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BELL CHIMES AND THE ROLE OF BELLS IN THE LIFE OF A COMMUNITY AND THE REQUISITION OF BELLS FOR MILITARY PURPOSES (1917–1918)

Abstract: The article examines the question of bells requisitioned and melted down for military purposes during the First World War through the example of Csongrád, a small Hungarian Catholic town. It examines the role played by the parish priest and the strategies used to save the bells. To assess the extent of the loss to the community it describes the bells in Csongrád before 1917, the way in which they were rung and the local characteristics of the bells.¹ The research reveals the local characteristics of a changing set of customs under the influence of a historical event. The efforts made to save the bells illustrate the expanding moral and ethical role of the priesthood.

Keywords: parish history, bell-ringing customs, First World War, requisition

Csongrád bells before 1917

In the late 17th and early 18th century Csongrád had a small church named after Hungarian King Saint Stephen, built of reed, timber and stone without a tower.² According to a protocol drawn up in 1716 the fittings of the church included two small and a larger bell.³ The first inventory drawn up in 1726 in the Church of Our Lady (now Saint Roch) built after the small church was destroyed by fire, also mentions these bells.⁴ The larger bell was dedicated to the Assumption of

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1 Data on the “enlisted” Csongrád bells have survived in the second volume of the *Historia Domus* thanks to the care of the parish priest. Although the notes made by the parish priest Dr. Thury have been published earlier by Dudás – Kóhegyi, I have noted the physical parameters and inscriptions of the bells in the footnotes to facilitate identification. DUDÁS – KÓHEGYI 2000.

2 It stood in the yard of the house at what is now Szent Rókus tér 4.

3 VPL LVis. Liber 3. 92–94.

4 VPL LVis. Liber 3. 400–401. 1726. For more details, see: BARA 2016.

Mary, one of the smaller bells to King Saint Stephen. The name of the third is unknown.⁵

The only information preserved in the records on the bell of the chapel of Saints Roch, Rosalia and Sebastian, built in 1738 (behind the present Church of Our Lady) is that it was later used in the cemetery and until it broke.⁶ By 1761 the number of bells had increased to five;⁷ In 1778 seven bells hung in the temporary belfry built beside the church.⁸ We have precise data on only two of the bells from that period. A small, damaged bell cast in 1758, that must have escaped attention during the requisition in 1917 (or the parish priest may have remained tactfully silent about it) can still be found in the storeroom of the parish church of Our Lady.⁹ The other, the Assumption of Mary bell cast in 1760 was very likely made by melting down the Assumpta bell listed in the very first inventory – perhaps at the time the new parish church was built. Like the previous one, this bell mentioned as the “old second” bell, was made in the Buda workshop of Antal Zechenter; it had a relief on its body of Jesus on the cross.¹⁰

Parish priest András Kanyó had the “old big bell” in today’s Church of Our Lady made in the year the tower was built (1784). The first entry in Hungarian in the Csongrád *Historia Domus* is one of the parish priest’s sermons in which he encouraged the faithful to donate more generously. We know from the sermon that, thanks to the parish priest, two other priests, the chaplains and the parish servants, they had already collected 142 forints 9 krajcárs for the bell.¹¹ The Csongrád parishioners must have heeded the parish priest’s words: in the same year they ordered from the Buda workshop of János Brunner the large bell¹² that glorified the protecting Trinity. To mark a death the people of Csongrád paid 50 krajcárs for each set of chimes. The bell-ringer rang the smaller bells in the parish church free of charge.¹³

A year later they fished out of the Körös river a “phantom bell” that according to its inscription had been made in Eperjes (today Prešov in Slovakia).¹⁴ Accord-

5 VPL APar. Cs. 1735.

6 DUDÁS – KÓHEGYI 2000. 389.

7 VPL LVis. Liber 6. 26–29 June 1761.

8 VPL LVis. Liber 7. 1778.

9 The passing bell was made in 1758 in the Buda workshop of Antal Zechenter. Its inscription: GOSCH MICH ANTONI ZECHENTER IN OFEN ANNO 1758. NPI *Historia Domus* Vol. II, 25.

10 Weight of the bell 354 kg, diameter 86 cm, height 78 cm. Inscription: HAEC CAMPANA FUSA EST IN HONOREM B. MARIA VIRGINIS IN COELOS ASSUMPTAE PRO ECCLA CSONGRADIENSI ANNO 1760. GOSS MICH ANTON ZECHENTER IN OFEN 1760. NPI *Historia Domus* Vol. II, 25.

11 NPI *Historia Domus* Vol. I, 37–40.

12 Weight 843 kg, diameter 113 cm, height 100 cm. Inscription: IN HONOREM SS. TRINITATIS SUM BUDAE ANNO 1785. PRO CSONGRÁD. JOHANN BRUNNER GOSS MICH IN OFEN. NPI *Historia Domus* Vol. II, 26.

13 VPL APar. Cs. 4 July 1891. Letter from Antal Hegyi to the Vác Episcopal See.

14 Referring to László Tari, local historian Lajos Dudás also stated that it was pulled out of the Körös river on 4 March 1785. Tari 1977. 13. The original inscription on the bell: MAR IHS GOSSE MICH ANNO MDCXXXII GEORG WIERD IN EPPERIES. It weighed one hundredweight 15 pounds. NPI *Historia Domus* Vol. II, 26–27.

ing to the legend the tiny Saint Stephen's church, the predecessor of the present Saint Roch church did not have a bell so an old hand bell was used to signal that mass was about to begin. When the hand bell was rung, the people of Csongrád heard the muffled sound of a bell coming up from the Tisza river. For a long while fishermen superstitiously avoided the spot from where the mysterious sounds were heard. Until one of them caught in his net the bell that for two centuries served as the passing bell of the Saint Roch Church. At the time the bell was raised from the river an old beggar said that the people of Csongrád would only have the bell for as long as they rang it for the salvation of souls drowned in the river.¹⁵ The small bell also known as the "little second" cracked in 1912 and the authorities had it recast in the workshop of Antal Novotny in Temesvár (now Timișoara, Romania).¹⁶

The present Saint Roch Church's only bell, the Roch bell that can still be seen today was ordered by the town, as the holder of the advowson, in 1793 from the bell founder József Brunner of Buda.¹⁷ The date the bell was made figures mistakenly in several church inventories and also in the relevant literature.¹⁸ The bells that served the filial church right up to 1818, when the tower was built, hung in a wooden belfry near the church.

