



## The Catholic Church in Hungary: a Case of Remodernisation?\*

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The title of my paper contains a question mark against the word remodernisation. The word implies that the Catholic Church in Hungary is moving towards a more modern status, and that in so doing it is reviving a former status which was modern in some way. But in an age of postmodernism this concept is a question mark in itself. If we may take the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council as modernity within the Church, the *aggiornamento* it represented was overwhelmed by the revolution of western society in the later 1960s, to the extent that the Church necessarily failed to keep pace with contemporary orientations and disorientations in those societies. From a global point of view the *aggiornamento* was perhaps part of the 1960s revolution since it aimed at nothing less than making monolithic structures flexible and focusing on the impact of the individual and local groups on social life. But in the eyes of these individuals the Church lost much of its authority, along with all such structures which claimed objective power. If there had not been the social commitment of the Church, the option for the poor, it would probably have lost any reason for existence in the eyes of large parts of the laity. What remained of the Church as a positive incitement was the quasi-existentialist 'engagement' which became the main or even only source of meaning in society. I myself am not quite sure what 'postmodern' means, but I think it has something to do with the delusion of 1968 commitment to battle for a renewed society 'from below', from an individualistic and sometimes utopian social point of view. This led to an eclectic looking back to tradition: premodern values and forms were interpreted from a personal perspective. This combination is what gave the postmodern attitude its aesthetic and spiritual, even mystical shape.

To be sure, when all this happened the communist bloc was never included. Of course the Universal Church was concerned with what happened in the communist countries, as demonstrated by the visits to these countries by Cardinal König, as well as by the Vatican's Ostpolitik.<sup>1</sup> But inside these countries there was no possibility of taking part in the changes in ecclesiology and society. A Czech intellectual told me shortly after the demonstrations in Prague in February 1988 that 'We are not striving for socialism with a human face (the Dubček formula) but rather for capitalism with a human face'; but this was at a time when capitalism had already begun to be questioned in the West, not least in the papal encyclical letter *Sollicitudo rei socialis* of 1988.

\*This paper was first presented at the conference 'Religions in Europe in the Twentieth Century' at the Open University, Milton Keynes, April 1997.

As in other communist countries, the Church in Hungary was cut off from all developments in society and Church for some 40 years.<sup>2</sup> It never lived through an *aggiornamento*, nor through any engagement of the laity, nor through any subsequent delusions. During all that time it had just two patterns: the precommunist Church and the persecuted/corrupted Church. What it is experiencing now is both a reattachment to the Church of the time before the Second World War and the vitalisation of a free Church in a free society. While the former means taking up what the Church was in the old days, the latter evidently means taking up the impulses of the Second Vatican Council. Since in the old days the Church had been in tune with its time and 'modern' in the sense of what was modern then, both of these current tendencies mean that the Church in Hungary is undergoing a remodernisation. But is it in fact the case that both are not really modern any more, because they are not keeping pace with the position of the Church in the western world today? We shall see.

## History

Christianity was introduced to Hungary by the king, St István, in 996, and for almost 1000 years was an essential part of the definition of being Hungarian.<sup>3</sup> This identity was, of course, challenged by the Reformation when Calvinism began to spread. Thus among Hungarians in Transylvania, part of today's Romania, the Reformed denomination is part of their selfconsciousness, marking their difference from others such as (Lutheran) Germans and (Orthodox or Eastern-rite) Romanians. In the other parts of Hungary, under Habsburg control, Roman Catholicism prevailed. Christianity was confirmed as a leading element in Hungarian consciousness by the domination of the Turks for 140 years after the Battle of Mohács in 1526. Hungary was then split into three parts: the centre triangle under Turkish rule; the eastern part, Transylvania, more independent but still controlled by the Turks; and the western part ruled by Habsburg Austria. It was in Transylvania where, for the first time in Europe, at the treaty of Torda (1557) tolerance of all Christian denominations was proclaimed, giving almost equal rights to Catholics, Reformed and Unitarians.<sup>4</sup> After the expulsion of the Turks the Catholic Church gained a more and more important role in the Hungarian state. Under the religious policy of Maria Theresa and Joseph II there were tensions, of course, arising from the hierarchy's conflict of loyalty between the Viennese Court and the Holy See, but the emperor had the right of 'patronage', meaning that no bishop could be nominated without his consent.

