé* biblique et le *bios* en tant qu'objet de recherche scientifique. Avec une approche interdisciplinaire, il est possible de travailler simultanément à la longévité d'une personne et à celle d'une planète habitable. La vie éternelle, promise à tous et toutes, est ainsi liée avec la conversion au bien commun planétaire, visant à la survie de la population mondiale sur une planète redevenue habitable dans l'avenir.

C'est dans ce contexte de pensée que des théologiens comme Jean-Baptiste Lecuit, à la suite de Hans-Urs von Balthasar, ont essayé de mettre l'accent sur l'universalité du Salut, jusqu'à mettre en question l'existence de l'enfer.⁹ Pour ceux-ci, seule la vie est capable d'éternité, non la mort, et c'est une erreur que de croire, comme beaucoup de théologiens médiévaux, qu'il y a une symétrie entre la vie et la mort éternelle, et entre le Salut des individus justes et la damnation éternelle des injustes. L'origine de l'image du «feu éternel», mythologique et apocalyptique plutôt que proprement évangélique, permet d'ailleurs de ne pas tenir pour parole de Dieu tout ce qu'ont écrit les évangélistes.

Aux yeux du Pape François, le principe d'universalité doit être suivi non seulement en croyant à une vie éternelle promise aux justes post mortem, mais aussi dans la vie temporelle de la collectivité humaine, concrète et actuelle. Inspiré sans doute par le patriarche orthodoxe de Constantinople Bartholomé, le Pape a accompli un geste proprement révolutionnaire en publiant la première encyclique écologique de l'histoire ecclésiastique, intitulée *Laudato Si'*.¹⁰

Par le fait que cette encyclique papale est la première qui soit entièrement consacrée à la problématique écologique de notre temps, sa publication en 2015

9 Jean-Baptiste LECUIT, «The Hope of Salvation for All in the Light of Contemporary Universalism», *Studia Bobolanum* 36.1 (2025) 33–44.

10 *Lettre encyclique Laudato Si' du Saint-Père François sur la sauvegarde de la maison commune* (2015), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/fr/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

Sur les vues du Patriarche Œcuménique Bartholomé: *Laudato Si'* 7–9.

peut être considérée comme un évènement historique. Son titre montre qu'elle a été inspirée par une prière de louange de François d'Assise et aussi par sa spiritualité fortement axée sur la communauté de tous les vivants, plantes, animaux, humains.¹¹ Le Pape rejoint ce saint du Moyen Âge chrétien en considérant que toutes les créatures reflètent la gloire du Créateur. Elles cohabitent dans une «maison commune» comme l'indique déjà le sous-titre de l'encyclique. Ce vivre ensemble a quelque chose de familial. Même des existants matériels se trouvent désignés par des images personnelles telles que «sœur» et «mère». Le ton est lyrique et reflète une conception idéalisée de la nature. Ses aspects cruels et catastrophiques ne sont pas évoqués.

Ce n'est pas de l'angélisme. Car le pape sait parfaitement qu'aujourd'hui plus que jamais, la prière de louange doit être accompagnée d'un jugement sévère, cette fois-ci moins sur le mal que la nature peut faire à l'homme, que sur les dégâts que l'homme fait quotidiennement à la nature.

Cette sœur crie en raison des dégâts que nous lui causons par l'utilisation irresponsable et l'abus des biens que Dieu a déposés en elle. Nous avons grandi en pensant que nous étions ses propriétaires et ses dominateurs autorisés à l'exploiter. La violence qui est dans le cœur humain blessé par le péché se manifeste aussi par les symptômes de maladie que nous observons dans le sol, dans l'eau, dans l'air et dans les êtres vivants. C'est pourquoi parmi les pauvres les plus abandonnés se trouve notre terre opprimée et dévastée.¹²

Tout cela va à l'encontre d'un espoir dans la longévité de la planète Terre.

Nous avons ici une nouvelle notion du péché. Sa nouveauté consiste en ce qu'elle ne met plus l'accent sur la non-observation des commandements concernant les pratiques cultuelles et morales, mais sur la violence qu'une humanité devenue puissante fait subir à des créatures en position de faiblesse et de pauvreté. Le Pape n'a pas hésité à ranger les espèces animales et végétales menacées d'extinction du côté des humains nécessiteux.¹³ Or, là où le péché contre la nature fait ravage, il faut une véritable conversion, un retour à la nature dont l'état fortement endommagé a été prouvé avec une quasi-unanimité par des scientifiques compétents.

11 François d'Assise, *Cantique des créatures*, SC 285, 343–345, cité en *Laudato Si'* 1 et 87. La spiritualité de Saint François est évoquée plusieurs fois, comme inspiration pour une écologie intégrale (10–12, 66, 87, 125, 218, 221)

12 *Laudato Si'* 2.

13 *Laudato Si'* 35, 45, 89.

Le Pape, qui s'est laissé inspirer par la spiritualité franciscaine et ses images poétiques, fait en même temps crédit aux biologistes et aux climatologues pour réclamer une conversion qui doit son efficacité simultanément à la foi religieuse et à la raison scientifique. Autrement dit, à la fois à la *zôé* et au *bios*. Il est convaincu que la sauvegarde et le Salut de notre communauté planétaire exige l'alliance de la foi avec la raison expérimentale. «Nous avons besoin d'une conversion qui nous unisse tous, parce que le défi environnemental que nous vivons [...] nous concerne et nous touche tous».¹⁴

Or, cette conversion à la fois religieuse et exigeant une attitude rationnelle doit faire face à une difficulté considérable, qui consiste dans la rapidité des changements que nous imposons à une nature dont l'évolution se fait avec lenteur, ayant besoin de milliards d'années. C'est ainsi que des espèces animales, qui existent depuis très longtemps, peuvent, sous les contraintes que nous leur imposons, disparaître très rapidement. La pollution de l'atmosphère, l'accumulation de déchets non biodégradables, la disparition progressive des forêts tropicales, la réduction drastique de la biodiversité, l'épuisement des sources d'énergie fossiles, la croissance démesurée des métropoles, la diminution des réserves d'eau potable, les guerres incessantes, la surpêche pratiquée dans nos mers, le trafic et la consommation de drogues, la privation de populations autochtones de leur espace vital, la stagnation de populations entières dans un état de pauvreté extrême, la multiplicité et la diversité de ces problèmes représentent un danger de dégradation énorme pour l'avenir de notre planète. Mais en même temps, ils révèlent à la raison que son sauvetage ne peut être attendu que d'une «écologie intégrale».

Le problème que *Laudato Si'* semble privilégier est celui du réchauffement climatique. Causé et entretenu par une teneur trop élevée en Co2 dans l'atmosphère, il provoque la fonte des glaces polaires. En résultent l'élévation du niveau des océans et l'inondation des territoires côtiers qui sont en grande partie habités par des populations pauvres, par exemple au Bangladesh. Ainsi des millions de nécessiteux risquent de s'enfoncer davantage dans la misère. L'augmentation excessive de la température qui provoque désormais de plus en plus souvent la canicule, favorise aussi des incendies, et bouleverse l'existence des animaux et des humains.

En attirant l'attention sur cette crise climatique, le pape a anticipé à plusieurs égards l'Accord de Paris sur le climat, signé le 12 décembre 2015 par les représentants

14 *Laudato Si'* 14.

politiques de 195 nations et entré en vigueur le 7 novembre 2017.¹⁵ Cet accord est axé sur des dispositions concrètes en vue de réduire «l'effet de serre» provoqué par le réchauffement de notre atmosphère. Dans l'Accord, il a été décidé que tous les signataires feront l'effort de contenir «l'élévation de la température moyenne de la planète nettement en dessous de 2 °C par rapport aux niveaux préindustriels poursuivant l'action menée pour limiter l'élévation de la température à 1,5 °C par rapport aux niveaux préindustriels »,¹⁶ d'ici à 2100. L'Alliance des petits états insulaires, qui regroupe les quarante-quatre pays les plus exposés aux effets du changement climatique, a pu également contribuer à cet engagement international,¹⁷ ce qui correspondait bien aux vœux de *Laudato Si'*.

Par contre, parmi les grandes puissances, plusieurs n'ont pas respecté leur engagement et, cédant à une sorte d'égoïsme économique, ont continué à augmenter le réchauffement fatal. La pire défection a été celle de la plus grande puissance du monde, lorsque le Président Donald Trump a décidé de retirer sa signature de l'Accord de Paris, en se justifiant avec son slogan «*America first*»: avant tout l'intérêt économique des États-Unis. Le mépris qu'il a affiché envers les prévisions alarmistes des scientifiques climatologues est bien connu. Son comportement que l'histoire classera probablement parmi les crimes contre l'humanité a été imité par d'autres puissants, tel le président brésilien Bolsonaro.

Arrivés à ce point, nous devons demander avec quelle argumentation théologique le pape réagit à cette crise planétaire. Il est logique que, s'il veut que la foi chrétienne entre dans la motivation du sauvetage de la planète, favorisant la longévité, il recoure à la source normative de cette foi qui n'est autre que la Bible. De fait, après avoir longuement exposé la problématique écologique de notre temps en reprenant les analyses des scientifiques, il fait valoir «la sagesse des écrits bibliques», notamment celle du livre de la Genèse. Il donne d'abord une interprétation clairement anthropocentrique de ce qu'il appelle le premier «récit» symbolique de la Création, en mettant l'accent sur la dignité de l'homme. Mais il montre aussi que cette dignité implique une mission, celle de soumettre et de dominer d'une façon responsable la terre et les autres vivants. Il affirme que cette double mission doit être suivie par les humains

15 Nations Unies, Accord de Paris (2015), https://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/convention/application/pdf/french_paris_agreement.pdf.

16 Accord de Paris 2.1.a.

17 Fathi TSHISEKEDI, L'action du G7 en faveur du développement des états du sud, *Mémoire Online*, https://www.memoireonline.com/11/22/13468/m_Laction-du-G7-en-faveur-du-dveloppement-des-tats-du-sud17.html.

en se comportant réellement comme image ressemblante de Dieu, c'est-à-dire avec non-violence.

Il aurait pu citer ici des exégètes comme Norbert Lohfink, qui rappelle que le terme hébreu *KABASH* a une double signification, l'une guerrière, l'autre pacifique. Il peut désigner l'acte par lequel un vainqueur piétine le vaincu, mais aussi l'acte par lequel un fort protège un faible, un geste qui est bien illustré par une image mésopotamienne représentant un berger qui pose son pied sur une brebis, libérant ainsi ses deux mains pour combattre un fauve qui menace la brebis. Or le contexte de *Gn* 1, 28 exige que cette signification pacifique et protectrice soit retenue et que la violente soit écartée. Il en va de même du terme *RADAH* qui signifie dominer. Le contexte ne permet pas qu'on le comprenne au sens d'un exercice d'une domination tyrannique, mais plutôt au sens du comportement d'un bon pasteur.¹⁸

L'autre métaphore biblique que le pape fait valoir est celle du jardinage selon *Gn* 2, 8-15: «Yahvé Dieu planta un jardin en Eden, à l'Orient, et il y mit l'homme qu'il avait modelé. Yahvé Dieu fit pousser du sol toutes espèces d'arbres séduisants à voir et bons à manger [...]. Et Yahvé Dieu prit l'homme et l'établit dans le jardin d'Eden pour le cultiver et le garder». Le Pape ajoute encore l'idée que «garder» signifie aussi «sauvegarder», ce qui est juste si l'on considère que toute plantation est exposée à des dégradations diverses. Le caractère implicitement écologique de ce texte est évident. Rappelons encore que, selon la tradition juive, la terre, même promise, est propriété exclusive de Dieu et que l'homme n'en est que l'administrateur.

Mais comment se présente actuellement la réalité? C'est ici que la norme biblique prend un accent critique, voire menaçant. L'encyclique le montre en abordant le thème du Déluge. Citons *Gn* 6, 5-8: «Yahvé vit que la méchanceté de l'homme était grande sur la terre et que son cœur ne formait que de mauvais desseins à longueur de journée. Yahvé se repentit d'avoir fait l'homme sur la terre et il s'affligea dans son cœur. Et Yahvé dit: 'Je vais effacer de la surface du sol les hommes que j'ai créés - depuis l'homme jusqu'aux bestiaux, aux bestioles et aux oiseaux du ciel -, car je me repens de les avoir faits.' Mais Noé avait trouvé grâce aux yeux de Yahvé.»

Quatre idées peuvent nous frapper dans ce texte. La première que la méchanceté humaine est vue comme universelle. La seconde que la possibilité de la disparition du genre humain est imputée à cette méchanceté. La troisième que les animaux sont entraînés dans la catastrophe due à l'homme. La quatrième laisse entendre

18 Norbert LOHFINK, *Unsere große Wörter. Das Alte Testament zu Themen dieser Jahre*, Freiburg : Herder, 1977, 156-177.

l'heureuse inconséquence divine. Dieu en effet, qui dans un premier temps regrette de l'avoir créé revient sur son intention de l'anéantir, eu égard à Noé le Juste qui obtient cette grâce pour tous. Il se comprend que le lecteur moderne ne mette pas ici l'accent, comme l'avait fait les juifs de l'antiquité, sur l'image d'un Créateur qui regrette d'avoir créé l'homme avant de lui faire grâce. Mais il trouvera tout à fait crédible le message selon lequel l'humanité, telle qu'elle se comporte collectivement, est capable de causer sa propre ruine. C'est ce que le Pape veut insinuer en citant l'histoire de Noé.¹⁹

L'auteur de ce texte ne précise pas en quoi consistait la méchanceté des hommes du temps de Noé. Mais si le Pape y renvoie dans son encyclique, on comprend pourquoi il voit une analogie entre le péché à portée écologique de notre temps et la méchanceté dont parle le texte. En effet, dans les deux cas, il s'agit d'un mépris ou du moins de la perte de vue de la volonté du Créateur de voir tous les êtres vivants se lier dans une coexistence non violente et pacifique, seul moyen de les préserver d'une catastrophe commune. Cette analogie se trouve confirmée par la mise en scène appuyée des espèces animales dans le récit du Déluge. Par là, se manifeste une haute estime des vivants extra-humains. Leur valorisation et leur droit à l'existence se trouvent soulignés par le fait qu'ils sont co-destinataires de l'alliance que Dieu conclut avec Noé. Là, Yahvé promet qu'il n'y aura plus de Déluge et déclare, en contemplant l'arc en ciel qui apparaît: «voici le signe de l'alliance que j'institue entre moi et vous et tous les êtres vivants qui sont avec vous, pour les générations à venir» (*Gn* 9, 12).

A partir de cette base scripturaire, le Pape peut facilement arriver à l'affirmation que les animaux tant sauvages que domestiques ne sont pas de simples objets d'usage et de consommation, mais des êtres ayant une valeur en eux-mêmes. Il écrit: «Nous sommes appelés à reconnaître que les autres êtres vivants ont une valeur propre devant Dieu».²⁰ Cette valeur est très différente d'une valeur commerciale, elle correspond à une véritable dignité que déjà la sagesse vétérotestamentaire reconnaît implicitement à des animaux, au point qu'ils sont capables d'enseigner aux hommes la morale par leur comportement exemplaire. Nous lisons: «Il existe sur terre quatre êtres tout petits et pourtant sages parmi les sages» (*Prov* 30, 24). Et ailleurs: «Va voir la fourmi, paresseux ! Observe ses mœurs et deviens sage». (*Pr* 6, 6). Puis encore dans le livre de Job: «Interroge [...] le bétail pour t'instruire,

¹⁹ *Laudato Si'* 70–71.

²⁰ *Laudato Si'* 69.

les oiseaux du ciel pour t'informer. Parle à la terre, elle te donnera des leçons, ils te renseigneront les poissons des mers» (*Jb* 12, 7-8).

Même si le Pape ne cite pas ces textes qui valorisent certains animaux, il rappelle les paroles de Jésus sur l'exemplarité des oiseaux du ciel et d'autres vivants, paroles qui sont de la même veine. Ce faisant, sa pensée s'accorde avec celle de deux philosophes des Lumières, Rousseau et Voltaire, qui ont opposé une fin de non-recevoir à Descartes. On sait que ce dernier, en suivant Aristote, mettait en avant l'irrationalité des animaux et les considérait comme des automates incapables d'intelligence et de volonté.²¹ Par contre, Rousseau les tenait pour des vivants doués d'âme, d'entendement et de sensibilité, des vivants envers lesquels l'homme a non seulement des droits mais aussi certains devoirs.²² Quant à Voltaire, il reprochait à Descartes de ne voir dans les animaux que des objets privés de connaissance. Et Voltaire allait, chose étonnante, jusqu'à rappeler que Dieu lui-même les incluait parmi les partenaires de l'alliance qu'il a accordée à Noé après le Déluge.²³ Bénéficiaires d'une telle faveur, ne devait-on pas leur reconnaître une réelle dignité?

Retenons ce constat: avec son affirmation que les animaux ont une valeur propre devant Dieu, le Pape va dans la même direction que plusieurs grands penseurs des temps modernes. Ces philosophes ont inauguré un courant d'idées qui va plus loin. Selon ce courant, les humains ont des devoirs envers les animaux qui ont, de leur côté, des droits à faire valoir auprès des humains. Quels droits? D'abord celui d'être considérés comme nos ancêtres lointains, puisque nous descendons de ceux dont l'évolution nous a fait émerger. Ensuite, le droit qu'on peut appeler «réparation», eu égard à la provenance du christianisme dans le judaïsme qui se servait d'animaux pour en faire des victimes de sacrifices sanglants et des boucs émissaires portant leurs péchés. Le droit aussi de prendre au sérieux les découvertes de la psychologie animale qui, après avoir commencé à parler d'âme animale, est arrivée à identifier en elle une forme primitive mais réelle de conscience.

21 René DESCARTES, *Discours de la méthode*, éd. Etienne GILSON, Paris: Vrin, 1989, 119–120.

22 Jean-Luc GUICHET, *Rousseau, l'animal et l'homme. L'animalité dans l'horizon anthropologique des Lumières*, Paris : Cerf, 2006.

23 VOLTAIRE, art. Bêtes, *Dictionnaire philosophique portatif*, Londres, 1765, 43–46; Lettre à M. Bourgelat, 18 mars 1775, *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire* 22. *Correspondance générale*, Paris: Th. Desoer, 1817, 837.

Antonio Damasio, un neurobiologiste américain, a proposé la notion de «conscience noyau».²⁴ Il reconnaît ainsi chez ces vivants la capacité de connaissance, de sensibilité, de souffrance et de joie, voire des attitudes qu'on peut qualifier de morales. Qu'on pense seulement à la fidélité et la maîtrise de soi chez les chiens. N'oublions pas non plus la question délicate de l'expérimentation sur les animaux, des conditions d'élevage et d'abattage que nous leur imposons. Selon certains, il faudrait reconnaître que de véritables échanges de service puissent exister entre l'animal domestique et son propriétaire. Évoquons enfin les droits les plus élémentaires: d'être nourri, de se reproduire, d'avoir un espace de vie et de survie. C'est là qu'on voit combien la situation de tous les vivants pris dans leurs corrélations et leurs interactions est au cœur de la problématique écologique.

Dans ce contexte, on ne peut qu'adhérer à l'idée du Pape de situer les espèces végétales et animales parmi les pauvres de la terre que le péché écologique met aujourd'hui à rude épreuve.

En conclusion, disons ceci. Si ce qui a été dit dans *Laudato Si'* sur la valeur propre de chaque créature devant Dieu²⁵ correspond à la vérité, il est légitime de leur attribuer une réelle dignité. Certes non la même que la personne humaine qui est intangible. Non plus une qui interdirait que la vie animale puisse nous servir à entretenir, à guérir, à faire épanouir la vie humaine. Un modèle à suivre serait peut-être l'attitude des amérindiens qui s'excusent auprès du gibier qu'ils sont obligés de chasser pour ne pas mourir de faim. Cela leur interdit de les faire périr par pur plaisir. Mais cette attitude pourrait être aussi une extension de l'amour du prochain aux vivants préhumains. De même une manière de nous aimer nous-mêmes, puisque sans la sauvegarde de la biodiversité, l'espèce humaine ne pourra se perpétuer très longtemps sur terre. Descartes a eu tort de croire que les humains étaient maîtres et possesseurs absolus de la nature. Le Pape François a eu raison d'inaugurer une théologie intégrale. A nous de faire ce qu'il a dit.

Après avoir argumenté avec *Laudato Si'* en faveur d'une longévité collective de notre planète, qui est actuellement en danger d'être rendue, par l'humanité même, de moins en moins habitable, nous avons à conclure en montrant le rapport que

24 Antonio DAMASIO, *Le Sentiment même de soi. Corps, émotions, conscience*, Paris: Odile Jacob, 2002, 225–230, voir aussi Alexandre GANOCZY, *Christianisme et neurosciences : Pour une théologie de l'animal humain*, Paris: Odile Jacob, 2008, 37–42, 78–86, 248.

25 *Laudato si'* 16, 208.

nous voyons entre cette longévité espérée et la vie éternelle. Cette longévité paraît encore aujourd'hui difficile à atteindre. La vie éternelle dont parle le Nouveau Testament s'avère aussi indéfinissable et indescriptible que l'être même de Dieu. Aussi parle-t-on depuis toujours en langage analogique. La part de ressemblance entre éternité et temporalité consiste dans la durée, c'est pourquoi notre liturgie utilise la formule «*per omnia saecula saeculorum*», «pour tous les siècles des siècles». Implicitement, on met l'accent dans cette «durée» éternelle sur la dimension temporelle de l'avenir, c'est-à-dire un moment de vie qui est à venir et se produit en apportant du nouveau.

Déjà, Augustin osait parler de «*novitas aeterna*», la «nouveauité éternelle».²⁶ Dans la modernité, W. Pannenberg proposait la notion de «réalisation de possibilités toujours nouvelles», une sorte de «création continue».²⁷ Lecuit note dans un sens semblable le caractère radicalement dynamique de la vie éternelle, même s'il semble considérer la «vision béatifique» comme son sommet.²⁸ Alors que les théologiens médiévaux inventaient le «*nunc stans*», le «maintenant immobile», pour parler de l'éternel,²⁹ les modernes, sans doute plus conformes aux textes bibliques, mettent en avant la dynamique vitale de ce don du Vivant. En cela, ils se montrent aussi plus sensibles à la signification du *bios* et à son intégration dans la *zôé*.

Quant à identifier le plus haut moment de la vie éternelle à la «vision béatifique», on peut formuler des réserves. Car toutes celles et tous ceux qui vivent après leur mort avec le Christ ou Dieu ne sont pas appelés à trouver leur bonheur en le contemplant sans cesse, mais plutôt à agir avec Lui. Dès lors, la vision ne devrait qu'introduire à l'action. Car le plus grand des commandements reste, même dans l'éternité, l'amour du prochain. Les moines qui sont, dès leur vie dans le temps, «*in contemplatione activus*» et «*in actione contemplativus*», anticipent en quelque

26 *De pecc. meritis et remiss.* 2.11.

27 Sur l'eschatologie de Pannenberg: Wolfhart PANNENBERG, *Eschatologie und Sinnerfahrung*, in ID., *Grundfragen systematischer Theologie. Gesammelte Aufsätze* 2, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980, 66–79; ID., *Systematische Theologie* 3, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015, 569–694; Alexandre GANOCZY, *Théologie en modernité. Une introduction à la pensée de Wolfhart Pannenberg*, Paris, Cerf, 211–223.

28 Jean-Baptiste LECUIT, «La vie éternelle : corporelle, dynamique et universelle ? Les débats contemporains et leurs enjeux», *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 108.4 (202) 631–658.

29 Thomas d'AQUIN, *Sent I.*, d.38, q.1, a.5; John MARENBO, *Le temps, l'éternité et la prescience de Boèce à Thomas d'Aquin* (tr. Irène Rosier-Catach), Paris : Vrin, 2005, 135.

sorte ce que tout ressuscité aura à faire quand il sera avec le Christ ou Dieu. Voir le Dieu invisible satisfera sans doute leur curiosité légitime, mais la finalité de leur vie nouvelle n'est nullement égocentrique, elle est tout à fait altruiste. Voilà pourquoi il semble légitime de se référer à *Mt 25*, où la vie éternelle et sa bénédiction sont accordées à ceux qui ont rendu le *bios* supportable pour leurs prochains qui ont faim et soif.