The old bell from the Felgyó estate (that according to the literature "survived" the requisitioning) was made in 1813 in the Pest workshop of Henrik Eberhard.¹⁹ In 1825 parishioners of the Saint Roch Church had a 286-kilogram bell made, with the figures of Saint Anne, Saint Sebastian, Saint Florian and Saint Nicholas in relief on the body.²⁰ Half a century later a new bell was placed in the tower of Saint Roch Church – beside the two already there.²¹ This small bell was ordered by the town as holder of the advowson; it was sent to Vác to be consecrated as a *passing bell*.²² In 1891 (for reasons unknown) the sources mention only two bells in the Saint Roch Church. The town has these two bells adjusted at its own expense – presumably the suspension system was changed.²³

15 GÁT 2006. 162; GyÖNGYÖSSY 2016. 101.

16 *Csongrádi Újság*, 29 December 1912. Vol. X, no. 52, p. 3. Weight of the new passing bell 53 kg, diameter 47 cm, height only 40 cm. New inscription: D.O.M. KÉSZÜLT EPERJESÉN 1632 BEN. UJRAÖNTÖTTE: NOVOTNY ANTAL TEMEVÁROTT 1913 BAN. [D.O.M. MADE IN EPERJES IN 1632. RECAST BY ANTAL NOVOTNY IN TEMESVÁR IN 1913.] Dudás (manuscript) 1997. 5.

17 Inscription: GOSS MICH IOSEPH BRUNNER IN OFEN / IN HONOREM ST ROCHI COMUNITAS CSONGRADIENSIS CURAVIT 1793.

18 The bell is mentioned in an 1842 church visitation protocol and in the 1885 church inventory. Both places state that the bell was made in 1723. Cf. VPL LVIs. Liber 17. 154. 1842; NPI Inventory of the Saint Roch church, 1885; Dudás – KőHEGYI 2000. 394.

19 Dudás – KőHEGYI 2000. 395.

20 The "old bell" was of middling size and weight: 286 kg, diameter 84 cm, height 74.5 cm. Inscription: AUDIT HENRIENS EBERHARDT, PESTINI 1825. NPI Historia Domus Vol. II, 26.

21 The small bell weighed 24 kg, diameter 35 cm, height 30 cm. Inscription: CSONGRÁD VÁROS KÖZÖNSÉGE NEVÉBEN CSONGRÁD VÁROS RENDEZETT TANÁCSÚ HATÓSÁGA 1874. [ON BEHALF OF THE PEOPLE OF CSONGRÁD BY THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL OF CSONGRÁD 1874.] NPI Historia Domus Vol. II, 27.

22 VPL APar. Cs. 23 March 1875. Letter from József Szvoboda to the Diocesan Office.

23 NPI 14 July 1891. Letter from the Csongrád assembly to the Bishop of Vác.

The Csongrád parish priest who had the most bells made was Antal Hegyi (1886–1902). The two quintal Agnus Dei (“little second”) bell of the Church of Our Lady was recast in a larger size in 1891 because of a crack; it was raised up into the tower on 24 April, attracting much interest.²⁴ We do not know when the first bell was originally made.²⁵

Parish priest Antal Hegyi devoted special attention to fostering the veneration of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.²⁶ He had new statues made (1888), he increased the membership of the Csongrád Sacred Heart Society to several thousand, he taught the faithful the songs of the Sacred Heart cult – from his own publication that he had produced for the Society.²⁷ In 1889, when the spring flood threatened Csongrád with disaster, Antal Hegyi commended the suffering settlement to the protection of the Sacred Heart. When the flood subsided the parish priest officially proposed to the diocesan bishop that the feast of the Sacred Heart be a special votive day in Csongrád. Konstantin Schuszter approved the request with the proviso that there should continue to be no ban on work on the Friday following the second Sunday after Whitsun. Antal Hegyi wished to crown the successfully expanded Sacred Heart cult with a bell bigger than any of the previous bells. In 1891 he had stonemasons measure the load-bearing capacity of the tower. He accepted with disappointment that the tower could not take the strain of a three ton bell.²⁸ A bell of the largest size specified by the masons (1.8 tons) was ordered from the Buda workshop of Ferenc Walser for the price of 4800 forints, with a 15-year guarantee.

People attending the Feast of Assumption witnessed the arrival of the Sacred Heart bell at the parish church. According to tradition it was cast from the same giant Belgian cannon as the bell of Matthias Church in Budapest.²⁹ At the official raising of the bell the parish priest scattered coins from the tower among

24 *Csongrádi Lap*, 26 April 1891. Vol. I, no. 12, p. 3. The bell originally weighed 85 kg. After recasting its weight became 204 kg, diameter 67 cm, height 60 cm. Inscription: AGNUS DEI QUI TOLLIS PECCATA MUNDI MISERERE NOBIS / IN HONOREM FILII DEI PRO ECCLIA PAROCHIALI CSONGRADIENSI HAEC CAMPANA REFUSA ET AMPLIFICATA EST ANNO 1891. Walser F. Budapest. NPI *Historia Domus* Vol. II, 26.

25 This is probably the bell that according to one record was made in 1742. DUDÁS – KŐHEGYI 2000. 389.

26 Cult based on the vision of Margaret Mary Alacoque (1674) that spread with the support of the Jesuits and became popular in the 19th century.

27 *Jézus és Mária Szent Szíveinek dicsérete. Imakönyv a csongrádi Jézus Szent Szíve Társulat tagjainak használatára.* [In Praise of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. Prayerbook for the use of members of the Csongrád Sacred Heart Society.] A FT. Egyházmegyei hatóság engedelmével kiadja: A Társulat Elöljárósága. Szilber János nyomdája Csongrádon. 1903. CsKK TLM NA 94-2008.1

28 VPL APar. Cs. 22 June 1891. Letter from Antal Hegyi to the Vác Episcopal See.

29 *Csongrádi Újság*, 13 June 1909. Vol. VII, no. 24, p. 2. According to data given by Lajos Dudás the bell was somewhat lighter, 1431 kg. Dudás (manuscript) 1997. 6. Inscription: IN HONORUM SS. CORDIS D.N. JESU CHRISTI REGNANTE SS. MO PONTIFICE LEONE XIII. ANTISTITE VACIENSI SCHUSZTER REGE APOSTOLICO FRANCISCO JOZEFŐ I. PATRONO ALEXANDRO KÁROLYI COMITE J. V. K. HAEC CAMPANA MAJOR CURIS ET STUDIIS ANTONII HEGYI PAROCHI PRO ECCLESIA CSONGRADIENSI FUSA EST ANNO 1891. Cast by Ferenc Walser in Budapest. NPI *Historia Domus* Vol. II, 29.

