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Sacred and Profane in a Pilgrimage Feast

The object of this paper is to highlight the contrasts and tensions evident between the secular and ecclesiastical factions during the festival of Our Lady of The Snow which took place at Szeged on the 2nd to 3rd of August 1997.

The festival falls on the 5th day of August every year, in accordance with the Catholic calendar. The festival is celebrated on the weekend which falls closest to this date, hence the reason it was celebrated on the 2nd to the 3rd of August this year. The reason is that most people have free time at weekends so are more likely to attend.

The start of the festival was marked by profane preparations which had to be carried out before the festival began. This included the cleaning of the church and Franciscan cloister, flower arranging and rehearsals. Also, the work associated with the setting up and working of the stalls and carnival. The stall holders, carnival owners were attracted to the area because of the vast numbers of people who would be there for the feast.

The Franciscan monks and local volunteers from the community participated in the cleaning of the church. Also, a corridor which housed some monks' cells, in the cloister, was transformed into places to take confession as there were not enough confession cubicles. The monks are entirely responsible for the upkeep of their own cloister. The monks organise who is going to partake in each task and rarely have any disputes over this matter. There are rarely problems over such matters as monks tend to do all their necessary duties without question. They appear to go about their profane duties with an inner calmness and patience. All corridors, cells as well as other rooms were swept, dusted, washed and organised from Friday 1st of August. At approximately four o'clock on this evening the corridors of the lower floor of the cloister were full of dust as a result of the vigorous dusting of the ceilings as well as walls and floors. An elderly woman and a casually dressed monk, aged in his twenties, washed the floors of the corridors.

Brother Kelemen stated that monks dressed casually on many other occasions such as when going to Szeged University for teaching or divinity studies, visiting friends or relatives and doing sporting activities although after seeing a photographic album belonging to the Brothers it is evident that they wear whatever is

convenient. For example, there was a photograph of a monk wearing his habit whilst playing football and another of an elderly monk walking around the grounds of the church wearing a personal stereo and headphones. There were other volunteer workers situated around the church. A lady was cleaning table surfaces, chairs and pews in the church. It was as if everything had to be as clean as possible. The ladies who cleaned wore overalls over their clothes rather like those worn during and after wartime in the 1940s in Britain.

The ladies who were responsible for arranging the church flowers came from the St. Anne Guild (of Szeged-Alsóváros), a local religious group. Saint Anne is the protective saint of this group. According to two ladies who were arranging the flowers before the feast began, the women from the flower arranging group were aged between sixty-five and seventy-five. They also stated that they had no male members although their group does not exclude them. Apparently, men have no time for such pursuits. However, men helped when it came to the heavy work during the preparations for the feast. Apparently flower arranging is a relatively new activity. It was not the Guild's original purpose. Years ago a nun who lived at the monastery took care of the flowers but she returned to the nunnery she belonged to and the church caretaker died. The priest who was there at the time asked the ladies from the Guild if they would intervene so they met twice a week to arrange the flowers and change water in existing floral arrangements. This group usually has meetings each Tuesday evening for praying and singing and to have discussions regarding their daily lives. A priest is always present. Care is taken to ensure that all members are present. If a member is absent a telephone call or visit is made to ensure their well-being.

An announcement is made at church calling followers to contribute flowers for the pilgrim feast of Our Lady of The Snow. Most of the flowers come from the private gardens of the congregation. People who do not have gardens either buy flowers from shops or from people who have gardens. The type of flowers used for displays during the festival consisted of seasonal flowers and greenery. The flowers were mainly gladioli, roses, gypsophila, daisies and iris. The greenery consisted of mostly asparagus fern and some other type of hardy green foliage. These flowers had no symbolic significance. Evergreen foliage is used as a decorative plant at cemeteries to symbolise eternal life but greenery used during the festival was not evergreen so one can state that there was no symbolism in the using of greenery here either. Flower donors are asked to arrange their flowers nicely. It was not deemed acceptable for a flower display to look gaudy or inappropriate in any other way so the arrangers ensured that the flowers were tastefully arranged using no more than two or three colours of flowers in each display. The flowers were placed on altars, around the building of the church on the ground, around the main entrance and at the side entrance of the church. The church was given a very thorough clean before the flowers were put out for display inside the church on the Friday before the feast began and the remainder of the flowers were placed around the entrance doors and on the ground around the church from six o'clock on Satur-

day 2nd August. The flower arrangers worked in a fast and methodical manner. It was surprising to see people arranging flowers outside as it had rained from around one o'clock in the morning since the flower arrangers had previously stated that if heavy rain was forecast, the flowers would be fixed to the inside of the doorways of the church. Thankfully, the rain did not last much longer. Three hours later they were still working hard to fix the flower arrangement to the exterior of the church. Women tied the flowers and greenery to pieces of rope while men attached these displays to the doorways. All the heavy work was done by male volunteers or monks while the flower arranging was carried out by women.