All in all, then, the Church was one of the pillars of the Hungarian state. And this was true not only in the realm of politics and ideology, but also in public service. The Church ran most hospitals and – even more importantly – almost monopolised public education. The first university in Hungary was founded by the Jesuit archbishop of Esztergom Cardinal Péter Pázmány in Trnava (Nagyszombat) in 1635. Before the introduction of public schooling probably 90 per cent of schools were organised by the Catholic Church, mainly by religious orders like the Piarists, Benedictines and Franciscans. At the beginning of the First World War they still owned some 60 per cent of all schools.

Funding of these activities was secured by real estate property. The Church was the greatest landlord in the country. The political and sociological importance of this fact is evident when we consider that the other pillars of the Hungarian state, which was kept by deliberate Austrian policy as an agricultural country, were the gentry (10 per cent of the population were noblemen) and the peasants. There were internal quarrels, of course, but the ideal of the Church and its flock was the *acies bene ordi-*

*nata* as it was put on stage, for the last time, at the Eucharistic World Congress of 1938 in Budapest.

The population of Hungary never experienced the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century, so the Church was not compelled to apply its social doctrine, as expounded in *Rerum novarum*, in the form of workers' movements. Most Hungarians were peasants, but at the same time 'bourgeois' in the sense that they lived in agreement with society, sharing values and culture. Literacy was widespread: books were not rare in a Hungarian family. The culture was even multilingual.

When the communist regime introduced a socialist economy and industrial production, it was not the case that the workers were liberated from alienated exploitation; rather for the first time in history they were put into the condition of a proletarian class, selling their work to the exploiters, the Communist Party and its 'web' of nomenklatura.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time the Church was deprived of any means of helping the population or of orientating itself to the new conditions. Shortly after the seizure of power by the Communist Party the Catholic Church, or more exactly the clergy, was split into two. A 'peace movement of priests' was founded with the role of organising all the priests in the country.<sup>6</sup> Those who opposed it were put into prison. In founding this organisation, which had parallels in Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Poland, the Communist Party aimed both at controlling the influence of the Church on the people and at separating it from the authority of Rome. There were not many alternatives to heroism or collaboration. Most priests opted for inner emigration, formally adhering to the prescribed structures. The effect in sociological and psychological terms was that State and Church fell apart. Since then an invisible 'division line' has separated those who actively collaborated and those who evaded collaboration. While the communist government acted according to the biblical insight 'I strike down the shepherd and the flock is scattered',<sup>7</sup> being a Christian became on the one hand a public event of less and less importance and on the other hand a personal stand. The heroic stand of Cardinal József Mindszenty as a leading figure in the 1956 uprising, his refusal for decades in the American Embassy to leave the country and his flock after the pope, as he said, had ordered him to give way to Vatican Ostpolitik – all this was inspired by the political understanding of the Primate of the Hungarian Church and Pastor of all Hungarians. Reality started to differ more and more from the traditional picture, however. As many priests were suspected of working with the regime, faith tended to become more and more subjective,<sup>8</sup> individual, or part of a dissent which only later started to organise itself in underground groups. From the 1960s the government was sure about its success in undermining the Church's authority and in political terms showed a more liberal attitude, which was essential if it were to keep power after the catastrophe of the 1956 uprising. It initiated a famous policy of 'Goulash Communism', which made Hungary the most liberal and relatively affluent country in Comecon. Small groups of at most 15 members would gather to pray together (we should not forget that any gathering of more than five people, theoretically even a birthday party, had to ask for permission). It was not particularly dangerous to be a Christian, but it continued to be an obstacle to a professional career; nobody openly Christian was ever admitted to an ideologically sensitive position, starting from kindergarten teacher. By the early 1980s there were some 4,000 small communities, with practically no contact between them. The body of the Church was atomised. Faith was 'deconfessionalised' and 'spiritualised'.

As Miklós Tomka has shown, while the number of people going to church decreased constantly during the 1970s and 1980s, the number defining themselves as

'believers' remained much more stable. In the mid-1980s Tomka published evidence of this fact produced by sociological methods, including evidence of the moral and psychological value of faith among the population. He provoked harsh criticisms from those involved in official religious policy.<sup>9</sup> By the end of the communist era, however, the government was ready to admit the political need for religious education in family and church, negotiating an agreement at the beginning of 1989.<sup>10</sup> While continuing to stress the 'leading role of the Party' it was thus admitting private and (from its point of view) pluralistic instruction.

