

INTRODUCTION

In 1996, before the 10th Finnish-Hungarian Folklore Symposium held in Jyväskylä, Professor Vilmos Voigt asked me to be the host for the next, 11th meeting. I agreed with pleasure. And although with a delay of six months compared to the original intention, our plans have been realized and between 3rd and 6th of April 1998 the 11th Finnish-Hungarian Folklore Symposium, organized by the Department of Ethnology of the Szeged University took place in Szeged.

This symposium was an important event in the life of our department. We hope it could show our openness and willingness to establish new international relations, our ability to cultivate them and our efforts to participate in international scholarly life.

The Finnish-Hungarian symposium, bilateral in name and title, has been expanded with Estonian participants. It was a great pleasure for us to be able to greet our guests from Finnish and Estonian universities and other scientific institutions here in Szeged.

Right from the outset we built the organization of the seminar on the twin city relations between Szeged and Turku. I would like to express special thanks for the assistance given by Professor Veikko Anttonen who organized the Finnish delegation. The twin city relationship was also a great help: Dr. Éva Ványai, deputy mayor of the municipality of Szeged and Dr. László Farkas, former deputy under-secretary of state and counsellor of the city of Szeged supported our event right from the start. Our Finnish and Estonian guests were the guests not only of our department and the Hungarian Academy of Sciences but also of the city of Szeged. This also shows that close ties between our cities also greatly strengthen the co-operation between our universities and university departments. We would like to maintain these ties in the future too.

In preparation of the conference I was greatly assisted by my colleague Bertalan Pusztai, my students Beáta Ambrózay, Nóra Károly, Beáta Nagy and Márta Takács. I express many thanks for their kind co-operation.

Questions, Problems, Concepts

Before we begin our detailed programme, allow me to say a few words about the aim of the symposium. My interest in the organization of religious groups has personal aspects, too. Seeing the religious movements and the various small communities in Hungary in the late 1980s and the restrictive measures taken against them, the question arose: are these small religious groups alternative forms of organization, individual revolts against the atheistic, totalitarian state? What is the relationship between the old organizational forms, some of them decades or centuries old, and the new ones? What is meant by movement and society (confraternity), sect and minor church, church, new and old? From what kind of point of view can a movement or society be regarded as new or old? Maybe the hermeneutic level of the term "new" is very low and it shows a Christian/European viewpoint.

In all cases (perhaps) the religious movements required and also meant the rethinking and reformulation of the individual's system of relations, these relations being understood to mean the individual's relations with God and his fellow men, as well as with the present, future and past, the whole identity-structure.

This was of a different nature in the 18th century and in the 19th–20th centuries. The Catholic religious confraternities of the 18th century were directed from above and of a strongly ecclesiastical, apologetic and anti-Protestant nature. However, these movements also integrated many elements of folk religiosity. In the Kingdom of Hungary the church policy of enlightened absolutism dissolved these confraternities in the 1780s. This was an intervention from outside and from above in the life of the confraternities, rejecting the popular element. However, before their dissolution a survey was made of the confraternities, recording their assets and the circumstances of their functioning. (This excellent source material has still not been worked up by church history or research on religious ethnology.) After a pause of a few decades, the reorganization of confraternity life began in the middle of the 19th century. The highest point was reached in the late 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century. The confraternities set up in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were generally organized within the frames of the historical churches, were ecclesiastical and also made use of the forms of popular religious practice. In many respects, these confraternities resembled those of the Baroque age organized on a feudal basis, but they also bore many features of the bourgeois associations.

In the 1990s many new religious movements from both East and West appeared in Hungary and many of them have been established as "churches" on the basis of the still very liberal act on the establishment of churches. (There are

about 80 officially registered churches in Hungary.) What does this process reflect? Beside the new forms, the old ones, or at least a few old organizations have been re-established or have existed continuously. Is it merely institutional inertia that keeps them alive, or do they have a real function in society?

In Hungary, as elsewhere in Europe, the confraternities are of mediaeval origin. However, the original societies underwent gradual transformation and, especially during the Reformation, disappeared, then were re-established in the Baroque period. In the late 18th century enlightened absolutism brought some of them under its control and banned others. There was an upswing in the 19th–20th centuries when a whole series of religious confraternities were launched. Why were these confraternities formed, with what aim, who were their members, how did they function, did they develop some kind of symbolic language in the course of their everyday life? Did they have a special social function for the individual and the larger community?

In Hungary religious ethnology has not yet dealt with these questions or the question of the religious movements and confraternities, or only to a very limited extent. Sociology is able to show certain results. However, religious ethnology in Hungary has not yet begun the process of integrating the results of sociology of religion, rethinking its theories from the angle of its own discipline, and elaborating its own specific mode of approach and analysis in order to find its task in the study of religious movements, communities and confraternities as well as the roles of individuals.

In this area I am expecting that this symposium will bring new thoughts, proposals and progress.

The subject of research also needs to be defined. What do we understand by religious movement and religious confraternity? According to some views, they are forms created to meet the need and serve the purpose of religious patronage. Is their role limited only to that? Another big question is what the confraternity meant in the recent past and in the distant past. Are we projecting our present concepts back into social history? It is also worth reflecting on whether these are spiritual movements or whether they can be characterized as religious movements. What do the two concepts (spiritual and religious) cover in this case? What does their meaning indicate? Does it mean a critique of the hierarchized image of the church? Does the appearance of such confraternities in large numbers and their spread point to a breakdown in the operation of the churches? Are they organizations created to carry out tasks not dealt with by the official churches, like religious education, the care of Christian communities, the spread of religious culture, a charity service? Or is their role more than that? Are they an alternative in everyday social and religious life?

According to the holistic concepts of the self, the ego links itself to a superior



being through the confraternity forms. This being can be Mary, Jesus, or God in general. Within this link it can reinterpret itself, its life and social role. In times of rapid social change when individual life frames disintegrate – as was the situation in Hungary in the second half of the 19th century and early years of the 20th century, and following the elections of 1990 – there is an increase in the number and role of religious movements and confraternities. This is because they help to restore the life frames of the individual. Once the society has been restructured, the individual's integration and role in the society is stabilized and the role of the religious confraternities declines.

In 1992 I organized a conference dealing with organizing individuals in religious life. With the support of OTKA (the National Scientific Research Fund) a four-year research project is now beginning to examine the organization, functioning and social role of religious confraternities, parallel with the roles undertaken by individuals. This project supports the publication of the conference material.

All these circumstances and reasons inspired the choice of theme for the symposium. It seems to me from the themes submitted that similar problems concern the Finnish and Estonian workshops. This interest is manifested in their research projects and publications and is also present in the excellent journal, TEMENOS. The theoretical studies or case studies of our symposium deal with this problem and will no doubt answer many of the questions raised. They will certainly provide encouragement for our research here in Szeged.

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