Qu'est-ce que le «ciel»? Il est là où l'amour et la charité agissent en faisant le bien, selon le mot latin «*ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est*»: si Dieu est amour, si Son unité est communionelle, la vie éternelle des croyants l'expérimente comme tel. Ils ont donc, même dans l'éternité, gardé la foi en Lui, c'est-à-dire dépassé la simple vision de Son identité: ils s'en remettent entièrement à Lui. Ce n'est pas tellement la vision de l'Invisible, et une meilleure connaissance de celui-ci, qui les béatifie, mais la foi-confiance en Son Amour. Voilà pourquoi même le pécheur invétéré peut se convertir, découvrant après sa mort qui est Dieu pour lui aussi. Ainsi, même pour lui, incroyant, agnostique ou athée, la voie du Salut semble rester ouverte, comme le pensait déjà Origène.

Dans cette perspective, la *zôé* n'a pas toute seule le monopole, elle ne sauve vraiment qu'en ayant intégré le *bios*, notamment les avantages de la longévité que nous devons au progrès des sciences biologiques. Or, si nous rapprochons de cette façon la vie éternelle espérée par la foi de la biosphère analysée par les sciences, nous ne faisons que de «l'imitation» de Jésus, le Christ «Médecin». Car la santé fait chez lui partie du Salut, même de façon non-dite et seulement faite.

C'est là que nous comprenons la finalité de l'encyclique *Laudato Si'*, qui demande l'extension de la longévité au domaine de la planète: foi et raison, éthique théologique et recherche scientifique doivent s'y consacrer dans cette nouvelle alliance, faisant fi de toute laïcité raccourcie. En tout cas, ce qui nous paraît certain, c'est qu'il s'agit de sauver l'avenir des générations futures, humaines, animales, végétales, en rendant possible une longévité collective de tous les vivants, dans l'attente du mystère béatifique de la vie éternelle pour tous. Même pour ceux et celles que nos anciens destinaient si facilement à la damnation éternelle dans l'endroit mythologique de l'enfer. De cela, nous devons parler ailleurs et plus tard.

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“WHAT IS THE TRUTH?” THE PROBLEM OF FAKE NEWS

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Abstract. The study examines the issues and problems associated with fake news, so common today. After defining the term, it discusses the role of the media in the creation and dissemination of fake news, and assesses it from an ethical and moral perspective, before considering what readers can do when they encounter fake news and how the state and EU legislation can regulate media content. The study concludes with a discussion of the content and teaching of three documents of the Catholic Church that examine the role of the media in the context of the truthfulness of information.

Keywords: truth, news, fake news, misinformation, media, communication, journalism, *Inter Mirifica*, World Communication Day

Introduction

“What is the truth?” – we may ask with Pilate (John 18,38) several times a day, when we hear or see different, often contradictory, reports about the same event on different media outlets, or when we have the feeling that something is wrong with a news item we read on the Internet.

Whose interest is it to mislead people with fake news and untruths? For what reason and for what purpose do they want to influence the masses? Why do so many people fall for them? Can we do something about the unsolicited pseudo-information that is being shared by our friends on social media portals? Who can we turn to for help in deciding whether the information we are receiving is true? Questions like these can arise in any of us (because no matter how much one tries to keep out of the news stream, it will catch up with us sooner or later), whether we are active on social media or not, as fake news can now be spread in the mainstream media, which can reach many and thus shape and (often want to) shape minds.

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In this paper, I will first seek answers to these questions with the help of experts on the subject, and then briefly present the views of the Catholic Church on fake news. While it would be possible to go into more detail on the philosophical and dogmatic interpretation of truth and falsehood, as well as on the moral guidance on truth-telling in Scripture (which could be the subject of another paper), for reasons of space I will only discuss in some detail the content of the most important Catholic documents dealing with the media and fake news.

The emergence of fake news in history and the media

Fake news is not a new phenomenon in history, as in the past, there are many in the present, but I will mention just a few.

In the introduction to her study,² Petra Aczél refers to a news item depicted in a copper engraving published in 1671: a visit by King Louis XIV to the French Royal Academy of Sciences. This is a valuable representation of an important event, but the reality is different: the king did not visit the Academy until 10 years later, in 1681, in circumstances very different from those depicted in the copper engraving.

Perhaps the first ‘fake news’ to appear on the radio and cause mass hysteria was Orson Welles’ radio play based on the novel *The War of the Worlds*, broadcast on 30 October 1938 by CBS Radio. The news, announced as part of the Halloween broadcast, that Martians had landed on a New Jersey farm and begun their invasion of Earth caused widespread panic, with hundreds of thousands of people fleeing their homes, although the author stated at the beginning and end of the programme that the story was fictional. The panic did not result in any loss of life, but it took a few days for calm to be restored everywhere.³

When discussing the history of fake news in the media, several authors consider it important to mention year 2016, when the fake news phenomenon was elevated to campaign level in the USA during the 2016 elections.⁴ Just a few of the fake news stories that have taken off and reached hundreds of thousands of people

2 Petra ACZÉL, “Az álhír. Kommentár a jelenség értelmezéséhez”, *Századvég* 84 (2017) 5–26 (5).

3 M. Tamás TARJÁN, “Marslakók támadják meg az Egyesült Államokat”, *Rubicon*, <https://rubicon.hu/hu/kalendarium/1938-oktober-30-marslakok-tamadjak-az-egyesult-allamokat> [2025.05.15.]; Péter KREKÓ, *Tömegparanoia 2.0. Összeesküvés-elméletek, álhírek és dezinformáció*, Budapest: Athenaeum, 2021, 72–73; Diána Daniela KRIZBAI, “Álhírek és a biztonságunk”, *Hadtudomány* 29 (2019) 128–141 (131).

4 KRIZBAI, “Álhírek”, 132–133; ACZÉL, “Az álhír”, 10; KREKÓ, *Tömegparanoia*, 20–21.

on Facebook: the Pope backs Mr Trump, Hillary Clinton sold weapons to ISIS. Although during the campaign the fake news targeted Hillary Clinton, it was Trump, who won the presidential election, who later called CNN news and the New York Times ‘fake news’.⁵

We could go on and on about the many fake news stories and conspiracy theories that still attract crowds today (e.g. flat earth theory, reptilian theory, various health care delusions, etc. ⁶), but one thing is certain: with the ‘help’ of the internet and social networking sites, fake news and negative news spread faster today than before the internet, and are therefore capable of causing more damage than before.⁷

Definition and conceptual scope of fake news

News

First, it is important to clarify what is meant by ‘news’. In her study, Aczél lists a number of characteristics of the news: that which appears every day, that which the editor considers of interest to the public, timely, recent or recurring, ephemeral, “answers the who, what, when, where, why and how questions about a famous event”, a chronicle of events; “its character is dominated by the impersonality that comes from its realism.”⁸ From the point of view of its origins and its belonging to whom and to what, news is a social construction⁹, as a social media product it is an object, a commodity, a saleable, manipulable, realistic and objective form of communication, a man-made, relational form of communication.¹⁰ From the point of view of the individual, its components are the communicator, the object and the symbol, the latter being linked not only to the object but also to “the thought evoked by the object.”¹¹

5 KRIZBAI, “Álhírek”, 132-133.

6 KREKÓ, *Tömegparanoia*, 20–21.

7 KRIZBAI, “Álhírek”, 140.

8 ACZÉL, “Az álhír”, 7 (tr. EK).

9 MÓNika ANDOK, *A hírek története*, Budapest: L’Harmattan, 2013, 18.

10 ACZÉL, “Az álhír”, 8.

11 ACZÉL, “Az álhír”, 8 (tr. EK).

In order to interpret the news correctly, it is important to choose the communication concept in which to embed the news. The transactional direction perceives communication as a transmission of signals and information, the other direction perceives it as an act of participation and sharing, broadly speaking as a rite of passage involving both the communicator and the receiver. In the latter, it is not the novelty or the deviant content element that is important, but that which can strengthen the community and serve the “need to experience”. Here, objectivity does not imply detachment, but rather that the author remains unmarked, allowing the symbols to speak for him.¹² Aczél thus defines:

news is a form of communication whose connection to reality can only be grasped in conjunction with human thought (interpretation, associations), whose communication and reception are motivated by a participatory function, by the need to participate and experience, in which the authorlessness is not impersonal but a manifestation of the forces of the world, and in which novelty does not alienate but connects us to the events of the world.¹³

Fake news and its co-concepts

In year 2016, the Oxford Dictionaries named *post-truth* the word of the year.¹⁴ This term denotes an era in which factuality is eclipsed, with emotions and subjective beliefs playing a greater role. Although the term existed in the first decade of the second millennium, its use in public discourse increased dramatically in 2016 with the EU referendum in England and the US presidential election.¹⁵

According to Péter Krekó, a researcher of fake news and conspiracy theories in Western, developed societies, the collective head-washing that is now taking place in the West is now voluntary: the fake news industry is flourishing, through which people deceive themselves, lie to themselves. Everyone can have their own opinion, but also their own fact – “in the magical world of post-truth, the distinction between fact and opinion is blurred, and there can be several mutually exclusive ‘facts’ about the same

12 ACZÉL, “Az álhír”, 8.

13 ACZÉL, “Az álhír”, 9.

14 Oxford Languages, Word of the Year 2016, <https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/2016/> [2025.05.19.]; Gábor Barnabás HORVÁTH, “Torzuló valóság a viturális térben. Az álhírek és veszélyei,” *Tudásmenedzsment* 21 (2020) 260–268 (263).

15 Oxford Languages, Word of the Year 2016, <https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/2016/> [2025.05.20.]; KREKÓ, *Tömegparanoia*, 19–20.

phenomenon.”¹⁶ This post-truth era is made up of pseudo-news. Kreko defines the term as “information disseminated in public forums that is created with the intent to deceive.”¹⁷ The lie is institutionalised: whoever creates the fake news knows that what he/she writes/says is not true. The one who transmits and spreads it is either a propagandist or an ardent believer – Kreko says that the latter are in the majority.¹⁸

The word ‘fake news’ itself is not a scholarly term (a terminus technicus), but rather a political concept embedded in a conceptual framework of worldviews and views, a term used in public life and in the media.¹⁹ According to Aczél, there are also difficulties in the naming of the term, since both German and French have difficulties in translating it (it has been preserved as Anglicism), while the Hungarian language has adopted it unnoticed as ‘pseudo-news’.²⁰

In their study, Norman Vasu and his co-authors classify pseudo-news as an information-conveying concept into five categories. (1) Disinformation, i.e. false information, which is lies and rumours deliberately spread to weaken national security, (2) misinformation, which is lies or rumours propagated from the political side, with an interpretation of the facts based on ideological bias, (3) misinformation disseminated without political purpose or other malicious intent, (4) entertainment in the form of parody, satire or other apparently humorous pieces of falsehood, and finally (5) lies disseminated for financial gain form separate groups.²¹

Perhaps a slightly more detailed allocation of this, according to the subject of the information, is the Zimdars allocation. The system²² developed by Melissa Zimdars, which has since been widely used and sharply criticised, sets out 11 categories for labelling and typing online fake news. It distinguishes between fake news, mockery satire, propagandistic disinformation, gossip, conspiracy theory, news from oppressive states, hate speech, clickbait hyperbole, politically biased news, news that needs further scrutiny and credible news.

16 KREKÓ, *Tömegparanoia*, 21 (tr. EK).

17 KREKÓ, *Tömegparanoia*, 21 (tr. EK).

18 KREKÓ, *Tömegparanoia*, 21.

19 ACZÉL, “Az álhír”, 10.

20 ACZÉL, “Az álhír”, 10.

21 Norman VASU *et al.*, “Fake News: National Security in the Post-truth Era”, *Policy Report*, January 2018, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies and Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, 5, https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/PR180313_Fake-News_WEB.pdf [2025.05.19.]

22 New Jersey State Library, https://libguides.njstatelib.org/facts/fake_news [2022.09.05.].

In exploring the world of fake news, it is also worth mentioning other concepts closely related to fake news as a concept, which are presented by Ágnes Veszelszki based on the thought process of Theresa Heyd. The first broad conceptual category is the scope of Internet fraud, which has two subcategories according to its specific purpose. The first is for profit: this includes phishing and spam, the second is for entertainment: this includes hoaxes, urban legends and clickbait, the real purpose of which is to increase online reach by sharing and thus generate advertising revenue. The second major conceptual category is propaganda, which is nowadays mostly associated with political leaders and governments. This influence and manipulation through the use of media always has a purpose and is always linked to content. It is important to add that the aim is also to increase online revenues by raising awareness. The third major conceptual category is news parody, which is not necessarily misleading, but rather entertaining. In its language, it imitates news media, and its essence is style imitation.²³

The above shows that the conceptual scope and categorisation of fake news is very broad, with even experts disagreeing on the exact definition of fake news. We must therefore agree with Aczél, who argues that the scientific study of fake news is still incomplete, that its interpretation is biased and controversial sometimes and that its use is inconsistent.²⁴

Misinformation, i.e. the mechanisms of misinformation

An important point to note is that the English language distinguishes between intentional disinformation and unintentional misinformation, as in many cases the media present misinformation that is based on a misconception. This is the basis for the categorisation of misinformation according to the so-called intentionality of dissemination.²⁵ The difficulty is to distinguish between them, since we do not know, on the one hand, the purpose for which the author of the news created it and, on the other hand, the extent to which the person who shared the fake news was aware of its truth or falsity, especially in the fast-moving online world.²⁶

23 Ágnes VESZELSZKI, “Az álhírek extra- és intralingvális jellemzői”, *Századvég* 84 (2017) 51–82 (54–58).

24 ACZÉL, “Az álhír”, 13.

25 VESZELSZKI, “Az álhírek extra- és intralingvális jellemzői,” 53.

26 KREKÓ, *Tömegparanoia*, 22.

Based on Wardle, Veszelszki also classifies fake news according to the way it is spread, distinguishing six types. These are (1) the use of a credible source in an inappropriate context, (2) fake sites that mimic original news sites and exploit their brand credibility, (3) fake news sites, (4) visual elements that spread false information, (5) manipulated content, (6) parody content.²⁷

But how does this fake news reach consumers? In their study, Katalin Fehér and Olivia Király ask, among other things, who exercises narrative control over fake news. They identify three phenomena that are dominant today and towards which a shift away from classical journalism and media practices can be observed with the emergence of new media. These not only make narrative control more widely available but also support the dynamics of pseudo-reporting.²⁸ The first phenomenon is so-called *churnalism*. The Collins Dictionary derives the word from a combination of the words 'churn (out)' and 'journalism', which refers to the use of unverified sources in online media.²⁹ These can often be pre-produced press releases, links that can be easily shared on social media. Another related phenomenon is *prosumerism*, also taken from the English words 'producer' and 'consumer', which means that "the media consumer is essentially the producer of media content."³⁰ For mainstream media, this is a real treasure trove: faster and more cost-effective distribution of content that is captured and immediately posted by internet or mobile users at the event location. Of course, in this case, the pace does not always allow for thorough verification of information, so this fake news is quickly spread by social media sharing as mainstream media content. (The social media response to this will be discussed later.) The third phenomenon is the so-called *filter bubble effect*, where data is emphasised. Pseudo-news consumption can be tracked and coded, resulting in media consumption patterns and user preferences that can be used to write reinforcement algorithms.³¹ Recommendations (e.g. ads, "You might also be interested in this") link users to "increasingly homogeneous sources ... eventually locking them into a filter bubble. (...) As a result, similar

27 VESZELSZKI, "Az álhírek extra- és intralingvális jellemzői", 53–54.

28 Katalin FEHÉR – Olivia KIRÁLY, "Álhíresülés – a hamis hírek dinamikája a médiában", *Századvég* 84 (2017) 39–48 (41).

29 "Churnalism", *Collins English Dictionary*, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/churnalism> [2025.05.22.]

30 FEHÉR – KIRÁLY, "Álhíresülés", 42.

31 Tibor KOLTAY, "A posztigazság kora és a könyvtárak", *Könyv és Nevelés* 20 (2018) 48–61 (50–51).

news or pseudo-news is associated with more similar news. The filter bubble thus allows a smaller and smaller field of vision of reality.”³²

Another question is why we accept fake news in the first place, how content that is not based on reality or only partially based on reality becomes credible and acceptable, and why it makes readers share it. As reasons for this, Fehér and Király identify two important phenomena in addition to sensationalism, astonishment and entertainment. The first is the so-called cognitive dissonance, known from social psychology, which occurs when “we notice that our attitudes, thoughts and actions do not fit together.”³³ To avoid this discomfort (e.g. certain news content is simply disturbing for some reason), a person unconsciously resorts to what is known as confirmation bias: he or she selects information according to his or her own values – gathering evidence that supports it, giving it greater weight, while discarding, twisting or ignoring the contradictory. This is why the filter bubble effect can be deepened: comfort-inducing news is not scrutinised, regardless of its veracity. The other phenomenon that explains the background to the reception of news content is the so-called *backfire effect*, “which occurs when the news consumer’s worldview is threatened by facts and new information confirms, rather than refutes, the previous, emotionally based belief.”³⁴

In conclusion, we can conclude with the authors that fake news is a complex and comprehensive phenomenon that, starting from the traditional media, “promotes the spread of false information deliberately”³⁵ due to the intertwining of mainstream media, new media and social media. This trend is reinforced not only by user-generated content journalism, but also by the filter bubble effect and the psychosocial phenomena described above.

Taking action against fake news

What a news reader can do

As Péter Krekó writes, human cognition is imperfect, yet it strives for certainty. We cling convulsively to the most unsubstantiated information, because the wrong

32 FEHÉR – KIRÁLY, “Álhíresülés”, 42; KOLTAY, “A posztigazság kora”, 50–51 (tr. EK).

33 FEHÉR – KIRÁLY, “Álhíresülés”, 43 (tr. EK).

34 FEHÉR – KIRÁLY, “Álhíresülés”, 43 (tr. EK).

35 FEHÉR – KIRÁLY, “Álhíresülés”, 44.

explanation is more reassuring than the unexplained. The world created by pseudo-news and conspiracy theories often serves our beliefs more effectively and is more attractive, exciting and comfortable than reality. Strong biases make us all impressionable and manipulable - even if not to the same degree.³⁶

So, just as it is not easy to fight against fake news, especially in today's mass media-influenced world, it is not easy to recognise it. Several studies³⁷ have found that people who consume media are very bad at distinguishing between legitimate, fake and paid online news.³⁸ As a result, several authors have put forward suggestions to filter out fake news with a high degree of certainty.

For the ordinary news consumer, the October 2020 SANS Security Awareness newsletter³⁹ recommends checking the reliability of news. To do this, it is important to examine a few aspects of the news and the reader. From the news side, it is important to consider the source (a blog is less reliable than a reputable scientific journal), to check the credibility of the references cited in the article, whether different sources are reporting the same news, whether the author is a professional, whether the article is recent or recounts an older story, who has posted comments and what kind of comments (generated or from paid commenters), and whether the news is funded and if so, by whom. For their part, it is important for readers to determine whether or not they themselves are biased about the subject of the article (it is common to read articles that support their own opinion or view, and to exclude news that contains other opinions), and to be wary of reposting - if unsure about the credibility of the news, think twice about sharing it with others. The author concludes that fake news can shape an individual's opinion and influence his decisions, so it is important to take the time to do these steps to "make sure you can make informed decisions based on facts."⁴⁰

There is already a non-profit online platform that educates schoolchildren and their teachers on how to detect fake news.⁴¹ As social platforms have been sharply

36 KREKÓ, *Tömegparanoia*, 12.

37 ACZÉL, "Az álhír", 18-20; FEHÉR – KIRÁLY, "Álhíresülés", 45.

38 KRIZBAI, "Álhírek", 137.

39 Jason JORDAAN, "Fake News", OUCH! Newsletter, October 7, 2020, SANS Security Awareness, SANS Institute, <https://www.sans.org/newsletters/ouch/fake-news/> [2025.05.22.]

40 JORDAAN, "Fake News", *ibid.*

41 *Checkology – The News Literacy Project*, <https://get.checkology.org> [2025.05.22.] – See Zsuzsanna SZVETELSZKY, "Közösségi kételyek", *Századvég* 84 (2017) 27–39 (35).

criticised for the spread of fake news⁴², two of the biggest global players, Google and Facebook, have also taken up the fight against fake news by launching several projects to help filter out untrue and unsubstantiated content for users.⁴³ Google has “made it possible for other sites and fact-checking organisations to flag an article if they believe its truth is disputed or incorrect, using the Fact Check tag.”⁴⁴ This technique has also been adopted by editorial offices, organisations and other independent sources. Facebook has set out ten tips for exposing fake news: 1, be sceptic about headlines; 2, look at the URL; 3, check the source; 4, be aware of unusual format; 5, check the photos accompanying the news story, as well as 6, dates and 7, evidence; 8, check other reports; 9, wonder if the story is a joke and finally 10, think critically about the stories you read before sharing.⁴⁵

Veszelszki has researched the extra- and intralingual characteristics of fake news and has compiled a 14-point list of tips for recognising fake news, based on the results of his own research and the guides for recognising fake news. He stresses the importance of checking the URL of the news and the reliability of the source (site) and draws attention to the critical treatment of sensationalist headlines, unusual formatting and images accompanying news, as well as the linguistic quality and stylistic features of the text. It is essential to check the author and date of publication, to consider the evidence and whether there is further reporting on the subject, and whether the news itself is a joke and the story is deliberately misleading. He also mentions news reader bias and encourages readers to seek expert advice if they are unsure about the reliability of the news. While very amateur attempts that resemble news portals are easier to spot, it is important to check with sites that use more sophisticated deception techniques and contain better quality news content.⁴⁶

In the case of scientific articles published on the internet, András Holl suggests that readers should check the metadata of the articles to verify their reliability. It is common to refer to one original article, often the source is also hyperlinked and the names of the researchers who produced the research are also given. Holl

42 VESZELSZKI, “Az álhírek extra- és intralingvális jellemzői”, 52–54.

43 SZVETELSZKY, “Közösségi kételyek”, 35.

44 FEHÉR – KIRÁLY, “Álhíresülés”, 46 (tr. EK).

45 KRIZBAI, “Álhírek”, 137–138, following James CARSON – Michael COGLEY, “Fake News: What Exactly Is It – And How Can You Spot It?”, *The Telegraph* (07.01.2021), <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/0/fake-news-exactly-donald-trump-rise/> [2025.05.23]

46 VESZELSZKI, “Az álhírek extra- és intralingvális jellemzői”, 74.

proposes a ‘weak’ version and a ‘strong’ version using more sophisticated web technologies, both based on a kind of chain of trust:

that news is trustworthy that has a trustworthy origin (original article, author, backing institution) and that has undergone trustworthy transformations (second and third publication), in this case also based on the trustworthiness of the second or third media, the contributing journalist or editor.⁴⁷

In the ‘weak’ version, the technology that helps to establish the trustworthiness of the data (dedicated browser add-ons) only gives the reader an indication of whether the required meta-information is included in the article, while the ‘strong’ version attempts to build a chain of trust to some reliable starting point using semantic web technologies. The main shortcoming of the proposed technologies for identifying fake news, the author sees, is that “they assume that the news consumer is willing to take the opportunity, willing to accept external help to decide the trustworthiness of the news.”⁴⁸ This verification requires active reader interest, since the easy spread of fake news can be explained by three factors: sloppiness of processing, personal bias and whether the news was shared by a friend.⁴⁹

Tibor Koltay takes stock of what needs to be done in the fight against fake news from the perspective of library staff, who can support users in dealing with issues of expertise. He interprets some points of the infographic⁵⁰ on the IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions) website. The phrase “reading between the lines” can not only refer to the exaggeration of a title, but it is also important to infer the underlying and hidden from the spoken, i.e. “looking behind the words”. It is very important to examine the impact of one’s own views on one’s judgement, as a serious problem is that “misinformation reinforces people’s preconceived attitudes, beliefs and values.”⁵¹ It is also important to make sure that

47 András HOLL, “Az interneten megjelenő tudományos hírek megbízhatóságának kérdéséről – technikai lehetőségek a megbízhatóság megállapítására és jelzésére”, *Tudományos és Műszaki Tájékoztatás* 66 (2019) 509–514 (510), <http://real.mtak.hu/101577/1/12372-39250-1-PB.pdf> [2025.05.23.]. (Tr. E.K.)