At the same time, religious groups dared to look for contacts and to share religious experience. Nowadays almost all the scattered groups have merged into a smaller number of church movements. Some of these are local Hungarian branches of foreign organisations,<sup>11</sup> such as Focolare and Opus Dei, or charismatic movements (now with some 2,000 members) like Emmanuel or Beatitudes (formerly Léon de Juda), but indigenous movements have been revived as well, especially Regnum Marianum,<sup>12</sup> founded at the beginning of this century as a priests' movement and transformed into a socially orientated youth organisation. The success of these new religious movements and of some older movements illustrates one aspect of post-modern religiosity, namely a tendency away from secular political commitment and towards spiritual experience and guidance. Of course, one has to differentiate between those who had been involved in underground spiritual seeking and are now coming into these spiritual communities and those, mainly young people, who have joined new religious movements (Catholic or other kinds) from an atheist or agnostic environment. In the former case western religious traditions are now encountering the spiritualisation of religion forced by the antichurch policy of the atheist state. In the latter case a spiritual vacuum is felt and filled.

By the end of communist times there were also some charitable activities, such as the Malta Charity, led by the parish priest Imre Kozma, which played an important role when it sheltered East German refugees in Budapest during the mass migration of the summer of 1989 that caused the crumbling of the Berlin Wall, and was among the first to bring aid to the turmoil of the Romanian Revolution of Christmas 1989.

The end of the communist regime was also marked by the nomination to vacant dioceses of a number of bishops who had been intellectually trained under the conditions of a persecuted Church and had undergone the experience of priesthood in a communist state.

### **The 'Social Letter'**

Soon after the changes of 1989 several political and social organisations appealed to the bishops to share the Church's view of the economic and social situation of the country. The bishops accordingly began to prepare a pastoral letter under the initiative and guidance of the bishop of Szeged, Endre Gyulay. This process was in no way easy: under the given conditions intellectuals capable of interpreting the social doctrine of the Church and analysing the political, economic and social situation from a church point of view were rare in Hungary.

In August 1996 a circular letter from the Hungarian Bishops' Conference to 'believers and all people of goodwill' about Hungarian society was finally published under the title *Towards a More Just and More Brotherly World!*<sup>13</sup> Under four major headings it describes (in my own words) (1) the social situation of the people, including health matters; (2) the national economy, including environmental problems; (3) the state and civil society; and (4) culture, including the media and

education. Each chapter opens with factual descriptions and then moves on to 'interpretations and suggestions'. This approach indicates a certain humility, as does the expressed intention: 'We want to rebuild through common efforts not only economic, social and political life in our country, but also consciousness of values (including moral values), in order to help ... to build a better and more human life ...'.<sup>14</sup> The emphasis is first of all on economic and political matters, and then on moral issues. Thus the Church takes into account the fact that it is not the leading element in society but just one among others and offers its contribution to a common effort. At the same time, however, in so doing the Church rejects any traditional confinement to 'moral questions only', which was favoured by the former political systems and which many present-day politicians would like to see restored. The Letter claims competence for the Church in political matters in a lay society, but as only one element of that society, as confirmed in the final observation: 'the Church today is still part of the life of society, as it has been an organic part [of Hungary] for a thousand years.'<sup>15</sup> The very first paragraph refers to the 1100th anniversary of the foundation of the Hungarian State and the 1000th anniversary of the establishing of Christianity in Hungary – both celebrated in 1996. The difference in mood between the celebration of 1996 and the celebration of the Millennium one hundred years earlier is very striking: at that time almost everything which shapes the urban beauty of Budapest was being built with the intention of glorifying Hungarian independence and culture (and to the envy of Vienna to such an extent that the emperor personally took care that the opera house in Budapest would not be larger than that of the Austro-Hungarian capital). This glory is history now.

In line with this realistic attitude all aspects of the Catholic social doctrine which Tomka once called 'triumphalistic'<sup>16</sup> are put aside. It is true that the Church is committed 'to propagate the Gospel ... and show the way to eternity', but 'within all historical situations' and as 'criteria for leading an earthly life'. These are the introductory remarks.<sup>17</sup> Throughout the Letter the Church is seen neither as a pillar of the state, nor in opposition to it, but within a reality which is in fact indifferent to it. It is in this marginalised position that the Hungarian Church offers its help.

