

# Historical aspects of the Catholic Church's role in the police forces in Hungary<sup>1</sup>

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*This study presents the police forces in Hungary during the Austro–Hungarian Empire, complete with an analysis of the period between the two world wars. The presentation of organization and structure aims to introduce and analyze the system of relations mainly between the Catholic Church and the police forces. As to the author's research on local history, when comparing the gendarmerie (in Hungarian "Csendőrség") and the town police, the study primarily focuses on the police forces of the Royal Town of Sopron and the Royal County of Sopron.*

*The goal is to prove that pastoral care, established through the cooperation between the institutions of pastoral care and the armed forces, was operating within an effective framework during the period encompassing the two world wars.*

## Systems of relationships in the police of the town of Sopron

Police administration has a social purpose of maintaining security and public order. The state is expected to set out criteria based on democratic factors laid down in the laws and implementation instructions. Implementing these criteria in a due manner ensures the protection of the collective values of the society and the lives, possessions and dignity of individuals against illegal practices. (Finszter, 2011: 5)

A properly designed policing strategy is capable of achieving the implementation of policing objectives by which it becomes possible to strengthen public security. The effectiveness of policing establishments can be measured with adequate efficiency in two different ways. In the one case, the crime, public order preservation and traffic safety statistics show the effectiveness of policing. In this way we get a picture of the number of offenses detected in criminally infected areas, as well of the development of road traffic accidents. In the other case, the people's subjective sense of security can be picked as a subject of analysis. Local security is a priority issue that greatly affects people's subjective sense of security. (Katona,

2008: 27) Assessing the effectiveness of police work in most cases is determined by the quality and quantity of contacts between individuals and police officers taking action.

People working in the enlisted staff of police forces and national security agencies, when taking action, as well as when building their social and individual relations, in most cases are confronted with emotional and moral problems affecting the individual behavior to a greater or lesser extent. A sufficient degree of processing these problems of emotional and moral origin in the organisational unit's structure is not provided for. The experience of the past

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few years has shown that not only soldiers, (Ujházi, 2012: 295–313) but also police officers and the staff of national security agencies and other organizations implementing policing activities, live and work in particular circumstances which need the emerging problems of an emotional origin to be addressed accordingly.

The Compromise took place in the spring of 1867 and organised the Habsburg Empire on the basis of dualism. The empire consisted of two countries with parliamentary systems: Austria and Hungary. In addition to a single monarch, the two states were linked by foreign affairs, defense, treasury and a customs union. (Unger, Szabolcs, 1973: 211) After the Compromise, the management and execution system of Hungarian law enforcement wanted to be fully rid of the organizational structure it had been forced to have by the Austrian Empire. The main objective was to restore the situation as it was in 1848. After the rearrangement of policing, which followed the Compromise, the Hungarian Royal law enforcement agencies consisted of Hungarian (town) police establishments, the Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie, the Royal Hungarian Excise and the customs agencies, the bodyguard units, the Hungarian Royal Crown Guard and the House of Representatives Guard, as well the correctional facilities. (Parádi, 1995: 52)

The Hungarian police establishments were split into state and municipal (town) police establishments. Assurance of public order was practiced by the state and local governments.

The Sopron Town Police Captaincy began its operation on April 3, 1861, but until 1866, despite repeated protests from the town, the "Polizeidirection", as a state law enforcement authority, was also operating within the municipality.<sup>3</sup>

The Town Police Captaincy ceased operation in 1872, its functions, powers and jurisdiction to maintain order in the area was taken over by the municipality police. Its tasks can be defined as follows: residence qualifications, industry affairs, labour books, apprentice contracts, recruitment, maintaining order, issuing fugitive warrants.<sup>4</sup> The panel was headed by a captain, who had been appointed by the local government through tenders. The captain directed the subordinated bodies through the police administration office.<sup>5</sup> The town government exercised full control over the police, so, through vacancy announcements and financing, numerous tasks from subsidizing, purchase and replacement of uniforms and weaponry, disbursing loans up to retirement were concentrated in one management body. The town leadership paid great attention to education and raising the cultural level of the enlisted police personnel. Clear references to the development and maintenance of the relations between the leadership and enlisted personnel of the Town Captaincy and the Catholic Church can be found in the mayor's 1907 year report. (Töpler, 1908: 32)

The town leadership made efforts to establish a small scale library for the enlisted police staff. In the absence of library funds, the library was completed from donations and offerings. (Töpler, 1908: 33) One of these donators was Páder Rezső, the provost of the chapter named after St. George the martyr. He had donated a large number of religious and literary themed books for the enlisted police staff.<sup>6</sup>

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3 Sopron can be found near the western border of Hungary, at the foot of the Alps, 60 km from Vienna and 220 km from Budapest. [http://portal.sopron.hu/Sopron/portal/front\\_show?contentId=1558](http://portal.sopron.hu/Sopron/portal/front_show?contentId=1558) (downloaded: 16 03 2013)

4 Sopron Town Council documents, IV. B 1403 Index Books: 1861, 1920, 1921.

5 Such corporate bodies were administrative, criminal, guard and law enforcement bodies, and, as auxiliary facilities, detention facilities, audit offices, utility offices, servant personnel, and, for some towns, agriculture and night guards, somewhere even the firemen associations.