48 HOLL, “Az interneten megjelenő tudományos hírek megbízhatóságának kérdéséről”, 513.

49 KREKÓ, *Tömegparanoia*, 74.

50 International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, “How to Spot Fake News”, <https://repository.ifla.org/items/c5dbfa34-7d00-47ac-8057-0183a5056438> [2025.05.23.]

51 KOLTAY, *A posztigazság kora*, 57.

someone has already checked the text, looked at it, and to look for the original source of the information rather than the alleged source, and to see what others have written about the source, author or publisher of the news.⁵²

Professional ethical judgement: A Hungarian perspective

The need to uncover the truth in the media is, as in the past, closely linked to the freedom of the press and freedom of expression. The latter two are recognised as rights⁵³, the former should be met as an ethical requirement by the communicator. The main issue is the extent to which the following circumstances are taken into account in this relationship: the credibility of the communicator, the control of the channels and resources necessary for the effective dissemination of the communication, and the knowledge and attitudes of the receiving community. All these can make a particular communication or news item more convincing, whether its content is true or false.⁵⁴

52 KOLTAY, A posztigazság kora”, 57.

53 *Constitution of Hungary: Magyarország alaptörvénye* (2011.04.25.) art. IX., <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=A1100425.ATV&searchUrl=/gyorskereso?keyword%3Ds%25C3%25B3%25C3%25A1sszabads%25C3%25A1g> [2025.05.24.], 2010. évi CIV. törvény a sajtószabadságról és a médiatartalmak alapvető szabályairól [Act CIV of 2010 on freedom of the press and the basic rules governing media content], <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=A1000104.TV&searchUrl=/gyorskereso?keyword%3Dsajt%25C3%25B3szabads%25C3%25A1g> [2025.05.24.], a 1993. évi XXXI. törvény az emberi jogok és az alapvető szabadságok védelméről szóló, Rómában, 1950. november 4-én kelt Egyezmény és az ahhoz tartozó nyolc kiegészítő jegyzőkönyv kihirdetéséről [Act XXXI of 1993 on the promulgation of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, signed in Rome on 4 November 1950, and its eight additional protocols], <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=99300031.TV&searchUrl=/gyorskereso?keyword%3Ds%25C3%25B3%25C3%25A1sszabads%25C3%25A1g> [2025.05.24.]

54 Gábor POLYÁK, “Szabad-e hazudni? Közpolitikai eszközök az álhírek és a dezinformációk visszaszorítására”, in *Milyen média milyen társadalomnak? Konferenciakötet, a Károlyi József Alapítvány szervezésében*, Fehérvác, 2018. április 27–28., 91–105 (91). https://www.academia.edu/38372642/Szabad_e_hazudni_K%C3%B6zpolitikai_eszk%C3%B6z%C3%B6k_az_%C3%A1lh%C3%ADrek_%C3%A9s_a_

The ethos and professional rules of journalism as a profession have always been closely linked to the desire to find out the truth, even when the journalist has expressed his or her opinion in a subjective genre. Uncovering previously unknown facts and reporting them as news “contributes significantly to the media’s democratic functions, namely to controlling power (*watchdog power*) and to debate public issues in an argumentative manner.”⁵⁵

The journalistic profession’s own approach to seeking and reporting the truth is set out in the journalists’ codes of ethics that summarise the rules of the profession. The basic standards set out in these codes of ethics define the way journalism is perceived by society and journalists have no discretion in how these standards are observed. In the following, we will briefly review the Hungarian regulations - of course, similar standards are also formulated by professional circles in other countries.⁵⁶

With regard to fake news and untrue information, Article 4 of the Hungarian Journalists’ Code of Ethics⁵⁷ (Truthful reporting and conscientiousness) states that journalists and editors must not “intentionally or negligently make untrue statements in any form of publication (written, broadcast, online), and must verify facts and data with due care and diligence” (4.1.), and it is an ethical offence to “obstruct the truth or make it difficult for colleagues to ascertain the truth” (4.2.). The Code of Ethics naturally sets out the ethical decisions that can be taken against untruthful statements (cf. Article 10).

It is important to note that the contents of the Code of Ethics are binding for members of the National Association of Hungarian Journalists (MÚOSZ), but – and this is particularly important in the world of online media, where everyone is free to express their opinion - the Association recommends in the Introduction that all citizens outside its membership should apply the Code and follow its standards (cf. Introduction). With regard to fake news and untrue information, Article 4 of the Hungarian Journalists’ Code of Ethics (Truthful Reporting and Conscientiousness) states that journalists and editors must not “intentionally or

dezinform%C3%A1ci%C3%B3_visszaszor%C3%ADt%C3%A1s%C3%A1ra [2025.05.25.].

55 POLYÁK, “Szabad-e hazudni?”, 92 (tr. EK).

56 POLYÁK, “Szabad-e hazudni?”, 93.

57 Magyar Újságírók Országos Szövetsége, *Újságírói etikai kódex* [Hungarian National Association of Journalists, *Ethical Code of Journalism*], <https://muosz.hu/kodexek/ujsgairoi-etikai-kodex/> [2025.05.25.] (Tr. EK).

negligently make untrue statements in any form of publication (written, broadcast, online), and must verify facts and data with due care and diligence” (4.1.), and it is an ethical offence to “obstruct the truth or make it difficult for staff to ascertain the truth” (4.2.). The Code of Ethics naturally sets out the ethical decisions that can be taken against untruthful statements (cf. Article 10).

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European Union regulatory proposals

In January 2018, the European Union set up a High level Group on fake news and online disinformation,⁵⁹ which outlined a complex public policy and self-regulatory regime against⁶⁰ disinformation.⁶¹ In the report,⁶² the experts identified five priority themes. The first is ensuring transparency, covering both the entire digital value chain (real/unreal information, understanding the news flow of online news dissemination, the motivations and funding background of news publishers) and the ownership of the media and the sponsorship of content, and the distribution of content (paid users, algorithms developed for this purpose), thirdly, the source of news (quality news and algorithms of social platforms) and fourthly, fact-checking activities. It also proposed the creation of European research centres to implement transparency measures.⁶³

58 *Ethical Code of Journalism*.

59 *Final report of the High Level Expert Group on Fake News and Online Disinformation*, <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/final-report-high-level-expert-group-fake-news-and-online-disinformation> [2022.09.05.]

60 POLYÁK, “Szabad-e hazudni?”, 98.

61 KRIZBAI, “Álhírek”, 138–139.

62 *A Multi-Dimensional Approach to Disinformation. Report of the Independent High Level Group on Fake News and Disinformation*, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/6ef4df8b-4cea-11e8-be1d-01aa75ed71a1/language-en> [2025.05.25.]

63 *A Multi-Dimensional Approach to Disinformation*, 22–25.

Secondly, the experts mention the strengthening of media and information literacy, i.e. media awareness. This should be done in two areas: education and non-education. In the field of education, there is a need to reassess and amend education policy, i.e. to include the necessary competences in the curricula, to include this factor in the evaluation criteria of the education system and to train teachers. Outside school education, all age groups should have the opportunity to acquire media and information literacy. The experts recommend coordinating the activities of the various organisations involved and developing an evaluation system for training programmes.⁶⁴

The third set of proposed measures includes the development of tools to filter out disinformation in order to empower users and journalists, while encouraging a positive attitude towards technological progress. In addition to the development of programmes to enable users to monitor more effectively, it is also important to develop tools for journalists to automatically check the reliability of information, while training journalists and supporting innovative projects are also essential.⁶⁵

The report also stresses the crucial importance of preserving the diversity and sustainability of the European news ecosystem. This requires the EU to support quality journalism and related research and development, while member states must respect editorial freedom and independence and support innovative solutions from their own resources.⁶⁶

Last but not least, the report recommends the adoption of a European code of conduct, which would require monitoring and evaluation of resolution mechanisms. The proposal also outlines the process for the adoption and implementation of the code. This code would set out voluntary standards for all stakeholders (media companies, monitoring bodies, digital platform operators, advertising industry), including advertising principles for social platform operators, making sponsored content recognisable, ensuring transparency and accountability in the handling of personal data, cooperation with fact-checking bodies, ensuring access to fact-checking services, etc.⁶⁷

At present, this public policy toolbox, which goes beyond legislation, is still to be developed, but it will certainly be determined in the future whether appropriate

64 *A Multi-Dimensional Approach to Disinformation*, 25–27.

65 *A Multi-Dimensional Approach to Disinformation*, 27–28.

66 *A Multi-Dimensional Approach to Disinformation*, 29–30.

67 *A Multi-Dimensional Approach to Disinformation*, 31–34.

restructuring of the media and education systems can provide sufficient public policy help to counter the threats posed by fake news and disinformation.⁶⁸

Security aspects

Not only educating society to conscientious media consumption, stricter professional regulation of news providers (without infringing freedom of expression, of course) and the specialisation of fake news would serve to combat fake news and misinformation. Since fake news can also affect the sense of security of a country's population⁶⁹ and thus its security policy, as not all of it is created for political, diplomatic or military reasons, it can even become a tool of hybrid warfare. In her study, Diána Daniella Krizbai highlights that there is also work to be done on the security policy side: it would be advisable to provide law enforcement and armed forces personnel and services with more specialised and practice-oriented training than before in recognising fake news and raising the fight against fake news to a higher security policy level.⁷⁰ To quote Kreko, he also considers this necessary because

today's fake news industry, at least in the West, thrives without war, dictatorship or censorship. (Of course, many in the media and politics are interested in creating a “sense” of war: making the economic crisis look like the end of the world, the arrival of refugees like a civilizational struggle between continents, terrorism like a daily death threat to all, the crown virus like the destruction of the human race. In the western half of the world, we cannot speak of a classical, top-down, institutional brainwashing. People brainwash themselves with fake news - and the tabloid and fake news media and populist politicians are just the soap for this. And social media is the sink.⁷¹

Church statements on media's 'truth'

The Catholic Church has made a number of strong statements on the media and communications since Vatican II. Thanks to technological progress, the proliferation

68 POLYÁK, “Szabad-e hazudni?”, 101.

69 KRIZBAI, “Álhírek”, 131.

70 KRIZBAI, “Álhírek”, 139–140.

71 KREKÓ, *Tömegparanoia*, 20 (tr. EK).

of broadcast media has brought news, programmes and cinematographic works to almost everyone in the world, and it is part of the universal mission of the Church to give guidance to her members and to all people of good will.

A new feature of 1963 was the fact that journalists were invited to be present at Vatican II's meetings, thus making the proceedings of the Council open to the world through the press. This further confirmed the Vatican II's aim of opening the Church to the world.

While several papal messages on World Communications Day mention truth in general, the following is a closer look at the first document of the Catholic Church on mass media and communication, as well as two Church statements that explicitly call attention to the role of truth in the media.

Decree on the Means of Social Communication (1963)

Already in 1960, Pope John XXIII, in preparation for the Council, had entrusted the Secretariat for the Supervision of Publications and Entertainment with the task of drafting a document on the mass media (the Secretariat was later merged into the Commission for Lay Apostolate). The draft, which had been rejected the first time, was discussed again in 1963 and, although there were many objections to it, the order of the Council made it impossible to reopen the debate, so on the 4th December 1963 Pope Paul VI promulgated the *Decree on the Media of Social Communications, Inter Mirifica*.⁷² In what follows, I review its most important ideas in relation to the issue of untrue statements.

The document states at the outset that the Church has the task of teaching on the main issues related to the new media and their use, for the advancement of the whole human community. It does so because these means not only contribute to the recreation and cultivation of the people and to the spreading of the kingdom of God but can also do harm if misused (IM 2). Proper use requires that those who use them “know the principles of the moral order and apply them faithfully in this domain” (IM 4), and must also consider the subject matter, the circumstances and the impact of each means.

72 *Decree on the Media of Social Communications Inter mirifica*, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19631204_inter-mirifica_en.html.

An important issue in mass media is that of information, the acquisition and transmission of news. Information is useful and indispensable, and rapid disclosure provides fuller and more continuous knowledge, so society has a right to information about all that is in the public domain (cf. IM 5). “The proper exercise of this right demands, however, that the news itself that is communicated should always be true and complete, within the bounds of justice and charity. In addition, the manner in which the news is communicated should be proper and decent.” (IM 5) All members of the society have an essential role in the formation of a correct public opinion, and on the part of the recipients, personal, free and, very importantly, moral choice according to the law has a powerful role to play (cf. IM 8–9).

The moral responsibility of those who participate in any way in the creation and dissemination of communications is paramount. “It is quite evident what gravely important responsibilities they have in the present day when they are in a position to lead the human race to good or to evil by informing or arousing mankind.” (IM 11) This special task makes public authorities responsible on the basis of the principle of the common good, which cannot be contradicted by any economic, political or artistic considerations. In its duty to protect society, it has an important role to play in ensuring that nothing is done to cause serious harm to public morals and the progress of society (cf. IM 12).

In pastoral ministry, the mass media have an essential role to play and must be used responsibly by all members and organizations of the Church (pastors, bishops, faithful, and the Pontifical Commission for Social Communications and the new national commissions) to proclaim salvation. The Council takes the initiative to organise an annual day in every diocese in the world “on which the faithful are instructed in their responsibilities in this regard” (IM 18): to pray and give for the maintenance and development of this form of apostolate.

Although the conciliar decree does not explicitly mention the issue of fake news, its words calling for the observance of moral law and the principle of the common good indicate that in mass media, the truthfulness and truthfulness of information, on the one hand, and the responsibility that comes from shaping public opinion, on the other, are indispensable.

Letter of Pope Paul VI on the occasion of the 6th World Communications Day

Pope Paul VI's letter on the occasion of World Communications Day in 1972 focused on the role of social communications in the service of truth.⁷³

The honest and diligent search for the truth is the task of both the creators and the receivers of the news, so that "the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth" is conveyed. Like scientific research, the delivery of information requires the communicator to carefully check the facts, verify the credibility, critically evaluate the source and make sure that nothing essential is left out or hidden – but the responsibility is much greater, as they must also draw important conclusions from the facts. In religious matters, the responsibility is even greater, since it concerns matters of the relationship between God and man and requires more than mere professional competence: in these cases, which are closely linked to the mystery of salvation, the noble dimension of the reporter's vocation and the apostolic dimension of his work come to the fore.

News consumers also have a great responsibility: in respecting and responsibly seeking the truth, they must not be passive and uncritical of media content, which ultimately violates their own personal dignity. The possession of personal dignity and intelligence implies the right to exercise personal judgement, which must be used whenever it is necessary to choose between the media's news dump. Most people are in daily contact with the mass media and depend on it for their lives (for information about world events, for entertainment) – precisely for this reason it is important to have a critical perspective, i.e. to be alert to deviations from the truth. While artistic freedom exists, it must be pointed out that it cannot be detached from the truth and exploitative.

The greatest truth for believers in Christ is Jesus Christ (cf. John 14,6), but He also shows the way for those who do not yet know it. His truth sets us free (cf. John 18,37; 8,31-36) and saves us from bondage (cf. Gal 5,1) - the means of mass communication are particularly suited to the divine Word continuing its redemptive work through them. Although the believer knows that events are not moved by blind fate, but by God himself, he knows, not yet fully seeing the whole

73 POPE PAUL VI, *Message of the Holy ather for the World Social Communications Day. Theme: The Media of Social Communications at the Service of Truth*, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/messages/communications/documents/hf_p-vi_mes_19720421_vi-com-day.html [2025.06.01.]

body of the Word, that everything fits into God’s plan. A deeper insight into indisputable truth brings us close to the freedom we seek –

freedom from slavery either to human passion or intellectual prejudice; freedom from fear of failure and defeat; freedom from the dominance of power structures or pressure groups striving to impose on us their interpretations of life and events with little concern for what is true; freedom, finally, from that type of opportunism which will deliberately mask or confuse the truth to avoid a personal embarrassment, to cloak something disgraceful, or to make a financial gain.⁷⁴

Right thinking about the truth should also guide the use of the social communication. If one keeps in mind that God is the ultimate Truth and the source of all truth, and remains faithful to Christian moral teaching, these are also guarantees that one can remain faithful to the truth.

At the end of his letter, Paul VI declares that he acknowledges and encourages the efforts of priests, monks and lay people who, through the mass media, lead others to encounter the true light (cf. John 1,9). He concludes by expressing the hope that everyone: newsreaders, spokespersons, technicians, educators and all those who listen to them will take advantage of the opportunity offered by World Communications Day to reflect on and benefit from the ideas of this letter.

Throughout his letter, Pope Paul VI speaks of truth as something that carries with it a great responsibility to seek, to speak and to transmit. Although we do not explicitly encounter the concept of fake news or untrue information in this letter, the Pope points out that the publication and dissemination of falsehood as news is incompatible with human dignity, respect for other human beings and the dignity of the work of those working in the media.

Message of Pope Francis for the 52nd World Communications Day

The theme of Pope Francis’ message for 24 January 2018 is pseudo-news, entitled “The truth will set you free (John 8,32). Fake news and journalism for peace”.⁷⁵

74 POPE PAUL VI, *Message of the Holy ather for the World Social Communications Day*, 5.

75 *Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for World Communications Day*, 24 January 2018, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/papa-francesco_20180124_messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html [2025.06.02.]

In the introduction to his letter, the Pope reflects on human communication as a fundamental way of experiencing community. As the image of his Creator, man is able to express and share with others what is true, good and beautiful, to speak about himself and the world, but he can also use this capacity in different ways because of his arrogant selfishness, as in the case of Cain and Abel or the story of the Tower of Babel (cf. Gen 4,1-16; 11,1-9). The sign of this misuse is the perversion of the truth, both at the individual and the community level. In God's plan, communication "becomes an effective expression of our responsible search for truth and our pursuit of goodness."⁷⁶ In today's accelerating communications environment, thanks to digital systems, the phenomenon of fake news has emerged, prompting Pope Francis to dedicate this letter to the theme of truth, as his predecessors from Pope Paul VI onwards have done.

Section 1 introduces the concept and phenomenon of 'fake news'. It states that, in a general sense, misinformation is the dissemination of fake news through online or traditional media, based on non-existent or distorted data, with the aim of deceiving or manipulating the reader, influencing political decisions or gaining economic advantage. They are effective because, on the one hand, they can resemble the truth and, on the other hand, they can exploit stereotypes and prejudices to capture people's attention, creating fear, contempt, anger and disappointment. They are helped to spread by social networks, which they use manipulatively to gain high ratings and cause harm.

It is difficult to expose the phenomenon of fake news, because other opinions and views cannot enter a closed digital system. The logic of misinformation means that instead of a constructive dialogue with other opinions, anyone can become a disseminator of one-sided and unfounded opinions. "The tragedy of disinformation is that it discredits the others, presenting them as enemies, to the point of demonizing them and fomenting conflict."⁷⁷ The falsification of the truth leads to the further spread of arrogance and hatred by intolerant and hypersensitive attitudes.

Section 2 deals with the recognition of fake news. It is everyone's responsibility to confront falsehoods, which is by no means an easy task. The educational initiative to teach how to read and evaluate the communicative environment, the institutional and legal steps to develop rules to curb the phenomenon, and the steps

⁷⁶ *Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for World Communications Day*, Introduction.

⁷⁷ *Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for World Communications Day* 1.

taken by technology and media companies to control the digital profiles of fake news spreaders are all laudable initiatives. But the key to exposing the mechanism of misinformation is deep and careful reflection. The Pope calls it ‘snake-tactics’: disguise yourself in order to be bitten, as you did with the first ‘fake news’, the Fall (cf. Gen 3,1-15): the method of the ‘Father of Lies’ (John 8,44) is disguise, an inconspicuous and dangerous seduction.

After explaining the history of the Fall in detail, the Pope says that desire plays a role. Falsehood often spreads like a virus, quickly and unchecked, not because of the logic of sharing, but because of the insatiable desire that awakens in man.

The economic and manipulative aims that feed disinformation are rooted in a thirst for power, a desire to possess and enjoy, which ultimately makes us victims of something much more tragic: the deceptive power of evil that moves from one lie to another in order to rob us of our interior freedom. That is why education for truth means teaching people how to discern, evaluate and understand our deepest desires and inclinations, lest we lose sight of what is good and yield to every temptation.⁷⁸

The title of the third paragraph of the letter is already known from the letter written by Pope Paul VI: “the truth will set you free” (John 8,32). Pope Francis quotes Dostoevsky to show that those who lie to themselves for a long time, who are constantly in contact with misleading language, have their inner world clouded and sink into disrespect for themselves and others. The most effective way to guard against this is to allow the truth to purify one’s self. In the Christian vision of the world, truth is not only about revealing reality, because it has to do with the whole of life. In Scripture, it is linked to support, to steadfastness, to trust, to rely on the truth so that one does not fall. The only true support in this sense is the living God himself, as Jesus said, “I am the truth” (John 14,6). “We discover and rediscover the truth when we experience it within ourselves in the loyalty and trustworthiness of the One who loves us. This alone can liberate us”.⁷⁹ (cf. John 8,32). Getting rid of falsehood and seeking connection is the basis for one’s words and actions to be true, authentic and trustworthy. It is necessary to balance what helps community and brings good, and what divides and creates conflict. Truth cannot be possessed as an impersonal, externally imposed thing, but only in the

78 *Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for World Communications Day 2.*

79 *Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for World Communications Day 3.*

free relationship between persons, in listening to each other. Truth must always be sought, for falsehood can creep into the statement of truth: one can build an unimpeachable argument on undeniable facts, but if it is used to hurt someone or to discredit someone in front of others,

however correct it may appear, it is not truthful. We can recognize the truth of statements from their fruits: whether they provoke quarrels, foment division, encourage resignation; or, on the other hand, they promote informed and mature reflection leading to constructive dialogue and fruitful results.⁸⁰

Section 4 focuses on the true news that is peace. The best antidotes to falsehood are people who renounce lust and help truth come to the fore by listening to others and daring to engage in honest dialogue, who are attracted to what is good and who use language responsibly. Responsibility leads out of the world of misinformation, so the importance of those who are responsible for information by virtue of their job - journalists, who are the guardians of the news - is enormous. In today's world, Pope Francis calls journalists a real mission, their primary task being to recognise that the human person is the most important. "Informing others means forming others; it means being in touch with people's lives. That is why ensuring the accuracy of sources and protecting communication are real means of promoting goodness, generating trust, and opening the way to communion and peace."⁸¹

At the end of his letter, the Pope invites everyone to promote *journalism for peace* that confronts falsehood, that does not hide anything; that is done by persons as a service to persons, especially those whose voices are not heard in the world; that reveals the true roots of conflicts so that solutions can be sought with good intentions; and that can offer alternative solutions to verbal violence and sensationalism. In closing, Pope Francis appeals to God, to Truth itself, so that all human beings may be instruments of peace towards their fellow human beings.⁸²

The letter is an important milestone in the teaching of the Church on communications. In a swift response to a phenomenon that is emerging in today's world, with its ever-accelerating flow of information and causing many problems, it points out that the root of the problem lies in man and urges all to dare to be

80 *Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for World Communications Day 3.*

81 *Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for World Communications Day 4.*

82 *Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for World Communications Day 4.*

instruments of peace in search of the real truth, of Christ, even in a world where many people and in many ways seek to hold people in their power with false and misleading information.

Conclusion

Dealing with the phenomenon of fake news is not a simple task: it requires more than writing a few words of definition, drawing conclusions and finally establishing why lying is a crime.

The above points to the fact that we are dealing with a very complex phenomenon when trying to interpret fake news and disinformation, since their creation, causes, forms of appearance, spread, internal logic and mechanisms, recipients and effects can be extremely complex, as can the various levels and means of combating them. In this paper we have tried to present these, and also to show how the Catholic Church, after honestly facing the problem, can give encouragement and guidance to its members and to people of good will in the fight against the news-wrapped influence, manipulation and ultimately the dominating power that is imposed on them on a daily basis.

Throughout the writing of this study, I have been guided by the words of Father Paul Bolberitz, a Catholic professor who died a few years ago, in a philosophy class: “the one who has the information, has the power.” Indeed, He who has the Word, the Truth, has the power over the whole created world.

