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## EXAMPLES, PATTERNS, MODELS

### THE PRAYER BOOK AS A SOURCE OF FEMALE IDENTIFICATION MODELS

**Abstract:** In this study I show the examples used by the Hungarian Catholic church at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century for the moral edification of female believers. My sources were prayer books of the period compiled especially for women and young girls. These books were intended to play a role in religious and moral training, in construction of the ideal Catholic girl, and especially in the urban environment, in counterbalancing popular literature and the secular ideals it offered. The female and male saints held up as models are given an important part in the prayer and meditation texts. In the texts of the period they appear not as intercessors with miraculous powers but as the perfect examples of virtuous lives. In their life careers and the values they represent we can see a Catholic female identification model intended by the clergy to serve as a guide in everyday life. Here, both secular society and church discourse identified the place of women in the triple role of wife, mother and housewife. The female prayer books examined held up for them as a model the virtues of the Virgin Mary (purity, obedience, renunciation).

**Keywords:** prayer books, women, examples, saints, Virgin Mary

The use of examples, models that can be followed is an important tool in shaping social norms and in education. Values and events can be stressed in the way of life and characteristics of the persons held up as examples that can serve as a guide and provide points of reference in the difficulties of everyday life. It can also be said that they are actually social and cultural products, as the moral and cultural values of a given age or social milieu are manifested through them.<sup>1</sup> From this point of departure I would like to show the examples used by the Hungarian Catholic church at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century to construct the female model it held to be ideal. Who did it hold up as an example and what episodes from their life stories, what ideals and moral properties, did it stress? Prayer

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<sup>1</sup> MIHÁLY 2006. <http://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00035/00099/2006-01-vt-Mihaly-Hosfogyatkozás.html> accessed on: 1 December 2015.

books published in the period especially for women and girls serve as the sources for my investigation.

## A few words about the period

The chosen period of my investigation is the long 19<sup>th</sup> century that brought a radical change in the social role of women in Hungary too. With the introduction of compulsory schooling girls too were able to participate in public education, resulting in a rapid increase in female literacy. By the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially after the First World War, Hungarian women too were able to continue their studies in higher education, to enrol in certain university faculties, and many female professions were also open to them.<sup>2</sup> All this created the possibility for their own vocation and independent life.

The image of the reading woman also belongs to this period: the changes in literacy produced a multitude of new genres. Thanks to the spread of public education, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century close to half of the Hungarian female population was able to read and write and a further 17% was able to read.<sup>3</sup> Beside the Bible and the prayer book, cookery books, women's magazines, press products for women and above all cheap popular novels in which intimate details of private life and the internal life of the private sphere appeared also became popular in Hungary.<sup>4</sup> Both denominational and lay public discourse regarded novels with suspicion because they were thought to arouse irrational, romantic expectations and even erotic imaginings threatening the existing order. In this way Madame Bovary, Anna Karenina, Effi Briest and Ibsen's Nora appearing in contemporary novels became archetypical figures of the violation of social norms.<sup>5</sup>

The Catholic church expressed its concern and adopted a firm position against the growing output of popular reading matter and the new kind of female ideals it contained.

"It is hardly worth the trouble to speak about the damage caused by bad books in the souls of some, in whole classes, homes and families, in the whole of human society, not to mention religion and

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2 PUKÁNSZKY 2006. 23.

3 TÓTH 1996. 229-250.

4 For more details on the spread and situation in Hungary of the new "female" genres, see: Pogány, György: *Nézetek a leányok olvasásáról és olvasmányairól a dualizmus első felében (1867-1895)* [Views of girls' reading and reading matter for girls in the first half of the Dualist Monarchy (1867-1895)]. [http://epa.oszk.hu/01200/01245/00044/pgy\\_0904.htm](http://epa.oszk.hu/01200/01245/00044/pgy_0904.htm) Accessed on 1 December 2015; KÉRI, Katalain: "Nők csak mértékkel olvassanak ..." Adalékok a hazai női olvasóközönség 18-19. századi formálódásának történetéhez ["Women, read only with moderation..." The formation of the Hungarian female reading public in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries] In: Csóka-Jaksa, Helga – Schmelczler-Pohánka, Éva – Szeberényi, Gábor (eds.), *Pedagógia – oktatás – könyvtár: Ünnepi tanulmányok F. Dárdai Ágnes tiszteletére*. PTE Egyetemi Könyvtár, Pécs, 2014. 319-342. (A Pécsi Egyetemi Könyvtár Kiadványai 12.)