the onlookers.³⁰ For the occasion Antal Hegyi had the parish church's other bells adjusted.³¹

The Sacred Heart bell was rung at three o'clock every Friday afternoon with the exception of Good Friday – in remembrance of Christ's death on the cross; on major church feasts this bell was also rung at dawn, noon and evening. There was a separate fund for the bell: mourning families paid 2 forints 30 crowns for each set of chimes. It must have been a substantial source of income given that family members of wealthier deceased in Csongrád had the bell rung for the repose of their souls every hour up to the day of the funeral.³²

The weight and vibrations of the bells in the tower of the Church of Our Lady began to cause cracks in the vault of the church around the turn of the century. The author of an article in *Csongrádi Lap* noted ominously that ever since the Sacred Heart bell had been placed in the tower there was a danger that the vault would collapse on the heads of the congregation.³³ A year later a piece of masonry weighing around a hundredweight did in fact fall from the exterior of the tower.³⁴ In the summer of 1910 the bells were withdrawn from use for an extended period while the axis was replaced. In 1913 the old big bell had to be silenced for a few days for the repair of faults resulting from regular use.³⁵

The earliest Csongrád cemetery bell was probably the one transported by boat from Pest in 1851, personally accompanied to Csongrád by the parish priest Lajos Virter.³⁶ The second cemetery bell glorified the risen Christ; it was made in 1891, during the time of parish priest Antal Hegyi.³⁷ The big cemetery bell weighing ten hundredweight and tuned to E flat was paid for by a bequest in the will of János Kuruczleki who died without descendants. The bell worth two thousand forints was consecrated in the name of the donor's patron saint, Saint John the Apostle in 1896. The bell arrived by train from the workshop of Antal Novotny in Temesvár. Following the will of the donor it was rung for half an hour every year at the time of his death (at one in the afternoon of 16 October) for the repose of his soul and

30 *Csongrádi Lap*, 30 August 1891. Vol. I, no. 30, p. 3.

31 "Among the old bells, the modification of the big bell and the passing bell was very successful, but that of the so-called big second did not succeed because its clapper became so heavy that it was hardly able to strike the bell. The bell founder says the cause of the problem is that the old bell loop was not placed in the centre of the bell and so the bell is not properly balanced when it swings. [According to Antal Hegyi the problem was that the bell was too close to the old big bell below it and so there was not enough space for a sufficiently long mechanism for the clapper. As a result it struck only one side of the bell, that opposite the rope.] Another fault was that the axle bed of the small second bell snapped when the bell was fitted and so has to be replaced." VPL APar. Cs. 18 September 1891. Letter from Antal Hegyi to the Vác Diocesan Authority.

32 VPI APar. Cs. 4 July 1891. Letter from Antal Hegyi to the Vác Diocesan Authority.

33 *Csongrádi Lap*, 5 June 1904. Vol. XIV, no. 23, p. 3.

34 "All those bells and bell-ringing are damaging the tower." *Csongrádi Újság*, 1 May 1904. Vol. II, no. 18, p. 3.

35 *Csongrádi Újság*, 20 July 1913. Vol. XI, no. 29, p. 2.

36 Cited by: DUDÁS (manuscript) 1997. 6.

37 Weight 120 kg, diameter 57 cm, height 49 cm. Inscription: IN HONOREM RESURECTIONIS DN. JESU CR. FUSA 1891. ÖNTÖTTE [CAST BY] WALSER F. BUDAPEST. NPI Historia Domus Vol. II, 28.

that of his deceased wife.³⁸ It was rung by the cemetery caretaker three times a day and for burials. In the following decades the cemetery belfry was often chosen as the place for suicides.³⁹

Because the people of Csongrád too were of the opinion that *an honest person does not settle in a place where the bells cannot be heard*, parallel with the process of creating growing numbers of scattered farms more and more belfries were erected in outlying areas. One of the earliest known of these bells stood in an area called the Old Vineyards; we know that by 1853 it had a paid bell-ringer.⁴⁰ This bell cracked in 1868; the authorities had it repaired with the costs covered by public contributions.⁴¹ Most of the belfries erected in the second half of the 19th century and early 20th century were located next to farm schools, where priests from the town also held religious services. Pupils of the schools or a temporary “bell-ringer” living in the vicinity rang these bells three times a day.⁴² In 1916 there were 13 belfries in the extensive outlying areas of Csongrád.

The dedication of the Csongrád bells allows us to draw conclusions regarding the living cults and the most popular saints. On the basis of the known reliefs and inscriptions,⁴³ the dedications of the Csongrád bells before 1917 were the following: the bell of the *Blessed Lady taken up to Heaven* with a relief of *Christ crucified*;⁴⁴ *Saint Stephen*,⁴⁵ *Holy Trinity*;⁴⁶ relief of *Saint Anne*, *Saint Nicholas*, *Saint Sebastian*

38 A special fee was charged for ringing the big cemetery bell: one forint 30 krajcárs for each set of chimes, of which 30 krajcárs went to the cemetery caretaker. *Csongrádi Közlöny*, 5 January 1895. Vol. 1, p. 3. The bell weighed: 1049 kg, diameter: 126 cm, height: 108 cm. Inscription: A VILÁG ELMŰLIK EZ AZ ÓKÍVÁNSÁGA. AKI PEDIG ISTEN AKARATÁT MEGTESZI MINDÖRÖKKÉ MEGMARAD. JÁN 2.17 EZEN HARANGOT SZENT JÁNOS EVANGÉLISTA TISZTELETÉRE ISTENBEN BOLDOGULT KURUCZLEKI JÁNOS ÉS SZIVÁK JULIANNA HITESPÁR VÉGRENDELETI HAGYOMÁNYÁBÓL A CSONGRÁDI RÓM. KAT. TEMETŐNEK ÖNTETTE HEGYI ANTAL PLÉBÁNOS AZ ÚRNAK 1896. ÉVÉBEN. AZ ÉLŐKET HÍVOM, A HOLTAKAT SIRATOM, A VILLÁMOKAT ELHÁRÍTOM. NOVOTNY ANTAL TEMESVÁROTT, [THE WORLD AND ITS DESIRES PASS AWAY BUT HE WHO DOES THE WILL OF GOD LIVES FOREVER. JOHN 2.17. ORDERED BY PARISH PRIEST ANTAL HEGYI IN 1896 FOR THE CSONGRÁD RC CEMETERY IN HONOUR OF SAINT JOHN THE EVANGELIST FROM THE LEGACY OF THE DEVOUT JÁNOS KURUCZLEKI AND HIS WIFE JULIANNA SZIVÁK. I CALL THE LIVING, MOURN THE DEAD, WARD OFF LIGHTNING. ANTAL NOVOTNY TEMESVÁR] NPI Historia Domus Vol. II, 27.

