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Parish Records as a Source for Comparative Pedagogical Research.

This paper is based on my research into Hungarian church archives for information that will make it possible to compare the education of the people carried out in northern Sweden by the Swedish Lutheran Church and the education carried out by the Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches in Hungary.\(^1\)

In order to make it easier to determine what are genuine Swedish traditions within ecclesiastical education, it may be fruitful to study the Catholic cultural heritage within the same field. Hungary is a typical example of central European culture. A comparison between the role in education and teaching played by the Lutheran church in northern Sweden during a specific period of time, and the role of the Roman Catholic Church in Hungary within the same field during the same period, could clarify potential patterns and reveal similarities and differences. Such a comparison would have to be, however, limited to a period of time during the 18th century.

When I started my research, I became acquainted with and inspired by the work of Professor Egil Johansson (Umeå University) and the detailed Swedish church archives on which he based his scientific results. The research of Egil Johansson gives a detailed picture of the huge work carried out by the Swedish clergy in educating the people. According to the Swedish Church Law of 1686, every individual, children and adults, regardless of social class, had to learn to read and to understand the meaning of "the words of God" as it is said. In the parish examination records we can – in theory – follow the development of every individual regarding reading ability and in comprehension of the Lutheran belief.

My Hungarian sources for the comparison with northern Sweden are to be found in various Hungarian church archives and even outside the archives. I have used the results of Professor Egil Johansson's unique research on the Swedish parish catechetical examination records. So far I have found that there are interesting fields for comparison between Hungarian and Swedish church tradition primarily in the field of catechesis.

In the huge Hungarian church archives we can find documents from the Catholic Canonical visitations. These visitations were carried out as a form of inspection from

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\(^1\) I have not included the Lutheran church in Hungary in this presentation.
as early as in the Middle Ages and they represent the most ancient church administration in Hungary. The bishop controlled the supervision of the parishes belonging to his diocese and it was he who exercised authority over these visitations.

At the visitations the bishop or the archdeacon – to whom this duty was generally transferred in Hungary – checked the keeping of the church records. The keeping of church records was made an obligatory task by the Synod of Trent (1545-1564). The Ottoman occupation of Hungary had unfortunately already taken place\(^2\) when the decision to keep church records was taken, and the situation in the country made the task impossible for most of the parishes. In 1611 a Hungarian Synod took measures to be able at least to maintain baptism and marriage records.

Baptism records are the oldest Hungarian church records. As early as in 1515 the Hungarian Synod in Veszprém had ordered the keeping of baptismal records, because the Catholic church wanted to control spiritual relationships\(^3\) as well as kinship. The former could be as big an obstacle for getting a permission to marry as the latter.

From 1625, the year of the introduction of the *Rituale Romanum*\(^4\), it became compulsory throughout Hungary not only to keep records of baptism and marriage but also of death and confirmation. In addition to these four records a *Liber Status Animarum* also was required. This was a list of the "status of the souls" in the parish. These lists consisted of family records, where each member of the household was recorded separately. The *Liber Status Animarum* included information about every member of the family: name, age, status within the family (in relation to the *pater familias*, the father), sacraments received, and in some cases "maturity" (for example capable or incapable of getting married). Servants of the household had their own entries, although we cannot be sure that every servant was recorded as many of them came and went seasonally.

Thus, from 1625 on, the parishes had to note five different pieces of information in the church records: baptism, marriage, death, confirmation and status of the souls.

It was not possible for a bishop or an archdeacon to make visitations to every parish each year, perhaps each parish was visited once in three years. When a visitation was due, a questionnaire was sent out in advance. This had to be answered in writing by the priest of the parish. The questionnaire was divided into different sections. A detailed description of the inhabitants of the village had to be given no matter whether they were Roman Catholics or belonged to another denomination. This custom lasted until the end of the 18\(^{th}\) century.\(^5\)

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\(^2\) More than a third of Hungarian territory was occupied by the Ottoman Empire from 1526–1686 and Transylvania was more or less a vassal state during the same period (Hamák 1991, 56).

\(^3\) An example of a spiritual relationship is the relation between a godparent and a godchild. The names of godparents were recorded in the church books and a godfather was not allowed to marry a goddaughter.

\(^4\) An administrative reform enacted by the Pope Paulus V.