5 LYONS 2000. 354.

faith, virtue and good morals. [...] Reading books that are against religion or destroy morality is like poison to the soul, a poison far more dangerous and destructive than natural poison because it is the poison of scepticism and false belief, godlessness and immorality. [...] May you never come under the power of a certain senseless reading rage.”<sup>6</sup>

The ideas formed about the “modern” woman in the new genres and thematised with growing frequency in public discourse induced members of the clergy to set out and define how they saw the ideal Catholic woman.<sup>7</sup> To achieve this it was necessary to construct an alternative female image based on Christian teachings. One of the vehicles used to transmit these ideas was the prayer book that still had a firm place among the genres of mass literature in the period examined.<sup>8</sup> Their texts could be effective means of presenting the examples as for many centuries literature (both secular and religious) had played the primary role in this.<sup>9</sup> But before beginning a detailed analysis of the examples presented in the prayer books, I would like to make a brief digression to draw attention to a few characteristics of the genre of prayer books for women.<sup>10</sup>

6 *Venite Adoremus* 1902. 70-71.

7 DE GIORGIO 1994. 192.

8 The size of the print runs for various books indicates that the prayer books were intended for mass reading; for example: Tárkány, Béla: *Lelki manna [Food for the Soul]* was printed in 244,000 copies; *Vezércsillag [Lodestar]* in 21,000 copies; Soós, István: *Liliomfűzér [Bunch of Lilies]*, a prayer book for confirmation, 24,000 copies. SZINNYEI 1891-1914. <http://mek.oszk.hu/03600/03630/html/> Accessed on 9 November 2015. On the publications and situation of Hungarian book publishing in the period, see: Fülöp, Géza: *Olvasási kultúra és könyvkiadás Magyarországon a felvilágosodás idején és a reformkorban (1772-1848). [Reading Culture and Book Publishing in Hungary during the Enlightenment and the Reform Age (1772-1848)]* Budapest, Hatágú Síp Alapítvány, 2010. 49-51.

9 MIHÁLY 2006. <http://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00035/00099/2006-01-vt-Mihaly-Hosfogyatkozás.html> Accessed on 1 December 2015.

10 A multi-year project on prayer books drew my attention to the source material. Our main aim in the project was to use the texts of the prayer books to reveal the religious teachings and the dogmatic points of the different denominations systematised and passed on by the authors, that is, the clergy, and through this to attempt to approach the religious culture and spirituality of the given period. The texts of the books also provide an opportunity to take different aspects of social history into account in our analyses as these prayers were not but entirely individualised works but were intended to meet complex needs. They have a normative character, serve as a guide for readers, explain to them their obligations and strive to be of use in a wide variety of situations for as many people as possible.

## Prayer books for women and girls at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Hungary

While up to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century we hardly know of any Catholic prayer book in Hungary addressed specifically to women,<sup>11</sup> from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a spectacular increase in the number of prayer books intended for women, young girls and educational institutions for girls. Naturally this does not mean that women did not read or use prayer books before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But they were not separate from the prayer books intended for the different social groups and they followed a more or less clearly set general pattern. We also know that it was often women – mainly of high birth – who ordered, financially supported or, less frequently, themselves wrote Hungarian prayer books in the 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, also undertaking a major role in directing and shaping the religious life of their own environment (for example, their own household).<sup>12</sup> This kind of female piety disappeared in the years after 1800 when the initiative was taken over by the rapidly proliferating printing houses, the independent book trade and church book publishing.<sup>13</sup> This brought not only an increase in the number of prayer books but also in many cases innovation in the arrangement of their content. In prayer books published before the 19<sup>th</sup> century the life of women generally did not appear at all, or only in connection with marriage, childbirth and widowhood. For the most part the books contained the customary devotional practices (daily prayers, prayer texts for church liturgies, prayers for the church year, prayers to saints and Mary, devotional practices and litanies). These continued to be the main part of the books, but a group titled “Various prayers” clearly reflects a differentiation to meet different emergencies in the lives of women. In many cases a similar trend can be observed in the books with general content. Thus, we find prayers for virgins, single women, women living alone, orphans, brides, young wives, pregnant women, women in childbirth, women in confinement, married women, mothers, women nursing a sick child or husband, women

