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THE SACRIFICE OF ATONEMENT IN ROMAN CATHOLIC COMMUNITIES IN THE SZÉKELYFÖLD REGION

Abstract: In the light of the Marian apparitions in the 20th-21st centuries, people today are in a crisis situation characterised by alienation from the church and the faith, selfishness, the proliferation of sin, from which the way out would be atonement, accepting a sacrifice of atonement. From the mid-20th century a growing number of private revelations in Hungary and Transylvania face us with the same phenomenon and solution to the problem. The study presents a few atonement practices that have appeared in the last thirty years in Roman Catholic religious practice in the Székelyföld region.

Keywords: atonement, sacrifice, prayer, pilgrimage, penance, Székelyföld

The study presents some of the findings of a lengthy fieldwork begun in 1994 and still ongoing, with occasional interruptions. The presence of the atonement movement in the Székelyföld region first came to my attention in Csíkszentdomokos, where in 1994 I encountered a number of different atonement devotions (in church, in private homes – in a number of communities, carrying around in procession a Charbel prayer-house, a statue of the Pilgrim Madonna)¹. When I discovered that this was not a local characteristic, I extended my research to other settlements of the area, in the Csík Basin (Csíkszereda, Csíkszentkirály, Csíktaploca).² From 1999 I have tried to find out about the atonement practice in Szőkefalva,³ Korond, Szováta

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1 See: FÁBIÁN 1996; 1999.

2 For interim reports on findings, see FÁBIÁN 2006.

3 I have been doing fieldwork here since 17 June 1999. The still ongoing research work was more intensive between 1999-2005; during that time I regularly took part in the public appearances in Szőkefalva and in the night-time atonements. On a number of occasions I travelled to the location in the company of pilgrims. After the end of the public appearances each year, I closely observed 1-2 events, generally the pilgrimage feast on the anniversary of 17th June and the May atonement. I conducted interviews with the seer, her family members, the local clergy, and with pilgrims visiting the shrine. For a report on the results, see: FÁBIÁN 2000.

and along the Felső-Nyárád (Nyárádremete, Nyárádköszvényes)⁴, then from 2010 in the whole of the Székelyföld⁵ region.

Atonement is forgiveness of sins sought with sacrifice and prayer. The atonement sacrifice is an action that wipes out the sin and restores the relationship between God and man. In the Old Testament it is only animal sacrifice made for sins, and in the New Testament Christ's death on the cross that is given that interpretation.⁶ According to the teaching of the Catholic Church Jesus' sacrifice of his life is the most perfect atonement sacrifice that resulted in reconciling the relationship of love between God and man, that Adam and Eve had broken with sin. In addition, individuals must themselves strive to experience the atonement sacrifice that they can offer as redemption for their own sins and those of others.⁷ However, this is not a central article of faith of the Catholic Church, its necessity has been judged differently over the course of history, thus its justification was emphasised only by a narrow circle, although we find among them high church dignitaries, such as Pope Pius XII, or Pope John Paul II.⁸ The practice of penance and the veneration of the Sacred Heart placed special stress on it.⁹ From the mid-19th century atonement appears as an expected task in the messages of the Marian apparitions, but we find its first explicit statement in the messages of Fatima. Mary most often asks for atonement brought with sacrifice, renunciation and prayer for accumulated sins, and warns of their consequences.¹⁰ In the 20th century, besides the Marian apparitions, we find a growing number of individual vision experiences that emphasise the same things. In a number of cases it is stated that performing this mission is the special task of Hungary, as the country of Mary.¹¹

20th-21st century atonement movements in Hungary

In Hungary over the last thirty or so years a colourful atonement prayer practice has emerged, comprising various devotions, either differing or in many respects similar, supplementing each other and intertwining. Their establishment was urged by private revelations in various parts of the world – but particularly in Hungary – supernatural messages that, like the popular/world famous apparitions of Mary in the last century and a half (Lourdes, Fatima, Medjugorje)

4 For a report on the results, see: FÁBIÁN 2011.

5 In 2010 I conducted a survey by questionnaire in 58 settlements of the Székelyföld region to examine the presence of atonement. The research was based on a census conducted in 1998 regarding atonement places in the Gyulafehérvár Archdiocese. I carried out research on the spot in fifteen of the settlements examined, and collected information on the other settlements through telephone conversations with local church leaders and individuals active in the organisation of religious life. On the results, see: FÁBIÁN 2012. The research currently being carried out is based on the results of that investigation.