\(^5\) As a consequence of the political reforms of the church carried out by Emperor Joseph II (Hungarian Habsburg monarch 1780-90), the Catholic visitations no longer applied to Protestant inhabitants.
The Catholic priest also had to give information about the church building and the property of the church, about the religious orders working in his parish, about the languages spoken within the parish, about the quality of the education and of the schoolmaster and about religions other than Roman Catholicism practised in the parish. These Catholic Canonical visitations were intended to provide such detailed information as whether there was a Protestant vicar or schoolmaster working in the village and within which confession the villagers were confirmed.

For the purpose of my research I am interested in notes on the specific issues, listed below, to which answers might be found in different Hungarian church records.⁶

1. What kind of education and knowledge of foreign language did the priest have? The fact that you can find this information recorded demonstrates that educational status was considered very important.
2. Who was in charge of the education of the children? Was there a schoolmaster or a parish clerk in charge or was the priest himself the teacher?
3. What was taught (what was the curriculum)?
4. How often and for how long did the children attend lessons?
5. Is there anything in the Hungarian church records that provides evidence of the level of knowledge attained by individuals?

In the 18th century a summary of the "Status of the souls" could be attached to the Canonical visitation protocols if the bishop (or the regent in the case of the royal towns) decided to do so. The original records remain at the parish and give the opportunity to study them on site.

In both Hungary and Sweden, the priest/clergyman noted the age at which the children received the sacraments.⁷ In the Catholic Church records we find anni discretiones, the age when the individual child was able to distinguish between good and evil and was thus ready to receive his/her first Holy Communion. How did the priest judge that maturity? The children were educated both at home and by the priest or schoolmaster,

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⁶ The Catalogue of the Visitation Records was published in Hungary 1994-1999. For this study the most important volume is number 2, compiled by Maria Kéringer-Patkó in 1997. It contains the visitation records of the diocese of Vác, where the village of Kóka is located.

⁷ My study deals with the Roman Catholic sacraments baptism, eucharist and to some extent confession. Baptism and eucharist are sacraments in both the Roman Catholic and the Lutheran Church. Confirmation is important in both churches, but only the Roman Catholic Church counts confirmation as a sacrament. Confession is also a sacrament only in the Roman Catholic Church.
then they were tested in the basic articles of the faith in their first confession, which took place before the celebration of Holy Communion.8

Diagram 1. The age at which girls and boys received Holy Communion for the first time. This figure includes 200 households from the village of Kóka in 1761.

8The Catholic tradition still focused on orality in the 18th century. The children had to have learnt at least the Pater Noster, Ave Maria and the prayer for absolution by heart and preferably also the Creed.
To illustrate my method, I present above a part of a family record prepared for a Catholic Canonical visitation in 1761. As a pilot study I worked through the first 200 households in the record from the village of Kóka, which belongs to the Vác diocese near the capital Budapest.  

As shown in *Diagram 1*, the vast majority (92.3% of the boys and 96.9% of the girls) up to the age of nine years were not considered mature enough to receive Holy Communion. Those who received it earlier probably had a special reason (e.g. illness). *Diagram 1* thus shows that *anni discretiones* was taken into consideration. Once the children had received Holy Communion they were no longer regarded as small children. Before receiving Holy Communion they had been tested as to their understanding of the meaning of their beliefs.

According to contemporary statistics 10-20 % of the children attended a village school, usually only for a short period of three years and only during the winter. They were supposed to learn reading at least and in some cases even writing. Under such circumstances the instruction that the church could give in teaching children to memorize, discuss spiritual and moral questions etc., was of great value.

In the 18th century the Lutheran Church of Sweden followed the same custom preceding Holy Communion. Each child was tested before Easter by the vicar, who visited the families belonging to the parish, and supervised their knowledge. These children were nine or ten years old, which means that they were in the age of *anni (aetas) discretione*, the years of discernment, when the children were believed to first hear the voice of conscience and be able to tell the difference between good and evil, *capax doli*. From that on they needed pastoral care to confess their sins and receive absolution. The children should study the lessons in the catechism and improve their reading until they understood the meaning of "the words of God" and were allowed to go to the Lord’s table for the first time. From *Diagram 2* below we can see that this Swedish custom resulted in almost the same figures for those taking Holy Communion as in Hungary.