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11 We have two surveys of Hungarian-language prayers books published before 1850, but they do not include any prayer books addressed to women. These two surveys are: Gajtkó, István: *A XVII. század katolikus imádságirodalma. [17<sup>th</sup> Century Catholic Prayer Literature]* Budapest, Élet Kiadó, 1936. (Palaestra Calasanctiana 15); HOLL, Béla: *A magyar nyelvű nyomtatott katolikus imádságoskönyveink bibliográfiája [Bibliography of Catholic Prayer Books Printed in Hungarian]* (Manuscript). Piarista Rend Magyar Tartomány Központi Levéltára, Sajtó Írások sorozat 121. tétel, Budapest, 1958. As far as we know, Martin von Cochem’s *Grosse-, Mittlere- és Kleine Himmelschlüssel, oder höchst nützliches und trostreiches Gebetbuch für alle christkatholischen Stände, besonders für das Frauengeschlecht* a prayer book that was extremely popular in Hungary too and reissued numerous times and *Myrrhengarten des bitteren Leidens ... zum besondern Dienst des andächtigen weibliche Geschlechts eingerichtet* can be cited as examples here.

12 For more details on Hungarian female piety in the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, see: BAJÁKI, Rita – BÁTHORY, Orsolya (eds.), *A nők és a régi magyarországi vallásosság. [Women and Piety in Old Hungary]* Piliscsaba, MTA-PPKE Barokk Irodalom és Lelkiség Kutatócsoport, 2015. (Pázmány Irodalmi Műhely – Lelkiségtörténeti tanulmányok, 10.)

13 FÜLÖP 2010, 49-51.

bringing up a child, farmers' wives with servants, women praying for husbands fighting in a war for the homeland, elderly women and widows. In addition, an innovation in books compiled mainly for young girls was meditations written with the intention of moral edification, education and guidance. These provided an even more direct opportunity than the prayer texts to shape attitudes.<sup>14</sup>

The picture emerging from my investigations to date is that many of the prayer books published in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century or later were compiled specifically for urban educational institutions for girls and church schools. This fact determined the audience targeted by the authors as well as the possible reading public for these books. With two exceptions the authors were famous Catholic writers, poets and speakers, or were members of the main orders. Their texts therefore present their ideas to readers.<sup>15</sup>

### Examples to follow

The Roman Catholic church regards the saints as the principal examples to follow. Their veneration and following is rooted in the notion that they realised the Christian ideal and the believers strive in all aspects of their lives to realise that ideal.<sup>16</sup> Thus when we look for examples to follow in the prayer books it is above all the prayer texts addressed to saints that offer assistance. They were written principally to the female saints, as their main interest was in female models. But when analysing the texts we will also see that many male saints could also become models because of particular outstanding virtues in their lives.

Regardless of the period, prayers written to the saints and meditations were an integral part of all prayer books. At the same time there is a certain shift in the function of the different saints in the prayer texts. While in books in popular use with roots reaching further back in time than the 19<sup>th</sup> century, readers could turn to them as effective intercessors in certain emergency situations (illness, natural

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<sup>14</sup> A few examples from the meditations of "Thoughts helping spiritual life" in the "Mary's Child" prayer book: The seriousness of life, the use of time, controlling passions, humility, selflessness and goodness of heart, spiritual purity, love of one's fellow man, meekness, life of work, moderation, art of reading, wise amusement, sincerity and uprightness, respect for one's parents, respect for superiors, fraternal love, true friendship, faithfulness to the Church, patriotism, spiritual life.

<sup>15</sup> We know of only two female authors of prayer books in Hungary, Mária BLASKÓ (1891-1956) and Irma Reiner (1878-?). Mária BLASKÓ was active as a writer and teacher, she was one of the leading figures of the Sacred Heart children's movement in Hungary (the Heart Brigade). Irma REINER became known as a translator and writer of religious works. *Diós, Magyar Katolikus Lexikon I.* [Hungarian Catholic Lexicon] (KL), 2003. <http://lexikon.katolikus.hu/B/Blask%C3%B3.html>, and KL XI, 2006. <http://lexikon.katolikus.hu/R/Reiner.html> Accessed on 1 December 2015.

<sup>16</sup> KL XII., 2007. <http://lexikon.katolikus.hu/S/szentek%20tisztelete.html> Accessed on 1 December 2015.

catastrophe),<sup>17</sup> in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century texts the main focus was on their exemplary lives and qualities. The influence of the rational spirit of the Enlightenment can be felt in the background. The demand and aspiration was that in place of the miracle-working role in veneration of the saints in the Baroque age, the believer should be given an example to follow.<sup>18</sup> This placed veneration of the saints on a different plane, making it possible to stress certain of their virtues in order to shape the behaviour of female readers.