6 MAGYAR KATOLIKUS LEXIKON <http://lexikon.katolikus.hu/E/engesztel%C5%91%20%C3%A1ldozat.html> Accessed on 13 August 2015.

7 Cf.: SZEDERKÉNYI s. d.

8 Cf.: SZEGEDI s. d.

9 ERDŐ 2012.

10 Cf.: BARNÁ 2000. 50–53; LENGYEL 2007. 275; ANTALÓCZI 1991. 36–42.

11 See: LENGYEL 2006. 111–119.

emphasise conversion and atonement.¹² A common feature of the atonement prayer practices linked to the movements of seers of various origin, many of them from Hungary, is that they are performed for redemption of the sins of mankind, and according to a specified schedule, at a particular time of day, or day of the week or month. In the atonement devotional practice in Hungary in the 1990s the influences that can be felt most strongly are three Hungarian women – Mária Natália Kovacsics a nun, Erzsébet Szántó Mrs Károly Kindelmann and Mária Rogács Mrs Zoltán Takács – an Australian, Little Pebble and an Italian seer, Pierina Gilli.¹³

Mária Natália Kovacsics¹⁴ (1901-1992), a nun, had vision experiences from childhood. In private revelations Jesus drew attention to the excessive sin and offered atonement as a means of redemption, designating it the privileged task of the Hungarian people. In the interest of achieving world peace, she urged the spread of veneration of the *Victorious Queen of the World*, as well as the establishment of an atonement order and an atonement chapel. Her notes in the form of a diary¹⁵ were published in several languages. In the early 1940s she had to inform her church superiors about the supernatural messages. Cardinal József Mindszenty recognised the need for and importance of atonement, in a number of circular letters he encouraged the faithful to follow these devotions.¹⁶ The Christmas 1946 circular letter of the Hungarian Catholic Board of Bishops is also proof of a stand for the movement.¹⁷ Despite this, it is only after the 1980s that the spread of the devotions can be observed in Hungary, but at that time it no longer received the earlier support. In the past ten years, it can be felt that greater value is again placed on the movement within the Church. Since 2012 the Queen of the World Atonement Movement has undertaken to cultivate and continue the spiritual legacy of Sister Natália.¹⁸

Erzsébet Szántó Mrs Károly Kindelmann (1913-1985) launched the *Flame of Love* movement.¹⁹ From 13 April 1962 right up to her death she received private revelations from Jesus and Mary that she published in the “Diary of the Flame of

12 Cf.: BARNÁ 2000. 48-49.

13 On the spread in Hungary (Palócföld region) of the devotions they urged, see: LENGYEL 2006. 111-117; LENGYEL 2007. 274-281.

14 On her biography and the atonement movement she launched, see: FOGÁS 1993, 1994, 2001; <http://www.vilagkiralynoje.hu/>; <http://www.natalia-nover.lapok.eu/>; ANTALÓCZI 1991. 134-135; LENGYEL 2006. 113-114; LENGYEL 2007. 276-277.

15 The extent to which the notes written subsequently at the order of a priest can be regarded as a spiritual diary is disputed. The authenticity of the first Hungarian-language edition of the private revelations (*Regina [...] s. d.*), produced without the knowledge of Sister Natália and not based on the original notes in Hungarian (it was translated into Hungarian from a German-language publication), is also questioned. Cf.: FOGÁS 1993. 11-13. This version is most often popularised as a diary, with the difference that the mistakenly translated title (Victorious Queen of the World) appears correctly, the word “győzelmes” is used in the place of “győzedelmes”. See: http://www.vilagkiralynoje.hu/ma_files/natalia_nover.pdf; <http://www.egipatrona.hu/kapolna/index.php/natalia-nover/natalia-nover-naploja-vilag-gyozelmes-kiralynoje#.VjCcrdLhDIX> Accessed on 05 May 2015.