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DECONSTRUCTING BOUNDARIES BETWEEN ANIMALS AND HUMANS THE SERPENT IN THE *GREEK LIFE OF ADAM AND EVE*

ILDIKÓ KOVÁCS¹

Abstract. Scholars have proposed various explanations to the puzzling conversation between the serpent and Eve, between an animal and a human in the narrative of the Fall and in *the Greek Life of Adam and Eve*. I argue here that a Derridean reading highlights the ways the narrative deconstructs the boundary between human and animal. I explore the similarity between the human and the serpent both in terms of appearance (an upright posture and limbs, being “furless”), and abilities (voice, speech, and reason, fear of God). I discuss the identity and specific features of the serpent, focusing on the similarities and differences between human and the serpent, implied in the rewritten narrative of the Fall, in the dialogue between Eve and the serpent, and the episode of the punishment.

Keywords: human, serpent, *Greek Life of Adam and Eve*, deconstruction, *animot*.

Introduction

The etiological account of the creation and Fall in Genesis 2–3 seeks to explain certain phenomena like the bond between man and woman, the origin of evil, but also the relationship between the human and the animal realm. The mythical images express a kind of philosophical reflection on these questions, including that of the boundary between human and animal. The interpretation of these issues can benefit of a fresh perspective by introducing the Derridean notion of deconstruction, applied to the binary opposition between human and animal. This viewpoint allows the rethinking of the boundaries between humans and other beings.

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Jacques Derrida has reflected on some elements of the account of the creation and Fall in Genesis 2–3,² addressing the relationship between human and animal. Thus, evoking a number of motifs from the etiological narrative of the Fall, Derrida challenges the strict distinction between humans and the animals, inasmuch as the latter would be understood as a single, unified category. He does that by inventing the notion of *animot*, – a multiplicity of living creatures that cannot be reduced to the single generic category of *Animal*, a chimera combining “a multiplicity of animals”, “an irreducible living multiplicity of mortals”, sharing with humans the condition of living beings, deprived of speech, of the word that names a name, a condition that, he argues, should nonetheless be perceived otherwise, not as privation.³

The Book of Genesis has been discussed by scholars who engage with a Derridean reading.⁴ Conversely, re-writings of the story of the Fall like the *Greek Life of Adam and Eve* (GLAE)⁵ were not included in this discussion.

The GLAE is remarkable in a number of ways, as it expands the dialogue between Eve and the serpent, putting the blame for the Fall on Eve exclusively, and has several other noteworthy elements regarding the relationship between the human and the animal realm. In this paper, I explore the similarities between human and serpent implied in the Genesis account and the GLAE. Focusing on the GLAE I highlight the ways in which the narrative deconstructs the boundary between human and animal. To that purpose I focus on the serpent, the tempter or its instrument, that appears to a certain degree as an *animot* or chimera. I explore the similarities between the human and the serpent both in terms of appearance (an upright posture and limbs, being “furless”, i.e. naked), and abilities (voice, speech, reason, and fear of God).

- 2 Jacques DERRIDA, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (trans. David Wills), New York: Fordham University Press, 2008, 15–21.
- 3 DERRIDA, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 41, 47–48.
- 4 Hannah M. STRØMMEN, *Biblical Animality after Jacques Derrida* (Semeia Studies 91), Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2018 (focusing on Gen 9, Acts 10 and Rev 17); David M. CARR, “Competing Construals of Human Relations with “Animal” Others in the Primeval History (Genesis 1–11)”, *JBL* 140.2 (2021) 251–269.
- 5 The GLAE has been dated between the 2–4th century. John R. LEVISON, *The Greek Life of Adam and Eve*, (Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature), Berlin–Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2023, 85–97; Marinus DE JONGE – Johannes TROMP, *The Life of Adam and Eve and Related Literature*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997, 66–67.

The difference between humans and animals

Theological and some philosophical readings of the creation accounts understandably highlight the difference and superiority of human beings over animals. Thus, humans differ from animals in terms of their nature, a notion inherent in the metaphor of being of the same flesh and bone. This aspect produces at first sight an unbridgeable distinction between humans and all other creatures.⁶ However, Derrida points to the difference between the first creation account, which envisions the human beings created in the image of God as ruling over animals, and the second account, in which Adam, the earthling, although naming the animals, shares in their nature.⁷ The animals are “living things that came into the world before him but were named after him”.⁸

The emphasis on the distinction between humans and animals is particularly manifest in interpretations of the idea of *imago Dei*, based on Gen 1,26-28.⁹ Being created in the image of God grants humans their uniqueness in the created realm.¹⁰ Philosophical discussions also highlight the abilities that distinguish humans from animals. Jean Grondin emphasises the limitations of the animals in terms of cognitive functions, and the superiority of humans from the perspective of self-consciousness, self-transcendence, the consciousness of mortality and empathy.¹¹

6 Ryan Patrick McLAUGHLIN, “Noblesse Oblige: Theological Differences Between Humans and Animals and What They Imply Morally”, *Journal of Animal Ethics* 1.2 (2011) 132–149 (135).

7 DERRIDA, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 15–17.

8 DERRIDA, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 17.

9 McLAUGHLIN, “Noblesse Oblige”, 134–137. On the implied idea of representation: W. Randall GARR, “‘Image’ and ‘Likeness’ in the Inscription from Tell Fakhariyeh”, *Israel Exploration Journal* 50.3–4 (2000) 227–234. I will not discuss the possible interpretations of the notion of *imago Dei*. For a detailed analysis see Claus WESTERMANN, *Genesis 1-11*, (trans. John J. Scullion), Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1984, 147–155. W. Sibley TOWNER, Clones of God Genesis 1:26-28 and the Image of God in the Hebrew Bible, *Interpretation A Journal of Bible and Theology* 59.4 (2005) 341–356.

10 McLAUGHLIN, “Noblesse Oblige”, 136.

11 “Like us, animals feel, suffer, are born, die, and reproduce. They understand each other, and they make us understand what they have to say, and not just through their voices. But it is not certain that they can think beyond their immediate situations and take their distance from them. Humans benefit from a unique ability to transcend themselves (which goes

The closing remark of Genesis 2, according to which, before the Fall, the man and the woman are not ashamed of their nakedness in front of each other (2,25) deserves further attention. Derrida links humans' consciousness of their nakedness with self-awareness; conversely, "the property unique to animals, what in the last instance distinguishes them from man, is their being naked without knowing it. Not being naked therefore, not having knowledge of their nudity, in short, without consciousness of good and evil."¹² As opposed to animals, the man, Derrida argues, "would be a man only to the extent that he was able to be naked, that is to say, to be ashamed, to know himself to be ashamed because he is no longer naked".¹³ On the other hand, this particularity, which distinguishes human beings from animals also implies that in the logic of the narrative, before the Fall there is little difference between humans and animals. They realise their nakedness and they become ashamed of it only after eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.¹⁴ "Adam and the woman are now separated from animals by virtue of the ability to see themselves, to be self-aware and self-conscious; human beings now have a characteristic that they share with no other living creatures."¹⁵

While these distinctions between humans and animals – reason, self-consciousness, self-awareness – make sense from a theological and philosophical perspective, in the mythical narrative they do not apply, notably if one considers the serpent and the relationship between humans and the serpent.

along with a consciousness of mortality) and to put themselves in someone else's place." Jean GRONDIN, "Derrida and the Question of the Animal", *Cités* 30.2 (2007) 31–39 (39). To put it somewhat differently, as Viktor E. FRANKL pointed, human have the ability of dereflection (*Man's Search of Meaning. An Introduction to Logotherapy*, New York–London: Simon&Schuster, ³1984, 125–131. On the distinction between humans and animals in the light of Gen 1,26–28, see also Ann CLINE KELLY, "Talking Animals in the Bible: Paratexts as Symptoms of Cultural Anxiety in Restoration and Early Eighteenth-Century England", *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 33.4 (2010) 438–451 (437).

12 DERRIDA, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 4–5.

13 DERRIDA, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 5.

14 STRØMMEN, *Biblical Animality*, 57; CARR, "Competing Construals of Human Relations with "Animal" Others", 260.

15 Stephen GROSSE, "Building a Relationship with the Earth: Humans and Ecology in Genesis 1–3", *Denison Journal of Religion* 5 (2005), Art. 4, <https://digitalcommons.denison.edu/religion/vol5/iss1/4/>, 12; CARR, "Competing Construals of Human Relations with "Animal" Others", 257.

Deconstructing boundaries: the vanishing difference between humans and the serpent

The serpent in Genesis 3 and the GLAE is akin to other mythological ophidic characters with ambivalent, predominantly negative roles, common with those in other myths.¹⁶ One of the particular features in the narrative is that humans live in close proximity to and understanding with the animals, until this blissful condition is shattered. The motif of original harmony with the animals is not uncommon in myths depicting a “golden era”, marked by the ideal coexistence of all living creatures, which ends, by some reason, leaving place to disharmony and enmity. In the Gilgamesh, Enkidu lives in communion with the animals, understands them, and they do not fear him. This harmony is lost after his intercourse with Shamhat, who seduces him and introduces him to civilisation.¹⁷ Here too the snake plays a negative role, snatching from Gilgamesh the plant of rejuvenation that would allow him to escape mortality.¹⁸

One feature of this coexistence in harmony is the speech of animals and/or the ability of humans to communicate with animals.¹⁹ In Gen 3, the fact that humans

16 The snake in the Epic of Gilgamesh (tablet XI., 287, Stephanie DALLEY, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, The Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 119; Sophus HELLE, *Gilgamesh: A New Translation of the Ancient Epic*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021, 111). The terrifying snakes created in the Epic of Creation, tablet III, verses 23–26: “Mother Hubur, who fashions all things, Contributed an unfaceable weapon: she bore giant snakes, Sharp of tooth and unsparing of fang (?). She filled their bodies with venom instead of blood.” DALLEY, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 245. In Egyptian mythology, Apophis “is a rebel against divine and cosmic order”. “Apophis”, in Manfred LURKER, *The Routledge Dictionary of Gods and Goddesses, Devils and Demons*, London–New York: Routledge, 2005, 16; Barbara WATTERSON, *Gods of Ancient Egypt*, Cheltenham: The History Press, 2003, 47, 108. A good example of the ambivalent character of the snake is Nehebkau, a snake-demon, which later becomes a protective and benevolent primeval deity. *Nehebkau*, LURKER, *The Routledge Dictionary*, 134.

17 Gilgamesh, tablet I, 180–195 (HELLE, *Gilgamesh*, 10).

18 Gilgamesh, tablet XI (DALLEY, *Myths*, 119, HELLE, *Gilgamesh*, 111).

19 For occurrences of talking animals in Mesopotamian myths see Benjamin R. FOSTER, “Animals in Mesopotamian Literature”, in Billie Jean COLLINS (ed.), *A History of the Animal World in the Ancient Near East*, Leiden–Boston–Köln: Brill, 271–288. Numerous fables are quoted here. However, Foster stresses, that “direct conversation or interaction between humans and animals” are rare (“Animals”, 284). In Greek mythology animals’

can understand the words of the serpent may also evoke the idea of the original harmony between humans and animals.

In what follows, I follow the way the difference between humans and animals is deconstructed on the example of the serpent.

A creature of God

Both in Genesis and in the GLAE, the serpent is one of God's creatures, a male creature, as indicated by the gender of the Hebrew and the Greek noun. In the GLAE this is underscored by the fact that he lives in Adam's part of Eden, reserved for male beings (GLAE 15,3).

In the GLAE the identity of the "tempter" may seem confusing, because it merges at least two (if not more) distinct characters that play a role in the Fall. Thus, various passages speak of the enemy (ἐχθρός – GLAE 7,2; 15,1; 25,4; 29,13), or more specifically the devil (διάβολος – GLAE 15,3; 16,1.2.5; 17,4), the serpent (ὄφις – GLAE 16,1.4; 17,4; 18,1), or in one peculiar case, Satan (σατανᾶς – GLAE 17,1). The differences in naming the tempter in the various passages may have to do with the integration of different traditions in the text, most notably the widespread view emerging in the Hellenistic period, according to which the serpent is an

speech in mythical times is a common idea. As Katarzyna KLECZKOWSKA emphasises, in the mythological ages there is a "total lack of distinction between species" ("Those Who Cannot Speak. Animals as Others in Ancient Greek Thought", *Maska* 24 (2014) 97–108. In this age "animals and humans are described as living together and sharing the same language." Chiara DI SERIO, "Marginal Remarks on the Concept of 'Time of Origins' in Classical Greek Culture", in *Myth and History: Close Encounters*, edited by Menelaos CHRISTOPOULOS – Athina PAPACHRYSTOMOU – Andreas P. ANTONOPOULOS, (MythosEikonPoiesis 14), Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2022, 291–302 (295). DI SERIO refers to Philo, *De confus. ling.* 6 (all animals shared the same language); Callim., *Ia.* 2, fr. 192, Dieg. 6.22–32 ("Marginal Remarks", 293–294). In Plato's *Statesman* the foster children of Cronus had "the ability to converse not only with human beings but also with beasts" (Pl., *Polit.* 272b, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, 12, trans. Harold N. Fowler, W.R.M. Lamb (LCL 164), Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: W. Heinemann, 1921). Xenophon in the *Memorabilia* cites Socrates recalling a time "when beasts could talk" (Xen., *Mem.* 2.7.13–14, *Xenophon in Seven Volumes*, 4., trans. E.C. Marchant, O.J. Todd (LCL 168), Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press; London: W. Heinemann, 1923.

instrument of the devil.²⁰ I will not focus here on the relation between these three entities or hypostases mentioned in the GLAE as stand-alone characters. Here I will focus only on the serpent.

Posture and bodily features

We can only speculate about the posture and bodily features of the serpent in the biblical narrative. One can infer that the serpent is envisaged as having an upright posture. In the punishment scene God sentences him to crawl on his belly from that point on, without explicitly describing his condition before the divine punishment (Gen 3,14). This suggests a change in the previous posture of the serpent and his way of moving. This remarkable feature, probably linked to his having limbs approaches him to humans.²¹

The GLAE fills this gap and leaves no space for speculations. The narrative gives some more details about God's punishment: "upon your breast and your belly you will go, *lacking both your hands and feet* (ὕστερηθεὶς καὶ χειρῶν καὶ ποδῶν σου). There will be left to you neither *ear* nor *wing* nor one body part of these (ἀφεθήσεται σοι ὠτίον οὔτε πτέρυξ οὔτε ἐν μέλος) with which you enticed with your wickedness and caused them to be thrown out of paradise" (GLAE 26,2-3). This passage envisions the serpent as a creature with human-like characteristics. Beyond hand and feet, he has ears, by which he had listened to the enticement of Satan. The reference to wings suggests that the serpent is envisaged as a winged creature. The depiction of serpent-like characters with limbs and wings reminds of the seraphs of the Hebrew Bible,²² but it also occurs in representation of deities like Ningishzida.²³ Later Christian artistic

20 This confirms the view of Marinus de Jonge and Johannes Tromp that the GLAE is not a "rewriting" of the Genesis, but it works mostly with the interpretations of Gen which were already widespread in the time GLAE was written. As they point out, "GLAE agrees with broad interpretative traditions in establishing a close connection between the serpent and the devil. No such connection exists in Genesis 3, where diabolical figures are entirely absent." DE JONGE – TROMP, *The Life of Adam and Eve*, 47–48.

21 CARR, "Competing Construals of Human Relations with "Animal" Others", 258–259.

22 Cf. Num 21,6; Isa 6,2.

23 James H. CHARLESWORTH, *The Good and Evil Serpent: How a Universal Symbol Became Christianized*, London – New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010, 62. Ningishzida is often

representations that belong to the reception history of Gen 3 also depict the serpent with legs or with a human-like face.²⁴

Nakedness

Nakedness is a shared condition of humans and the serpent (as furless animal). However, the GLAE reinterprets nakedness, focusing less on the physical aspect. The segregated character of the Paradise makes the assertion of Gen 2,25 on the nakedness and original lack of shame of the first humans irrelevant.²⁵ GLAE 20 understands nakedness and clothing in an ethical-spiritual sense. Eve avows: “I knew that I was naked of the righteousness with which I had been clothed.” She will seek clothing only for herself, in her part of the Paradise (20,4). Adam will become aware of his nakedness only later (21,5), but will not seek to cover it, but decry his becoming estranged from the glory of God (21,6).²⁶ Nakedness accompanied by the lack of shame as an expression original harmony, plays no role in the GLAE, as opposed to Gen 2,25. Awareness of nakedness is not an expression of self-awareness as philosophical readings of Genesis 3 would have it. It is awareness of being naked of righteousness and estrangement from the glory of God, i.e. it becomes synonymous with the fallen, sinful condition.

Cunningness/wisdom and reason

The Hebrew Bible describes the serpent as the most cunning (עָרִים) of God’s creatures (Gen 3,1). Derrida refers to “the cunning genius of the animal, the evil genius as animal”.²⁷ Conversely, LXX Gen 3,1, the pretext of the GLAE, tells that the serpent is wiser than any other animal (Ὁ δὲ ὄφις ἦν φρονιμώτατος πάντων τῶν θηρίων τῶν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ὃν ἐποίησεν κύριος ὁ θεός). Being wise (φρόνιμος) replaces the deceitfulness of the serpent in the Hebrew text. The serpent appears

represented as a serpent with limbs, human-like posture, and, in some cases wings.

24 As Ann Cline Kelly notes, this tradition originating in the Middle Ages and enduring well into the English Restoration, was probably meant to eliminate the “uneasiness about how the Serpent could speak without human speech organs”. CLINE KELLY, “Talking Animals”, 446.

25 LEVISON, *The Greek Life of Adam and Eve*, 485, 583, 1039–1040.

26 LEVISON, *The Greek Life of Adam and Eve*, 572–575, 1039–1040.

27 DERRIDA, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 46.

thus as an animal endowed with reason. Eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil approaches humans to the serpent.

GLAE follows the LXX Gen 3,1 describing the serpent as “wiser than all the beasts” (16,2).²⁸ This wisdom is tested when the devil seduces him. The dialog between the devil and the serpent, and the fact that the serpent hesitates, shows his ability to reason (GLAE 16). The claim of the serpent that he fears his deception of Eve would anger God (GLAE 16,4) envisions him as a character that has the capacity to think beyond his immediate situation. The devil has to seduce him to convince him to join his evil plan, and the serpent eventually fails. This leads to another question: is the serpent a cunning tempter or a victim?²⁹ As he claims that he fears God, he has to be seduced by the devil, to become a seducer himself. In this he resembles Eve who hesitates but eventually yields to temptation. This questions the wisdom of the serpent (a feature inherited from the LXX).

The serpent is also envisaged as able to put himself in the place of the humans, and voice certain emotions, with the (negative) intent to deceive them: he tells Eve that “I grieve for you [two], for I do not want you to be ignorant” (GLAE 18,1).

Speech

Already in the biblical account, the serpent is endowed with speech.³⁰ Speech, *logos*, is an expression of reason.³¹ Talking animals are not common in the Bible. Aside from the serpent in Genesis 3, the only other example of an animal possessing the ability to speak is Balaam’s donkey (Num 22,28, cf. 2 Pet 2,16). In this specific

28 The word used here for beasts, θηρία, is the same as in GLAE 10, when Eve and Seth encounter a wild beast (θηρίον). Though later this term was used in a negative sense, as it means *wild* animal, in this case it refers to all animals, as in LXX Gen 2,19. The notion of ζῶον, means living being, was only used from 5th century onwards. KLECZKOWSKA, “Those Who Cannot Speak”, 98.

29 “A superior entity puts the words in their mouths.” CLINE KELLY, “Talking Animals”, 439.

30 CHARLESWORTH, *The Good and Evil Serpent*, 297–298 (arguing that originally the serpent was not conceived as evil); Jean-Louis SKA, “The Study of the Book of Genesis: The Beginning of Critical Reading”, in C.A. EVANS, J.N. LOHR, D.L. PETERSEN (eds.), *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, Leiden: Brill, 2012, 3–26; CARR, “Competing Construals of Human Relations with “Animal” Others”, 258–259.

31 KLECZKOWSKA, “Those Who Cannot Speak”, 101.

instance, it is emphatic that God enables the animal to speak.³² In the case of the serpent the ability to speak is taken for granted. (More examples of talking animals are found in the apocryphal Acts.³³)

Already in Genesis, but even more so in the GLAE, the serpent engages in several dialogues. The most intriguing part of the GLAE is the dialogue between Eve and the tempter. The serpent starts the conversation with Eve by claiming: “I am grieved on your account that *you are like animals*, for I would not have you ignorant” (GLAE 18,1). He promises them that after eating from the tree, they “shall know what is good and what is evil” (GLAE 18,3) and “*would be like Him (God)*” (GLAE 18,4). This suggests that there are only two options for the human being: to be like animals, or to be like God. But what then does it mean to be human? In Genesis, animals seem to be “an ideal starting point for defining humanity by an opposition.”³⁴ The serpent *is* an animal. However, the claim of the serpent in the GLAE, quoted above, inevitably leads to another question: where does the serpent belong, if not to the animal world? He does not say: “you are like me and the other animals”. Or is Satan the one who is speaking here? This might seem reasonable: the devil is the one speaking, and the serpent is only his vessel. To be sure, the complexity of the identities of the tempter, incorporating various characters, turns the serpent into a kind of chimera, a demonic *animot*, endowed with speech, not unlike the wyvern evoked by Derrida.³⁵

The question remains: why does Eve engage with the serpent?³⁶ Various explanations have been proposed to this puzzling conversation between a human and an animal. Although the first humans are envisioned as having the ability to speak to animals, the story does not imply that humans may trust the animals and rely on them. Eve trusting and conversing with the serpent could indicate her curiosity, or her ignorance regarding the identity, abilities and intentions of the serpent. In

32 CLINE KELLY, “Talking Animals”, 438.

33 The dog who acquires human speech and serves as Peter’s messenger in the Acts of Peter, the baptised lion in the Acts of Paul, the speaking serpent and donkey in the Acts of Thomas. See the discussion by Janet SPITTLER, *Animals in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles. The Wild Kingdom of Early Christian Literature* (WUNT 247), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008, 130–140, 182–186, 193–209.

34 KLECZKOWSKA, “Those Who Cannot Speak”, 97–98.

35 DERRIDA, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 66.

36 CLINE KELLY, “Talking Animals”, 440.

this case she does not realise who she is talking to.³⁷ The reception history of the passage in Gen 3 includes the view that she sees a seraph, a flying serpent, a celestial being.³⁸ According to the allegorical interpretation of Philo the serpent stands for desire, which engages sense-perception (the woman), reaching thereby to reason (the man).³⁹ Remaining in the logic of the narrative, however, in the GLAE it is Satan who speaks through the serpent and deceives Eve, while the serpent is only his vessel.⁴⁰

Analysing a fragment of Paul Valéry's "Silhouette of a Serpent" where the serpent of Genesis speaks, Derrida says that "this cunning master of nakedness dissimulated at the origin of desire begins by avowing: I am lying, I am an other, and here are the animal guises by means of which I disguise myself in "animal simplicity," showing and hiding at the same time what is in truth neither so much animal nor simple, nor, in any case, the identity of a single and simple animal."⁴¹ The fact that the serpent expresses himself and speaks of his emotions and functions as an instrument of deception makes him indistinguishable from humans.

Fearing God

The serpent not only shows his ability to reason but even expresses his fear of God. He responds to the devil with: "I am frightened that perhaps the Lord will be angry with me" (GLAE 16,4). Through this remarkable positive trait, not found in Genesis, the serpent resembles humans even more.

Conclusion

The GLAE reevaluates and refines some issues Genesis does not discuss in detail. The figure of the tempter is much more nuanced and complex. It seems

37 As 17th century Anglican bishop Simon Patrick and 18th century cleric and historian Samuel Shuckford suggests, cf. CLINE KELLY, "Talking Animals", 445.

38 CLINE KELLY, "Talking Animals", 444.

39 QG 1.47-48, Philo Alexandrinus, *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, trans. Ralph Marcus, (LCL 380), Cambridge, 1979.

40 Cline Kelly evokes the assumption of Richard Kidder that "the Devil commandeered the serpent's body and produced the human speech that Eve hears." CLINE KELLY, "Talking Animals", 445.