Among the female saints the following can be found, almost without exception, in the prayer books of the period examined: Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, Saint Margaret of Hungary, Saint Ann, Saint Katherine of Alexandria, Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint Mary Magdalen, Saint Cecilia, Saint Clare, Saint Agnes. Others who appear less frequently are: Saint Therese of Lisieux, Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque, Saint Rose, Saint Helena, Saint Juliana, Saint Philomena, Saint Apollonia, Saint Barbara, Saint Katherine of Siena, Saint Veronica, Saint Ludmilla, Saint Lucy, Saint Jane Frances de Chantal, Blessed Gizella of Hungary.

If we look through this list we find that most were young virgins who died as martyrs or nuns. In their persons they represent female life situations where young girls before marriage take vows of eternal virginity so that they can devote their lives entirely to divine love. Accordingly, the prayers addressed to them also stress the virtues of virginity, physical and spiritual purity and a life devoted to God. For example, in the prayer to Saint Margaret in her prayer book, Blaskó wrote:

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17 One of the most popular Hungarian prayer books, the *Arany Korona* [Golden Crown] can be mentioned as an example. It was compiled in 1719 from her most popular prayers by Eszter PONGRÁTZ, a woman of high social standing. It was subsequently reissued 38 times right up to 1911. Readers of this book could pray to Saint Barbara for a good death, to Saint Anna for offspring and a good marriage, to Saint Catherine for mercy in approaching death, and to Mary Magdalen for remission of sins. It was also generally known that Saint Apollonia helped in case of toothache, Saint Rosalia in infectious diseases, and Saint Margaret helped women in danger during childbirth.

18 It must of course, be mentioned here that the texts were written by priests. Thus, the shift in focus in prayers written to the saints from their role as intercessors to their exemplary virtues reflects primarily a change in the official attitude of the church. We must see behind this the effort slowly unfolding from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century made by the church to rationalise its own teachings in line with the changed religious and social relations and expectations of the period. The attitudes of the urban bourgeoisie moving further away from Baroque piety and the reduced emphasis on religious practice all acted in this direction. However, the faith placed in the miracle-working power of the saints remained strong in popular religiosity. This can be explained by the lengthy process whereby folk culture absorbed the influence of the Baroque, as well as by the fact that bourgeois values and ethos had less influence on the rural population. A good summary of the state of religion in 19<sup>th</sup> century Hungary can be found in: Kósa, László: A vallási közönyösség növekedése a 19. század közepén. [The growth of religious indifference in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century] In: Kósa, László (ed.), *Művelődés, egyház, társadalom* [Culture, Church, Society]. Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 2011. 155-184. The findings of the extensive German and Swiss research can also be indicative. For example: SCHIEDER, Wolfgang: *Religion und Gesellschaft im 19. Jahrhundert*. Stuttgart, Klett Cotta Verlag, 1993.; NIPPERDAY, Thomas: *Religion im Aufbruch. Deutschland 1870-1918*. München, Beck Verlag, 1988.; LEHMANN, Hartmut: *Säkularisierung, Dechristianisierung, Rechristianisierung im neuzeitlichen Europa. Bilanz und Perspektiven der Forschung*. Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997.; ALTERMATT, Urs: *Katholizismus und Moderne. Zur Sozial- und Mentalitätsgeschichte der Schweizer Katholiken im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*. Zürich, Benziger, 1989.

“Help me to long for the Master [...] encourage me to devotion so that I am immersed in the Lord [...] teach me self-sacrifice so that I am ready to sacrifice all for Jesus [...] spur me to endurance and loyalty to my Master [...].”<sup>19</sup>

Or in another prayer, written to Saint Aloysius:

“Help me to reject earthly vanities, delights and temptations, as you rejected the pomp and temptations of the royal court [...].”<sup>20</sup>

Then, a few pages later, we read the following:

“Cultivate and bring to flower in yourself the buds of heroic virtue based on love that must open soon for the happiness of the home. Your heart belongs first to the Lord Jesus and then to your betrothed. It cannot belong to anyone else.”<sup>21</sup>

Many other prayer texts could be cited to show that the saints were set as an example above all to legitimate and emphasise an example to be followed based on physical and spiritual purity, obedience, self-denial and renunciation. In this idea the sentiment of love had to be realised principally in love of God that was placed above all worldly love, but at the same time did not exclude such love. Indeed, that was what ensured the happiness of the girl, the wife, the mother and the housewife.