6 In the period between 1902 and 1916, Páder Rezső, a Roman Catholic Provost was a vicar of the chapter in the St. George parish in Sopron.

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The mayor's records and report clearly show that the Catholic Church was providing support to the town police not in an organisational form but based upon individual initiative.

## Presenting religious duties of the policing establishments in Sopron County

From 1881 until 1946, the Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie operated in the area of the Kingdom of Hungary, Transylvania and Croatia. The Gendarmerie, unlike the town police, mainly carried out the public security duties of law enforcement in rural Hungary. In personnel, advancement and disciplinary matters, the Gendarmerie reported to the Ministry of Defence while in respect to administrative and police service it was under the control of the Ministry of the Interior. (Csizmadia, 1976: 192–193)

In 1925, one Gendarmerie Division Command operated in the area of Sopron County having its headquarters in Sopron, under which there were two wing headquarters, five squadron headquarters and twenty post headquarters.

The evaluation of the public security situation in 1925 and the efficient operation of the gendarmerie are presented in the following quote.

“As concerns the restoration of public security, the fullest appreciation is deserved by the Gendarmerie's operation, which already completely relies on peace and is a model-like institution in respect to both discipline and reliability.” (Gévay–Wolf, 1926: 38–39)

In addition to their public security service, the main task of the Gendarmerie operating in the county was to prevent smuggling and to control the border. In the years after World War I, after the normalization of the public security situation, it was the first time a shortage of gendarme was experienced. This shortage was mainly due to the outbreak of the World War II and the First Vienna Award (1938), as many gendarmes were deployed to Upper Hungary (Felvidék) and Subcarpathia (Kárpátalja) in order to restore public security. (Czillinger, 1941: 44)

The ministries that directed the Gendarmerie, in the period between the two World Wars sought to manage the emotional, mental and physical burdens of the gendarmes, implementing this through prescribing education, sport activity and spiritual exercise.

When studying the available documents, it becomes apparent that the Gendarmerie's service regulations and thus their moral mentality was permeated by Christian and religious affection. ~~an~~ ~~arms~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~police~~ ~~through~~ ~~worship~~, Church, care for spiritual salvation, conscience and prayer.

To provide an orderly and disciplined gendarme service, knowledge of, and adherence to, moral and religious values was essential. Communication with people, professional execution of instructions, providing legality of actions and showing an example of respect for private life – are activities where religious values are always kept in mind.

The books and records available also show how important it was for the implementation of gendarme services that religious duties be exercised. In addition to professional and vocational problems, gendarmes were provided support in solving moral and emotional problems as well. All this is sufficiently proved in the pocketbook “A csendőr vallási kötelességeiről szóló” (“About religious duties of a gendarme”) officially distributed by the Ministry of Defence. (Endrődy, 1902)

The section on religiosity determines the Gendarmerie to be a strong bulwark of the state and the Church. In the given period, the Church's influence on the gendarme was not only in

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terms of human conduct, in displaying moral and religious values, but as a law enforcement agency, which also functioned to support the Church. This was how the relationship between the Church and the law enforcement was solidified. Religion appears as a solid base for the gendarme, protecting him from mental and bodily influences.

*“This sure foundation can be no other than the faith and religiosity.”* (Endrődy, 1902: 76)

Without religiosity there is no trust and reverence. Religion is the basis and support for, and developer of, the state and social life, virtue and morality.

*“If anyone should be religious, most of all a gendarme should be this”.* (Endrődy, 1902: 78) A gendarme, similarly to a modern policeman, had a number of problems to contend with. He had to comply precisely with orders and instructions and meet his duties as set out in legislation, also he needed to choose the right social circle and friends, as well as continue

a moral and sober lifestyle, setting an example to follow for law-abiding citizens.

*“Religion encourages a gendarme to faithfully fulfill his duties even when in greatest danger; religion binds the heart of a gendarme to remain true to his oath and the cause he serves; religion blesses all noble actions of the gendarme and sanctifies his grave.”* (Endrődy, 1902: 79) The above lines describe all the essential qualities of policemen that help in

executing their tasks and show them the way in situations that sometime seem hopeless. In the performance of duties the lawfulness and the humane attitude shall be strived for.

The second part of the section on religiosity is about the importance of faith and prayer.

*“The unbeliever does not listen to the voice of conscience; has no virtue, no morality, which would exhort and ennoble his apathetic mood; piling sin on sin he finally becomes a burden to himself – and commits suicide.”* (Endrődy, 1902: 81)

Unfortunately, people in despair intentionally take their own lives. They cannot or do not want to face the tasks and problems waiting for them. A suicide can be avoided through co-ordinating desires and needs, thereby creating an emotional balance. (Buda, 2001: 15) There are certain jobs and occupations (e.g., policeman, fireman, doctor, paramedic, soldier, nurse, clergy) where the performance of work tasks is associated with increased mental and physical strain. In most cases, they help people in trouble. Whereas, emotional problems emerging during help-rendering activities can cause internal stress or emotional trauma, to try to manage these alone and cope with hopelessness alone, may lead the individual to try to escape through suicide.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, solutions offer themselves even for the most hopeless problems. In this case, faith and pastoral care can contribute to alleviating the tension of the soul, thereby saving lives.

