

CO-EXISTENCE AND CONFLICTS

Everyday-life of a lay religious confraternity

The paper deals with one aspect of the operation and everyday activity in the 19th–20th centuries of the confraternity of the rosary, widely known among Roman Catholics: I would like to speak about the co-operation with ecclesiastical and secular authorities and the conflicts of this co-existence. In short, about the everyday operation of a form of religious practice conducted within an organized, institutionalized frame.

Although the actual rosary, as an object, is regarded as uniquely characteristic of Catholics, similar means for counting prayers can also be found in other religions.¹ According to the Catholic legend, the Virgin Mary herself gave the rosary to Saint Dominic in the 13th century.² Forms of its use in a communal frame are known from the last third of the 15th century.³ There are records of rosary confraternities in Hungary too from the end of the 15th century.⁴ The basic structure of the rosary remained essentially the same: 150 Ave Marias, 15 Pater Nosters and three times five, that is 15 mysteries taken from sacred history. In different periods and places, other prayers could also be associated with these, giving rise to the various forms of rosary devotion. This 800-year-old prayer underwent numerous changes in the course of history, but was always capable of renewal.⁵

One such renewal can be dated to 1826 when Jean-Maria Jaricot, a French woman from Lyons, initiated the formation of 15-member prayer groups corresponding to the number of mysteries.⁶ In this way, each sacred mystery was said simultaneously in the group and so this kind of rosary was made living according to Madame Jaricot. With episcopal and papal support, this form of confraternity spread rapidly from the 1830s in Austria, Germany and Hungary. One of the first Hungarian parent confraternities (archiconfraternitas) is known to have operated in Győr (North-west Hungary) from 1843. From then on the confraternity spread rapidly in Hungary and between 1885 and 1945 also published its own periodical. Many prayer-books were published for the members.⁷

On the basis of the situation in Hungary today, the fieldwork material (interviews) and data in the rosary periodical, I tried to find an explanation for why this form of society spread so rapidly. I hypothesized that the transformation

1 RADÓ 1961. 488–492.; KLINKHAMMER 1981. 473–507.; LÉVAY 1934:229–255.; VEREBÉLYI 1983.

2 BÁLINT 1977. 152.

3 GELENIUS 1975. 102–108.; KÜFFNER 1975. 109–117.

4 BÁLINT 1977. 367.

5 BARNA 1991a.

6 ANGELICA, SCH/WESTER/ 1918

7 Hermann 1973. 331–332.; BARNA 1991a.

of Hungarian society in the late 19th century created new demands in religious life and so a new frame, forms new also in content, and new social roles were required in religious practice. And the new type of rosary confraternity must have corresponded to these demands very well, being a form able to link the horizontally organized confraternity with the vertically organized church.

My paper seeks an answer to this working hypothesis, largely on the basis of analysis of the records of a single society, the Living Rosary Confraternity of Kunszentmárton which was formed in 1851, kept its minute-books with care up to 1940, and still functions, as well as interviews conducted in recent times in different parts of Hungary, the national periodical *Rózsafüzér Királynéja* (Queen of the Rosary), and the religious literature of the rosary (prayer-books, confraternity publications).⁸ As this research is still under way, I am able to report on only partial results.⁹

The rosary confraternity in everyday religious life

Only a Eucharistic Confraternity had operated in Kunszentmárton before the establishment of the rosary confraternity. The former had been banned together with the other religious societies in 1783 by the rule of enlightened absolutism. A funeral society was formed in the 1830s and a choral society in 1845. This means that the religious society, as a form, existed but covered only a very limited stratum of the population of this market town which consisted mainly of peasants and guild tradesmen.¹⁰

The rosary confraternity was built on these precedents.

It was in Máriaradna (now in Romania), a place of pilgrimage at the edge of the Great Plain¹¹, that the people of Kunszentmárton came into contact with the new, confraternity form of rosary devotion. The time was a distinctive historical period: Whitsun 1851. After the defeat in August 1849 of the Hungarian revolution and war of independence – the 150th anniversary of which we are now celebrating – it was then that the Habsburg government once again allowed greater freedom of assembly, including pilgrimages. It was thus in a special state of mind that the people of Kunszentmárton went on pilgrimage to Máriaradna: with injured national sentiments and heightened religious spiritual need. This special psychological situation may also have been a factor in the great enthusiasm with which they embraced the new prayer confraternity form.¹²

Briefly, this form means that a 15-member group is organized and the members simultaneously pray 5 mysteries of jubilation, 5 of praise and 5 of sorrow