39 *Csongrádi Újság*, 20 July 1913. Vol. XI, no. 29, p. 2; *Csongrádi Lap*, 10 May 1914. Vol. XXIV, no. 19, p. 2.

40 In 1853 István Lantos vineyard bell-ringer complained to the municipal authority that although he was entitled to a payment of 2 garas from the larger vineyard owners and 1 garas from the smaller owners, very few of them paid him. He requests that his income be paid from the municipal funds – as it was earlier because of the same difficulties. The representatives voted in favour of payment of an annual sum of 3 pengőforints. Forgó – Forgó 1987. 62.

41 MNL CsML CsL Community documents, 29 February 1868. Minutes no. 145.

42 “Among the vineyards there stands a cross [...] with a small belfry beside it, that is rung at dawn, noon and evening.” VPL APriv. János Mátyus, 10 May 1823. Letter from the Csongrád judges to the Vác diocesan bishop.

43 We do not know the dedication of all bells.

44 This is presumably the Blessed Lady bell mentioned in 1735, recast. Church of Our Lady 1760.

45 Former parish church (now Saint Roch Church), mentioned: 1735.

46 Church of Our Lady 1785.

and Saint Florian;⁴⁷ Sacred Heart bell with reliefs of an angel and a pelican;⁴⁸ Sacred Heart bell with the relief of a heart surrounded by a crown of thorns;⁴⁹ Immaculate Heart of the Virgin Mary;⁵⁰ Agnus Dei (Lamb of God) bell with a cross;⁵¹ Christ resurrected;⁵² Saint John the Evangelist;⁵³ and Saint Roch⁵⁴.

The early Saint Stephen bell had the same dedication as the old church that burnt down: for the people of Csongrád this saint and Hungarian king was their protector against the Turks and the challenges of the Reformation. Although one of the first bells of the church was dedicated to the Assumption of Mary, the living cult of Mary in Csongrád is not reflected in the dedications of the bells; typically they were dedicated to the adoration of Christ crucified and resurrected, and glorified him as the Lamb of God.

It would appear that veneration of the Holy Trinity in Csongrád had remained popular since the early 18th century (see the tympanum of the altars in today's Saint Roch Church – 1723–24; Holy Trinity bell – 1785; Holy Trinity sculptural group – 1869). The reason for the cult could be the protection it offered against plagues and other dangers – that is, it closely resembled the veneration of Saint Roch.

As a memory of the revived cult of Sebastian during the epidemic of the plague, the people of Csongrád called the “old big bell” in today's Saint Roch Church decorated with reliefs of Saint Anne, Saint Nicholas, Saint Sebastian and Saint Florian, the Sebastian bell. The portrayals of Bishop Saint Nicholas and Saint Florian are the only ones in the town, we do not know of any other cult symbol attached to them. The appearance of Saint Florian on the bell could have represented the wish to ward off fires, while the fishermen and navvies of Csongrád-Belsőváros who had the bell made could have looked for help from the Bishop of Myra who supported the poor.

We know that under the influence of the Franciscans the veneration of the grandmother of Jesus, patron of family peace and childbirth was already popular in the settlement in the 18th century. Both churches in Csongrád had a Saint Anne altar, her feast was celebrated with special pomp. Later a booklet in praise of Saint Anne was compiled by parish priest Antal Hegyi.⁵⁵

The two Sacred Heart and Heart of Mary bells were the result of the systematic pastoral work of parish priest Antal Hegyi. The imposing Sacred Heart bell proclaimed the cult of the town's “new protector”, while the bells of the

47 Saint Roch Church 1825.

48 Church of Our Lady 1891.

49 Homoki Chapel, Bokros, 1900.

50 Homoki Chapel, Bokros, 1906.

51 Church of Our Lady 1891.

52 Cemetery bell, 1891.

53 Cemetery bell, 1891.

54 Saint Roch Church 1723.

55 NPI *Szent Anna asszony tisztelete*. A Ft. Egyházmegyei Hatóság engedélyével kiadott a csongrádi keresztény hívek használatára. [*Veneration of Saint Anne*. Published with the permission of the Diocesan Authority for the use of the Christian faithful of Csongrád.] Csongrádi Közlöny nyomdája, 1896.

Bokros-puszta (Homoki) chapel erected at the initiative of the parish priest created the sacral centre (“heart”) of a cluster of farms that was gradually becoming a settlement.⁵⁶

The Saint John bell in the cemetery pays tribute to the memory of the fiery apostle Saint John who raised the dead and occupied a place beside Jesus. The quotation from the First Epistle of John reminds the faithful of the mortality of all things.

Regarding the place where the bells were made, before the railway was built between Csongrád and Kiskunfélegyháza they were always ordered from bell founders in Buda (Zechenter, Eberhard, Brunner, Walser), as the safest way of transporting them was by boat down the Danube and up the Tisza. In the last decade of the 19th century bells for Csongrád were also cast in Arad and Temesvár (Hőnig, Novotny), and transported by rail to the settlement. Seeing the many orders arriving from Csongrád from the increasingly prosperous farming and vine-growing population, for years Novotny and Walser – the main rival bell founders – advertised in the local papers.



In the 1910s the Csongrád parish possessed and supervised a total of 25 bells: three in the cemetery, three in the Saint Roch Church in Belsőváros, four in the Church of Our Lady, two in the Bokros (Homoki) Chapel, and 13 in the outlying areas.

Advertisement by the legal successor of the Walser factory in *Csongrádi Lap*, 20 February 1898, Vol. VIII, no. 9, p. 4.