16 See: ERDŐ 2012.

17 For the text of the circular letter, see: http://www.vilagkiralynoje.hu/ma_files/a_magyar_katolikus_puspoki_kar_1946_os_karacsony_i_korlevele.pdf Accessed on 05. May 2015.

18 http://www.vilagkiralynoje.hu/vilag_kiralynoje_engesztelo_mozgalom/ Accessed on 05 May 2015.

19 On the movement, see: ANTALÓCZI 1991.85-98; BEGYIK s.d.a; s.d.b; <http://www.szeretetlang.hu/> On the spread of the movement in Hungary, see: LENGYEL 2006. 112-113; LENGYEL 2007. 277-278.

Love”²⁰. The ever wider spread of sin is emphasised through her too, the way out would be atonements in the spirit of the “Flame of Love of the Immaculate Heart of the Virgin Mary”. In her case too, the atonement mission of the Hungarian people is emphasised. The movement launched in the 1960s at first found followers mainly abroad, the earliest church recognition was not in Hungary either but in 1988 in a diocese in Ecuador.²¹ It spread more widely in Hungary in the 1980s and won church approval in Hungary in 2009. The spirituality is supported by the international church private society, a legal entity called the Flame of Love Movement of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.²²

Mária Rogács Mrs Zoltán Takács (1956 -), a woman from Sükösd, has seen apparitions of Jesus since 1993.²³ Since 1994 on the first Friday of every month and on every Friday during Lent she experiences the sufferings and death of Jesus on Golgotha with increasingly intense pain. She has undertaken these atonement sacrifices, at first for the youth of the world, then for the priests of the world, and since 1999 for the salvation of the whole world. She sees the dead, has healing powers and the gift of speaking in tongues. Between 1996 and 2014 the supernatural messages and teachings transmitted through her were published in *Golgota*, a monthly paper she edited, and then on their own website.²⁴ At the request of Jesus they also hold regular weekly²⁵ and monthly²⁶ atonements offered for youth, for priests and for the sick.²⁷ The special task for the Hungarian people of atonement also appears in the messages and teachings transmitted to her, also expressed in the use and gift of a special five-coloured rosary.²⁸ Recognition of her activity extends mainly to the “Community of Love” circles supporting her.²⁹ The Catholic Church receives her activity for the most

20 The diary has been published in several Hungarian and foreign-language editions around the world. After the recognition of the movement in Hungary (2009) the Szent István Társulat also issued a critical edition. KINDELMANN 2010. This publication is also available in electronic form on the website of the Flame of Love movement. <http://www.szeretetlang.hu/?old=leiras&parent=4> Accessed on 05 May 2015.

21 BEGYIK s. d. 5-6.

22 The movement also has its own website: <http://www.szeretetlang.hu/> Accessed on 12 August 2015.

23 Nowadays the Sükösd phenomena can be followed on the internet, on the website of the Sükösd Community of Love organised around the seer: <http://www.sukosdiszerettkozosseg.hu/> The site also lists devotional literature on this topic published in the last twenty years: <http://www.sukosdiszerettkozosseg.hu/kiadvanyaink/> Accessed on 10. July 2015. Social scientists have also carried out fieldwork at the site; see: PUSZTAI 1999; ARNOLD 2005.

24 <http://www.sukosdiszerettkozosseg.hu/jezus-krisztus-urunk-tanitasai/> Accessed on 10 June 2015.

25 At first atonement devotions were performed three times a week, on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays; since Lent 2013 they have not been held on Fridays. <http://www.sukosdiszerettkozosseg.hu> Accessed on 12. June 2015.

26 On the 13th of every month they hold atonement in memory of the Fatima apparitions. <http://www.sukosdiszerettkozosseg.hu> Accessed on 12 June 2015.