8 BARNÁ 1996. 291–292.

9 Since 1998 the project on confraternities is supported by the OTKA (the National Scientific Research Fund).

10 DÓSA – SZABÓ 1936.

11 BARNÁ 1991b.

12 Minute-book 3–9. In the possession of the parish archiv.

from the life of Jesus, then exchange these mysteries each month. It is because of this simultaneous prayer that this rosary is regarded as “living”.¹³

Another reason why this form of confraternity was so popular could have been that it broke the large community of religious society down into small communities that the individual could grasp and, at the same time, through them also incorporated the individual into the larger community. In the first year, 1851/1852, separate groups for men and women were organized, but from 1852 the organization of mixed groups which functioned for decades can be traced. However, from the early 20th century the rosary increasingly became a female devotion and confraternity although, even in the mid-20th century, its leaders were men. This structural change reflects the image of a patriarchal society. In this society the needs for social guidance and the resolution of social tensions differ by gender. There is a greater demand for this in women than in men. Differing patterns of socialization are to be found behind this. Women’s socialization is of a much more strongly communal nature than that of men. This provides an explanation for the role mentioned above: there were many men among the leaders of the women’s confraternities in the 20th century too.¹⁴

Although I have only just begun to analyse the confraternity membership records, it seems to me that the society linked two traditional principles of the horizontal organization of society into its own organization: the ties of kinship and the local principle. In the 19th century the 15-member groups were largely organized on the basis of kinship and neighbourhood. By joining forces, these groups could form an even larger frame. The ordinary members could belong to this larger community frame through the group leader whose person ensured and maintained the network of informal ties among the different groups. Family participation in the rosary confraternity must have reinforced family links and family emotional ties. Through this confraternity too, the individual was integrated into the larger town/parish community.

In the years following its establishment, the framework formed in this way, “the Confraternity”, practically took over certain forms, venues and occasions of religious life.

It was able to do so because 1. its operation meant that it undertook a large part of church patronage, 2. because it set clear, transparent and easily performed tasks, 3. it required of its members a feasible co-ordination of individual and collective religious practice. In the frame of individual religious practice this meant the „rosary ten”, that is, praying 10 Ave. The space and time structure for this was flexible: the prayers could be said at any time and anywhere, even during work. This placed emphasis on intimacy in prayer, which is an important requirement of individual religious practice.

The confraternity members perform individual devotions simultaneously with (many) others. The rosary thus went together with the awareness of belonging to a larger community. When the mysteries were exchanged and on

13 MARTON W.Y.

14 BÁLINT 1942.

festive occasions of confraternity life, the prescribed devotions were performed in a community frame and the members participated collectively at public religious services, particularly in the processions. Forms of Christian solidarity also appeared in their religious practice: they undertook to perform devotions in place of deceased or sick members until a new member entered the confraternity.

It could be an explanation of its popularity that it requires of its members clearly formulated tasks that are performed by anyone without difficulty. These are tasks which can be performed easily by men and women, children and elderly persons, healthy and sick, civil servant, tradesman and agricultural labourer, layman and priest. And the measurable performance also held out the promise of reward: the indulgence linked to the rosary object and devotion.

In addition to individual and collective prayer, caring for the places of communal religious practice was an important task of the rosary confraternity. This meant first of all permanent patronage in the form of maintenance, care, equipment and cleaning of the communal places of religious practice, which can be seen as a typically modern form of alms-giving. The church had to be supplied with liturgical objects and equipment, and decorated with flowers. The material symbols of the confraternity (crucifix, banner, portable statue of Mary, candle, images of the stations of the Cross, rosary pictures) added to the pomp of public religious services (masses, processions, funerals, pilgrimages). These objects were ordered from Pest, Vienna and Graz and besides outward show, they served as symbolical material manifestations of the group awareness. They must have reinforced and maintained a corporate consciousness. No doubt it was because of this patronage that the parish priests supported the operation of the rosary confraternity.¹⁵

The function of outward show served by these objects expanded the communal role undertaken by the rosary confraternity. Their use increased the solemnity of many occasions of communal religious practice. In this connection, the demand arose for the rosary confraternity to set up its own funeral society with a two-fold purpose. One aim was to assist the survivors of deceased members with material assistance and a contribution to the costs of the funeral, and another, for which there was a big social demand, was to add to the pomp of funerals through participation by singers of the rosary confraternity and use of the confraternity's symbols – crucifix, banners, candles and large rosary. The funeral society was formed with the authorization of the parish priest and the chief administrative officer of the county, and functioned until the middle of the 20th century, even in the first decades of the communist regime.

These must also have acted to increase awareness: the ordinary members could see how their singers, daughters of Mary (who carried the banners and statue of Mary in processions) and group leaders were esteemed. They could see from their own experience that the church was more beautiful, the procession more splendid and spectacular.