“A pure heart brings us to God in heaven. Sensuality drags us down to the ground, into the mud, into sin. Overcoming sensuality raises us up, directs the wings of our soul towards heaven. [...] Purity is the touchstone of our love for Jesus. [...] Femininity, that raises woman above the animal state in the eyes of her husband – achieves its glory in purity [...].”<sup>22</sup>

Especially in prayer books addressed to young girls we find that the female and male saints addressed in prayers became a tool of moral education that placed physical and spiritual purity on a pedestal. The reading and repetition of the prayers addressed to them instilled an awareness of this norm and internalised it. Knowing that one of the most strongly emphasised topics of the period (from the viewpoint of women’s history) was the moral education of young girls, this emphasis is not surprising. The members of the clergy also recognised the importance of the question. They saw in girls not just the future of the nation but

19 *Imádság és élet [Prayer and Life]* 1923. 450.

20 *Imádság és élet [Prayer and Life]* 1923. 440.

21 *Imádság és élet [Prayer and Life]* 1923. 549.

22 *Imádság és élet [Prayer and Life]* 1923. 65.

also the guarantee for the revival of the church and Catholic faith.<sup>23</sup> In this way the focus was on deepening girls' religiosity and isolating them from worldly dangers. This involved all areas of modern bourgeois life.

“Be extremely cautious in worldly pleasures and as far as possible keep yourself away from them. [...] following the example of your heavenly mother, seek your joy and refreshment in the home, within the family circle.”

– wrote Károly Ágoston in 1894 in his prayer book compiled for unmarried young women.<sup>24</sup> Thus, in the view of the church, women's moral purity could be violated outside the family circle and so it warned girls against excessive dancing, sports, amusements, the cinema and theatre. The author held up Saint Elizabeth as an example:

“She did not find any joy in dancing and secular festivities, but when she was obliged to she took part in such things so as not to cause scandal. But then after one dance she stopped, saying: this one dance was enough for the world; I shall leave out the rest for the name of Jesus.”<sup>25</sup>

Besides improper forms of amusement, the meditations in prayer books most frequently blamed reading bad books for the bad morals of youth. Here too they typically preferred very strong restrictions, allowing only works of a religious nature. We can read an episode in the life of Saint Therese as a deterring example in Ágoston's prayer book:

“[...] novels came into her hands and at first she read them unsuspectingly, merely out of curiosity, but they soon became a passion. And from then on her godliness steadily declined [...] it became tepid and lax, a tendency to vanity and self-love crept into her heart. The desire arose in her to see [...] herself and together with this she came to love cosmetics and entertainments. [...] But after a while the

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23 In this connection an idea widely held in the international literature is that the increased attention paid by the clergy towards women (pastorisation) led to the feminisation of religion. This feminisation could be observed principally in the overrepresentation of the traditional religious practices of women, confraternities and female monastic orders. For more details, see: PALETSCHEK 1993. 300-318. A few more literature discussions of the thesis concerning the feminisation of religion: BOCK, Gisel: *Women's History and Gender History: Aspects of an International Debate. Gender and History 1*, 1989. 7-30; HABERMAS, Rebekka: *Geschlechtergeschichte und "anthropology of gender"*. *Geschichte einer Begegnung. Historische Anthropologie 1*, 1993. 485-509; BUSCH, Norbert: *Die Feminisierung der Frömmigkeit*. In: GÖTZ VON OLENHAUSEN, Irmtraud (ed.), *Wunderbare Erscheinungen. Frauen und katholische Frömmigkeit im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*. Paderborn, 1995.

24 *Mária hű leánya [Faithful Daughter of Mary]* 1894. 146. It should be noted that Károly Ágoston was only the translator of the prayer book. No information on the original is available.

25 *Mária hű leánya [Faithful Daughter of Mary]* 1894. 151.

danger towered so high over her that God showed her the hellish place to which she would go if she continued her bad habits."<sup>26</sup>

In the same prayer book the teacher priest also presents the life careers of two lesser known male saints. James Olier, who showed all his new clothes to the Virgin Mary, so that he could be sure that his dress was morally acceptable,<sup>27</sup> and the other, also a great devotee of Mary, Saint Edmund, who always avoided bad company.<sup>28</sup> He also introduces Frances de Chantal, another saint less well known in Hungary<sup>29</sup>, as a young girl of good birth who was orphaned and was tempted by her lady companion to take part in entertainments and dress up. The pious girl naturally resisted the temptation and "later was betrothed to a virtuous young man of true faith and prepared for this important step in retreat, meditation and prayer, with good deeds and taking the sacraments more frequently."<sup>30</sup>