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9 This record was found by Professor Klára Dóka, 1st Archivist at the National Archives of Hungary.
10 Tóth 1992, 75.
Diagram 2. The age of children receiving Holy Communion for the first time according to the parish record of the village of Bygdeå, north of Umeå.

The Swedish parish examination records noted when a person went to the Lord’s table for the first time. These notes correspond to the notes about Holy Communion in Catholic parish records all over the world.

Diagram 2 shows that Swedish children were at least fifteen years old when they received their first Holy Communion, preceded by their first teaching (see *anni discretiones* above). Instruction in the catechism followed the first Holy Communion and continued until the child was considered mature enough and to have sufficient knowledge of the catechism to get confirmed, whereupon they e.g. were allowed to marry.

In the Catholic Church confirmation is a sacrament, administered by the bishop. In the 18th century confirmation was the last step on the way to maturity. The occasion needed special preparation on the part of the parish priest.

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12 Statistics and diagram by Egil Johansson, Research Archives, Umeå University. The figure includes those of the population of Bygdeå born in 1763.
Diagram 3. The age at which girls and boys were confirmed in the village of Kóka
In spite of the fact that confirmation was a common sacrament in the Catholic Church, one could live a full Christian life without being confirmed, which was probably the main reason a section of the adult population were never confirmed. As can be seen from Diagram 3, about half the population (50% of the women and 42% of the men) aged 50-59 years were not confirmed. With the exception of the older, we can see that more women than men were confirmed, mostly before the age of 19 (80.8% of the women and 62.5% of the men), and that this percentage increased amongst twenty-year-olds. The percentage of men was lower and they were on average older when they were confirmed.

The priest taught the candidates their catechism - sometimes several years - until the bishop came to question them. The bishop wanted to make sure that the candidates had enough knowledge before they were given the sacrament.

The Hungarian family records were not as detailed as the Swedish ones at individual level. These records were compiled for the Catholic Canonical visitations, which did not take place every year. For various reasons the visitations were often delayed, and this had the effect that facts about people, who had died some years previously, also had to be noted in the family record. That often led to confirmation not being noted in the case of deceased people, only the communion. The family members could clearly remember when the deceased had taken communion, because that was a regular practice but they could not remember, whether or not the deceased had been confirmed.

Thus, taking one single family record from one single year will not yield exact data but show only tendencies. These tendencies will provide a basis for investigating pedagogical issues, but they do not generate accurate statistics.

After checking the first 200 households in the family record for the whole village of Kóka, the following can be adduced:

- There was only one household in the village consisting of just two members (man and wife). All the other families in the record were large.
- The names in the family record are organized in relation to the *pater familias*, similar to the arrangement in the Swedish parish examination records.
- The text and the names are given in a Latin form.
- In many cases the maiden names of the women are noted, not only their Christian names. The *mater familias* and the daughters-in-law are listed by their maiden names, which indicate their position. The first two families in the *Liber status animarum* below (*Figure 4*) serve as an illustration. Here we can see that the son’s wife in the first family is registrated by her Christian name and her maiden name, as is the *mater familias* in the second family.
**Figure 4.** From a record from the village of Kóka in Hungary (see footnote 8)*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>FAM NAME</th>
<th>SEX</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>CHR</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joannes Pap</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>64</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Joannes Pap</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Filius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sara Fazekas</strong></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Uxor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josephus</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Horum fily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgan</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>M</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>M</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Helena Katona Gregory Varga</strong></td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Uxor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susanna Mazarov</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>Virgo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helena Barbara</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Filia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*Filius=son, Uxor=wife, Horum fily=son’s son, Virgo=maid, Filia=daughter)

- Generally the ages are rounded up to the nearest ten. This is also the case in the early Swedish parish records. As regards the age of the children, the records clearly note the age at which the sacraments were received.
- There was only one family in the family-register of 200 people who, in exception to the norm, had not received the sacraments.

The results of this pilot study, as shown in *Diagrams 1-4*, can be said to provide a general picture of the pedagogical function and similarity of structure in church traditions in both countries.
References:


Tóth, István György, Literacy and Written Culture in Early Modern Central Europe. Budapest. 1996.