*“Avoid the company of non-believers because bad company ruins good morals.”* (Endrődy, 1902: 84)

Already more than a hundred years ago, the gendarmes' attention was called to the danger of developing improper social relationships. Virtue and morality — these two concepts defined the Gendarmerie's motto, by making the gendarmes, during their service, recognize criminal lifestyles, and, in all circumstances, seek to bring these people to justice. Nowadays, instead of morality and virtue, we focus on the concepts of blamelessness, honesty, integrity and being corruption-free.<sup>8</sup>

7 Such problems of emotional origin include: partner relationship conflicts (divorce, child custody), issues of financial origin, loss of a job, brushes with the law, problems at workplace (conflict with colleagues and/or a boss), death of a close relative, serious illness, mental disorders, depression, alcohol and/or drug use.

8 Presentation of the National Defense Service. <https://intra.police.hu/nvsz> (downloaded: 13 01 2013)

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Under the Fundamental Law of Hungary every person shall be entitled to the free exercise of their religion. (Magyar Közlöny, 2011: 10661) During the period of off-duty time, the police members have the opportunity to attend worship services. However, this was not always the case.

*“[...] All holidays and Sundays, whenever service allows it, with a humble and eager heart hurry to participate in worship. Not only on the days when the routine order allows, but whenever only you can.”* (Endrődy, 1902: 87)

The manifestation of a Christian attitude and outlook on life have become apparent even to civilians as they could see gendarmes, dressed in uniform, participate in a church service. AARMS (12) 2 (2013)

The following lines can be read in the memoirs of Bajcsi Károly, retired gendarme captain. *“In Táta, every Sunday we went together; that is, in a troop, to the Church located on the Calvary hill for a church service, that is, to listen to the Mass where the gendarmes assisted the priest.”* (Bajcsi, s.l.)

The participation in worship appeared in the Gendarmerie's life as an opportunity, recommendation and expectation.

The section on religiosity describes the power of prayer and its role in the Gendarmerie's life.

*“If someone needs prayer, certainly it is a gendarme; it gives him courage in danger and, drop by drop, adds patience to his heart in the various vicissitudes of life, it gives him strength to discharge his duty.”* (Endrődy, 1902: 90)

True religious life can be found not in the postulates of faith and not in church institutions, neither in ordinances, but in your prayers. *“All the devoutness of a gracious soul manifests in the words of prayer.”* (Borbély, 1977: 17) Through prayer, peace and devotion fill the hearts and the entire being of man. As a result of prayer, the mind is purified and, in unity with the happiness of the soul, wins strength and encouragement from God to overcome emerging problems.

The positive expression of Christian moral conduct by Hungarian gendarmes is sufficiently reflected by the action by which members of the Royal Hungarian Gendarmerie, with the assistance of Raoul Wallenberg, Embassy counselor and under the protection of the Swedish Embassy, saved lives of thousands of Jewish refugees through defeating attacks of members of the Arrow Cross Party and, in this way, preventing their intended deportation. (Szalay, 2002: 151)

## Conclusions

Using and analysing historical examples, and the documents from the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, subscribed by the municipality of the Royal Town of Sopron, we have highlighted the system of connections between the contemporary town police and religion and the Church. Reviewing the documents revealed that the town leadership sought to provide professional training and teaching of religious and moral standards to the enlisted police staff by creating a library. We cannot find clear references in the municipal reports and registry books as to what kind of relationships the enlisted police staff was fostering with churches, but it could be clearly seen that the local government was seeking to build church relations.

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Faith, religion, pastoral care and participation in worship were fully integrated into the life of the Gendarmerie. Routine orders, teaching aids and statutory references discuss the aspiration for Christian, religious and moral behavior for the enlisted staff of the Gendarmerie.

## Finale

The present study sought to answer in what form religion, faith and pastoral care had been present in law enforcement agencies and policing establishments in the last centuries, with special focus on the territorial units in the Royal County of Sopron. The research was divided into two parts. First of all, documentary materials on the police of the Royal Town of Sopron, and the mayor's reports found in the Archives of Sopron were the subject of the investigation. Secondly, the documents and sub-prefect's reports concerning the Gendarmerie unit located in the Royal County of Sopron were studied.

It appears from the documents found that the leadership of the Royal Town of Sopron sought to provide professional and cultural development for the police personnel, but the religious and pastoral care was not implemented in an organized manner. As concerns the Gendarmerie serving in the Royal County of Sopron, we found significantly more complex systems of religious and ecclesiastic relationships. The Ministry of Defense, as one of the central governing bodies of the Gendarmerie, purposefully sought to create religion and faith links to Churches. This effort was primarily directed at issuing publications aimed at moral education and ensuring organised participation in worship.

Through amending domestic and international bilateral agreements a possibility can be created to establish the police pastoral service, which would provide efficient support for manageability of spiritual and moral problems policemen are being faced with.

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