56 The big bell in the Homoki Chapel weighed 96 kg, diameter 64 cm, height 55 cm. Inscription: JÉZUS SZENTSÉGES SZÍVE TISZTELETÉRE ÖNTETTÉK A CSONGRÁD-HOMOKI HÍVEK 1900 BAN. OH JÉZUSOM ÉDES SZÍVE, ADD HOGY TÉGED MINDIG JOBBAN SZERESSELEK. HŐNIG F. ÖNTÖDÉJE ARADON. [CAST AT THE ORDER OF THE FAITHFUL OF CSONGRÁD-HOMOKI IN 1900 IN HONOUR OF THE SACRED HEART. OH SWEET HEART OF MY JESUS, MAY I ALWAYS LOVE YOU MORE. CAST BY F. HŐNIG IN ARAD.] NPI Historia Domus Vol. II, 27; The smaller bell in the Homoki Chapel weighed 61 kg. Inscription: SZŰZ MÁRIA SZEPLŐTELEN SZÍVÉNEK TISZTELETÉRE ÖNTETTE HEGYI ANTAL PLÉBÁNOS 1906. SZŰZ MÁRIA ÉDES SZÍVE LÉGY AZ ÉN MENEDÉKEM. ÖNTÖTTE: HŐNIG F. ARAD. [CAST AT THE ORDER OF PARISH PRIEST ANTAL HEGYI IN HONOUR OF THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY 1906. SWEET HEART OF VIRGIN MARY BE MY REFUGE. CAST BY F. HŐNIG, ARAD.]

Use of the bells

The descriptions of the Csongrád bells include information on the way they were used. We know from these, as well as from other sources, that the winter and summer bell-ringing practice differed: From Saint Michael's day to Saint George's day, that is, in the winter period the *Angelus* bell rang on weekdays at 5 a.m. and again at 7 p.m. For many people the morning bell meant the time of awakening and morning prayers, and in the evening – after prayers – the animals were driven in, girls walking in the town returned home and the gates were closed. During the summer period the bells rang an hour later; the time of the noon bell remained unchanged.⁵⁷ The bells were rung as a reminder one hour or half an hour before the start of mass, as well as at the beginning and end of mass.⁵⁸

The bell-ringer noticed from afar the approach of pilgrims arriving with banners for the church feast and welcomed them with continuous bell-ringing.⁵⁹ The bells were rung for an hour on All Souls Day in remembrance of the dead. There was also long ringing to mark the birthday of the king and the pope, and when the diocesan bishop visited the town.

Besides their everyday use, the bells in Csongrád were rung mainly as a mark of respect for the dead. When parish priest András Kanyó explained to parishioners the need for a big bell he spoke mainly of the role it would play in the cult of the dead:

“This will be the bell that will encourage you, my dear faithful, in the service of God. It will be the bell that reminds you every hour it chimes that you must be ready at any time for your last moment. In a word: This will be the bell that tolls its mournful sound when you take your last farewell from this sinful world, accompanying you on your journey to the cemetery.”⁶⁰

In 1843 the bell-ringer provided one set of chimes for everyone to ease the passing of the seriously ill. A payment of six krajcárs had to be made for each further set of chimes.⁶¹ The order of chimes of the passing bell indicated the gender of the dead mainly by the inclusion or exclusion of a pause.⁶² Even the poorest families made an effort in addition to the expense of a wake, to pay to have the

57 From Saint Michael's day to Saint George's day weekday masses were held at 6 and 8 a.m. *Csongrádi Közlöny*, 27 September 1896. Vol. III, no. 39, p. 3.

58 DUDÁS – KÓHEGYI 2000. 387.

59 *Csongrádi Közlöny*, 18 August 1895. Vol. II, no. 33, p. 3.

60 NPI *Historia Domus* Vol. I, 39.

61 VPL APar. Cs. 17 September 1843. Letter from András Keviczky bell-ringer to the Bishop of Vác.

62 For the death of an adult man the bell-ringer rang the big bell three times, then after a short pause rang the passing bell (--- : +++). If the deceased was a woman there was no pause (--- +++). For a male child two chimes were rung with the big bell bell, then after a pause the passing bell (--- : +++), for a girl there was no pause between the two (--- +++). EGYHÁZI – MÉSZÁROS (manuscript) 1976.

big bell rung.⁶³ Parish priest János Mátyus criticised this custom in the following words:

“You have the big bell rung so much that it almost deafens me in my room and it threatens to crack the bell; you take your leave of the dead but you never want to have a requiem mass said for them!”⁶⁴

We know of only one case, during the cholera epidemic in 1855, when bell-ringing for the repose of the dead was restricted at the request of the chief administrative officer:

[because] “the constant bell-ringing in the present period causes considerable alarm, I consider it would be expedient to limit the bell-ringing to no more than a specified one or at the most two hours a day.”⁶⁵

In 1867 the municipal authorities terminated free bell-ringing also in the Saint Roch Church they maintained: they charged ten krajcárs for each set of chimes rung for the repose of the dead. They also introduced the measure that the bells of the parish church would be rung for deceased persons from Belsőváros only for a separate fee.⁶⁶

The sound of the bells was illustrated with a different, usually humorous verse, in each settlement: the Csongrád variant has survived thanks to collecting done by participants in a Know Your Country Students Camp held in 1976:

“Gingalló, szent ajtó,
főzz kását, nincsen só!
Ha nincs só, kérj mástól,
ha nem ád, vágd pofon!”

[Ding dong, sacred door,
make porridge, without salt.
Ask for salt from someone else,
if they have none, slap them hard.]⁶⁷

Even in recent decades the people of Csongrád rang the bells to ward off hail, mainly in the outlying areas. In 1901, when the Csongrád parish priest refused

63 DUDÁS (manuscript) 1997. 2. A fee of four crowns per set of chimes was charged for the 15-quintal big Sacred Heart bell. *Set*: A ‘unit’ of uninterrupted chimes.

64 VPL APriv. János Mátyus, 10 May 1823. Letter from the Csongrád magistrates to the Bishop of Vác.

65 MNL CsML CsL Papers of Lajos Dudás, 21. d. 8 August 1855. Letter from the chief magistrate to parish priest Lajos Virter.