In addition to the saints mentioned above, female saints who became exemplary wives and mothers and were held up as models by the church were also mentioned, although fewer in number. Practically all the prayer books include Saint Ann, the mother of Mary, who could be taken as an example in a whole series of crisis situations in the life of women: before betrothal, in happy marriage, in childlessness, in difficult childbirth, in widowhood, in prayerful behaviour, in child raising, charitable deeds and support for the distressed.<sup>31</sup> We also find among the women Blessed Gizella, wife of the first Hungarian king, Saint Stephen, who as wife remained always faithful and deeply religious.<sup>32</sup> Saint Blanka also appears: as the mother of Saint Ladislav she lived for her maternal vocation even as a widow, she was always beside her son, teaching him fervent piety.<sup>33</sup>

26 *Mária hű gyermeke [Faithful Daughter of Mary]* 1894. 145.

27 On the basis of the episode in the prayer book it was not possible to identify James OLIER with any of the known Blessed James (of Piacenza, Sale, Griesinger, Marchia). KL V., 2000. <http://lexikon.katolikus.hu/J/Jakab.html> Accessed on 1 December 2015.

28 The Catholic Church recognises two Saint Edmunds. One was king of East Anglia who died a martyr for his faith (841-870), the other was Archbishop of Canterbury and a theologian (1170-1240). The episode described in the prayer book cannot be found in the life history of either of the two. KL X., 2005. <http://lexikon.katolikus.hu/%C3%96/%C3%96d/%C3%B6n.html> Accessed on 1 December 2015.

29 After a happy marriage and giving birth to six children, Saint Jane Frances Frémyot de Chantal (1572-1641) founded the Congregation of the Visitation. KL III., 1997. <http://lexikon.katolikus.hu/J/Johanna%20Franciska.html> Accessed on 1 December 2015.

30 *Mária hű gyermeke [Faithful Daughter of Mary]* 1894. 163.

31 We know her name and some events from her life from the apocryphal gospel of James. According to this source the Virgin Mary's mother was childless for a long while. Legend had it that she was still alive when Jesus was born. She is the main patron saint of women struggling with various problems. KL I, 1993. <http://lexikon.katolikus.hu/A/Anna.html> Accessed on 1 December 2015.

32 Blessed Gizella was the wife of Stephen, the first Hungarian king. The Bavarian princess was a deeply religious woman and wanted to enter a monastery. At the wish of her parents she married the Hungarian king (985-1065?). KL IV, 1998. <http://lexikon.katolikus.hu/G/Gizella.html> Accessed on 1 December 2015.

33 Saint Blanka (1188-1252) was not officially canonised, but she was the object of such respect in public opinion that sainthood remains associated with her figure. KL I, 1993. <http://lexikon.katolikus.hu/B/Blanka.html> Accessed on 1 December 2015.

“[...] who said to her royal child: I would rather see you on your bier than know that you had wounded God with sin [...]”<sup>34</sup>

Finally, it is worth mentioning another two especially pious wives and mothers: Saint Elizabeth<sup>35</sup> and Frances Chantal. In the prayers addressed to their persons the emphasis is not on the more than average holiness of their lives, their miracles, mystical experiences of God, or their entry into an order, but on the qualities attainable for everyday women. In the case of Frances Chantal the prayer text presents the woman

“[...] who did everything for the upbringing of her children and lost the crown of sainthood [...]”<sup>36</sup>

and we read the following about Saint Elizabeth:

“she did penance in the dress of a penitent, closely followed the upbringing of her children and valued the loss imposed on her by God more than the imperial crown.”<sup>37</sup>

As we have seen, Frances also appeared in other prayers, but as a young girl approaching marriage. Her example and the other stories cited show that the life history of the saints could be coloured and shaped practically to suit the required purpose. The main thing was the virtue the author wished to show and for this episodes in the life history had to be adapted or certain details given special stress.

The discourse on women at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century designated the place of women in the triple role of wife, mother and housewife. In this respect there was no difference of opinion between lay and church parlance. They both referred to women as “priestess of the household altar”, the “guardian of the home fireplace”, the “servant of the family altar”. These expressions also indicate that this role had almost sacral meaning.<sup>38</sup> It was therefore natural that the Catholic church held up the Virgin Mary as the most important example for its believers.<sup>39</sup> Mary the mother, wife of the carpenter, the parent raising children was given as the principal example to follow, as we can read in the prayer book “Glory! Peace!” written by the famous Hungarian Piarist priest, Sándor Sík:

“The real veneration of the Blessed Virgin is to take her above all as an example, ordering our lives according to her life. All Christians

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34 *Mária, légy anyám!* [*Mary, Be My Mother!*] 1938. 19-20.