41 DERRIDA, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 65.

reasonable that the devil – who is a master of disguises –, when approaching Eve with his malicious plan, uses the serpent – who is “wiser than all other animals” –, as his vessel. This hypothesis is also supported by GLAE 26,2 in which, when God is punishing the serpent states that it “became a thankless vessel”.

In shaping the character of the serpent, the GLAE deconstructs the difference between human and animal. The serpent, a humanlike and diabolic animal, a diabolic *animot*, has an upright posture, limbs and wings. He can reason, he is endowed with wisdom, he has the ability to speak and shows emotions. He has to be tempted in the same way as the first human couple, he fears God just as Adam and Eve does. He is punished together with the first human pair because of his role in the Fall.

Thus, a Derridean reading of the GLAE, highlighting the deconstruction of boundaries, exposes some similarities between humans and the serpent which are “as unexpected as they are irrefutable”.⁴²

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42 DERRIDA, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, 48.

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CHURCH ORGANS IN THE 17TH–18TH CENTURY ARCHDEACONRIES OF CSÍK AND GYERGYÓ

GÁL HUNOR¹

Abstract. The organ has adorned Western Christian worship for over a millennium, though this was not always the case. It took centuries for it to become an instrument officially recognized by the Church. Today, some organs have even reached monumental proportions.² The history of these instruments – especially from the 17th and 18th centuries – remains largely unknown in the Archdiocese of Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia).³ This study presents the organs of the archdiocese, focusing on those from three districts, based on archival sources and physical research methods.

Keywords: Church organ, organ builder, organs of Transylvania, Archives of the Archdiocese of Alba Iulia.

The Beginnings and Traces of Organ Use in Transylvania and in the Archdiocese of Alba Iulia

This study does not provide a detailed discussion of the instrumental or structural development of the organ,⁴ as that has already been covered by numerous researchers (these discuss its ancient Greek origins, its use in the Roman Empire,

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- 2 ADOLPH, Wolfram, “Die größten Orgelwerke der Welt. Eine tabellarische Auswahl nach Ländern”, *Organ. Journal für die Orgel* 3 (2000) 21.
- 3 The Archdiocese of Transylvania, later Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia), founded in 1009, is a Roman Catholic particular church in Romania. Its territory roughly corresponds to historical Transylvania.
- 4 Here we refer to traditional, classical pipe organs.

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and its eventual spread within the Christian Church).⁵ Similarly, experts and researchers in this field⁶ have in recent decades thoroughly examined the role of organs in Transylvania, from their appearance and the impact of the Reformation onward. Several initiatives have also aimed to present comprehensive overviews of the organ inventories of various denominations – an ongoing effort to this day.⁷ This study presents only a few essential historical and research-related facts concerning organs specifically within the Archdiocese of Alba Iulia.

Very few records remain regarding the musical life or the history of musical instruments during the time of Christianisation of the Hungarian population in

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- 5 József GEYER, *Az orgona*, I., Budapest–Szeged: Szegedi Katolikus Tudósító, 1931; István DÁVID, *Műemlék orgonák Erdélyben*, Kolozsvár – Budapest: Polis, 1996, 11–28; Gábor LEHOTKA, *Az én hangszerem az orgona*, Budapest: Oltalom Alapítvány 1993, 6–13; Otília Valéria OROSZ, *Műemlék orgonák az Érmelléki Református Egyházmegyében*, (Partiumi Füzetek 5), Nagyvárad: Partiumi és Bánsági Műemlékvédő és Emlékhely Társaság – Királyhágómelléki Református Egyházkerület – Nagyvárad Római Katolikus Püspökség 2008, 44–48; Ferenc SOLYMOSI – Attila CZÁR, *Magyarország orgonái*, Kiskunhalas: Magyarországi Orgonák Alapítvány, 2005, 8–19; István ENYEDI, *Orgile istorice din judetul Satu Mare-Szatmár Megye műemlék orgonái*, Szatmár: Muzeul Sătmărean, 2004, 9–11; Csaba CSÍKY, *Kolonics. Orgonaépítéset a 19. századi Erdélyben*, Marosvásárhely: Marosvásárhelyi Színművészeti Egyetem Kiadója, 2007, 19–23; Dávid SÍPOS, *Orgonáknak zengések - A történelmi dési, széki és görgényi református egyházmegyék orgonái* (Erdélyi Református Egyháztörténeti Füzetek 26), Kolozsvár: Komp-Press Kiadó – Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 2019, 17–34; Izabella K. DEDINSZKY, *Az orgonáról-esztétikai tanulmány*, Budapest, 1942, 1–17.
 - 6 I will omit further aspects related to different instruments and historical considerations, as these have already been collected and published by Hermann Binder, Dávid István, Csaba Csíky, Erik Türk, Steffen Markus Schlandt, Tünde Molnár, Pál Enyedi, Attila Márk, Erzsébet Windhager-Geréd, Sebestyén Pécsi, and Dávid Sipos. SÍPOS, *Orgonáknak zengések*, 18–19.
 - 7 Erich TÜRK, *Die Orgellandschaft dreier nordsiebenbürgischer Landkerise: Cluj, Sălaj und Bistrița-Năsăud. Három észak-erdélyi megye orgonátája: Kolozs, Szilágy és Beszterce-Naszód megye*, Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület, 2014, 25–29; ENYEDI Pál – MÁRK Attila, *A Magyar unitárius egyház orgonái I. A Háromszék-Felsőfehéri és a Székelyudvarhelyi Egyházkör*, Kolozsvár – Budapest: Magyar Unitárius Egyház – Liszt Ferenc Zeneművészeti Egyetem Egyházzenei Kutatócsoport, 2021, 11–12; SÍPOS, *Orgonáknak zengések*, 17–34; CSÍKY, *Kolonics*, 23–31; József CSÁKI, “Szendrei József, az ismeretlen 18. századi erdélyi orgonaépítő”, *Református Szemle* 95.1 (2002) 106–125.

Transylvania. Documents from the late 14th century already mention organs or organ builders in Transylvania, but such data can only be considered reliable through thorough and well-documented archival research.⁸ Later, more in-depth research has sometimes yielded different information on this topic.⁹ In the Archdiocese of Alba Iulia, historical changes – both minor and major – brought about religious and political shifts that also marked turning points in the development of organ building.¹⁰

The oldest currently active organs in the archdiocese date back to the late 17th century¹¹, preserved thanks to various “instrument migrations” and successful reconstructions in recent times. Although no medieval organs have survived in the Archdiocese of Alba Iulia, a few depictions do remain, allowing us to draw some conclusions about the former organ culture. For example, in Péterfalva (Petersdorf, Petriș) in Bistrița County, above the western entrance of the now Evangelical church, there is a stone carving of an organ (with a figure holding a portative organ), and in the Reformed church of Nagygálambfalva, there is a late 14th-century fresco showing an angel playing a portative.¹²

- 8 The earliest source referring to an organ mentions the instrument of the Marienkirche in Sibiu (Nagyszeben) in the mid-14th century, though its exact dating requires further investigation. See more in the study of Pál ENYEDI, “Legende und Wirklichkeit Anmerkungen zu den frühesten Angaben zur Orgelgeschichte Siebenbürgens“, *Studia Musicologica* 63.1–2 (2022) 151–171 (158–164, 170).
- 9 ENYEDI, “Legende“, 158–164, 170. It should be noted that the organ builder Stephanus Renispolgar, mentioned in 1367, worked in Esztergom, not Sibiu, contrary to the view widely spread in Transylvanian organ history literature over the past quarter-century. Dávid SIPOS, “A három opponensi vélemény”, *Magyar Egyházzene* 24.1 (2016/2020), 99; SIPOS, *Orgonáknak zengések*, 18–19; ENYEDI, “Legende“, 152–156, 169–170.
- 10 SIPOS, *Orgonáknak zengések*, 17–34.
- 11 Old instruments from the 17th–18th centuries, still in use today, can be found within the Archdiocese in the following locations: Csíkbánkfalva, Újtusnád, Abafája, the seminary chapel in Alba Iulia (Gyulafehérvár), Saint Michael’s Church in Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár), Szék, Retteg, Bodola (now in the Holy Cross Church in Brașov), Kide, Gelence, Sáromberke, and Sárfalva. See. Hunor GÁL, *Orgona a másik karzatban – A gyulafehérvári főegyházmegye „hangszervándorlásairól” a 17. századtól napjainkig*, in: Szárnyra kelnek, mint a sasok, Teológiai tanulmányok Editor: Endre Kiss, in: *Studia Theologica Transsylvaniensia Supplementum 3. Series Doctorandorum 1.*, Budapest–Kolozsvár: Szent István Kiadó – Verbum, 2024, 97–121.
- 12 SIPOS, *Orgonáknak zengések*, 19.

The first presumed written traces of liturgical organ use appear precisely in the episcopal see of Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia) in the 14th century, found in the lists of Roman Catholic cathedral cantors.¹³ *“From a document dated 1258, we know that a cantor named Gregory served in Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia); and a letter from Bishop András Szécsi in 1350 reports on the presence of a cathedral choir.”*¹⁴ However, art historian András Kovács offers a noteworthy observation:

It is beyond doubt that the singing/chanted canon-cantors of the Transylvanian Chapter played a role in executing the musical components of medieval liturgy. However, I dare say that the mere mention of these canon-cantors – whose roles were nearly as old as the bishoprics themselves – does not yet allow us to conclude that organs were present. In those early times, liturgical singing mostly meant vocal ‘productions’ by liturgical confraternities.¹⁵

In the 13th–14th centuries, small, portable (portative) instruments were already in use.¹⁶ By the 15th–16th centuries, numerous documents and accounting records inform us of the spread of organs, not only among the Saxons but also among the Hungarians. Even in the period immediately preceding the Reformation, sources may refer to organists. For instance, in Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia), an organist is recorded as early as 1520; in Cluj, Bonaventura Kassai is first mentioned in 1534 as the Franciscan organist. In other locations – Braşov in 1429 and 1499, Sibiu in 1441 and 1506, Mediaş in 1535, Sighişoara in 1511, Biertan in 1520, Bistriţa in 1523, and Târgu Mureş in 1525 – records indicate the presence of organs and organists.¹⁷ In Csíksomlyó, Ferenc Bányai is mentioned in 1535 as a cantor and also

13 Some have mistakenly referred to the figure playing a portative organ in the initial of the later Bratislava – Gyulafehérvár Codex (1367) as the earliest example of Transylvanian organ history. However, neither the origin and content of the Codex nor its medieval use is linked to the beginnings of Transylvanian organ history. ENYEDI, “Legende”, 156–157.

14 Vilmos GERÉD, *A gyulafehérvári székesegyház orgonái*, Kolozsvár: Verbum, 2009, 4. Before the mid-14th century, there is no evidence of a pipe organ in Transylvania. And even then, only in Sibiu. Not even the cantor or the choir attest to this

15 SIPOS, *A három opponensi vélemény*, 99.

16 Tamás KNECHT (ed.), *Élő múltunk A gyulafehérvári Szent Mihály-székesegyház és érseki palota*, Kolozsvár: Verbum, 2012, in GERÉD, *A gyulafehérvári székesegyház orgonáinak története*, 142.

17 Hermann BINDER, *Orgeln in Siebenbürgen: Ein Beitrag zur siebenbürgischen Orgelgeschichte von den Anfängen bis zur Mitte 19. Jahrhunderts*, Kludenbach: Gehann-Musik-Verlag, 2000 Kludenbach: Gehann-Musik-Verlag, 2000, 11–20; DÁVID, *Műemlék orgonák Erdélyben*, 15.

the confessor of the Beguines.¹⁸ Returning to Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia), according to the Benedictine monk Kilián Szigeti, it was likely the well-known Tamás who “played the organ”¹⁹ during a Te Deum celebrated by Bishop János Gosztonyi of Transylvania, commemorating King Ferdinand I’s expulsion of John Zápolya from Buda in 1520. When the furnishings of the cathedral were inventoried in 1565 after its destruction, two excellent organs were reported to have been burned. The repertory compiled by István Dávid and Csaba Csíky’s book *Kolonics* confirm the existence of an organ as a matter of fact. However, it is unlikely that Csíksomlyó, then considered one of the smaller monastic houses, had its own organist. It must also be noted that during this period, the organ did not accompany liturgical singing directly but rather alternated with it or played preludes. The cantor, who was responsible for directing the singers in the choir (at the front of the sanctuary), could not have sat at the organ – usually located high on the wall of the sanctuary or nave – as it would have prevented him from fulfilling his duties. Standing out from this period are the towns of Sibiu and Braşov, which possessed organs, and to which Bistriţa also sought to catch up – indeed, in 1570, it commissioned a new organ from a master craftsman in Lemberg (Lviv).²⁰ Beyond ecclesiastical settings, organs became favoured instruments in royal courts as well. Educated statesmen, such as John Hunyadi and King Matthias Corvinus, are known to have owned organs – likely small, portative types.²¹

In the 15th–16th centuries, the organ had already assumed a significant role in church music. The Catholic liturgy required it to a great extent, and thus organ playing – gradually becoming an independent art – flourished in Transylvania as well. New musical genres emerged, as they did throughout Europe, and the organ slowly began to sound not only within liturgical settings but also as a solo instrument. It is noteworthy that during the princely period of Transylvania, musical life reached a European standard. Girolamo Diruta’s publication *Il Transilvano* (*The Transylvanian*), the first organ method book, appeared with the

18 János KARÁCSONYI, *Szt. Ferencz rendjének története Magyarországon 1711-ig* II., Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1924, 27–28; DÁVID, *Műemlék orgonák Erdélyben*, 16; CSÍKY, *Kolonics*, 21.

19 Kilián SZIGETI, “Orgonálás a középkori Magyarországon Budavár elestéig, 1541-ig”, *Magyar Zene* 16.4 (1975) 380–388 (382).

20 SIPOS, *Orgonáknak zengések*, 19; CSÍKY, *Kolonics*, 21.

21 TÜRK, *Orgellandschaft*, 25–26.

support of Zsigmond Báthory, Prince of Transylvania.²² Subsequently, the era of the Reformation had a particularly strong impact on organ-building traditions both in Europe and in Transylvania, especially in regions where the Reformation process had largely taken hold. In Transylvania, while church music and organ building flourished among the Saxons reformed in the Lutheran spirit, the Calvinist Reformation and the decrees of the Hungarian Unitarian denomination led to the removal of altars, images, and organs from many Hungarian medieval churches.²³ The use of the organ was only resumed by the Protestant denominations starting from the early 18th century.²⁴

Regarding the number of instruments in the archdiocese, the study published in 2010 by Vilmos Geréd, the former choir director of Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia), can be considered authoritative.²⁵ According to Geréd's research, 269²⁶ traditional organs are recorded, of which 243 are functional, 26 are non-operational, but

22 István DÁVID, *Az orgonaépítés története Erdélyben I.*, *Magyar Egyházzene* 1.4 (1993/1994) 467–476 (467).

23 At the Synod of Debrecen in 1567, they spoke against the use of the organ: „Az Antikrisztus táncoltató miséjéhez alkalmazott hangszereket pedig, a képekkel együtt, kihányjuk, mivel azoknak semmi hasznok nincsen az egyházban, sőt jelei és alkalmi a bálványozásnak.” SIPOS, *Orgonáknak zengések*, 21 [“We cast out the instruments used for the Antichrist's dancing mass, along with the images, for they are of no use in the church, but are rather signs and occasions for idolatry.”].

24 SIPOS, *Orgonáknak zengések*, 20–30; ENYEDI – MÁRK, *A Magyar unitárius egyház orgonái* I, 11–12; TÜRK, *Orgellandschaft*, 27.

25 Within the Archdiocese of Alba Iulia, no detailed summary of organ historical research has yet been published either in print or in online databases. A pioneering work in this regard is the short study *The Protection of Our Organs* by Vilmos Geréd, published in 2010. Vilmos GERÉD, *Orgonáink védelme*, in Mózes NÓDA – Korinna ZAMFIR – Dávid DIÓSI – Márta BODÓ (eds.), *Ideje az emlékezésnek, Liber amicorum: A 60 éves Marton József köszöntése*, Budapest-Kolozsvár: Szent István Társulat – Verbum, 2010, 497.

26 The foundational and most comprehensive work to date in the literature on Transylvanian organs remains the 1996 book *Monumental Organs in Transylvania* by István Dávid. This monograph lists 256 organs used by the Catholic denomination. Undoubtedly, in the decades since then, more data have surfaced on various instruments. Within the Archdiocese of Alba Iulia alone, the number of previously unknown organs likely exceeds this figure, especially in the southern regions – Gyulafehérvár, Hunyad, and the Szeben-Fogarás archdeaconries – where many of the instruments are located in depopulated villages or filial churches. DÁVID, *Műemlék orgonák Erdélyben*, 36.

19 could become functional with repairs and restoration. Seven instruments require complete restoration, and among them, three are particularly valuable 17th and 18th-century pieces, which are unique even within the archdiocese and are exceptional instruments. Among the approximately 300 individual instruments, there are European-level organs that, together, are significant supplementary elements to the pan-European organ-building palette. Transylvanian organ building, including the instrument collection of the Archdiocese of Alba Iulia, has followed the Central European style. These instruments, despite the fact that the majority of authentic material remnants of our musical culture and cultural history consist of small rural organs, still represent a significant cultural-historical value alongside churches, public buildings, cemeteries, and sacred objects.

Methods and Sources of Archdiocesan Organ Research

The history of organs – their construction circumstances, usage, related expenses, maintenance – can be uncovered through financial account books, various written archival documents, and ultimately, the surviving instruments themselves. By examining church historical sources and contemporary written records, it becomes clear that during the aforementioned turbulent historical periods, the Telegd archdeaconry suffered great losses due to various military campaigns, wars, epidemics, and uprisings. A vast number of valuable church and organ-related documents were destroyed, not to mention the instruments themselves. The Telegd archdeaconry, in particular, was heavily ravaged by Turkish-Tatar invasions between 1661 and 1694. However, even the 20th century was no exception, marked by the devastation of two world wars.

The idea of providing a more detailed description of organs as historical and artistic monuments first emerged in Hungary in the second half of the 19th century. Within the three archdeaconries, organ-related historical accounts, references, or notes appear only sporadically, and usually only in the monographs of certain settlements. Among these, the organ history of the Franciscan pilgrimage church in Csíksomlyó stands out.²⁷ Interestingly, from a research and instrument history perspective, World War I marked an important turning point, as tons of organ pipes were mobilized for the war effort.²⁸ After collecting church bells and other

27 Fortunát BOROS, *Csíksomlyó, a kegyhely*, Kolozsvár: Szent Bonaventura, 1943, 109–115.

28 DÁVID, *Műemlék orgonák Erdélyben*, 26,

metal objects for military industry purposes, the removal of organ façade pipes made of tin or tin alloys was ordered in the final year of the war. Parishes and clerical offices could request exemption from this measure in accordance with a bishop's decree. Instruments considered significant from a musical standpoint, or those made before 1850 with particular historical or artistic value, could be exempted from requisition based on the opinion of an expert committee. Despite hundreds of instruments existing in the Archdiocese of Alba Iulia at that time, only 30 had old records or known data resurface through these submitted exemption requests.²⁹

In the mentioned reports, only one exemption request was made by the episcopal authority: for the organ donated³⁰ in 1720 by György Mártonffy³¹, Bishop of Transylvania, to the settlement of Karcfalva in the Upper Csík region, asking that it be spared from requisition.

Some of the documents concerning pipe requisitions in Csík County, prepared by the Angster company, are preserved in the Baranya County Archives in Pécs. These descriptions and inventories hold significant value in the field of organ history.³² Later, in 1977, a ministerial directive required a report on church organs and bells of historical value within Hargita County, covering the three archdeaconries in the region. This was the first known, more detailed data

29 In the reports submitted by parish priests, exemptions from pipe requisition were requested for 16 organs. ARCHDIOCESAN ARCHIVES OF GYULAFEHÉRVÁR (ALBA IULIA), Num. 7812–1917.

30 ARCHDIOCESAN ARCHIVES OF GYULAFEHÉRVÁR (ALBA IULIA), *Canonica Visitaciones*, (AAGY. Can vis.) 1743, box 2, vol. 5, p. 728.

31 Baron György Mártonffy, bishop, was born around 1663 in Csíkkarcfalva. He was ordained a priest in Vienna in 1691. From February 18, 1716, to September 5, 1721, he served as the bishop of Transylvania. He is buried in the crypt of Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia). During his episcopate, he repeatedly supported the church of his native village. in. Sándor FERENCZI, *A Gyulafehérvári (Erdélyi) Főegyházmegye történeti papi névtára*, Budapest – Kolozsvár: Szent István Társulat – Verbum, 2009, 337.

32 Paradoxically, the first mapping of Hungary's organ inventory began due to a decree issued by the Minister of Defense in 1917. Ferenc Solymosi published valuable data about this in the journal *Hungarian Church Music*. Ferenc SOLYMOI, "Az 1918-as orgonasíp-rekvirálás és az Angster-féle 'Rekvirált orgonasípok lajstroma'" I, *Magyar Egyházzene* 2.3 (1994/1995) 341–354; Ferenc SOLYMOI, "Az 1918-as orgonasíp-rekvirálás és az Angster-féle 'Rekvirált orgonasípok lajstroma' II, *Magyar Egyházzene* 2.4 (1994/1995) 473–497.

collection effort concerning the organ inventory in Hargita County, which includes the Csík and Gyergyó archdeaconries. However, it concluded merely with the submission of clergy reports and, in some cases, photographs.³³ After the political regime change, the body of Transylvanian literature dealing with organs grew significantly. By the turn of the millennium, organ research was not only being published in print but also became accessible through online databases, which now contain the results of surveys of several hundred organs.³⁴ István Dávid began a denomination-independent data collection project on the history of Transylvanian heritage organs. His pioneering book and doctoral dissertation, published in 1996, presented the inventory of 256³⁵ instruments belonging to the four Roman Catholic dioceses of Transylvania. His work remains the only comprehensive historical overview and repertory of the entire organ inventory of Transylvania.³⁶

33 The organ and bell reports received were preserved by Márton Tarisznyás (1927–1980), the museum director of Gheorgheni, who in 1979 passed them on to the engineer László Márton. In 2023, Márton handed the materials over to the author of these lines for preservation. According to the manuscript, reports were received from the following deaneries: 19 from Lower Csík, 17 from Upper Csík, 22 from Gyergyó, 15 from Székelyudvarhely, and 41 from the Székelyudvarhely Unitarian Church circle. These reports came from the Catholic, Orthodox, and Unitarian parish offices. The manuscript's reference code is: *Orgona, harang és csengők összeírása 1977, alcsíki, felcsíki, gyergyói kerület*, manuscript.

34 We do not provide a detailed description here of the results of organ research published so far, as these have already been summarized in the research of Dávid Sipos. Dávid s, *A történelmi dési, széki és görgényi református egyházmegyék orgonái*, Doctoral Thesis, Cluj, 2016, 11–18.

35 István Dávid published data on 238 Catholic church instruments in his repertory. Of these, 220 instruments are located within the Archdiocese of Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia); the remaining 18 are found in the dioceses of Satu Mare, Oradea, and Timișoara. The distribution of the 220 instruments across the 15 archdeaconries is as follows: 10 in I. Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia), 8 in II. Hunyad, 7 in III. Szeben-Fogarás, 6 in IV. Erzsébetváros, 9 in V. Covasna-Brassó, 26 in VI. Kézdi-Orbai, 16 in VII. Kolozs-Doboka, 16 in VIII. Inner-Szolnok, 7 in IX. Torda-Aranyos, 7 in X. Küküllő, 21 in XI. Maros, 19 in XII. Lower Csík, 25 in XIII. Upper Csík, 12 in XIV. Gyergyó, and 31 in XV. Székelyudvarhely. Altogether, data were published on 220 instruments. DÁVID, *Műemlék orgonák Erdélyben*, 47–153.

36 The published data compile the instrument inventory up to 1996; since then, further data have emerged on both old and new instruments.