66 MNL CsML CsL Community documents, V. B. 42. 16 March 1867. Minutes no. 119

67 EGYHÁZI – MÉSZÁROS (manuscript) 1976.

permission to ring the bells against the clouds, he was blamed for the damages that followed.⁶⁸

The fire wardens on duty in the Csongrád tower were employed by the settlement. Every quarter hour they walked around the external balcony, greeting people with a loud *Praised be our Lord* to signal that they were awake and vigilant. For fire protection purposes the town was divided into a number of districts: in the case of trouble the tower wardens used the big bell to signal the location of the fire they had observed.⁶⁹ They also placed a flag in the corner of the tower facing the direction of the fire.⁷⁰ The volunteer fire brigade was formed in 1890 but anyone who noticed the danger was required to help in fighting the fire. In the early 20th century the local press called Csongrád the “tower guards Eldorado”, saying that the fire wardens who were often asleep were generally not called to account by their supervisors.⁷¹ In 1871 parish priest Ferenc Alvinczy said that it was because of the lack of space for movement that the tower guards fell asleep so quickly and they were generally not the ones to warn of danger but were woken by people in the town.⁷²

Because of the roof of wood shingles and the firewood stored up in the tower for the use of the guards, the risk of fire in the church tower was very high. Parish priest Antal Hegyi more than once wrote a firmly worded letter to the authorities demanding that the firewood be removed from the tower:

“The authorities of the community of Csongrád have had a dangerous fire risk shoddily built of boards in the church tower, immediately below the bells, for the tower guards and arranged for the most primitive form of heating, without seeking the permission either of the Church Authority or of the holder of the advowson. Since this cubby-hole mistakenly called an alcove greatly endangers the safety of the church and its furnishings, especially considering that a large quantity of firewood is stored in the tower, and taking considerations

68 “The grape harvest promised to be very rich this year. However for many growers this crop was lost. Last Saturday there was such a heavy hailstorm that the whole crop of around 850 hectares was completely destroyed. Many people believe that this hailstorm was caused because the parish did not allow the bells to be rung against the clouds.” *Csongrádi Lap*, 28 July 1901. Vol. XI, no. 30, p. 3.

69 This bell-ringing practice was introduced somewhere around the turn of the 19th to 20th century, before that the bells conveyed only the existence of the danger but not its general location. *Csongrádi Közlöny*, 2 August 1896. Vol. III, no. 31, p. 3.

70 EGYHÁZI – MÉSZÁROS (manuscript) 1976.

71 “In recent weeks there was a fire in Félégyháza and the tower guard, as is the custom in our town too, was sound asleep. [...] The mayor dismissed the tower guard. We feel great pity for the sad fate of the Félégyháza tower guard and sincerely recommend that he come to Csongrád, the Eldorado of tower guards. When even the wire that connects the tower to the town hall serves to wake the tower guard in case of fire and ask him the favour of ringing one of the bells.” *Csongrádi Újság*, 17 May 1908. Vol. VI, no. 20, p. 3.

72 NPI *Historia Domus*, Vol. I, 11.

of economy into account, I was obliged last year to terminate the fire insurance for the church."⁷³

Although it belonged to the church, this part of the highest building in the town was also used for purposes of public security, but there were occasionally disputes over what the community authority could do with the tower and what it could not. In 1886 the minister for religious affairs and public education had to declare that the church tower that was raised and rebuilt in 1886 (on the basis of a clear account of construction costs) constituted the sole property of the Roman Catholic church.⁷⁴

In earlier centuries too the need had arisen to regulate the right to use the bells and dispose of the income from bell-ringing. In 1806 the community authority wanted to restrict begging that had reached excessive proportions by building a hospice for the poor. Since they did not have sufficient funds to begin the construction, they wished to increase the revenue from having the church bells rung and use it for the hospice. This would have meant that the bell-ringer could only ring the bells if the person announcing the death presented evidence of the sum paid to the town hall.⁷⁵ The idea was presented in forceful terms to the parish priest who firmly refused to cooperate. The authority argued in vain that the cost of casting the bell had been covered by donations from Csongrád parishioners, and so the revenue from it should be used for public purposes and to meet the Christian duty of caring for the poor;⁷⁶ parish priest János Mátyus rejected the idea:

"Since such a decision was made without my knowledge and is entirely illegal, it would be harmful both to the dignity of church order and to church law, as well as to the poverty of our church building that is crumbling and leaking in many places."⁷⁷

When parish priest János Edelényi died in 1886, but the new priest had not yet entered into service, the community authority had an alcove created in the tower for the fire wardens. To make space for the alcove, they had one bell placed above the other. As a consequence of the unworkmanlike alteration, five years later it became impossible to use the bell that had been moved up. Parish priest Antal Hegyi also involved his church superiors in the dispute that arose in particular over who should pay for the damage.⁷⁸

73 VPL APar. Cs. 12 November 1891. Letter from Antal Hegyi to the Vác Episcopal See.

74 VPL APar. Cs. 29 January 1892. Letter from the Bishop of Vác to minister Albin Csáky.

75 VPL APar. Cs. 25 January 1806. Extractus Protocolli, letter from the chief magistrate of Csongrád, protocol.

76 "As our town daily expands there are many of our fellow men now without succour, having reached extreme poverty and second childhood, bearing public burdens together with us, it is therefore our principal duty to provide for them as our fellow men." VPL APar. Cs. 5 March 1806. Report of the Csongrád magistrate to the Bishop of Vác.

77 VPL APar. Cs. Letter of reply from János Mátyus to the town, 25 January 1806.

78 VPL APar. Cs. 29 January 1892. Letter from the Bishop of Vác to minister Albin Csáky.

There are examples everywhere of the extraordinary use of bells, mistakes, scandals or accidents involving bells. In 1894, on the day of the funeral of Lajos Kossuth the community leaders asked the parish priest to have the bells rung in honour of the occasion.⁷⁹ Because Kossuth was a Lutheran, parish priest Antal Hegyi (after seeking the opinion of the county bishop) did not allow the big Sacred Heart bell to be rung. But – as a good member of the opposition and supporter of the spirit of 1848 – he had a banner in the national colours placed above the church door, saying: “the bells are consecrated vessels of the church, but the banners are not consecrated”.⁸⁰ However, not everyone accepted his decision: on the day of the funeral a “few lads” used a skeleton key to enter the church tower unnoticed and rang all the bells.⁸¹ On the third of March 1899 the parish priest received a telegram informing him of the death of His Holiness the Pope. On that day all the bells in Csongrád were rung. Later it was found that the pope had merely fallen ill, the information in the telegram was erroneous.⁸² On 18 April 1901 the chains of the clock in the tower of the Church of Our Lady became entangled with the clapper of the big bell causing the bell to emit sounds similar to those of danger warning. This continued until the clapper of the bell broke off. The fire wardens shouted out from the tower to the alarmed residents that there was no emergency, the trouble was caused by the clock.⁸³ A similar case occurred in 1891 when:

“the evening Ave Maria bell chimes almost caused a fatal accident when the clapper broke in two and the bottom half nearly killed the bell-ringer.”⁸⁴

On the whole it can be said that in Csongrád, an almost entirely Roman Catholic settlement, there was always a demand for bell-ringing. The new parish church was originally intended to have two towers that would be able to accommodate as many as 6–8 bells, but this plan was not carried out due to lack of funds. It was always easy to find donors to have new bells cast: the towers of the two churches were filled and belfries of various size were erected in the outlying areas. “Raising” the bell was always a special event as men with hat in hand and women in tears watched the result of their sacrifices, the new bell in the tower, and waited with excitement to hear its first chimes. Bells articulated the everyday lives of the people of Csongrád, watched over them and accompanied them on the major events in their lives.