Humility in the 'Social Letter' is nevertheless accompanied by an assertion of the priority of the principle of solidarity over that of subsidiarity. The three basic principles or pillars (*alappillér*) of social doctrine are said to be 'In the first place the dignity of the human person, the principle of solidarity, and the principle of subsidiarity'.<sup>18</sup> While quoting *Quadragesimo anno* which states that acting against subsidiarity is obnoxious to social order, because all social activity aims at supporting all members of the social body – a statement which evidently involves a perspective looking down from above – the Letter refers to *Gaudium et spes* to draw the conclusion that cooperation in common work has to be encouraged.<sup>19</sup> Subsidiarity can be interpreted as a practical effect of the principle of hierarchy – the delegating of competence to every level while giving support from top to bottom – and for the 'Social Letter' solidarity along with subsidiarity needs to be realised within society. The reason for this, says the letter, arises out of recent history. The style of the communist government was paternalism, and the claim (or fiction, we might say) that the state takes care of every detail of the life of its subjects has deprived them of independent thinking, initiative and responsibility.<sup>20</sup> The authors of the Letter describe clearly the historical delay which has affected the Hungarian people: they are faced with the task of achieving immediately what slowly developed in western countries during the 60 years which elapsed between *Quadragesimo anno* and *Centesimo anno*.

The Letter's practical proposal is for a social market economy.<sup>21</sup> In an autonomous economy it is the duty of the state to mitigate social injustice, and the international companies are reminded that they should not only profit from investment but should also import moral and cultural standards: globalisation includes the globalisation of responsibility.<sup>22</sup> The Letter not only calls for social responsibility in the economy, but also stresses that according to the principle of human dignity there can be no distinction between 'honourable' and 'dishonourable' (*érdemes – érdemtelen*) poverty.<sup>23</sup> In this way it emphasises the 'option for the poor': to speak out for those who cannot defend themselves.<sup>24</sup>

The Social Letter thus calls for a speeding-up of the developments that took place in western society in the 1960s, involving individual and common commitment 'from below' (*'alsóbb szintű'*: 'moving from the lower rank').<sup>25</sup> The Church refers to the call by the opposition movement during communism for a 'civil society' (*'civil társadalom'*) which would include decentralisation, participation in public affairs starting from the lower levels of society (regarding housing, work and so on), and the creation of appropriate organs. The authors add that all this is required by the principle of subsidiarity as well, but argue that governments since 1989 have failed to realise these demands because it was not in their interest to foster democracy by 'socialising' themselves (*társadalmiasodás, Vergesellschaftlichung*).<sup>26</sup> The effect is that centralisation continues and even signs of restatisation (*újraállamosítás, Wiederverstaatlichung*) are to be seen. The communist government aimed at atomising all society (including the Christians),<sup>27</sup> but the new government follows the same line. (There seems to be some truth in this assertion: the most prominent parties today, the Socialist Party (MSZP) of Gyula Horn and the Liberal Party (SZDSZ), are constantly being criticised for corruption.) Politicians say that they need the support of the Church, and therefore keep some of their social promises, but their major aim, says the Letter, is to continue with the policy of state capitalism. Hungary's present economic problems are caused by the enormous debts incurred by the Kádár regime in order to finance Goulash Communism, which in practice meant paying salaries higher than the value produced by the workers. The inactivity, or more accurately the ineffective activity, of the reformed communists and the liberals seems to be having the effect of stirring up old feelings and prejudices, so that for many people communism, liberalism (which is frequently said to be connected with Jewish emancipation in the nineteenth century) and freemasonry are once again the enemy of religion.

The open and harsh criticism directed at political activity since 1989 is confirmed in the Letter by detailed figures on the social and economic situation of the country, data which are most impressive at any first reading of the text and which have never before been compiled so completely.

Poverty has increased dramatically: between 1989 and 1993 the percentage of the population officially affected rose from 5 to 25. The number of people below the subsistence level in this country of some 10 million inhabitants grew from one million in the 1980s to two million in 1992 and three and a half million in 1995.<sup>28</sup> In 1996 the average monthly wage was 46,000 forints (about £185). Today pork costs about £2 per kilogramme. Roughly speaking, salaries are ten times lower than in Germany, but prices of everyday goods are only half the German level, so for a Hungarian prices are five times higher than in the West. Unemployment is on an international level at 10 per cent but the social security system is inadequate and is in fact being cut because of the state's financial deficit. The real value of pensions has decayed by 23 per cent in 5 years. Probably 30–40,000 people are homeless. Forty-five per cent of children under 19 live in households which have less than the subsis-

tence level income. Families get less support than ever. In 1995 the number of abortions reached 77,000. The Letter complains that there is no visible plan in the shaping of economic and social structures.<sup>29</sup>