The Location, Division, and Historical Overview of the Csík-Gyergyó Archdeaconry

Following the establishment of the Diocese of Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia) in 1009, a major step in the development of its organizational structure was the creation of the archdeaconries, a process that took place during the 11th to 13th centuries.³⁷ In the medieval diocese, there were 13 archdeaconries, which roughly corresponded to the territories of the royal counties.³⁸ The present-day regions of Lower Csík (Alcsík), Upper Csík (Felcsík), and Gyergyó together formed the historical Telegd Archdeaconry. For most settlements in historical Hungary, the first written archival reference is found in the records of papal tithe collectors, which for the Transylvanian diocese date from 1332 to 1337. In these papal tithe registers, the Csík region is listed under the names Chyk and Chik. Unfortunately, no medieval archival sources have survived that specifically document the Csík churches as ecclesiastical administrative units. The medieval ecclesiastical administrative structure began to change during the Reformation, especially after 1556, when the diocese was left without a bishop. From 1592, the regions of Csík, Gyergyó, and Kászon were merged into a single archdeaconry, which was divided into three (sub)deaneries, a structure that remained until the time of the Catholic renewal. During the Reformation, all three regions of this archdeaconry remained predominantly Catholic, with only a few settlements temporarily adopting the new faith. After the restoration of the Transylvanian bishopric in 1716, more detailed archival records began to appear concerning the ecclesiastical organization and parishes of the Csík and Gyergyó archdeaconries.³⁹ On August 8, 1744, the Csík deanery was formally divided into two separate entities: the Archdeaconries of Lower Csík and Upper Csík.⁴⁰

37 Rita-Magdola BERNÁD, *Plébániai levéltárak I. A Gyulafehérvári-, a Sepsiszentgyörgyi-, a Szamosújvári- és a Gyergyószentmiklósi Gyűjtőlevéltárak repertóriumai*, Gyulafehérvár-Budapest: ELTE Egyetemi Levéltár, 2009, 11–15.

38 József MARTON – Tamás JAKABFFY, *Az erdélyi katolicizmus századai: Képes egyházmegye-történet*, Kolozsvár: Gloria, 2007, 13.

39 Rita-Magdolna BERNÁD, *Plébániai levéltárak III. A Csíkszeredai Gyűjtőlevéltár repertóriumai*, Gyulafehérvár-Kolozsvár: ELTE Egyetemi Levéltár, 2021, 17.

40 Károly VESZELY, *Erdélyi egyháztörténelmi adatok*, Kolozsvár, 1860, 372., BERNÁD, *Plébániai levéltárak III. A Csíkszeredai Gyűjtőlevéltár repertóriumai*, 19.

The territorial boundaries of the Telegd Archdeaconry, and later those of the two Csík and the Gyergyó Archdeaconries, largely coincided with the historical regions of Csík and Gyergyószék, and from 1876 onward, with the administrative divisions of Csíkvármegye, including the districts of Lower Csík (Alcsík), Upper Csík (Felcsík), Gyergyó, and Kászon.⁴¹ Consequently, the organ-related regions examined in this study encompass and cover the entire geographical area of “Csíkvármegye” as it existed under the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Following the administrative reorganization of Romania in 1968, a restructuring of the archdeaconries became necessary. Today, the three archdeaconries extend roughly across the northeastern and southern parts of Harghita County, which was established in 1968. Additionally, two Armenian Catholic parishes – Gyergyószentmiklós and Szépvíz – are affiliated with the Felcsík and Gyergyó archdeaconries, along with two Franciscan churches and monasteries, as well as a Catholic-founded high school (main gymnasium) in Csíkszereda. Therefore, this study collects organ-related historical data according to the historical boundaries of the three archdeaconries, which, for the reasons mentioned above, can be regarded as a unified research area from the perspective of organ history during the 17th and 18th centuries.

With a few exceptions, the three ecclesiastical administrative regions correspond to the previously mentioned administrative boundaries of Harghita County.⁴² The data presented regarding the organ inventory found in the three discussed archdeaconries includes information that has so far been little known or entirely unknown to professionals and those interested in the topic. Furthermore, previously published inaccurate data has been corrected or clarified. As a result, this study offers an entirely new and accurate picture of the subject, providing a valuable reference point for future research into other deaneries during this historical period.

According to the 2023 Archdiocesan *Schematism*, the Alcsík–Kászon Archdeaconry consists of 16 parishes.⁴³ The Felcsík Archdeaconry is made up of 26 parishes, one Franciscan monastery, and one Pauline monastery,⁴⁴ while the

41 An exception was Maroshévíz, or Oláh-Toplicza, which already belonged to the Maros-Torda County.

42 The parishes of Gyimesbükk and Kostelek belong to Bacău County, while the parishes of Gyergyóbékás and the Háromkút filial belong to Neamț County.

43 *A Gyulafehérvári Főegyházmegye név- és címtára 2023*, Kolozsvár: Verbum, 2023, 155.

44 *A Gyulafehérvári Főegyházmegye név- és címtára 2023*, 155–156.

Gyergyó Archdeaconry comprises 20 parishes and one Franciscan monastery.⁴⁵ Over time, the centers of the archdeaconries have operated in various settlements.⁴⁶

Sources of 17th–18th Century Organ Data in the Two Csík and Gyergyó Archdeaconries

The detailed research findings presented regarding the 17th–18th century organ inventory in the two Csík and Gyergyó archdeaconries reveal information that has previously been either largely unknown or inaccessible to professionals and enthusiasts of the subject, or that previously published inaccurate data has now been corrected or clarified. As a result, this study provides an entirely new and accurate picture of the topic, which serves as an important reference point for the research of 17th–18th century organ history in the Csík and Gyergyó regions.

In terms of ecclesiastical historical sources and contemporary written records, during the tumultuous periods, many valuable documents mentioning organs were destroyed due to campaigns, wars, and conflicts in the three archdeaconries. As a result, in most cases, beyond local parish archival sources, the Archiepiscopal Archive in Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia) has provided significant, valuable, and essential organ historical data. Similarly, the visitation protocols from the 18th and 19th centuries serve as primary sources, as parish records from this period have rarely been preserved, whether in the Archdiocesan Archive or in parish archives. Additionally, other document-worthy sources can be mentioned.

Over time, in most cases, churches and chapels have been rebuilt, which means the fate of the instruments within them is closely intertwined with the construction history of these churches and chapels. In the three archdeaconries, it is fortunate that the Reformation did not take hold, with only a few villages experiencing brief periods of Protestant influence, and even then, only for a short time. As a result, the surviving ecclesiastical documents allow for the tracking of the presence and evolution of organs. Regarding the organs' dates of manufacture, the instruments in the three archdeaconries date back to the 17th century, that is, the Baroque period, and extend to the present day.

45 *A Gyulafehérvári Főegyházmegye név- és címtára* 2023, 156–157.

46 Rita-Magdolna BERNÁD, *Plébániai levéltárak I. A Gyulafehérvári-, a Sepsiszentgyörgyi, a Szamosújvári- és a Gyergyószentmiklósi Gyűjtőlevéltárak repertórium*, 287.

In the Csík and Gyergyó archdeaconries, the surviving records from the 17th and 18th centuries frequently mention the existence of organs in the larger parishes, as well as the cantors who were capable of playing them. Thanks to the Catholic restoration, from 1716 onwards, the regular episcopal visitation records (*canonica visitatio*) in the churches of the three studied archdeaconries began to specifically list organs among the liturgical instruments. Later, the visitation records from the 19th and 20th centuries provide more detailed information about the size and condition of the organs. References to the makers of these organs are rare, and with a few exceptions, their names remain anonymous.

The organs and organ builders of the Csík and Gyergyó archdeaconries in the 17th and 18th centuries

Based on the archival sources available to us, as well as the few existing instruments, we can establish that a form of organ culture clearly existed in the Csík and Gyergyó archdeaconries from the mid-17th century.⁴⁷ In the 17th century, archival sources from all three districts reference existing organs in the following locations: Csíksomlyó, Franciscan church (1650?, 1659), Gyergyószentmiklós (1662, 1677), Csíkszereda, Mikó Castle (1694), Gyergyóalfalu (1697), and Csíkszentgyörgy (around 1690).

The 17th-century organs of the three districts were made in Braşov, as well as outside Transylvania, likely in Poland, possibly in Kraków. Braşov stands out as a sought-after organ-making center, as evidenced by the organ purchased for the Şaşnăd church in 1629, or for Csíksomlyó in 1659, both of which were later repaired by Kájoni, as well as the organ purchased in 1677 for the Gyergyószentmiklós church.

The organs of the 17th–18th centuries (smaller positive instruments) were primarily equipped with bellows operated by leather straps.⁴⁸ This is supported by numerous expenditure entries in the cash registers and account books, as the “organ straps” quickly wore out, necessitating the purchase of replacements.

47 The memories of the Saxon organ culture from the 14th to 16th centuries were summarized by Hermann Binder in his indispensable book on the subject. BINDER, *Orgeln in Siebenbürgen*, 11–23.

48 Even today, organs that can still be operated with strap-pulling mechanisms can be found in places such as Csíkbánkfalva, the Roman Catholic church in Gelence, and the Reformed church in Marosvécs.

Organ builders or repair masters known by name only appear in this region from the late 18th century. Apart from János Kájoni and the deacon István Abos from Alfalva, there is no record of local masters operating in the districts, but due to the brevity of 17th–18th-century sources, we cannot rule out the possibility of other local masters being active.

The oldest known 17th-century organ builder is P. János Kájoni, a Franciscan monk, who was also a prominent figure in the early history of organ building in Transylvania. He left behind a Hungarian-Latin inscription from 1664 on a prepared wooden plank (wooden tablet) in the Somlyó organ, stating that he had built organs in Csíksomlyó, Szárhegy, and Mikháza, and had also made “et alia multa instrumenta” (many other instruments). The aforementioned Hungarian-Latin inscription⁴⁹ is one of the significant sources and memorials of the 1661 Tatar invasion of Csík and the 17th-century ecclesiastical music history of Transylvania.

According to the chronicle of Leonárd Losteiner, the organ was discovered in 1759 when P. Bocskor Paulin, the guardian of the Somlyó Franciscan monastery, had the Kájoni organ in the church repaired.⁵⁰ Later, in 1779, Ádám Bocskor, the regent of the Seminary, recorded that in May, together with János Raab from

49 The referenced manuscript was published multiple times with some variations in translation. It first appeared in Losteiner’s handwritten work in 1777, and later in the *Scientific and Artistic Journal of Music* on February 11, 1927, as well as in P. Boros Fortunát’s 1943 publication *Csíksomlyó, the Shrine*. Leonárd LOSTEINER, *Cronologia Topographico-Corographica, seu sub specie Annual felicitatis et calamitatis Provinciae Transilvanicae et Siculiae descriptio pervetusti Monasterii Csiksomlyovinensis 1777*, Manuscript, CSÍKSOMLYÓ FRANCISCAN MONASTERY LIBRARY., 591., p. 742–744, Zene, 8.9 (1927) 173, BOROS, *Csíksomlyó, a kegyhely*, 110–111.

50 According to museologist Erzsébet Muckenhaupt’s description, the paper document was rediscovered in 1985 within the wall of the Franciscan monastery in Șumuleu (Csíksomlyó), along with 123 other old books. It was subsequently restored in the laboratory of the National Library of Bucharest. The Hungarian and Latin inscription is on paper glued to a wooden board (257×94 mm). The board’s dimensions are 302×134×29 mm. A hanging ring is visible on the back. It was framed, placed under glass, and hung on the side of the new organ by the Franciscans. The manuscript is currently part of the collection of the Csíki Székely Museum in Miercurea Ciuc and is available for research. Inventory number: 6249. Erzsébet MUCKENHAUPT, Kájoni János: A csíksomlyói ferences templom régi orgonájának felirata. Szárhegy, 1664, Kájoni János emlékére, halálának 330. évfordulójára, in: *Csíksomlyó Üzenete*, XI/ 2, 2017, 35–36.

Braşov, they repaired the organ, with Raab replacing several pipes and the worn pedal of the mixture with new ones.⁵¹

Regarding the Csíksomlyó organ, P. Simon Jukundián, Kájoni's first discoverer, wrote in 1879 to one of his friends: "I played the organ for 8 years (in Somlyó, Mikháza, and Szárhegy) on the organs he built with his own hands."⁵² If Kájoni's organ in Csíksomlyó truly remained in existence until the second half of the 19th century, it was dismantled by István Kolonics. In Szárhegy, however, an organ that Kolonics had rebuilt remained in use until 1904, and in 1910, it was moved to the Catholic church in Sáromberke, where it is still in use today.⁵³ The further fate of Kájoni's other instruments is unknown.⁵⁴ However, it can be proven that Abos István, originally from Alfalva, learned organ building from Kájoni and later repaired an organ in Csíkszenttamás.⁵⁵

Subsequently, in the first half of the 18th century, a document found in the archive of the Endes family from Csíkszentsimoni also refers to the organ in Csíkszenttamás, stating that on July 28, "1724, Sándor Abaffy made an agreement with Péter Meneges, a citizen of Braşov, to have an organ built for 80 forints."⁵⁶

At the end of the 18th century, among the masters of Szeklerland, one of the most notable was Mátyás Velter from Sepsiszentgyörgy, who worked in Csíkcsicsó, Csíkszentdomokos, and later in Gyergyóalfalu. Similarly, in the Gyergyó and Csík

51 BOROS, *Csíksomlyó, a kegyhely*, 112.

52 Vegyesek, *Új Magyar Sion Egyházirodalmi Folyóirat* 10 (1879) 398–399.

53 The instrument located in Sáromberke is attributed by organ builder Albert M. Balogh, based on stylistic features, to Johannes Hahn, an 18th-century organ builder from Sibiu, rather than to Kájoni.

54 In Mikháza, it is noted in 1707 that the old Kájoni organ was removed and replaced with a new organ and choir gallery commissioned by Governor Count Zsigmond Kornis. The Kornis organ was repaired and expanded by organ builder Ignác Takácsy in 1893. In 1910, it was replaced by a M+P/7 pneumatic organ from the Rieger company worth 2,800 crowns, considered "a pious relic of the 17th century". HISTORIA DOMUS SEU CONVENTO MIKHÁZA I. volume, 1707–1877, 15., MIKHÁZI FERENCES ZÁRDA DOMUS HISTÓRIÁJA II. volume, 1877–1990, 37, 119.

55 CSÍKSZEREDA COLLECTION ARCHIVES, (hereinafter referred to as CSCA.) *A Csíkszenttamási parish records*, 565/e. Economic documents, 1. box, 1721 year, AAGY. Can viz, 1723, box 1, vol 1, p. 193.

56 Imre SÁNDOR, "A csíkszentsimoni Endes család levéltára, 1660–1725", *Genealógiai Füzetek-Családtörténeti Folyóirat*. 5 (1907) 46–48.

districts, the Upper Hungarian organ builder Lőrincz Rózsa appeared in 1774, among others. At that time, he lived in rented accommodation (“comorált”⁵⁷) in Gyergyóújfalu and worked in Csíkszentmiklós.

Conclusion

In the former Telegdi area, now part of the Lower and Upper Csík, as well as the Gyergyó districts, organs are already mentioned in archival sources from the 17th century. However, these sources also suggest the presence of other instruments in the church communities that are not documented due to the lack of archival records. Although this period was historically a difficult time for Transylvanian Catholicism, it is certain that in larger churches and monasteries, the sound of the organ accompanied hymns praising God.

In the early 18th century, and especially after the Catholic restoration, church visitation records and parish documents began to provide more detailed information about the increasingly widespread, yet smaller mechanical slider-chest organs, often with only 4 to 6 stops, and occasionally with bellows-operated mechanisms. Similarly, the visitation records also list the names of cantors who were able to play the organ.⁵⁸

57 Organ builder Lőrincz Rózsa's rental of accommodation (*comorálása*) in Gyergyóújfalu is known in connection with the organ repair in Csíkszentmiklós. CSCA: *Csíkszentmiklós parish records*, 564/e. Thematically arranged documents, box 2., vol. 3: Records and orders of property lawsuits (Ferenc Balogh lawsuit) /1627/ 1756–1765 (3 volumes) 138.

58 Based on the research of historian János Szócs, it can be stated about the musical life of the era that: „Vélhetően, nem működött itt olyan iskolamester, kántor a 16., a 17. és a 18. században (1571–1800), aki ne értett volna a kottaolvasáshoz és íráshoz. Áll ez leginkább a 18. századra. Amint az 1731-es vizitáció okmányai jól mutatják, a legtöbb iskolamester, kántor udvarhelyi és kolozsvári középiskolában tanult, és jól tudott orgonán játszani.” [“Presumably, there was no schoolmaster or cantor functioning here in the 16th, 17th, or 18th century (1571–1800) who did not understand music notation reading and writing. This was especially true in the 18th century. As the documents of the 1731 visitation clearly show, most schoolmasters and cantors were educated in the secondary schools of Odorheiu Secuiesc (Székelyudvarhely) and Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár), and were proficient in organ playing.”] János Szócs, “Elemi oktatás Csíkszéken 1571–1800” I, *Csíki Székely Múzeum Évkönyve 2007–2008*, Csíkszereda: Csíki Székely Múzeum, 2008, 302.

Considering the musical needs of the parishes in the three districts during the 17th and 18th centuries, we can conclude that in that political and economic situation, the communities made full use of every opportunity and made significant financial sacrifices to ensure that the liturgies were accompanied by the sound of the organ.

A detailed report on the 17th-century organs of the three archdeaconries⁵⁹

Place Name	Builder/ Installer	Year Built/ Installed	Size	Remarks
Csikszentgyörgy	1.	Around 1690	M/4	Later moved to the chapel in Csíkszenttamás.
Csikszenttamás	1.	1690	M/4	Purchased from the church in Csikszentgyörgy, repaired by István Abos in 1721.
Csiksomlyó, Franciscan Shrine	Echárd Brassai	1650?		Brought from Kraków.
	János Eperjesi?	1659		Purchased by Miklós Somlyai from Braşov, repaired and expanded by János Kájoni in 1664. Repaired in 1759, and again by János Raab in 1779.
Csiksomlyó, Saint Anthony Chapel	1.	1629	M/4	Purchased from Braşov for the Şaşnăd church, repaired in 1779 in Odorheiu Secuiesc and moved to the St. Anthony Chapel. It has disappeared from the chapel.
Csikszereda, Mikó Castle Chapel	1.	1694 1831	M/4	General Bajkó János had the organ installed in 1694 to commemorate his release from Turkish captivity. It was destroyed.
Kászonújfalu, Chapel	1.	16??		Positive organ, over 400 years old.
Gyergyószentmiklós, Saint Nicholas Church	1.	1662		Purchased a duplex regal from Csiksomlyó.
	2.	1677		Purchased from Braşov.

⁵⁹ The report was largely compiled based on episcopal visitation records and various parish documents.

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Place Name	Builder/ Installer	Year Built/ Installed	Size	Remarks
Gyergyóalfalu	1.	Before 1697		The organ was repaired at this time.
Szárhegy, Franciscan	János Kájoni	16--?		

A detailed report on the 18th-century organs of the three archdeaconries

Place	Builder/ Installer	Year Built/ Installed	Size	Remarks
Csatószeg		1735	M/6	
Csikmenaság		1776	M/6	Indicated as M/6 in 1786. Rebuilt by Kolonics in 1861.
Csikmindszent		1721	M/6	First record from 1735. Changed to M/6 in 1786.
Csikbánkfalva	Johannes Baumgartner	1700? from 1883	M/2	Brought here from Sepsiszentiván by Kolonics. Repaired in 1959 by Ignác Páll, in 1997 by Albert Péter, and in 2001 by Zoltán Pap, and in 2016 by László Bors.
Csikszentkirály		1721		Positive organ in 1735, M/3 in 1823.
Csikszentlélek	1.	1721		Positive organ in 1735.
	2.	1743		New organ recorded in 1743, M/6 version in 1823.
Csikszentimre	1.	1628? 1721		First noted in 1721, M/5 in 1743, I/6 in 1817. Sold to Mikóújfalu in 1838. Used until 1890.
Csikszentmárton	1.	1721		Set up in the nave of the church
	2.	1743	M/6	
Kozmás	1.	1712	M/4	Organ in good condition noted in 1717 and 1721. Classified as M/4 in 1735. Repaired in 1759.
	2.	1817	M/6	
Kászonjakabfalva	1.	1783	M/5	M/6 version noted in 1826.
Kászonújfalu	1.	1735	M/6	M/5 version listed in 1786
Nagykászon	1.	1721	M/5	Recorded in 1735, indicated as M/5 version in 1743.

CHURCH ORGANS IN THE 17TH-18TH CENTURY ARCHDEACONRIES OF CSÍK AND GYERGYÓ

Place	Builder/ Installer	Year Built/ Installed	Size	Remarks
Kászonimpér, Lord's Chapel	1.	1782	M/4	It was in use until 1877. A harmonium was purchased from József Nagy.
Tusnád	1.	1729	M/5	Rebuilt and expanded by Kolonics in 1885. Currently located in Újtusnád.
Csikcsicsó			M/3	In 1791, the old organ was sold to Taploca.
	Mátyás Velter	1791	M/6	In 1839, its old organ was moved to the Chapel of the Lord in Csíkelne.
Csíkelne, Saint John Church	1.	1743		At that time, it was in poor condition. In 1753, a positive organ was installed.
Csíkelne, Lord's Chapel	1.	1753	M/4	It was in use until 1840.
	Mátyás Velter	1791	M/6	Purchased from Csikcsicsó in 1840.
Csikmadaras	1.	1759	M/6	From 1817, it is recorded as M/6 version; repaired by József Beer in 1849.
Csikszentmihály	1.	1753	M/3	Indicated as M/3 in 1817, and as M/4 in 1831.
Csikrákos	1.	1721	M/6	Indicated as M/6 in 1817.
Csikszentdomokos	1.	1735	M/2	Positive organ with 2 versions recorded in 1743.
Csikszenttamás	1. Péter Meneges	1724		There is no definite data confirming when the organ was built.
Csiksomlyó, Saint Peter and Paul Church	1.	1714		New organ.
	2.	1743	M/7	New organ for 239 forints, repaired by Kolonics in 1862 and sold to Taploca.
Csiktaploca	1.		M/3	Purchased from Csicsó in 1791.

Place	Builder/ Installer	Year Built/ Installed	Size	Remarks
	2.	1745	M/6	In 1862, István Kolonics installed the old organ from the St. Peter and Paul Church in Csíksomlyó. The previous organ was sold from Taploca to Delne.
Csíkszereda, Holy Cross Church	1.	1753	M/4	Recorded as M/4 in 1817.
Csíkszentmiklós	1.	1711		The organ is noted.
	2.	1735		A new, good organ is reported. Repaired by Lőrinc Lose in 1774.
Csikborzsova, Saint Joseph Chapel	1.	1700?	I/4	Purchased from Szederjes by István Kolonics in 1878, then bought again in 1880. After 1966, it was transferred in damaged condition to Csíkszentmiklós. Currently awaiting restoration.
Gyimesfelsőlok, Saint Andrew Church	1.	1735	M/6	Purchased from Szentegyháza in 1903, and was in use until 1911.
Karcfalva	1.	1721	M/6	A gift from Bishop György Mártonffy, destroyed in 1917.
Szépvíz, Chapel of Our Lady of the Snows	1.	1753	M/4	Repaired by István Kolonics in 1869, used until 1879.
Szépvíz, Armenian	1.	1776	M/7	An old organ is mentioned, marked as M/7 in 1784.
Ditró, Saint Catherine Church	1.	1711	M/5	Elegant organ in 1732, indicated as M/5 in 1775. In 1846, it was moved to Csíksomlyó, and later handed over to Kolonics.
Gyergyóalfalu	1.	1725		A new organ was built in 1760, indicated as M/6.
	2.	1776	M/6	New organ indicated as M/6 in 1786.
Gyergyócsomafalva	1.	1728	M/4	Marked as M/4 in 1735.
	2.	1779	M/5	A new organ is noted.
Gyergyóremete	1.	1735		A positive organ is indicated in 1735.
	2.	1775	M/6	Indicated as M/8 version in 1786.
Gyergyószentmiklós, Armenian	1.	Around 1730?	M/6	First mentioned in sources in 1786.