79 Minutes of the Csongrád Municipal Assembly V. B. 71. 26 March 1894. minutes no. 78.

80 *Csongrádi Közlöny*, 25 November 1894, Vol. I, no. 37, p. 3.

81 *Csongrádi Közlöny*, 8 April 1894, Vol. I. no. 4, p. 4.

82 *Csongrádi Lap*, 5 March 1899, Vol. IX, no. 10, p. 2.

83 *Csongrádi Lap*, 21 April 1901, Vol. XI, no. 16, p. 2.

84 VPL APar. Cs. 2 June 1891. Letter from Antal Hegyi to the Vác Episcopal See.

The requisitioning of bells in Csongrád

There were already examples of the requisitioning of bells, that is, their use by the authorities for military purposes, in the 16th century, for example in the Barcaság region during the time of the election of two kings, and in the months of the 1848-49 revolution and war of independence, largely on a voluntary basis. However, during the First World War the initial, tactful tone of request by 1918 changed to an impatient order, as the shortage of raw materials became a serious problem.

In 1915 the state requested the churches to voluntarily hand in any bells that were dispensable, in return for a payment of four crowns per kilogram. The Ministry of Defence covered the cost of removal and transport, as well as compensation for any damage caused to the tower.⁸⁵ In the same year an itemised list had to be drawn up of all church and convent bells. The parish priests were asked to indicate those that were of artistic value or essential for liturgical service. Barely a year later they began to remove bells on the basis of this list.

At that time Dr. Károly Thury was the Csongrád parish priest. Before his arrival in Csongrád as parish priest he had earned a doctorate in church law at the Budapest University and then became director of the Count Károlyi Catholic institutions and religious instruction teacher at the Újpest College. He showed great interest in the Kolping societies and travelled to Frankfurt to attend the world congress of the association. He visited almost all countries of Europe, everywhere studying the operation of Catholic youth associations. Count László Károlyi appointed him to Csongrád in 1912 as a kind of reward for his successful development of the Catholic Young Men's Society in Újpest.⁸⁶

The young scholar-priest took over leadership of the Csongrád parish with great enthusiasm. The local historian Lajos Dudás has written about his work in Csongrád for the youth societies and for the renewal of the church.⁸⁷ The entries left by Dr. Károly Thury in the *Historia Domus* reveal that he not only had an educated but also a sensitive soul; he was filled with sincere concern at the horrors afflicting parishioners. In his correspondence with the enlisted men and prisoners of war he offered help to anyone in need and also joined in the work of the Red Cross.

Like all priests, Dr. Károly Thury knew from the circular letter of the diocesan bishop about the obligation to remove the bells. The arrival of members of the military bell removal committee could be expected at any time. He also knew that they would leave only four bells in Csongrád: the biggest and the smallest in the Church of Our Lady, the Roch bell in the Saint Roch Church and one cemetery bell. The lines parish priest Károly Thury wrote at that time reflected the impotence he felt:

85 VKM (Ministry of Religious Affairs and Education) 18 August 1915: no. 7903, and circular letter no. 413/1916 of 21 March 1916 addressed to the church authorities.

86 DUDÁS 2000. 84.

87 DUDÁS 2000.

“In February this year great sorrow fell on the Csongrád parishioners. The Moloch of war has already taken their sons, their goods, everything, now it is the turn of the bells [...]. The faithful felt deep sorrow, there was deep sorrow in my heart too, but in spite of that, following the instructions of the bishop the parish priest had to console his parishioners and keep alive in them the hope of victory. What a difficult task it was!”⁸⁸

The committee arrived in Csongrád on 24 February 1917. They removed and took away nine bells in all from the Church of Our Lady, Saint Roch Church, the Homoki Chapel and the cemetery. On that day they also requisitioned a number of 18th century bells. The Eperjes phantom bell was not spared either, it had been recast in 1913 and so did not meet the strict conditions for classification as a historic relic.

Two photographs survive from the day of the removal. In the first we see a crowd of local people in fur hats and head shawls against the February cold and in their midst parish priest Dr. Károly Thury, a teacher, and cantor Illés Kalmár stand in the square in front of the Church of Our Lady, their hands on the disc of the old big bell. Around them await a further six bells in a carefully arranged row, with the administrative marks painted on them by the removal committee. In its



Farewell to the bells in front of the Church of Our Lady, 24 February 1917. Photo: MNL CsML CsL XIV. 3. Papers of Lajos Dudás, 22. d.

⁸⁸ NPI Historia Domus Vol. II, 25.

structure the photo evoked contemporary images of funeral biers. While the cantor and teacher take their leave of the bells departing to war, standing erect with expressions of solemn pride, Dr. Károly Thury bends slightly forward, his body turning towards the old big bell; he is the only one who looks not at the photographer but at the departing servant of the church. The faces of the men, women and children around them express silent mourning and suppressed defiance. Many of them still remember the collections made for the “younger bells”, the celebration when they were raised into the tower, and their first chimes. They observed with-out resignation their latest, common loss caused by the war.

On the second photo we see the three bells that have been removed and local children in front of the Saint Roch Church in Belsőváros. The figures standing in the background are probably the bell-ringer-sacristan and the teacher. The crowd of children stands impatiently, some of them whispering together, around the forlorn bells in the centre. The beams used for the removal can still be seen propped up against the church wall.