35 The saint, known as Elizabeth of Hungary, or of Thuringia (1207-1231) was the daughter of the Hungarian King Andrew II and Queen Gertrude of Meran. Her husband was Ludwig, Landgrave of Thuringia with whom she lived in a happy marriage. They had three children. KL II, 1996. <http://lexikon.katolikus.hu/E/Erzs%C3%A9bet.html> Accessed on 1 December 2015.

36 *Mária, légy anyám!* [*Mary, Be My Mother!*] 1938. 19-20.

37 *Mária, légy anyám!* [*Mary, Be My Mother!*] 1938. 19-20.

38 PUKÁNSZKY 2006. 32.

39 McLEUD 1988. 152.

must strive for this: because Mary's life is a brief summary of all Christian duty and perfection. The faithful must constantly learn from this virgin what they must avoid, give up, correct, hold and practise.

It was God's intention in the life of Mary to give us an example and model of the most heroic virtues. Let us then meditate as often as possible on what Mary did and how, and we will find how effective her example is. It will serve us not only as a reliable rule in life, it will encourage and strengthen in us the beautiful, warm devoutness that was hers alone."<sup>40</sup>

Mary's life was well known, it would be difficult to find a more authentic or persuasive example to follow. In her veneration the church was able to turn towards women, and at the same time to hold up an acceptable, positive female image.<sup>41</sup> Obviously, it is not a matter of the creation of a new ideal, but rather of bringing certain qualities to the fore (motherhood, pious, obedient and humble woman), as we could also see in the case of the saints. We can read about this in the following prayer:

"May the immaculate example of the lily of purity, the Blessed Virgin Mary be always before my eyes so that I follow her footsteps in the path of life. She lived in modest solitude, submitting to your sacred will with all humility; gentleness, angelic purity and forbearance were the beautiful virtues that made her so dear in your sight; may I too strive to win your holy pleasure through those same virtues."<sup>42</sup>

The image of the virtuous Christian woman has been placed in the foreground, together with the earlier maternal figure of Mary the queen of heaven, mother of sorrows, intercessor and worker of miracles.<sup>43</sup>

"But above all follow Mary in her virtues, especially in her sacred purity. Abhor improper thoughts, desires, speech and deeds. Only she who strives to resemble her also in sacred purity truly venerates Mary."<sup>44</sup>

"To preserve your purity you must not only pray, you must also practise a degree of mortification. Besides the compulsory fasts, fast in honour of the Virgin Mary too. [...] Keep your eyes under control; it is dangerous to look at things you must not desire. [...] Read pious books, so that you can grow in faith and in your knowledge of the

40 *Dicsőség! Békesség! [Glory! Peace!]* 1944. 626.

41 SCHLÖGL 1995. 17.

42 *Vezérszillag az örök üdv elnyerésére [Lodestar to Eternal Salvation]* 1860. 380.

43 SCHLÖGL 1995. 37.

44 *Dicsértessék a Jézus Krisztus [Praised Be Jesus Christ]* 1891. 171.

religious ceremonies. [...] during amusements do not forget that you are a Christian and a follower of the Virgin Mary."<sup>45</sup>

"Preserve me, Oh Lord! from the main enemies of virginal innocence, from vanity and affectation. Close my ears and heart to words of flattery and temptation however free of danger they may seem. Stir up in me disdain and abhorrence for anything that would make me blush before myself and your all-seeing eyes."<sup>46</sup>

The prayer texts cited here, that were presented for young girls, clearly illustrate the lack of trust that characterised Catholic opinion of everything that belonged to the bourgeois world that was emerging at that time in which they saw the possibility of sin undermining morals. It raised as the principal example to follow the figure of Mary conceived immaculately and embodying Christian purity, virginity and obedience, as the counter pole to the symbolic figure of the period, the *femme fatale* tending to extremes, eroticism and sentimentalism. Accordingly, instilling an awareness of the "Marian" virtues came to play an important part in preparation for the life of a woman. This is indicated in the expressions "faithful daughter of Mary" and "children of Mary" that appear in the titles and texts of prayer books. This thought formed the main pillar of Catholic education for girls that was just beginning at that time. It functioned as a word of invitation that the clergy hoped would help the faithful, in the present case young girls and women, to resist the temptations of the age and stay far from the paths of sin. This was important, as the clergy saw that they could bring about the moral, religious and mental renewal of the entire society through the women and mothers. Placing Mary as the second, perfect Eve, in the centre underlined this teaching.