A rehearsal was held before the Holy Mass of the children at two-thirty on Saturday 2nd August. Again, different members of the community came together to help with this event such as monks, a few parents and priests. Older participating children helped with the younger members. The monks and priests wore their habits and the parents of the children were dressed in what looked like their good clothes while most of the children were dressed quite casually. Many, especially the boys, wore trendy training shoes. A few of the younger girls wore pretty dresses while the older girls seemed to place more importance on their hair. The children were formed in pairs and taught how to walk into the church and what to do later. Later, about fifteen minutes before the mass began, the children were helped into their vestments by monks, parents, and older children while, all the time, the priest calmly continued to instruct them.

Other rehearsals included that of the choir girls. Their group meets every Friday evening to practise and is led by a choirmaster. All members of the choir live in close proximity to the church. Their ages vary from eight to twenty-one. They sing on Sundays at the nine o'clock mass which is a service for young people. They practised only twice for this particular event. Their role at the feast is to sing at five different masses. The feast is significant for them because they express praise for the Virgin Mary through singing.

The preparatory work at the church strongly contrasts with that carried out at the market and carnival area because the people associated with this work are business people whose interests lie in making money from the pilgrims and not charity or necessarily helping others but in what they might call a service. By interviewing monks at the cloister one could sense the tension between this clearly profane group and the ecclesiastics.

A few people associated with the fair and stalls arrived on Thursday 31st July but the majority of them arrived throughout Friday 1st August and some arrived at the last moment before the pilgrim feast began. Most of the stall holders and carnival workers stayed on site. Alongside these people were other travellers such as the two Transylvanian women, dressed in their traditional folk costume, who set out and immediately started selling their wares, from large bags, next to the main entrance of the church. These women were illegal sellers. There was annoyance expressed at their presence so close to the church entrance since the other stall holders had felt obliged to move further afield and also for not going about their work

through the proper channels. Most of the market workers had to pay for the privilege of being there. There were other illegal sellers, gypsies and itinerants who also came from different regions. One illegal seller placed herself at the back of the church selling people their fortunes. She did this by placing a cardboard box in front of her which was filled with little pieces of carefully folded paper which had written fortunes on them. Two budgerigars which sat on the edge of the box picked these fortune papers out using their beaks.

Therefore, one can see that there was a great contrast between the atmosphere in the church and the market and carnival area. However, there are a few exceptions to this statement such as the link between the church and the main carnival and market area. For example, there were some stalls immediately outside the main entrance of the church which sold religious paraphernalia who were allocated this site due to the type of wares they sold. Directly behind the church there was an area which was used for the children's enjoyment such as a mini bikers' race track and pony riding area. It was unclear whether these had been purposely set aside or whether it was by pure chance that they were placed side by side. The last example was the grassy area situated at the side entrance of the church. However, the last two areas mentioned were not free of beggars and the occasional drunk.

One could detect the tension between the ecclesiastics and the market and carnival workers because of their close proximity to the church. Previously, they were permitted to set up their businesses anywhere around the grounds of the church but, more recently they were asked to move slightly further away. This area was cordoned off using tape to instruct them which area was deemed suitable by the church. However, a couple of traders moved their wares closer to the church such as the two Transylvanian women, mentioned earlier, much to the annoyance of the pious people. Also, while the market sellers and carnival workers were preparing for the event they were fairly quiet. In previous years there had been problems due to the playing of popular music too loudly even after they had been asked to turn the volume down. Another matter of concern was drunkenness and the rowdiness associated with such behaviour. Monks stated that in the previous year a rowdy crowd from the fairground had made a terrible din by shouting abuse. The church was concerned that the same problems would occur this year. The monks stated that they would not go into the market or carnival areas because they felt that this type of activity was highly unsuitable for a religious feast. The monks wanted the market area and fair to be situated further away from the church.

There was one area which seemed to be acceptable to both ecclesiastical and profane factions and that was the market area which sold religious goods and was situated near the entrance of the church. The sellers had been given permission to sell here simply because of the nature of their wares.