The Letter pays attention to minorities. While government statistics say about 2 per cent of the population belong to minorities, recent estimates put the figure at 8–10 per cent. The difference depends on two factors: language and self-identification. Many people avoid identifying themselves as members of minorities because they are afraid of the kind of discrimination they suffered in the past; whatever their origin, they identify themselves as Hungarian citizens. Mobility and urbanisation have meant that even in families of German, Ruthenian, Serb or other origin, the minority language is very often forgotten. The estimated 500,000 Roma live under the worst conditions today. They were the first to lose their jobs after 1989; unemployment among Roma is on average 40–50 per cent and in some villages as high as 100 per cent.<sup>30</sup> The Letter emphasises their plight.<sup>31</sup>

The figures on public health given in the Letter are presented with concern. Life expectancy is now only 64.8 years compared to 72.9 years in Austria. Mortality among adult men is said to be higher only in the former Soviet Union and Romania.<sup>32</sup> Alcoholism has doubled during the 1990s and now affects more than 10 per cent of the population. Since the 1980s Hungary has had the highest rate of suicide in the world.<sup>33</sup> Criminality has doubled in the 1990s.<sup>34</sup> The Letter expresses strong views on corruption, which remains unpunished when indulged in at middle and higher levels.<sup>35</sup> Detailed figures relating to the national economy are provided.<sup>36</sup> The Letter argues in favour of joining the European Union, while speaking clearly about the difficulties the country will have to face when it will be competing with others.<sup>37</sup>

Aspirations towards NATO and the EU involve a major problem which is also a problem for the Catholic Church. As a result of the treaty of Trianon in 1920 the Hungarian state lost two thirds of its territory and one third of its population,<sup>38</sup> and after the Second World War more losses were imposed. Consequently large populations of Hungarians live in today's Slovakia (600,000), Ukraine (155,000 in 1959), Romania<sup>39</sup> (an estimated 2,100,000) and states of the former Yugoslavia (477,000 in 1971).<sup>40</sup> Hungarian thinking is heavily conditioned by history. This is evident in the opening and closing passages of the 'Social Letter', as quoted above, and in many a political event. When, for example, in 1991 an economic cooperation treaty was concluded between Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary (which were subsequently called the Visegrád countries), it was signed in the same old Visegrád on the Danube where a similar treaty had been concluded in 1335. In the same way, despite the fact that no one in Hungary seems to think that a revision of the country's borders is a realistic expectation, the Hungarians 'outside the borders' are referred to in the Letter, because they still belong to the family.<sup>41</sup> The Hungarian government is now negotiating with the new government of Romania in order to ease the situation of the Hungarians there (under Ceaușescu they were openly persecuted); more difficult are relations with Slovakia. During the war in former Yugoslavia many Hungarians fled from Yugoslavia to Hungary, causing serious social problems. The Church is involved, too. It was only in 1994 that the Vatican redrew the borders of those dioceses which had ceased to coincide with those of the various countries. However, since the First and Second World Wars Hungarian Catholic communities in the neighbouring countries continue to depend to a large extent on spiritual and material support from Hungary. There is a real danger that when Hungary enters the EU Hungarians outside the country will suddenly find themselves outside Europe. The concept of 'Central Europe' was a key one for dissidents under communism: it

expressed their struggle for identification with the European ideals of freedom, communication and self-determination. Exclusion from Europe would mean much more to them than just economic disappointment.

The Hungarian bishops underline the fact that when dealing with social and political matters the Church does not arrogate any power to itself;<sup>42</sup> but they emphasise that it is strictly fulfilling 'the mission obtained from Christ led by responsibility for the country'.<sup>43</sup> It is interesting to compare these statements with equivalent passages in the document published in February 1997 by the German Catholic and Protestant Churches.<sup>44</sup> While waiving any claim to power in very similar words the German document makes no reference to a specific Christian mission.<sup>45</sup> A Christian perspective on social problems is based on the Christian vision of man as found in the Bible and evident in experience (*Erfahrung*), a term which is referred to history, God's fidelity (*Treue*) and His message.<sup>46</sup> Ethical claims originate in the divine gift of the ability to act in a reasonable and responsible manner.<sup>47</sup> While the German document, then, almost conceals any divine commandment under human experience (which might be a consequence of the interdenominational origin of the text), the Hungarian bishops expressly refer to such a commandment. What is new in the 'Social Letter' is that they consistently apply the Christian message to present-day politics, the economy and social welfare. Of course, the question of how eternal truth should be applied to concrete situations still remains to be answered.