27 For a summary, see: <http://www.sukosdiszerettkozosseg.hu/a-sukosdi-jelenseg/a-magankinyilatkoztatások-szereperöl/> Accessed on 12 June 2015; ARNOLD 2005. 35-44.

28 The prayer aid, identical to the missionary rosary, is coloured yellow, blue, white, red and green to symbolise the continents as well as the territories annexed to Hungary. Its use helps to carry out Hungary’s privileged task, to atone for the Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin, and for the whole world. Cf.: ARNOLD 2005. 41-43; LENGYEL 2006. 114-115.

29 On the judgement of the seers and their followers, see: ARNOLD 2005. 50-51.

part with reservations, some members of the hierarchy have brought measures forbidding it (László Huszár, Bishop of Nagybecskerek diocese, László Dankó and his successor Balázs Bábel of Kalocsakecskemét diocese, János Pénzes of Szabadka).³⁰

William Kamm (1950-), the Australian seer known as *Little Pebble*, has been receiving private revelations from Jesus and Mary from the age of eighteen.³¹ He has been publishing them since 1983. He regards his most important mission as being to assist preparations for Christ's second coming. Since 1983 he has also had an individual charisma, that he must use to create a unity of the Seers³². To this end he has contacted numerous seers around the world, including several in Hungary.³³ He has already achieved the "unity" with some, because he also receives messages through them from Jesus and Mary, that is one of the proofs of the justification of his task. On 13 July 1985, Mary asked him for prayer, penance and atonement for world peace and entrusted him with establishing Saint Charbel prayer houses (*Saint Charbel Prayer, Peace, Unity and Atonement Houses*).³⁴ They were given wider media coverage³⁵ after the seer's scandalous life, the condemnation of his activities³⁶, church declarations dissociating themselves,³⁷ and his imprisonment³⁸. He still carries out his activity that can be followed on his website.³⁹

According to the present state of our knowledge, there was a big wave of establishments of Charbel prayer houses in Hungary from the early 1990s⁴⁰, the information needed for setting up a prayer house was disseminated in a stencilled publication.⁴¹

30 On the measures, see: <http://www.hagiosz.net/?q=kvazilatnokno>; http://www.hagiosz.net/?q=sukosdilato_masok Accessed on 05 June 2015.

31 I have summed up the seer's biography and activity from the information on his official website: <http://littlepebble.org/> Accessed on 13 August 2015.

32 See: <http://littlepebble.org/2015/01/28/unity-of-the-seers-charism-of-the-little-pebble/> Accessed on 13 August 2015.

33 See: <http://littlepebble.org/2015/05/13/hungary-unity-of-the-seers/> Accessed on 13 August 2015. Among the seers in Hungary listed on the website, Ágnes MENKÓ is probably the same person referred to by Ágnes LENGYEL in her study, who mediates the revelations of the Flame of Love since the death of ÉRZSÉBET SZÁNTÓ Mrs Károly KINDELMANN. Cf: LENGYEL 2007. 278.

34 Programme of the Saint Charbel – House of – Prayer – Peace – Unity and Atonement *Szent...* s. d. 15-17.

35 Information can be found on the internet regarding the propaganda intended to discredit him. The journalist Graeme Webber devoted a book to the subject in 2008, see: <http://www.awolfamongthesheep.com.au/> Accessed on 13 August 2015.

36 It can be mentioned as an example that there were negative opinions emphasising the sectarian nature of the Saint Charbel order he established, the apocalyptic tone of the seer's prophecies and his proclamation of himself as the future and last pope.

37 The Maronite and the Roman Catholic churches took measures of this kind. He was also expelled from his own church.

38 <http://littlepebble.org/messages/> Accessed on 13 August 2015. The messages he conveyed can also be read on Hungarian internet forums. <http://www.azidokvege.hupont.hu/46/little-pebble-altal-kapott-uzenetek/> Accessed on 13 August 2015.

39 <http://littlepebble.org/> Accessed on 13 August 2015.