The dogma of the immaculate conception adopted at that time (1854) declared this idea of the church. The proclamation of the dogma and the "Marian century" that began with it were a good match for the internal consolidation of the church made necessary because of the secularisation processes.<sup>47</sup> In the opinion of Wolfgang Beinert, since the Counter-Reformation Mary appeared as the symbol of difference, of self-certainty and her figure was always evoked when Catholic identity and superiority were in need of reinforcement. The decline that could be observed in religious life throughout Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century again created such a situation.<sup>48</sup> Certain specifically Catholic religious teachings and forms of behaviour were revived in order to shape a uniform Catholic awareness and to strictly dissociate believers from the rival world-views. In this idea for the revival of Catholic life we can observe an unaccustomed dynamism of the Marian devotions and their mobilising power. Numerous confraternities were formed, World

<sup>45</sup> *Mária kongreganisták kézikönyve [Handbook of the Congregations of Mary]* s.d., 89.

<sup>46</sup> *Hajadonok őrangyala [Guardian Angel of Single Women]* 1858. 268.

<sup>47</sup> The period began and ended with the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception (1854) and the Assumption (1950). This period saw a new flourishing and great popularity of the veneration of Mary that had been pushed into the background by the Enlightenment and rationalism. BEINERT 1984. 71-85; SÖVEGES 2007. 221-223.

<sup>48</sup> On the growth of religious indifference see the literature cited in footnote 18.

Marian Congresses, Marian Saturdays, prayer nones, prayer eighths, and Marian five-year plans were organised.<sup>49</sup> Copies of votive statues were sent from place to place, nations were commended to the Heart of Mary, books on her life<sup>50</sup> and magazines<sup>51</sup> were published. New and frequent apparitions of Mary also further strengthened her cult.<sup>52</sup>

## Summing up

Reading the prayer texts one can feel how the members of the clergy strove to hold up examples for the women and girls among the believers that they thought could serve as an effective counterbalance to the attractive Noras, Madame Bovarys and Anna Kareninas of the period. They needed models with which women could identify that could unite in a single whole without contradictions the pious faith required by the church and the demand to preserve an everyday bourgeois existence.<sup>53</sup> This was not easily achieved: the roles of Catholic Christian and of urban bourgeois did not necessarily coincide. They were roles that could be chosen and combined in various ways, harmonising them required an effort from believers.<sup>54</sup> The members of the clergy gave clear guidance in this situation: become like the principal model, the Virgin Mary and copy her virtues (purity, obedience, renunciation) to become the priestess of the family altar. The authors of prayer and meditation texts also stressed the Marian virtues in the lives of the saints. They insisted on them because the only protection they saw in face of the dangers in the modern world lay in these strict bans. This view remained unchanged in the prayer books I examined from the end of the 1850s right up to the 1940s. But while in society we can observe the differentiation of many widely differing areas of life in the society, the church conserved its position, making it difficult to harmonise the various roles.

49 National congresses focusing on the person and veneration of Mary held during the period examined: Livorno 1895, Torino 1898, Lyon 1898; international congresses: Fribourg 1902, Rome 1904, Einsiedeln 1906, Zaragoza 1908, Salzburg 1910, Trier 1912. KL VIII., 2003. <http://lexikon.katolikus.hu/M/M%C3%A1ria-tisztelet.html> Accessed on 1 December 2015.

50 The best known biographies of Mary in Hungary during this period were: MUNKAY, János: *A boldogságos Szűz Máriának élete [Life of the Blessed Virgin Mary]*. Pest, BUCSÁNSZKY, 1854; INTAY, Vazul András: *Jézus és Mária élete [Lives of Jesus and Mary]*. Pest, EMICH Gusztáv Nyomdája, 1867; LÉVAY, Mihály: *A boldogságos Szűz Mária élete, tisztelete, szenthelyei, legendái – művelt nagyközönség számára [Life of the Blessed Virgin Mary, her veneration, shrines and legends – for the educated public]*. Budapest, Franklin Társulat, 1935; KÜHÁR, Flóris: *Szűz Mária élete [Life of the Virgin Mary]*. Budapest, Szent István Társulat, 1938.

51 They included: *Nagyasszonyunk [Our Lady], Mária kongregáció, [Congregation of Mary] Rózsafüzér Királynője [Queen of the Rosary], Mária Virágoskertje [Mary's Flower Garden]*.

52 Vision of Catherine Labouré – 1830, La Salette – 1846, Lourdes – 1854, Fatima – 1917.

53 SCHLÖGL 1995. 17.

54 SCHLÖGL 1993. 110-111.

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