In 1995 Bishop Asztrik Várszegi, abbot of Pannonhalma (the abbey which is as old as the Hungarian Church), voiced the criticism that 'the leadership of the Church has been late in recognising the signs of the times'.<sup>48</sup> 'A majority in the Church have the ideal and reality of the prewar period before their eyes: a powerful and strong Church, influential through its institutions. ... Today the restoration of authority and the control and safeguarding of the institution seem to have gained the upper hand.'<sup>49</sup> Since the 'Social Letter' was issued there seems to be less reason for concern: the picture of the Church as a pillar of the state, if not a state within the state, seems to be changing, thanks to an expressed social commitment.<sup>50</sup> The fact that the Church is creating institutions for education, including a Catholic university, might look like a restoration of the old instruments of political power, but it is more likely to indicate a new social concern.

Bishop Gyulay is well aware that the Church today has no means of influencing society except through its believers and small structures such as parishes, a few Catholic schools and two weekly journals. The Letter does not insist on the rights of the Church, therefore, but on its duties: far from prescribing solutions, it rather describes the problems from a Christian point of view, and thus deliberately does not confine itself to an ecclesiastical agenda, but expresses its desire to share its concern with society as a whole.<sup>51</sup>

Catholics are a minority now. Recent polls<sup>52</sup> show that since 1992, of citizens over 50 years old living in villages, 28 per cent go to church and 12 per cent are nonbelievers; of those living in towns, the figures are 17 per cent and 20 per cent respectively. For citizens aged between 18 and 40 the figures are 10, 29, 5.6 and 43 per cent respectively. The Hungarian Church is aware that the times of the 'Volkskirche', the 'People's Church' which pervades all strata and activities, are definitely gone: nevertheless it is not willing to give up teaching the Gospel. The Church looks back to the period of its prewar authority and discerns the true Christian foundation of that power, namely the competence of the Church for the moral and social life of the whole of society, but it realises that the restoration of the Church has to take the form of its transformation into a humble 'community Church'



which acknowledges that it is in a minority position. The figures quoted above show that the antichurch policy of the communist regime eventually created what in free and affluent countries was the effect of secularisation: a decay of religious practice.<sup>53</sup> Since 1989 the economy and popular values in Hungary have been assimilating to those of the West. Similarly, the Church has been developing strategies appropriate to the West, and indeed may even be able to teach the Churches in affluent 'western' postmodern societies about how to survive. This topic could be the subject of a hypothetical pastoral letter on the Church itself.

Practically speaking the publication of the 'Social Letter' has already strengthened the moral authority of the Church in society. In 1990 opinion polls showed that the Catholic Church was regarded as the most reliable of public institutions. It lost some of this reputation in the years that followed, but has largely regained it thanks to the 'Social Letter'.<sup>54</sup>

In the view of László Lukács, the communications officer to the Bishops' Conference,<sup>55</sup> the topics addressed in the Letter ought to have arisen from the 'basis', from the Catholic communities themselves, but he regrets that these were in no way prepared to give voice to their problems. Now a process of divulging has started. Representatives of parish councils gather to learn about the Letter and discuss its contents. They are supposed to familiarise the parishes with it, but here the lack of practice in communication is evident. Many are not used to leadership, to communication or even to talking in public about Christian topics. The Letter is thus the first example of a new instrument for motivation, training and integration at the level of the Catholic groups.

In the dioceses synods are now being held, which include the participation of lay people. This process is new to the Church, and some leaders feel uneasy, maybe because they are afraid of uncomfortable questions about the past or about claims for increased influence on the part of the laity. Many laypeople who held important positions in the communist state are now working in the synods, and this causes mistrust among those who have suffered discrimination for being Christians. The fact that these matters are being discussed is, however, a success in itself. Who knows, all this might be the start of a culture of communication amongst properly informed participants.

We may conclude, then, that with its 'Social Letter' the Catholic Church in Hungary has not only shown its awareness of the needs of the time but has taken a considerable step on the road to modernisation, at the same time carefully reaffirming its traditional responsibility in a secular world.