40 For examples from the Palócföld region, see: LENGYEL 2007. 278-281.

41 The prayer booklet cited in footnote 26 was on sale in the 1990s in the devotional articles shop of the St Michael Archangel parish church of Érd – Óváros; it was probably also published there. I have no information on whether it was distributed anywhere else. The close connection between the Hungarian seer mentioned in footnote 23 and Little Pebble probably also played an important part in the production of this publication, since it also included a message from Mary that Ágnes received on 3 November 1989 through the Australian seer. *Szent...* s. d. 13-14.



SZENT CHARBEL IMA-BÉKE-EGYSÉG-
és KIENGESZTELŐDÉS H Á Z A .

BÁRKA SZENT SZÜZE, MÁRIA ANYÁNK
KERESZTÉNYEK SEGÍTSÉGE.

I M A - P R O G R A M

I. RÉSZ

/ A Szűzanya által 1985.VII. 13-án adott 33.sz. Üzenet alapján./

- Előkészület az imahelyen /1.oldalon/
19.45 órákor /minden hónap első szombatján/ : Tömjenezés az imahelyen és az egész lakásban, majd szenteltvíz hintése.
Ezután elmondjuk a teljes Exorcizmust Szt.Mihályhoz.
20.00 órákor /név szerint köszöntve a jelenlévő Egieket/ elkezdjük
1. a Rózsafüzér-imádságot: 15 tizedet,
 - 1/1. az Szrvendetes-rózsafüzért felajánljuk a Szentatyáért, a világ összes biborosáért, püspökéért és papjaiért,
 - 1/2. a fájdalmas-rózsafüzért a jelenlévők kéréseiért mondjuk.
 - 1/3. a dicsőséges-rózsafüzért hálaadásul ajánljuk fel.
 2. 15 percig a Szentírásból olvasunk, felajánlva a tisztító-tűzben szenvedő lelkekért.
 3. Pár percig Jézus, Mária és a különböző Szentek által kapott Üzenetekből olvasunk, előkészülve ezzel az Úr Jézusnak hamarosan bekövetkező, hatalommal és dicsőségben történő második eljövételére.
 4. Mondjuk el a "Rózsafüzér-Keresztútát" a Tisztító-tűzben szenvedő lelkekért.
 5. A Loretoi-litánia elmondása következik.
 6. Litánia Szent Józsefhez.
 7. Litánia az "Órangyalhoz".
 8. Litánia Szent Charbel-hez. /ejtsd: Sarbel /
- Az időközben kért további imák elmondása:
9. Irgalmas rózsafüzér /198.sz. Üzenet alapján/ elmondása a szenvedő Egyházért, hogy küzdelme győzelmes és dicsőséges legyen.
10. Szeretláng rózsafüzér /261. és 270.sz. Üzenet alapján/
11. Szent Sebek rózsafüzér / " " " " /
12. Meg nem születettek
13. Szeretláng litánia
Befejező ének /pl. Salve Regina stb./

/Azt a füzetet, amelybe kéréseinket regisztráljuk az imaösszejövetelek alkalmával, a Szent Szűz /pl. Rosa Mystica/ képe elé helyezzük./

Cover of the Saint Charbel House of Prayer – Peace – Unity and Atonement prayer booklet, with the prayer order communicated in a private revelation at the first Saturday gathering.

Right from the time they first began to spread we also find propaganda against them in church publications.⁴²

The Italian seer Pierina Gilli⁴³ (1911-1991) urged veneration of the *Rosa Mystica*. In 1947 she had a revelation from the Virgin Mother as the Mystical Rose. She wore a white cloak decorated with three roses and asked for prayer (white rose), penance (yellow rose) and atonement (red rose). From 1974 when it was carved as a statue based on the vision, copies for use in processions have been made. The so-called *Pilgrim Madonna* statues are intended to transmit Mary's requests (prayer, penance, atonement), and like the Fatima pilgrim statue, to spread the blessings of the shrine. Numbered portrayals blessed at the shrine have spread around the world; we have data on their presence in Hungary from the 1980s.⁴⁴

At first the devotions that spread under the influence of these atonement movements were able to take root mainly in paraliturgy, but even at the beginning they had church representatives and places of transmission, such as Budapest⁴⁵, Érd⁴⁶, or Homokkomárom⁴⁷.