Place	Builder/ Installer	Year Built/ Installed	Size	Remarks
Gyergyótölgyes	1.	1731	M/5	Built around 1731 in Gyergyóújfalu, repaired by Lőrinc Rosa in 1775, transferred to Tölgyes in 1873. Used until 1943.
Gyergyóújfalu	1.	1721		A small organ is noted.
	2.	1731	M/5	New organ, repaired by Lőrinc Rosa in 1775, then moved to Tölgyes in 1873.
Kilyénfalva		1778	M/6	
		1782	M/6	
Szárhegy, parish church	1.	1711	M/5	An old organ is recorded in 1743. Marked as M/5 in 1766.
	2.	1780	M/8	A new organ is recorded.
Szárhegy, Franciscan	Johannes Hahn?	1752?		Marked as M/8 in 1830; rebuilt by István Kolonics in 1869. Since 1910, located in Sáromberke.
Tekerőpatak	1.	1735		Two organs are recorded: M/6 in 1766, M/4 in 1775.
	2.	1743		A well-preserved organ is installed.
	3.	1783	M/6	An old organ is recorded in 1743. Marked as M/5 in 1766.

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MEMBERS OF THE STATUS ASSEMBLY IN HÁROMSZÉK AND BRASSÓ COUNTIES

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Abstract. Following the Reformation, in the absence of a Catholic bishop, the Roman Catholic Status of Transylvania was established in the mid-17th century by secular nobility to represent Catholic interests. By the 18th century, the Status was led by the bishop, though Habsburg rulers later transferred its authority to a Catholic Committee (1767–1867). The Status-assemblies led by Bishop Mihály Fogarasy (1866, 1868) restored Catholic self-governance, culminating in a governing council in 1873. The Status had jurisdiction over educational, property, and foundation issues, while ecclesiastical matters remained under episcopal control. The annually convened assemblies in Kolozsvár [Cluj] included local authorities, clerical and lay representatives from across Transylvania, with elected lay delegates and notable participation from regions such as Háromszék [Trei Scaune] and Brassó [Braşov].

Keywords: Roman Catholic Church, history of Transylvania, Roman Catholic Status of Transylvania, Status Assembly, lay governance, Háromszék, Brassó.

Introduction

During the more than half-century existence of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the representation of Transylvanian Catholic affairs was carried out by the Transylvanian Roman Catholic Status, an institution with roots dating back to the era of the Principality. The first attempt at its reorganization took place in 1848; however, it was nearly two decades later, under the influence of favourable domestic political developments, that – through the assertion of legal rights – this institution, embodying Catholic autonomy, gradually took shape.

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The method for electing lay representatives to Status assemblies – which occasionally served as vociferous arenas of Transylvanian public life – was first regulated by the assembly of 1848 and subsequently reaffirmed by the 1866 assembly. This latter gathering, held with the majority participation of the clergy, formulated an organizational statute that led to the strengthening of episcopal authority. Nonetheless, Bishop Mihály Fogarasy postponed its implementation, fearing that lay representatives would gain excessive influence over ecclesiastical affairs. The decisions made at this assembly are, however, of notable importance, as they served as a starting point for the subsequent regulation of Status's operations.

Election of representatives to the Status Assembly

The Status assembly convened two years later, in February 1868, once again defined the organizational and operational rules of Status, including the election of representatives, through a two-tier system.² In the first stage, the parish general assembly elected delegates to participate in the archdeaconry-level electoral assembly, which was responsible for selecting the actual representatives to the Status General Assembly. Each parish was entitled to send one lay representative for every 1,000 believers to the electoral assembly of its archdeaconry. The electoral delegates at this level then elected two lay representatives to represent the archdeaconry in the general assembly of the Status.³ Archdeaconries were further entitled to an additional representative for every 6,000 believers. Thus, the Barcaság-Sepsi-Miklósvár archdeaconry could send two while the Kézdi-Orbai archdeaconry up to six representatives from the territory of the Transylvanian bishopric.

Free royal cities such as Brassó, as well as parishes with a population exceeding 5,000 and having the right to elect their parish priest – such as Barót [Baraolt], Altorja [Turia de Jos], Gelence [Ghelința], Lemhény [Lemnia], Polyán [Poiana (de Arieș)],

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- 2 Archives of the Roman Catholic Status of Transylvania [ARCST], Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848–1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1866, Kolozsvár, 1883, 10; Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1868, Kolozsvár, 1903, 15.
 - 3 Election of the representatives took place in accordance with the descriptions included in chapters II–IV of the minutes recorded at the Status Assembly Meeting of 1868, ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848–1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1868, Kolozsvár, 1903, 15–17.

and Kézdiszentlélek [Sânzieni]⁴ – could send their own representatives to the annual assembly in their capacity as patrons.⁵ According to the election statute, any Catholic male who had reached the age of 24, “held an independent civic profession, and possessed an honest and moral character” was eligible to become a Status assembly representative. Convicted individuals and those undergoing bankruptcy proceedings were excluded.⁶ The assemblies were intended to be held each summer during school recesses, rotating annually among different archdeaconries. The submission of proposals required the signatures of ten representatives, each of whom could speak on any given issue no more than twice. Decisions were adopted by simple majority, except in cases concerning the acquisition, sale, or mortgaging of fixed assets, which required a two-thirds majority.⁷ The Status assembly deliberated on the approval of annual budgets, defining the educational, ecclesiastical, and foundation asset management policies, Catholic educational and pedagogical matters, the examination of disputed patronage rights, representation of the Church before the state, and the election of the Church’s high council (later known as the Board of Directors) and its own officials. Its jurisdiction did not extend to matters of doctrine and morals, ecclesiastical rites, the structure of ecclesiastical governance, or limitations on property rights concerning church benefices.⁸ Despite the detailed regulation of the Status assemblies, Bishop Mihály Fogarasy – concerned about the rise of radical liberal forces and the perceived strengthening of lay influence – refused to convene another assembly. He made the organization of a subsequent session contingent upon the establishment of national Catholic autonomy. At the request of Status, the monarch abolished in August 1867 the Catholic Commission (*Commissio Catholica*), which had been established in 1767 by Empress Maria Theresa and operated alongside the Transylvanian Gubernium. Its responsibilities were transferred to the Provisional

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- 4 I use the official Hungarian place names of the time (in the Austro-Hungarian Empire) and add their corresponding present-day Romanian names in square brackets following each first occurrence.
 - 5 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848–1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1868, Kolozsvár, 1903, 15–17.
 - 6 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848–1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1868, Kolozsvár, 1903, 17.
 - 7 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848–1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1868, Kolozsvár, 1903, 17–18.
 - 8 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848–1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1868, Kolozsvár, 1903, 19.

Catholic Commission, now subordinated to the Ministry of Religion and Public Education. Nevertheless, the Transylvanian Catholic foundations remained under state administration.⁹ The shifting domestic political landscape intensified efforts towards establishing ecclesiastical autonomy in Transylvania. Ultimately, Bishop Mihály Fogarasy convened a new Status assembly for May 1873. In his opening address, he reaffirmed the validity of the 1868 regulations concerning the organization of the general assembly and the election of its representatives and went on to state the following: “In this regard, we have no other task than, avoiding theoretical disputes, to determine the regular convening of the Status assembly of our Transylvanian diocese based on previous legal practice and on the national framework, and thereby to realize the existence and functioning of our self-governance.”¹⁰

At this assembly, a request was submitted to Ágoston Trefort, Minister of Religion and Public Education (1872–1888), for approval of a 24-member Board of Directors – referred to as the Committee (*bizottmány*) – elected in accordance with Presidential Decree No 896/1867. This body was officially recognized by Decree No 1008/1873 and took over the responsibilities of the former Provisional Commission.¹¹ The Board’s authority extended to the execution of general assembly resolutions, the management of educational and pedagogical affairs, and generally to “all secular matters of the Transylvanian bishopric”, with the exception of doctrinal, ecclesiastical governance, disciplinary, and liturgical issues, which remained under episcopal jurisdiction. Comprising 8 clerical and 16 lay representatives, the Board of Directors became a permanent component of the Status assemblies.¹²

While at the assembly of 1873 the balance of participants still favoured ecclesiastical delegates (with 55 clerics compared to 43 laymen),¹³ from 1882 onwards, when the Status assemblies were convened annually,¹⁴ representation followed a 1/3 clerical to

9 László HOLLÓ, *A világiak által vezetett egyházmegye I*, Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2009, 121–122.

10 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848–1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1873, Kolozsvár, 1873, 3.

11 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848–1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1873, Kolozsvár, 1873, 3.

12 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848–1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1873, Kolozsvár, 1873, 7–8.

13 HOLLÓ, *A világiak által vezetett egyházmegye*, 124–125.

14 Prior to this, Status assemblies were convened in the years 1866, 1868, 1873, 1874, 1876, 1877, and 1879. Because of the warlike circumstances, Status assemblies did not take place

2/3 lay ratio. These assemblies were chaired by the incumbent Catholic bishop, or, in his absence, by a secular president acting in his stead.¹⁵ According to a resolution passed at the 1882 Status Assembly, representatives were elected for a six-year term.¹⁶ In addition to the lay representatives elected by the archdeaconry districts, ex officio lay members of the Status Assembly included representatives of the following groups: patrons of parishes, dignitaries, Catholic members of the House of Magnates, lord-lieutenants and deputy lord-lieutenants, the mayors of more prominent towns, representatives of the royal treasuries,¹⁷ members of the courts of appeal in Kolozsvár and Marosvásárhely, as well as directors and representatives of Catholic secondary grammar schools. Parishes with over 3,000 members were entitled to delegate an independent lay representative; however, this threshold was raised to 5,000 in 1913, in accordance with the 1866 regulations. In cases where parishes with the right of electing their parish priest had more than 10,000 adherents, they were permitted to delegate an additional representative.¹⁸ Based on the above regulation, from 1912 onwards, the city of Brassó was represented by two delegates at the assemblies.¹⁹

The election of lay representatives for the archdeaconry districts retained its two-round format as stipulated by the 1866 Status Assembly resolutions. First, a parish assembly was convened under the chairmanship of the parish priest, at which a representative was elected “from among their own number”.²⁰ This delegate, acting as an elector, then chose the two lay representatives who would participate in the Status Assembly. The 1873 Assembly designated 16 electoral districts in accordance with the number of archdeaconries, enabling the election of 42 lay delegates. It also

in 1916 and 1919.

15 HOLLÓ, *A világiak által vezetett egyházmegye*, 106.

16 HOLLÓ, *A világiak által vezetett egyházmegye*, 132.

17 The Directorate of Finance and the Directorate of Forestry in Kolozsvár, as well as the Chief Mining Offices of Marosújvár [Ocna Mureș] and Zalatna [Zlatna], were also represented,

18 Parishes entitled to delegate a representative: Ditró [Ditrău], Gyergyóalfalu [Alfalău / Joseni], Gyergyóremete [Remetea], Gyergyószentmiklós [Gheorgheni], Kolozsvár, Marosvásárhely, Csíkszereda [Miercurea Ciuc], Nagyszeben [Sibiu], Petrozsény [Petroșani], Székelyudvarhely [Odorheiu Secuiesc], and Brassó [Brașov].

19 Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Alba Iulia, Sfântu Gheorghe Collective Archives [ARCAAI-SGCA], Archives of the Brașov Parish (ABP), Documents of the parish and archdeaconry, Bishop's Circular No 6428/1912.

20 The filial churches delegated representatives jointly with their mother parishes, ARCAAI-SGCA, Archives of the Lunga Parish (hereinafter as ALP), Registered documents, 186/1901.

reduced the representation threshold from 6,000 (as per the 1866 resolutions) to 5,000 faithful, thus allowing electoral districts to send one additional lay delegate to the annual assembly for every 5,000 adherents above the base figure. It is important to note that free royal towns and the parishes with the right to elect their priest could delegate individual representatives. Accordingly, Kolozsvár sent three, while Brassó, Nagyszeben, Gyergyószentmiklós, Gyergyóalfalu, Gyergyóditró, and Csíkkarcfalva [Cârța] each delegated one lay representative to the annual assemblies.²¹

The Barca-Sepsi-Miklósvár archdeaconry, which encompassed the Catholic parishes of Alsó-Háromszék and Brassó counties, was divided into two electoral districts and thereby entitled to send two representatives. According to the 1874 division, the first district included Barót, Miklósvár [Micioșoara], Hídvég [Hăghig], and Illyefalu [Ilieni], totalling 4,950 adherents, while the second district comprised Sepsiszentgyörgy [Sfântu Gheorghe], Sepsikőröspatak [Valea Crișului], Mikóújfalu [Micfalău], Sepsiszentiván [Sântionlunca], Türkös [Turcheș], Bodza [Vama Buzăului], Tömös [Timișu de Jos], and Töröcsvár [Bran], with a total of 5,180 faithful.

The Kézdi-Orbai archdeaconry, encompassing the predominantly Catholic settlements of Felső-Háromszék [Depresiunea Târgu Secuiesc], was divided into seven electoral districts as follows: 1) Torja [Turia] and Futásfalva [Alungeni] (4,671 faithful); 2) Kézdiszentlélek, Kézdiszárzypatak [Valea Seacă], Kézdikővár [Petriceni] (5,463); 3) Kézdiopolyán [Poian] and Esztelnek [Estelnic] (5,188); 4) Lemhény, Bereck [Brețcu], and Ojtoz [Oituz] (5,601); 5) Ozsdola [Ojdula] and Gelence (6,492); 6) Nyújtód [Lunga], Kézdisárfalu [Tinoasa], and Kanta [Canta] (4,258); 7) Szentkatolna [Catalina], Imecsfalva [Imeni], and Zágón [Zagon] (4,083).²²

The election of archdeaconry representatives to the Status Assembly thus took place within an indirect voting system, whereby the electors chosen in each electoral district cast votes on behalf of their respective constituencies. Despite the long terms of office, not all parishes availed themselves of the opportunity to send delegates to the archdeaconry assemblies. This likely explains why the

21 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848–1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1893, 7.

22 ARCAAI-SGCA, ABP, Documents of the parish and archdeaconry. The organization of the Catholic Church's self-government within the Diocese of Transylvania, 1874, s.n. 2–3.

meticulously delineated system of electoral districts rapidly disintegrated. From the early 19th century onwards, parishes of each archdeaconry sent collectively a representative for the election of two lay delegates who would then represent the district. Accordingly, in 1883, only five settlements from the Barca-Sepsi-Miklósvár archdeaconry sent delegates: Sepsiszentgyörgy appointed József Künnle; Sepsiszentiván, Ferenc Seethal, a landowner; Barót, Ferenc Gergely; Illyefalva, Ferenc Fazakas; and Miklósvár, András Gyenge – to the assembly to be held in Brassó in September, which ultimately elected József Künnle and Ferenc Seethal based on the gathered delegates' confidence.²³ In the villages, electoral participation was minimal – in Miklósvár, for example, only ten individuals, primarily members of the parish council, took part in selecting the delegate to be sent to the headquarters of the archdeaconry.²⁴ Elsewhere, representatives were often drawn directly from among the parish council members.

Clerical representatives to the Status assemblies were elected at archdeaconry meetings. According to the 1874 regulations, archdeaconries with fewer than 12 parishes could delegate one clerical representative, while those with more were entitled to two. The Barca-Sepsi-Miklósvár archdeaconry, comprising 13 parishes, elected one cleric, while the Kézdi-Orbai archdeaconry, with 17, elected two,²⁵ generally selecting from among the current deputy archdeacons. In the former, the deputy archdeacon-priest of Sepsiszentgyörgy or Barót and the archdeaconry school inspector were typically delegated to the annual Status Assembly. Archdeacons were invited *ex officio*,²⁶ and in case of their absence, district secretaries substituted for them. The parish priests of Brassó consistently

23 ARCAAI-SGCA, ABP, Documents of the parish and archdeaconry; Minutes of the lay representative election held in Brassó on 14 September 1883, (no series number).

24 ARCAAI-SGCA, ABP, Documents of the parish and archdeaconry; Minutes of the lay representative election held in Brassó on 11 September 1883, (no series number).

25 ARCAAI-SGCA, ABP, Documents of the parish and archdeaconry; The organization of the Catholic Church's self-government within the Diocese of Transylvania, 1874, s. n. 2.

26 There were, however, certain occasions when the office of archdeacon was held by the parish priest of Sepsiszentgyörgy. For instance, in 1901, the bishop appointed Manó Fejér, parish priest of Sepsiszentgyörgy, as the district's ecclesiastical representative, In: ARCAAI-SGCA, Archives of the Sfântu Gheorghe Parish (hereinafter as ASGP), Registered documents of the parish, 177/190; In 1919, in the absence of Abbot Meisel of Brassó, the archdeacon was substituted by parish priest Károly Székely, ARCAAI-SGCA, ASGP, Registered documents of the parish, 27/1919 v.

prioritized attending the assemblies and, indeed, benefited from the Kolozsvár–Brassó railway line, which made travel easier compared to their fellow priests from Felső-Háromszék. The latter generally participated only when matters concerning their district were on the agenda – as revealed in a letter by József László, parish priest of Lemhény and district secretary. For instance, László Bálint, parish priest and archdeacon of Bereck, cited administrative duties²⁷ and poor health as reasons for his absence from the extraordinary Status Assembly of December 1895, which deliberated on the purchase of the Eszterházy estate in Alsóbajom [Boian].²⁸

The election of representatives for a six-year term was regulated by the Status Assembly of 1866 and subsequently by that of 1882. The electors delegated by the parishes were instructed “to engage in the election of such representatives who, besides the prevailing opinion of the majority, are believed to most closely fulfil the criteria outlined in the gracious episcopal call”.²⁹

Concerning the election of lay representatives, Bishop Mihály Fogarasy issued the following directive in his Circular No 1857/1867 addressed to the archdeacons: “It is unnecessary to remind Your Reverend Eminence of the utmost prudence and caution required in preparing and conducting the elections, so that, setting aside political partisanship, only the most devout members of our Church – religious, morally upright, intelligent, and composed Catholics – may be delegated to this important organizing assembly, whose wise and mature deliberations may bring forth benefit and blessing.”³⁰

Political affiliation, therefore, was not among the selection criteria. Rather, commitment to the Church and a morally sound lifestyle served as the principal benchmarks for nomination. Preference was generally given to county officials of the highest rank – lords-lieutenant, deputy lord-lieutenants – or, should they belong to a different denomination, to judges of the Court of Appeal, public prosecutors

27 ARCAAI-SGCA, Documents of the Office of the Archdeacon of Kézdi-Orbai (hereinafter as OAKD), Registered documents, 351/1895.

28 In 1916, Mihály Bagoly priest-deputy archdeacon of Kézdiszentkereszt [Poian], Cf. ARCAAI-SGCA, OAKD, Registered documents, 388/1895, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1915, 11.

29 ARCAAI SGCA, Archives of the Sânzieni Parish [ASP], Registered documents, Minutes recorded on 8 December 1867 at the Transylvanian Status Assembly, on behalf of Poian.

30 ARCAAI SGCA, OAKD, Registered documents, Episcopal Circular No 1958/1867.

or their deputies, members of parliament, and the mayors of former free royal cities,³¹ who were all summoned to Kolozsvár.³² At the same time, the 1897 Status Assembly declared that individuals affiliated with Freemasonry could not become members either of the Board of Directors or of the Assembly itself.³³

Status assemblies were typically attended by approximately 100 participants,³⁴ who, as members of the political and state administrative apparatus, exercised substantial influence and opinion-shaping authority.³⁵

According to the practice of lay representative elections developed in the second half of the 19th century, once the protocol of the district-level elections had been submitted, the bishop issued a personal invitation to the chosen representatives. Among the invited lords-lieutenant, we can mention József Potsa, who served for multiple terms on the Board of Directors (1873, 1893; Sepsiszentgyörgy); Mihály Mauer, royal chamberlain and lord-lieutenant (1893, Brassó); Zsigmond Mikes, lord-lieutenant (1915, Brassó); and, following the change of sovereignty, MP Baron Béla Szentkereszty (1929–1931, Árkos [Arcuş]), who, owing to his strong ties with the Romanian political elite, played a key role in securing public rights for denominational schools and, as a board member, in defending the rights of Status. Among the patrons, we find Count János Nemes the Elder (1834–1905), a landowner from Hídvég (1868, 1893);³⁶ Baron Béla Szentkereszty (1893) and Baron Tivadar

31 In 1913, the parish priest of Sepsiszentgyörgy would have gladly welcomed the town's mayor as a participant in the Status Assembly, but the bishop emphasized that no exceptions could be made; the leaders of towns with settled council were not eligible for invitation, ARCAAI SGCA, ASGP, Registered documents, Circular No. 6690/1913.

32 ARCAAI SGCA ASGP, Registered documents, 4440/1906, 55/1913 v.

33 HOLLÓ, A világiak által vezetett egyházmegye, 173.

34 At the 1868 Status Assembly, 103 out of the 196 invitees were present, including 57 clerical and 46 lay members, cf. Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1868, 12.

35 Lóránd PÉNZES, "A Státus ujjászervezése és jelenléte az erdélyi közéletben", *Keresztény Szó* 20.6 (2009) 21–23 (22).

36 His father, also named János Nemes (1792–1868), was an imperial and royal chamberlain a veritable privy councillor of state, who in early 1861 became the head of the department established under the newly reorganized Gubernium for the administration of Roman Catholic religious and educational affairs – an office that existed for barely one year. D. TÓTH Béla, "Az Erdélyi Királyi Főkormánysház visszaállítása (1860–1861)", *Korunk* 3 (2001) 16–29, <https://epa.oszk.hu/00400/00458/00045/kiraly.htm> (downloaded: 2.11.2024).

Béldi, landowners from Árkos and Bodola [Budila] respectively.³⁷ In proportion to the number of faithful belonging to the two archdeaconry districts, they were able to delegate a significant number of lay representatives to the Status Assembly. In 1911, of the 148 lay representatives, 10, and of the 73 clerical representatives, 5 came from the two districts, representing 14.8% and 3.65%, respectively, of the total number of representatives. The number of lay representatives further increased after the change of sovereignty. While in 1893 the Barca-Sepsi-Miklósvár District had only two representatives – Ferenc Seethal of Sepsiszentiván and Arthur Bogdán of Sepsiszentgyörgy –, by 1929, this number had doubled. In addition to Ferenc Seethal of Miklósvár (heir to the Kálnoky family's estates there), Gerő Temesváry of Uzon [Ozun], Rezső Kovásznai of Zernyest [Zărnești], and Dr Károly Kontasveller of Fogaras [Făgăraș] were also invited to attend the Status assemblies.³⁸ However, it was not only the increase in numbers but also the rising prestige of the representatives from Háromszék, or those holding estates in the region (too), that mattered, some of whom served as members on the Board of Directors or as vice-presidents of Status, actively promoting the interests of Transylvanian Catholicism. One such vice-president was Zsigmond (III) Szentkereszty of Zágón (1850, Kolozsvár – 1921, Kolozsvár), President of the Royal Regional Court of Nagyvárad [Oradea],³⁹

37 ARCAAI-SGCA, Archives of the Baraolt Parish (hereinafter as ABP), Printed publications, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1893, 5.