Nevertheless, one more observation is appropriate. The survival of the Church seems to depend very much on this kind of modernisation. The Church strives to pervade society on the basis of Christian human principles acceptable even to non-believers. On the other hand, a society in which a general humanist perspective is shared regardless of any doctrinal authority can accurately be described as secularised. (This is a major difference between secularism and antireligiosity.) Churches which call for the application of Christian values not only among the faithful but also among 'all people of goodwill' seem to be doing something equivalent to fostering secularism. Hence the Church runs a high risk, for secularism is the presence of Christian values in the absence of faith and Church. On the other hand, faced with deconfessionalisation and loss of church activity, be it caused by western affluence or by communist persecution, the Church is encouraged to concentrate on the essentials, its original contribution to society, its mission and its powers of survival. Thus the Church is redefining itself as leaven in society rather than as a

pillar of the state. Whereas in the old days the universality of the Church expressed itself in visible omnipresence, it now realises itself in care for society as a whole and for every individual, especially the 'voiceless', without any aspiration to take command. The Church in Hungary has drawn practical and ecclesiological conclusions from its underground experience: it exhibits self-assurance despite a hostile environment. Thus the Church is probably going to succeed in becoming one element in the modern, pluralist and relativist world without giving up its distinctive faith.

## Notes and References

- <sup>1</sup> This concern for the Church in communist countries was of course also demonstrated by opponents of the Vatican's Ostpolitik like Fr Werenfried van Straaten, who founded Iron Curtain Church Relief, later called Aid to the Church in Need. A global view on the Churches in Eastern Europe before and after 1989 is given in Desmond O'Grady, *The Turned Card* (London, 1996).
- <sup>2</sup> For what follows I am to a great extent indebted to conversations with church personalities in Hungary, including Bishop Endre Gyulay of Szeged, Archabbot Bishop Dr Asztrik Várszegi OSB of Pannonhalma, Fr Dr László Lukács O.Piar., and the press officer of the Hungarian Bishops' Conference, Prof. Dr Miklós Tomka. I want to express my gratitude to all of them for their patience in answering my questions. Of course, the presentation of the facts and the conclusions are my own.
- <sup>3</sup> Egedy Hermann, *A katolikus egyház története Magyarországon 1914-ig*, 2nd edn (Munich, 1983); Adriany Gabriel, *Beiträge zur Kirchengeschichte Ungarns* (Munich, 1986) (*Studia Hungarica* 30). Recent studies on the history of the Church in Hungary include: Margit Balogh and Jenő Gergely, *Egyházak az újkori Magyarországon, 1790–1992* (Historia – MTA Történettudományi Intézete, Budapest, 1993–96) (2 vols); Jenő Gergely, József Kardos and Ferenc Rottler, *Az egyházak Magyarországon Szent Istvántól napjainkig* (Kronona Kiadó, Budapest, 1997). On the reversion to paganism in national rhetoric around 1900 see Katalin Sinkó, 'Árpád versus Saint István: competing heroes and competing interests in the figurative representation of Hungarian history', in Tamás Hofer (ed.), *Hungarians between 'East' and 'West': Three Essays on National Myths and Symbols* (Museum of Ethnography, Budapest, 1984), pp. 9–26 (also in *Ethnographia Europea*, vol. XIV, pp. 67–83).
- <sup>4</sup> Ludwig Binder, *Grundlagen und Formen der Toleranz in Siebenburgen bis zur Mitte des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Köln/Vienna, 1976); Imre Tempfli, 'Ein Land und vier Religionen', in *Magyar egyháztörténelmi vázlatok*, nos 3/4, 1994, pp. 35–70.
- <sup>5</sup> István Balogh, *Kritik der revolutionären Vernunft* (MTA Politikai Tudományok Intézete, Budapest, 1992), pp. 234 ff.
- <sup>6</sup> József Gyula Orbán, *Friedensbewegung katholischer Priester in Ungarn* (Budapest, 1996). See also: Adriányi, *op. cit.*, pp. 177–97; Gabriel Adriányi, *Fünfundzwanzig Jahre ungarischer Kirchengeschichte 1895–1945* (Mainz, 1974) (*Studia Hungarica* 6); Friedrich Hainbuch, *Kirche und Staat in Ungarn nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Munich, 1982).
- <sup>7</sup> See Imre Kozma, 'Palms thrive in adversity: the Catholic Church in Hungary', in Paul Richard Blum (ed.), *The Catholic Church in Eastern Europe: Persecution, Freedom and Rebirth* (Aid to the Church in Need, Königstein, 1990), pp. 69–78, here p. 71.
- <sup>8</sup> Miklós Tomka, *Religion und Kirche in Ungarn: Ergebnisse religionssoziologischer Forschung 1969–1988* (Vienna, 1990), pp. 244 ff.; in 1985 he made a distinction between interior and exterior religiosity.
- <sup>9</sup> Miklós Tomka, 'Die Rolle der Religion in unserer Gesellschaft', in Tomka, *op. cit.*, pp. 238–50 (first published in Hungarian in the journal *Kritika*, no. 1, 1985, pp. 4–5).
- <sup>10</sup> Paul Richard Blum, 'Budapest plant für 1990 ein Religionsgesetz', *Deutsche Tagespost*, 12 August 1989.
- <sup>11</sup> In the 'spiritual vacuum' after 1989 nontraditional churches and organisations, such as the Faith Church (100,000 members) and Operation Mobilization, came into Hungary as well.