15 Minute-book 4.

The confraternity organized the pilgrimages. According to entries in the minute-books, in the 1850s the Radna pilgrimage confraternity was merged into the rosary confraternity. From then on, with the authorization of the town's secular and ecclesiastical leaders, they collected donations each year for the Radna pilgrimages. These funds were used to assist their poorer members and to have common masses said.¹⁶ The confraternity also played an active role in the introduction and cultivation of new events in religious life, such as the Calvary procession held late in the evening on Good Friday (1854), and the procession to statues of Mary standing in public places made on feasts of the Virgin Mary.¹⁷

The rosary confraternity played a big role in the purchase, publication and distribution of religious printed materials. More and more people in the town ordered and purchased such materials, even though they also continued to use the manuscript song and prayer books.¹⁸

The right blend of these functions and communal roles, and the acceptable proportion of individual and collective practice led to the point where, in the last decade of the 19th century, one sixth to one fifth of the town's population belonged to the rosary confraternity. Practically every family was represented in the confraternity.

However, a comparison of the membership lists and surveys shows that in practice it was rather the middle and lower strata which took part in the life of the confraternity and in this form of religious practice. The upper strata, from civil servants to larger landowners, hardly participated at all. This was a constant cause of complaint against Kunszentmárton on the occasion of visits by the archdeacon.¹⁹ We can see here the opposition between the elite and the people, the difference in religious practice of the two strata in a local community. This confraternity frame seems to have offered its members and leaders a possible form and path of social advancement. At the same time it also meant (social, secular, ecclesiastical) legitimation of the existing order. Participation as a family in the rosary confraternity must have strengthened family ties and emotional bonds.

As an organization built horizontally, intertwining part of the life of society, together with other organizations of a similar structure the rosary confraternity proved suitable for repeatedly restructuring and reorganizing communal ties and thereby establishing a degree of social stability. The festive occasions of confraternity patronage – blessing of a new crucifix, banner, etc. – are symbolic expressions of this stability. The parish priest generally also invited the town's political leaders to attend these church occasions, linking the horizontal and vertical planes of social organization.

However, there is a characteristic duality in the way both the secular and the ecclesiastical authorities, possessing a hegemony of power, wished to exercise varying degrees of control over the operation of the confraternity. This took the

16 BARNA 1991b.; Minute-book, passim

17 Minute-book, passim

18 Cf. the journal of the Living Rosary: *Queen of the Rosary*, published 1885–1945.

19 Archepiscopal Church Archiv, Eger

form of authorizing its operation, exercising annual control of its financial affairs, and giving ad hoc approval of its patronage. The town council, as the patron of the local Roman Catholic church, on occasion qualified certain meetings as contrary to the rules and declared their resolutions invalid.

Everyday conflicts

The confraternity organizational form was also suitable for dealing appropriately with the conflicts that occasionally arose between the believers and the clergy, between confraternity members and town authorities, and for reaching compromises. There were always conflicts.

In 1853 the newly formed confraternity was the target of slander and some members departed. The accusations: “fancy prayer”, “new invention”, “invention of the priests”, “they pray for the Germans” – this is a manifestation of the strong national sentiment following the defeat of the war of independence – “it was the idea only of the singers (=most of the organizers and leaders of the confraternity)”.²⁰ Complaints were also made to the parish priest. The priest’s explanations from the pulpit concerning the rosary confraternity were taken to mean the disappearance of the confraternity.²¹ Disputes arose within the confraternity concerning the authorization or ban on the lighting of candles beside the dead.²² For the sake of the poorer members of the confraternity the leadership was in favour of imposing a ban on this custom which was regarded as outward show, but it was unable to do anything in face of the rapid spread of the custom which soon became a compulsory norm.

The scattered farms (*tanya*) around the town sprang up in the 1860s. In 1869 members living “in the *puszta*” (=on farms) were excluded from the narrower leadership of the confraternity since the poor transport prevented them from taking part in the activity of the leadership. According to the minute-books, the technical solution of the “exchange of mysteries” was a quite frequent problem. For this reason, even in the 1870s the treasurer still gave explanations and guidance on the first Sunday of the month.²³

During its initial dynamic development the rosary confraternity played a strong integrating role, incorporating other confraternities. This happened to the pilgrimage confraternity. However, in 1876 the “Sacred Heart Confraternity” was formed in Kunszentmárton and also wished to hold its own new moon Sunday devotions in the church. The rosary confraternity opposed this and brought the dispute to the parish priest for decision, with the request that he authorize the communal devotion of the Sacred Heart Society for the second Sunday of the

20 Minute-book 35.

21 Minute-book 35.

22 Minute-book 36.

23 Minute-book 95.

month.²⁴ There were only a few cases of dispute over financial matters within the confraternity. Occasionally the *confraternity servants* (who delivered the confraternity's messages and mail) requested a wage increase, but this was always refused because there was always a member who was ready to undertake the task for the same money or even "to the glory of God" without pay.²⁵ Perhaps this example too shows how important membership of the confraternity was at that time for social prestige: people were even prepared to do unpaid work for it.