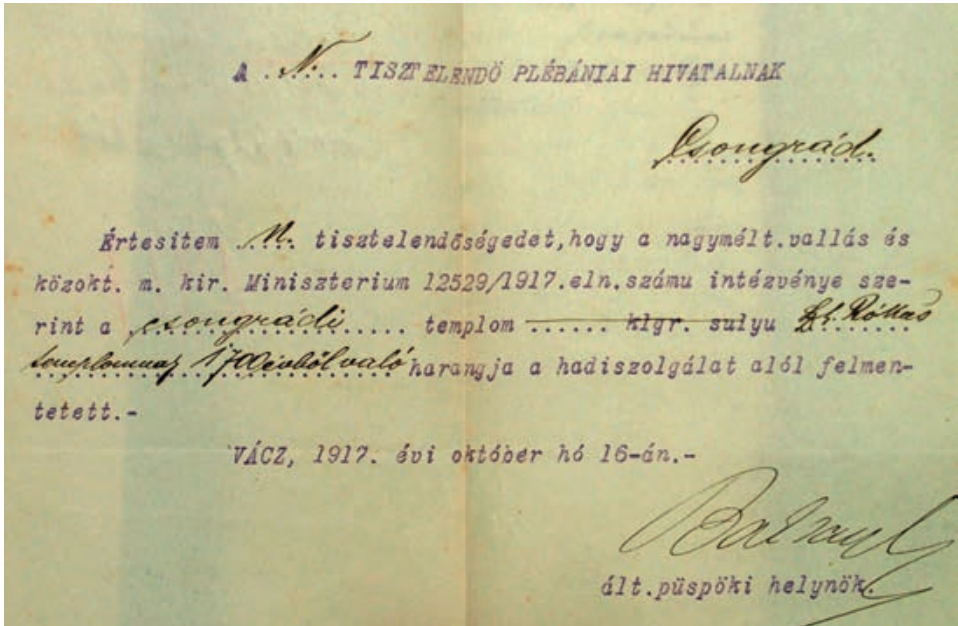


Farewell to the bells in front of Saint Roch Church, 24 February 1917. Photo: MNL CsML CsL XIV. 3. Papers of Lajos Dudás, 22. d.

The transfer of the bells to the railway station resembled a funeral procession. A crowd of thousands, tears in their eyes, the men with hats in their hands, followed the carts carrying the bells. Their only consolation was that the popular Sacred Heart bell was left untouched and the belfries in the outlying areas remained hidden to the authorities.

The remaining church bells were given a written exemption. The wording of the certification still bears the memory of their treatment in a manner almost befitting persons:

“I inform the reverend N. that under provision no. 12529/1917 of the Ministry for Religious Affairs and Education, the bell dating from the year 1700 in the Csongrád Saint Roch Church is exempted from military service.”⁸⁹



The Saint Roch bell “exempted from military service.” NPI 16 October 1917.

If it is not a simple error, we can rightly assume that in his first listing of the bells parish priest Dr. Károly Thury gave the wrong date for the casting of the bell. If the parish priest was aware of the real date (1793), he put it back close to a hundred years so that it would qualify under the regulation as a historic relic and so have a chance of escaping. He must also have been aware that under the regulations in force (apart from a few exceptions) only one bell could be left in each church. Károly Thury did everything in his power to ensure that that one bell in the Saint Roch filial church was as large as possible.

In 1918 the demands of war overrode all other considerations. The authorities began with great firmness to remove the “questionable” bells that had been left earlier. Only one bell, the smallest, could be left in each church and none at

⁸⁹ NPI 16 October 1917. Letter from the episcopal vicar of Vác to parish priest Károly Thury.

all in the cemetery and outlying areas. Without previous notification a group of soldiers appeared in Csongrád on 7 January 1918, carrying an open order. In desperation, the parish priest turned to the chief notary Gyula Söhlya: however the telegram sent to the Ministry of Defence begging their intervention was not even answered. The parish priest himself sent a telegram to the Ministry of Defence in Vienna requesting that the Sacred Heart bell be left in the interest of the town's fire protection. His effort was in vain:

“The Czech sergeant of the military committee laughed sarcastically and said: I won't even wait until you send the telegram, I am beginning the removal at once, I have the order in my hand and I will carry it out immediately, and he began to have the Sacred Heart bell broken up because they could only get it down from the tower in pieces.”⁹⁰

The people of Csongrád were deeply shaken by the fall of the Sacred Heart bell. The former parish priest Hegyi Antal, who at that time was serving as magistrate, was also witness to the day when the bell that he brought to life with such heavy sacrifices was broken into pieces, thrown onto a cart and taken to the railway station.⁹¹ On this occasion the soldiers left no opportunity for the parishioners to see the bells or for a farewell photograph to be taken.

This time the commander of the military unit learnt about the existence of bells in the outlying areas. He asked the municipality for two policemen who, accompanied by two soldiers, removed all the bells in the area. The military commander threatened the parish priest with treason and court martial because of his silence. In his defence Dr. Károly Thury pointed out that the bells in the outlying areas were not the property of the parish: they had been erected by individual families for private devotions, and it was therefore not his task to mention them to the authorities. In the end, in respect for his status as a priest, Dr. Károly Thury was not subjected to reprisals.

On that day the big Sacred Heart bell, the smaller Immaculate Heart of Mary bell in the Homoki Chapel, and 13 bells in outlying areas weighing less than 100 kg were taken away from Csongrád.

The silencing of the countryside was only one “episode” in the war losses suffered by the people of Csongrád. Dr. Károly Thury used every means at his disposal in an effort to influence this series of events within his own limited competence. He entered false data in official documents; he asked for outside help from the municipality and the ministries concerned; he failed to disclose the location of the bells in outlying areas – and when he was called to account he put forward well considered arguments, citing protection against fire and the limits of

90 NPI Historia Domus Vol. II, 26.

91 Károly Thury made the following remarks about his predecessor, Antal Hegyi: “Throughout my term as parish priest he always showed paternal good will towards me and I was attached to him with the love of a child.” NPI Historia Domus Vol. II, 35.

his competence. He went far beyond his office as a priest, defending the interests of his parishioners with determination. In 1918 the diocesan bishop of Vác transferred him from Csongrád to Fót but appointed István Szedlacsek as his worthy successor. One of the major programs in the activity of parish priest Szedlacsek was the rehabilitation of the bells. As a result of his persistence, six years after the end of the war Csongrád had as many bells as it had in 1916.

The fathers, husbands and sons lying in unmarked graves could be brought back, but the life instinct of the surviving community put forth new shoots above the ruins. The stubborn struggle and exemplary combined efforts to acquire bells produced the moral and symbolical victory that the war had not brought. The new bells cast after the First World War became symbols of the instinct and will to live – but their history is another story.⁹²

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NPI – Archive of the Parish of Our Lady, Csongrád.

VPL – Vác Episcopal and Chapter Archive

APar. Cs. – Acta Parochialis, Csongrád

APriv. – Acta Privatorum

LVis – Libri Visitationum