See Alex Kuli, 'Everyday is like Sunday', *Budapest Week*, no. 314, 10–16 April 1997, pp. 12–13.

<sup>12</sup> King Stephen dedicated the country to the Virgin Mary.

<sup>13</sup> All quotations are my own translation. The Hungarian title is *Igazságosabb és testvériesebb világot!* (Budapest, 1996); published by A Magyar Katolikus Püspöki Kar, Tömegkommuniációs Irodája, H-1053 Budapest, Ferenciek tere 7–8, III lh. II. em. I also made use of an as yet unpublished German version. An English version is being prepared.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, n. 9.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, n. 112. The German translation is 'ihr integrativer Teil', 'its integrative part', which is even stronger.

<sup>16</sup> Tomka, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> *Igazságosabb ...*, n. 1.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, n. 24.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, n. 26, quoting *Quadragesimo anno 79* and *Gaudium et spes 31*.

<sup>20</sup> *Igazságosabb ...*, n. 27.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, n. 30.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, n. 55, n. 54.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, n. 24.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, n. 24, with reference to *Rerum novarum 29*.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, n. 69.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, n. 68, n. 69.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, n. 4.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, n. 14.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, n. 16–18.

<sup>30</sup> 'Fünf vor Zwölf? Zur Minderheitenfrage – aus Sicht der Regierung', *Der Neue Pester Lloyd*, 9 April 1997, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> *Igazságosabb ...*, n. 18.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, n. 19.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, n. 20.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, n. 21.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, n. 22.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, n. 38–48.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, n. 40.

<sup>38</sup> Adriányi, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>39</sup> On the Catholics in Romania, see Gabriel Adriányi, 'Die Geschichte der katholischen Kirche in Rumänien im 20. Jahrhundert bis 1988', *Kirche und Glaube in Rumänien (Kirche in Not/Ostpriesterhilfe)* (Munich, 1990) (*Beiträge zur Religions- und Glaubensfreiheit 3*), pp. 11–23.

<sup>40</sup> Tibor Seifert, 'Über die Nationalitätenpolitik in der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts in den mit Ungarn benachbarten Staaten', *Der Neue Pester Lloyd*, 9 April 1997, p. 4.

<sup>41</sup> *Igazságosabb ...*, n. 9.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, n. 10.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, n. 5.

<sup>44</sup> *Für eine Zukunft in Solidarität und Gerechtigkeit: Wort des Rates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland und der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz zur wirtschaftlichen Lage in Deutschland* (Hannover/Bonn, 1997) (*Gemeinsame Texte 9*).

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, n. 4.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, n. 97–99.

<sup>47</sup> 'Die ethische Forderung entspringt der von Gott gegebenen Befähigung zu einem vernünftigen und verantwortlichen Handeln' (*ibid.*, n. 95).

<sup>48</sup> Asztrik Várszegi OSB, 'The Church after the change in Hungary', *Concilium*, no. 2, 1995, pp. 132–34; here p. 132.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, p. 134.

- <sup>51</sup> Interview with Bishop Endre Gyulay of Szeged, 4 March 1997.
- <sup>52</sup> Information from Miklós Tomka. See also Miklós Tomka, 'Prämoderne Kirche in post-kommunistischer Gesellschaft – der Fall Ungarn', *Hirschberg*, no. 50, 1997, pp. 129–34.
- <sup>53</sup> It is a serious question why the communist regime did not succeed in secularising Poland as it did all the other eastern-bloc countries, particularly in view of the fact that since 1989 secularisation (loss of the Church's authority, declining church attendance etc.) has set in in Poland as elsewhere.
- <sup>54</sup> Interview with Dr László Lukács, 10 April 1997.
- <sup>55</sup> Expressed in a meeting of parish council leaders in Budapest, 22 February 1997.