38 Cf. Minutes of the Status assemblies held in the years 1893, 1929, 1930, 1934, 1942, and 1943.

39 He completed his studies at the Faculty of Law of the University of Kolozsvár. He first served as a judge of the Court of Appeal in Marosvásárhely, then as President of the General Court in Kolozsvár. He presided over the final hearing of the highly publicized Memorandum Trial of 1894, following which he was promoted to the Curia in the capital. Subsequently, he was appointed President of the Royal Regional Court of Nagyvárad, and, in recognition of his merits, he was awarded the title of Privy Councillor. On this occasion, the parish priest of Zágón also extended greetings on behalf of the parish, as his father, István Szentkereszty, had served as chief churchwarden of the Zágón parish. Alongside his professional duties, he was also notable for his support of church and cultural initiatives: he was chief churchwarden of the Roman Catholic parish in Zágón, initiator of the building fund for the Marosvásárhely theatre, and member of the organizing committee for the Matthias Corvinus Monument in Kolozsvár. In 1885, he married Erzsébet Sándor of Csíkszentmihály (1859–1945), daughter of József Sándor, Minister of the Interior. The couple had three children: a daughter, Zsófia Erzsébet (born 15 September 1886 – died 5 August 1972); a son, Zsigmond György (1888–1925), who worked in Budapest

who held the vice-presidency of Status for eight years. He was among the first to emphasize the importance of adapting to changed circumstances while preserving autonomous rights. Following his death from a stroke, a requiem mass was offered for him in the Piarist Church.⁴⁰ As has already been mentioned, the office of lay president of Status was held by Ákos Béldi of Uzon, Lord-Lieutenant of Kolozsvár County (1846–1932) and lifelong member of the House of Magnates. However, apart from his hereditary title, he had no other connection to Háromszék, and so he will not be discussed in greater detail herein. Among the members of the Board of Directors, we find Dénes Kálnoky, Supreme Royal Judge of Háromszék;⁴¹ Lord-Lieutenant József Potsa, patron of the grammar school in Kézdivásárhely [Târgu Secuiesc];⁴² and Aladár Király, who served as deputy lord-lieutenant between 1914 and 1915 and as lord-lieutenant in 1917.⁴³

as a ministerial secretary; and another son, György (born 1892, Kolozsvár – died 1915, Budapest), who fought as a reserve lieutenant in the First World War, The premature death of this latter son deeply affected his parents and surviving family members, In his memory, two foundations were established in his name, aimed at supporting the education of patriotic, academically gifted boys in financial need, One supported wounded students from the Faculty of Law at the Franz Joseph University in Kolozsvár, and the other assisted war orphans or children of disabled parents studying at the Premonstratensian Secondary School in Nagyvárád. Zoltán BICSOK – Zsolt ORBÁN, *Isten segedelmével udvaromat megépítettem, Történelmi családok Erdélyben*, Miercurea Ciuc: Guttenberg, 2012, 477; László BALOG – MÁLNÁSI Levente, *Források Zágón egyház- és művelődéstörténet. „... Nincsen jobb mint Isten kezében ajánlani magamot...”*, II, Miercurea Ciuc: Státus, 2014, 189–190; László BALOG – Levente MÁLNÁSI – Lajos Levente SÁNDOR – Márta Mária KOVÁCS, „...Hagyatéku hagyod utódaidnak...” *Elvetélt álmok nyomában, Fejezetek a zágóni báró Szentkereszty család életéből*, Miercurea Ciuc: Státus, 2016, 23–26, ARCAAI-SGCA, Fond 714, A zágóni Szentkereszty család iratai, *Szentkereszty Pál családtörténeti levelezései, német nyelvű feljegyzései*, 1938, 3; Szentkereszty de Zágón family, <http://genealogy.euweb.cz/hung/szentksty.html> (downloaded on 27.08.2024).

40 *Religio*, 61.332 (1902).

41 Krisztián TÓTH, “Az Erdélyi Római Katolikus státus igazgatótanácsának 1873-as újjáalakulása és dualizmus kori tevékenységi köre”, *Studia Theologica Transsylvaniensia* 2 (2021) 331–360 (352).

42 ARCAAI SGCA, ABP, *Vegyes nyomtatványok* [Various printed publications], Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1893, 18.

43 ARCAAI SGCA, ABP, *Vegyes nyomtatványok*, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1914, 7; Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1915, 10; Minutes of the Status

Conclusions

To conclude, the representation of Catholics from the two archdeaconries became a constant at the Status assemblies that embodied the self-governance of Transylvanian Catholics. Among the clerical representatives, the parish priests and archdeacons of Brassó were the most consistent participants, while among the lay delegates, the lord-lieutenants of Háromszék frequently made their voices heard at the general assemblies held in Kolozsvár.

Addendum. Status Assembly Representatives of the Barca-Sepsi-Miklósvar and the Kézdi-Orbai Archdeaconries (1868–1918)

Lay Representatives of the Barca-Sepsi-Miklósvar Archdeaconry

Baron Nándor Rauber and Dr. Nándor Otrobán (1868, 1879)⁴⁴

Dénes Kálnoky, Chief Royal Judge of Háromszék (1868, 1873–1875)

András Bogdán⁴⁵

József Künnle, lawyer from Sepsiszentgyörgy (1882)⁴⁶

Assembly Meeting of 1917, 8.

44 Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1868, 11; *Közművelődés* 2.48 (1879) 377.

45 Of Armenian descent, member of a Roman Catholic family, His father, Lukács Bogdán, a merchant, opened a shop in Sepsiszentgyörgy in the early 19th century, His brothers: Lukács (1806–1848) and István (1810–1885), the latter served as chief churchwarden of the Roman Catholic parish of Sepsiszentgyörgy, He continued his father's business as a merchant, In the city's new Catholic cemetery, they built the Chapel of the Holy Cross – also suitable for celebrating the holy mass – in 1861, followed a year later by their two-storey family residence with a neoclassical façade, He played an active role in the city's leadership: he was treasurer and later committee member of the local casino, member of the municipal representative body and the county administrative committee, and member of the Roman Catholic church council and school board of Sepsiszentgyörgy, Lajos DEMETER, *Sepsiszentgyörgy személyiségei Életrajzok, életutak*, I.: A–J., Sfântu Gheorghe: Sepsiszentgyörgy, 2013, 93,

46 József Künnle served twice as a Member of Parliament and was a pillar of the Catholic Church in Sepsiszentgyörgy, He successfully reclaimed the parish's capital funds in the Kézdi-Orbai district, represented the Count Nemes family as a legal counsel, and managed the Ábrahám Nemes Foundation, His election was supported by Simon Kovács, the parish priest of Sepsiszentgyörgy and district secretary, ARCAAI-SGCA, ABP, Registered documents of the parish and archdeaconry, 505/1883.

Ferenc Seethal, landowner from Sepsiszentiván (1882)⁴⁷

Artúr Bogdán, bank official and managing director from Sepsiszentgyörgy, supporter of the Church (1889–1895)⁴⁸

József Potsa (1893 [?])⁴⁹

Benedek Köntzei (1901–1907)⁵⁰

Tivadar Künnle, lawyer from Sepsiszentgyörgy⁵¹

47 ARCAAI-SGCA, ABP, Registered documents of the parish and archdeaconry, Minutes of the election of Status Assembly representatives (14 September 1883).

48 Artúr Bogdán (1859–1939) was of Armenian descent and came from a Roman Catholic family known for supporting the Church, His father, András Bogdán, a landowner, became managing director of the Háromszék County Savings Bank in 1876, He attended secondary school at the Realschule in Brassó, and later studied at the Vienna Academy of Commerce, After serving one year in the Imperial and Royal 2nd Hussar Regiment, he returned to Sepsiszentgyörgy in 1880 and joined Háromszékvármegyei Takarékpénztár Rt. [Háromszék County Savings Bank Co.] as a cashier, eventually becoming its director general in 1889, In 1905, he received the nobiliary particle (*praedicatum*) “of Szépmező”, was later knighted in the Order of Franz Joseph, and from 1910 held the title of Royal Counsellor, As a banking executive, he helped found county savings banks, the Jókai Printing House, and the local Association of Bank Employees, He chaired the board of trustees of the civic schools and teacher training institute in Sepsiszentgyörgy, was member of the local casino, the Catholic church council, the municipal council, the county administrative committee, and – after the change of sovereignty – served as a board member of the Háromszék branch of the Magyar Party and was President of Előpataki Gyógyfürdő Birtokosai Szövetkezet [Proprietors’ Cooperative of the Előpatak [Válcele] Health Resort]. Cf. DEMETER, *Sepsiszentgyörgy személyiségei* I, 94; ARCAAI-SGCA, ASGP. Volumes. *A Sepsi-szentgyörgyi róm, kath egyháztanács és megyegyűlése tanácskozásairól felvett jegyzőkönyvek 1885–1908*, II, 42–45.

49 Potsa had already served as deputy lord-lieutenant of Küküllő County [Comitatul Târnava] when he acted as a lay representative at the Status Assembly, ARCAAI SGCA, Archives of the Brețcu Parish (hereinafter as Bepl), *Historia Domus 1869–1933*, Vol. I, 74; Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1893, 4.

50 Benedek Köntzei, President of the Chancery of Háromszék County, was affectionately nicknamed “Pope Benci” by friends due to his devout religiosity, He died in September 1916 after being struck by a military train in Torda [Turda], which led to the loss of one leg and ultimately his death from the injuries, *Közművelődés* 39.38 (1916) 1–2.

51 He also served as secretary of the preparatory “Committee of 15” for the Status Assembly, See: Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1917, 12.

János Temesváry, large estate owner from Uzon, chief churchwarden of the parish of Szentiván (1911–1917)⁵²

Pál Béldi, chief county notary and chamberlain

Tivadar Künnle (1896–1901 and 1907–1921), who also served as President of the “Committee of 15” within Status⁵³

Aladár Király (1916–?)⁵⁴

Elected Clerical Representatives

Ferenc Vas (1868)⁵⁵

Ferenc Vargyasi, priest and teacher of Brassó (1873)⁵⁶

István Vincze, rural dean and parish priest of Barót (1893)⁵⁷

Manó Fejér, parish priest of Szentgyörgy (1905)⁵⁸

Károly Székely, rural dean and parish priest of Sepsiszentgyörgy (1911–1917)⁵⁹

Ignác Korbuly, parish priest of Barót (1918)

Lay Representatives of the Brassó Parish

Joakim Pánzél, member of the Electoral Board (1868)⁶⁰

Gábor Vajna, lawyer (1889, 1893, 1914, 1915, 1917)⁶¹

52 Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1911, 7; 1914, 9; Minutes of the Regular General Assembly of Status in 1917, 9.

53 ARCAAI-SGCA, ASGP, Registered documents of the parish, 16/1902, 28/1919 v; *Erdélyi Tudósító* (1 March 1920), 1; *Közművelődés* 40.47 (1917) 2.

54 ARCAAI-SGCA, ASGP, Registered documents of the parish, 2/1918.

55 ARCAAI-SGCA, ABP, Registered documents of the parish and archdeaconry, 180/1873.

56 Ibid.

57 Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1893, 6.

58 ARCAAI-SGCA, ASGy, Registered documents of the parish, 290/1905.

59 Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1911, 7; ARCAAI-SGCA, ASGP, Registered documents of the parish, 27/1918; Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1914, 8; Minutes of the Regular General Assembly of Status in 1917, 10; *Közművelődés* 2.48 (1879) 377.

60 ARCAAI-SGCA, ABP, Mixed volumes, Minutes of the board meetings of the Braşov parish in the period of 13 September 1871 – 28 February 1881, 95; Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1868, 29; Minutes of the Regular General Assembly of Status in 1917, 11.

61 Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1893, 7; Minutes of the Regular General Assembly of Status in 1915, 12.

Árpád Papp, lawyer (1895)⁶²

János Zakariás, lawyer and parish prosecutor⁶³ (1899, 1914–1915, 1917)⁶⁴

Gábor Vajna, lawyer and churchwarden (1905, 1912)⁶⁵

Mihály Szent, ministerial councillor and financial director (1912)⁶⁶

Lay Representatives of the Kézdi-Orbai Archdeaconry

Baron János Apor and Ignác Szentiványi (1868, 1879, 1882)⁶⁷

Gyula Szatsvay, lawyer from Kézdivásárhely (1911)

Zsigmond Bánffy, lawyer from Kézdivásárhely and Péter Gábor,⁶⁸ Chief Magistrate of Kézdivásárhely (1893)⁶⁹

Gyula Cseh, Chief Magistrate of Kézdivásárhely (1911–1917)⁷⁰

62 ARCAAI-SGCA ABP, Mixed volumes, Minutes of the board meetings of the Braşov parish in the period of 1890–1897, 290.

63 Zakariás was elected as parliamentary representative of the Covasna electoral district, thereby becoming an ex officio member of the Status Assembly. As a result, Gábor Vajna was elected in his place.

64 Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1914, 9; Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1915, 12; Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1917, 11.

65 ARCAAI-SGCA, ABP, Registered documents of the parish and archdeaconry, 867/1905.

66 From 1912 onwards, the parish of Brassó was entitled to send two delegates, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1912, 13.

67 Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1868, 11; ARCAAI SGCA ABP, Registered documents of the parish and archdeaconry, 361/1882.

68 Imre Gábor was born in Bereck in 1847. His father, also Imre Gábor, was a postmaster, Mayor of Bereck, Member of Parliament, and the younger brother of cannon-founder Áron Gábor. He studied in Brassó, Csíksomlyó [Şumuleu Ciuc], and Nagyszeben [Sibiu], completing his legal studies in Kolozsvár and Budapest. Between 1869 and 1876, he served in the military, leaving with the rank of lieutenant. Upon returning home, he became a vice-notary and then an investigating magistrate at the district court in Kézdivásárhely. He represented the Bereck electoral district in Parliament for three consecutive terms. From 1883, he was chief magistrate of the Kézdi District and in 1895 was elected Deputy Lord-Lieutenant of Háromszék County. He passed away in Sepsiszentgyörgy in 1899 and was laid to rest in his wife's family crypt in Kézdiszázarpatak, DEMETER, *Sepsiszentgyörgy személyiségei*, 191–192.

69 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848–1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1893, 6.

70 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848–1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1914, 8; Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1917, 9.

Lajos Biró, teacher at the secondary grammar school in Kézdivásárhely (1914–1917)⁷¹
József Elekes of Szentkatolna, landowner (1893) and János Apor of Alsótorja, landowner (1893)⁷²

Clerical Representatives of the Kézdi-Orbai Archdeaconry

Károly Bálint, parish priest and rural dean of Kézdiszentlélek (1868)⁷³
László Bálint, parish priest of Bereck and district secretary (1877)
József László, parish priest of Lemhény (1893)⁷⁴
József László, rural dean and parish priest of Lemhény (1911)
Mihály Bagoly, parish priest of Kézdiszentkereszt and rural dean (1917)⁷⁵

County Officials from Háromszék Invited by Virtue of Their Office

Patrons, Dignitaries, and Members of the House of Magnates
Baron Béla Szentkereszt, landowner from Árkos (1911, 1912, 1914, 1915)⁷⁶
Tivadar Béli, landowner from Bodola (1911, 1912, 1915, 1917)
Béla Elekes,⁷⁷ retired lord-lieutenant and chief churchwarden of the Kézdivásárhely secondary grammar school (1911, 1912, 1915, 1917)⁷⁸

71 Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1914, 8; Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1915, 11; Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1917, 9.

72 ARCAAI SGCA, OAKD, Registered documents, 311/1889.

73 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848–1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1868, 24.

74 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848–1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1893, 6.

75 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848–1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1917, 10.

76 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848–1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1914, 7.

77 Béla Elekes (1854, Szentkatolna – 1928, Kézdivásárhely) became a royal court judge in Kézdivásárhely in 1896, later a judge of the Court of Appeal in 1902, and was an honorary member of the local casino. He went on to serve as lord-lieutenant of Háromszék County, was named an honorary citizen of Kézdivásárhely, and was knighted in the Order of Leopold.

78 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848–1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1911, 7; Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1912, 11; Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1915, 10.

Lord-Lieutenants and Deputy Lord-Lieutenants

Mihály Maurer,⁷⁹ Member of Parliament for the Hermány [Cașolț] constituency in Brassó County, royal chamberlain, Lord-Lieutenant of Brassó County between 1890 and 1900 (1893)⁸⁰

Count Zsigmond Mikes (successor to the above), lord-lieutenant (1911, 1912, 1914, 1915, 1917)⁸¹

Dr. Aladár Király, Deputy Lord-Lieutenant of Háromszék County (1911)⁸²

Members of Parliament

This group generally included 13 representatives. According to my research, from Háromszék County's constituencies, only Attila Hollaky,⁸³ representing the district

79 Mihály Maurer (Ürmös [Ormeniș], Felső-Fehér County, 1847–1921), Unlike most contemporary lord-lieutenants, he did not have academic qualifications of a graduate but attended the Theresianum in Vienna, an elite institution for aristocratic youth, In his youth, he travelled extensively across Europe before returning to his family estate in Felső-Fehér County, In the 1887 parliamentary elections, he was elected as a representative for the Hermányi constituency of Brassó County on a Liberal platform, though he did not serve long in Parliament, In May 1890, he was appointed lord-lieutenant of Brassó County, replacing András Bethlen. He held this post for ten years, resigning in 1900 due to health issues. Judit PÁL, “Erdélyi főispánok a Tisza éra végén” II, *Korunk* 20.4 (2009) 67–76.

80 ARCAAI SGCA, Bepl, Mixed volumes, *Historia Domus 1869–1933*, Vol, I, 74; Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1893, 4.

81 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848–1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1915, 10; Minutes of the Regular General Assembly of Status in 1917, 8.

82 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848–1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1911, 7; Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1912, 11; Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1917, 8.

83 His father moved from Lesnyek [Leșnic] in Hunyad [Hunedoara] County to his wife's hometown, Nagyajta [Aita Mare], where their son Attila Hollaky was born in 1838. He began his secondary studies in Nagyszeben, continued in Brassó with the Evangelicals, and completed them at the Reformed Gymnasium in Marosvásárhely. He began his legal studies in Nagyszeben and completed them in Marosvásárhely. He then returned to his father's estate in Székelytamásfalva [Tamașfalău], where he passed away in 1923. In 1881, he was elected magistrate of Orbai Seat and between 1882 and 1907 served as chief magistrate. From 1910, he represented the Covasna constituency in Parliament, He was highly active in public education and economic development, including work

of Kovászna, participated once in the proceedings of the Status Assembly (1911[?]-1917).⁸⁴

Clergy Participating Ex Officio

László Bálint, parish priest of Bereck and archdeacon (1893)⁸⁵

József Meisel, parish priest of Brassó and archdeacon (1908-1917)

Mihály Bagoly, parish priest of Kézdi-Szentkereszty, deputy archdeacon, later rural dean (1911, 1912)⁸⁶

Dániel Oláh, parish priest of Kézdiszentlélek and archdeacon (1914-1931)⁸⁷

Directors of Boys' Schools

József Eröss of Vargyas, Director of the Catholic Grammar School of Kézdivásárhely (1911, 1912-1917)⁸⁸

on the expansion of the Covasna health resort. He served as trustee for state-run schools, was managing director of Kovásznai Takarékpénztár Rt. [Covasna Savings Bank Co.], a board member of Kovásznai Fürdő Rt. [Covasna Health Resort Co.], and president of the local casino. Cf. Etelka SZABÓ, "Kovásznai arcok a múltból (9). Hollaky Attila", *Székely Hírmondó*, <https://www.hirmondo.ro/korkepek/kovasznai-arcok-a-multbol-9-hollaky-attila/> (downloaded: 8.08.2024); Magyar országgyűlés 1910-1915, in Ferenc VÉGVÁRY – Ferenc ZIMMER (eds.), *Sturm-féle országgyűlési almanac 1910-1915*, Budapest, 1910, https://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/OGYK_Almanach_1910-1918_1/?pg=0&layout=s (downloaded: 24.03.2024).

84 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848-1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1911, 7; Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1914, 6; Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1915, 11; Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1917, 9.

85 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848-1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1893, 7.

86 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848-1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1911, 8; Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1912, 13.

87 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848-1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1914, 8; Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1915, 13; Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1917, 10.

88 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848-1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1911, 8; Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1914, 9; Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1915, 12; Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1917, 10.

Károly Péter, Kézdivásárhely (1915)⁸⁹

Directors of Secondary Grammar Schools

Lajos Ágoston, Brassó (1914)⁹⁰

Grammar School Representatives

Vidor Hassák, priest and teacher, Kanta (1893)⁹¹

Dénes Szélyes, teacher, Brassó (1911, 1912)

Balázs Tóth, teacher, Kézdivásárhely (1911, 1912)⁹²

György Bálinth, teacher, Brassó (1915)⁹³

Ferenc Szlávik, teacher, Brassó (1917)⁹⁴

Catholic Mayors of Free Royal Cities

Brassó

Assessors to the Holy See

Gergely Gidófalvi, parish priest of Kézdivásárhely and archdeacon (1893)⁹⁵

Elek P. Csiszér, Franciscan superior, Brassó (1914–1915)⁹⁶

Dénes Szélyes, teacher at the secondary grammar school of Brassó (1914–1915)⁹⁷

89 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848–1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1915, 12.

90 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848–1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1914, 9.

91 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848–1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1893, 7.

92 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848–1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1911, 8.

93 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848–1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1915, 12.

94 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848–1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1917, 11.

95 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848–1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1893, 6.

96 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848–1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1914, 8; Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1915, 11.

97 ARCST, Fond IV, 4/e, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting 1848–1946, Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1914, 8; Minutes of the Status Assembly Meeting of 1915, 11.

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Book review

MARTIN SCORSESE – ANTONIO SPADARO, *DIALOGHI SULLA FEDE* [*CONVERSATIONS ON FAITH*], MILANO: LA NAVE DI TESEO, 2024, ISBN 9788834617311 (REVIEWED BY GYÖNGYVÉR BERECKZI¹)

In 2024, the transcript of conversations between the world-famous Italian-American film director Martin Scorsese and Antonio Spadaro SJ, a Jesuit priest and theologian, was published. These conversations took place over nearly eight years, between March 2016 and January 2024, and were compiled into this small interview volume titled “Conversations on Faith”.

The first meeting is about getting acquainted: the priest reveals the director’s areas of interest and their roots. Their shared Italian heritage provides a common denominator that creates a relaxed framework for a conversation that, for today’s persons, borders on the limits of intimacy: the question of faith. The meetings take place in New York and Rome, and on several occasions Helen, Martin Scorsese’s wife, is also present. She is not an active participant in the conversations, but her presence is not insignificant, as it provides glimpses of information about one aspect of the world-famous director’s everyday life and the atmosphere of their home.

In his childhood, in New York’s Italian quarter (where mostly Italian immigrants lived), juvenile delinquency flourished, but he was surrounded by such a large extended family that this family structure protected him from being drawn into the circle of violence. However, as a child, he suffered from severe asthma and due to his illness, he saw a lot from their apartment window – in a sense, too much – and this is reflected in his films. As a child, he served as an altar boy at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York, where one young priest in particular, Father Principe, had a special influence on him: he learned enormously from him, he affirms, for example, to be merciful to ourselves and to others. In time, he realized

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that vocation is a very serious matter, and although the priestly path impressed him, he recognized that this was not his calling and that's when he turned his attention to filmmaking.

What Scorsese says about one of his childhood struggles is thought-provoking for the reader – as a child, he couldn't understand how it was possible that the mystery of Jesus's death and resurrection did not shake the world: despite being aware of it, the world did not change, but everything remained the same. This thought can awaken the reader to their responsibility: any child, even those in our own environment, can be similarly shaken today if they experience that there is no harmony between our faith-practicing personality, the one that participates in the liturgy, and our everyday behaviour.

The volume is not an unusual collection of interviews, nor does it portray a celebrity being questioned about his faith, but rather a director who talks about his life and work, revealing that his interests, worldview, and everyday life are permeated by faith. The change that comes from the touch of grace, compassion, the possibility of a good life in an environment steeped in evil, free will, and the experience of divine love are topics that interest him, which he believes in, and that appear in his films. The volume encourages the reader to watch again Scorsese's films directly related to the topic of religion (at least the *Silence* and *'The Last Temptation of Christ'*) with an awareness of the thoughts that motivate the man behind the camera lens.

Scorsese is shockingly honest about the issue of violence in his conversations: he does not deny or embellish the tendency that resides in humans and is present in our everyday lives. The violence depicted in his films, which he saw as a child through the window of his house, was natural to him, and although he was never in danger of becoming involved, he lived and grew up in that reality.

Conversations on Faith is also a volume about respect, as Scorsese is talking about people, events, experiences and books that have a great impact on his work and personality. One may feel the urge of reading some of the books that inspired him that he mentions in these conversations and find a way of better understanding the messages of his films. The volume is an intense voyage, imbued with the wisdom of a lifetime, but still an ongoing search for Jesus.

The English translation is set to appear later this year: *Conversations on Faith*, New York: Grand Central, 2025. The Hungarian translation appeared at Helikon Publishers in János Betlen's translation (*Beszélgetések a hitről*, Budapest: Helikon, ISBN 9789636204907). The book's high-quality execution deserves

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special mention, particularly the sewn-in bookmark, which every seasoned but slow reader will appreciate. The cover features a crown of thorns that gains meaning upon reading the text, as it can be linked to the powerful childhood experience mentioned above.