There were eight masses as well as other ecclesiastical services throughout the pilgrim feast. Each mass or service was different and therefore could be characterised by its own theme. For example, the Holy Mass for the Children (2.30 p.m. Saturday 2nd August) was relatively different and perhaps low key in comparison to

the Holy Mass and procession (Sunday at 9 a.m.). The other services such as the Stations of the Cross (2 a.m. on Sunday 3rd August), the Greek Catholic Liturgy (Saturday 2nd August) and the Evening prayer and psalm singing at which the monks took on a more active singing role (Saturday 2nd August) were entirely different from each other and therefore one could see the strong contrasts between these events. Three of the most obvious contrasts were the time length and content (theology and ritual) surrounding each service as well as the numbers of people present.

The mass which contrasted most with the other services was the Holy Mass and procession, mentioned above. This event was looked upon as being the most important. The evidence in favour of this statement lies with the vast number of people who attended. There must have been approximately two thousand people altogether. Obviously, there was not enough space available for everybody so the corridor leading up to the sacristy as well as the area immediately at the entrance of the church was filled with an overflow of moving bodies. The word moving is used because that is precisely what they did throughout the sermon. It was as if most people wanted to try to get a better viewing spot, somewhere to sit if they were lucky or perhaps they stayed only for a little while and left. There were so many folk coming in and out of the church throughout the service it was difficult to state what they were doing. For example, how long they were staying and where they were going. The most tense part of the pilgrim feast took place during the procession towards the end of the Holy Mass. Many people remained inside the church but those who managed or were able to get outside joined the overflow of the church in the courtyard outside. Eventually, Bishop Endre Gyulay emerged with the choir girls, altar boys, monks and priests and the procession started with a large number of the congregation who followed on behind. One could feel the tension during the procession between the pious and the profane people. From an outsider's point of view, it was as if the pious made themselves more look self righteous by parading around the market and fair-ground in blatant view of those who did not participate in the ecclesiastical event. The music from the fair-ground and market area was lowered but not turned off completely so one could feel the tension between the two factions. Also, it was as if the Church was making a territorial claim outwit the confines of the church building. The traders appeared to continue to go about their usual routine of selling their wares except for the two Transylvanian ladies, mentioned earlier, who stopped working during the procession. Perhaps this is due to their place of work which was frowned upon because it was situated at the entrance of the church where people were congregating to hear the mass being broadcasted using loud speakers. These women knew that it was not right to trade here during such an event or at this particular time. Also, perhaps they were genuinely religious but felt compelled to trade here at such a prime trading area, at intervals, because of their need to make an income. Nevertheless, it was astonishing to see that they had the courtesy to stop work for a little while.

Another contrast which led to tension between the profane and ecclesiastical factions lay between those who were pious and others who either pretended to be

pious or those who did not feel compelled to attend religious sermons very often. A brother stated that he did not feel the pilgrim feast was spiritually beneficial to most of those who came because they probably attended only a few, religious services each year such as Easter and Christmas. This monk felt that they were hypocrites for attending such events if they did not go to other sermons. Also, it was as if this hypocrisy was more exaggerated during the procession. For example, those who joined the procession who did not go to church very often were little better, if at all, than the people who ignored the ecclesiastical side of the pilgrim feast altogether. The monk felt that the feast was not a true representation of piety.

There was tension between those who were pious. For example, some women who were dressed in folk costume came into the church approximately half an hour before the Greek - Catholic Liturgy service. They occupied two pews situated next to a doorway which led into a corridor to the left side of the church. They practised their own type of group piety by praying and singing together. One woman appeared to sing each line of a hymn or psalm and then the rest of the women joined in. Their private worship was difficult to follow as a result of having little knowledge of the Hungarian language and in any case their dialect sounded different from other worshippers. The women continued to sing and pray until it was no longer possible for them to do so. When the Greek - Catholic Liturgy service began the women looked angry and frustrated. They remained in their seats and participated in this mass but continued with their own type of worship afterwards. These women and no doubt others like them wanted to have their own private time to pray and sing either together or alone. Unfortunately, it was difficult for these people to partake in their desired private piety because the church had organised so many masses and other services in the time available during the pilgrim - feast.

Therefore, through observing and analysing the different factions which come together to ensure the viability of the event one can state that there are many contrasts and tensions during the pilgrim-feast of Our Lady of the Snow. These tensions and contrasts are mostly due to the obvious differences within and between each element, particularly, the profane and ecclesiastic.