The confraternity took over many forms and frames of religious practice. It became involved in conflicts because of this too. As soon as some other interest or group tried to appear in the field they dominated, it immediately came into conflict with the interests of the rosary confraternity. This is the reason why the confraternity was unable to tolerate anyone taking part in church patronage without its knowledge and authorization and outside the frames of the confraternity. There are entries in the minute-book declaring that they do not allow the use in confraternity communal feasts (processions) of procession banners made by non-members but with the permission of the parish priest. They could not ban them from the church because that was the competence of another (ecclesiastical) authority, but the confraternity firmly insisted that liturgical objects made by outsiders could not be used in forms of religious practice it organized (first Sunday mass, processions, pilgrimages, litanies).

The Kunszentmárton confraternity joined the Győr archconfraternity which had been formed in 1843. They sent their membership lists to Győr. A copy of their admission document has also survived. However, I have not yet found any trace of the confraternity's official state registration. The first reference to this is made in 1856 and trace of it can be found from 1859 in the minute-book recording control by the town council of the confraternity's finances. The last council countersignature I have found dates from 1913.²⁶

Religious life in Kunszentmárton underwent change in the decades between the two world wars. The Romanian occupation of the Eastern part of the Great Plain and then its annexation to Romania made the pilgrimages to Radna impossible. This organizing role of the rosary confraternity gradually disappeared.²⁷ Local society also became more articulated. The primary role of religion and the church in organizing and integrating society was greatly reduced. In 1940 the Carmelite order settled in Kunszentmárton. Together with this, a new, rival form of confraternity, the scapular confraternity, also became popular.²⁸ However, the events of the Second World War and the communist rule that followed prevented organic development.

From 1948 confraternity life was characterized by hiding. The confraternity was forced into private life and the ghetto of church life. In 1946–1949 the

24 Minute-book 100.

25 Minute-book, passim

26 Minute-book 194.

27 BARNÁ 1991b.

28 JÓZSA 1991.

communist state banned and dissolved the religious societies. The ban did not directly affect the rosary confraternity which had by then retreated largely into prayer life, but the hostile social atmosphere led to a drastic decline in its membership. The confraternity withdrew from the public religious services. Its life was restricted entirely within the frames of individual religious practice, but it has survived here right up to the present.

A few conclusions

At the time of its establishment in the 19th century, the living rosary confraternity was one of the most important organizers of religious life. As a horizontally structured organization, it embraced the greater part of Catholic society and proved suitable for the restructuring and reorganization of community relations and thereby contributed to a certain degree of social stability. However, neither the ecclesiastical nor the secular authorities wanted to renounce control and influence over the organization at that time.

It seems to me important that the confraternity and its members had an awareness of modernity. This was manifested both in the minute-books and in the frequent references to novelty made in the confraternity's printed literature. The same spirit was found in the confraternity press which caused many changes in the mentality of the members.

This initial dynamism may have been strengthened by the circumstance that the confraternity members were aware that they belonged to a Hungarian arch-confraternity and, through this, to an international system of relations. The internationalism was strengthened by the fact that the journal *Rózsafüzér Királynéja* regularly published news from abroad, especially from Lourdes.²⁹

Around the turn of the century other organizations of a similar structure appeared beside the rosary confraternity. In the 20th century, especially from the middle of the century, the rosary confraternity increasingly lost ground and became a prayer society of middle-aged and elderly women. This meant that its original function acquired greater emphasis. The young people were attracted to other organizations and the demand for outward show in religion declined or it was forbidden. Other forms of aid and show at funerals emerged. After 1988 the Carmelites again returned to Kunszentmárton.³⁰ The Carmelite third order was reorganized, mainly with elderly members. The charismatic communities integrated many young people. The rosary confraternity had its banner renewed and placed in the church again. Its elderly members participate in the pilgrimages organized by the priest. Every 5–10 years they also visit Máriaradna. But the role they play in religious life has been reduced to a minimum and their role in patronage has also become insignificant, although they help to clean the church.

²⁹ See the monthly periodical *Rózsafüzér Királynője* (Queen of the Rosary)

³⁰ JÓZSA 1991.

However, it is possible that a study of their history in the 19th–20th centuries and the social roles they undertook, illustrated with historical examples, could be an important contribution to a better understanding of the current rapid spread of religious communities, their operation and social context, throwing light on the general and specific characteristics.

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