The atonement practice in Hungary has become considerably more varied and widespread. The numbers urging and following it have increased, as has the number of transmission places. Some branches of the movements with roots in Hungary (Victorious Queen of the World and Flame of Love cult) are receiving growing support from the Hungarian Catholic Church. In 2006 the Conference of Hungarian Catholic Bishops proclaimed a year of atonement prayer for the revival of the Hungarian nation.⁴⁸ The Hungarian church dioceses operating in the territory of historical Hungary, including the Gyulafehérvár Archdiocese also joined the initiative.⁴⁹

The atoners' joint internet forum, *Engesztelők lapja*⁵⁰ can help to learn about the present atonement practice; it provides detailed and up-to-date information on the atonement movements within the Hungarian-speaking territories, mainly those

42 Cf.: SIPOS 2015.

43 On her visions and the movement she launched, see: ANTALÓCZI 1991. 99-102; WEIGL 1992. On the spread of the Pilgrim Madonna cult in Hungary, see: LENGVEL 2007. 278-279.

44 According to the information available to date, one of the earliest placings in a church was in the Holy Family church in Budapest in 1985, where the practice of praying for the Hungarian people on the 13th of each month has continued from that year right up to the present. Cf.: <http://www.szentcsalad.hu/?show=4> Accessed on 20 August 2015.

45 One such place in Budapest was the Kútvölgy chapel in Buda, where atonements for Hungarians began in 1969 under the leadership of the local parish priest István REGŐCZI. For more detail on the history of the chapel, see: REGŐCZI 1996. 19-26.

46 The parish church of Saint Michael Archangel in Érd - Óváros became a bigger centre of attraction in the early 1990s where atonement devotions were held on the 12th of every month while József Izeli was the parish priest. I have no information on the period following his retirement (in 2007).

47 From 1988 the place of pilgrimage that has roots reaching back to the 18th century became one of the major atonement centres in Transdanubia. Since then the practice of atonement on the 13th of each month is still observed there. On the revival of the shrine, see: SÁNDOR 1999.

48 A special commemorative album was devoted to events of the prayer year. SÜLLEI et al. 2007.

49 Süllel et al. 2007. 21.

50 <http://www.engesztelok.hu/> Accessed on 03 September 2015.

with Hungarian roots, the concept of atonement, its theological interpretation, and Hungary's atonement vocation. Browsing the site one is struck by the rapid increase in visions urging atonement, and the whole series of new tools offered to counterbalance the proliferation of sins, such as the atoners' way of the cross⁵¹, the united Flame of Love of the Holy Spirit and Mary⁵², etc. This phenomenon is also illustrated by a publication issued in 2014 by the Stella Maris Foundation⁵³. It contains more than 50 rosary prayers (57 in all) "dictated by heaven" in the last 10-15 years alone. The increasing support and popularisation of the activity of seers in Hungary mentioned above, the greatly increased emphasis placed on Hungary's atonement task, as well as the Hungarian atonement tradition reaching back to Saint Stephen or even further can be mentioned as an explanation of the manifestation also recognised in the literature on the analysis of visions.⁵⁴

20th – 21st century atonement movements in Transylvania (Székelyföld region)

From the late 1980s under the influence of the private revelations presented above, various atonement prayer communities organised from grass roots level and atonement places with larger catchment areas were established also in Transylvania, in the Székelyföld region, at first following initiatives from Hungary, then at their own initiative. The earliest to spread was the Thursday prayer practice⁵⁵ linked to the private revelations of Erzsébet Szántó Mrs Károly Kindelmann, generally in private houses, as devotions performed within the frame of the rosary confraternity.

The earliest atonement prayer practice linked to a church arose in Csíktaploca. Atonement devotions began in 1987 in the parish church of the settlement that belongs to the Csíkszereda administrative area, at first on Thursdays, then from September 1988 on the 12th of each month, where sacred hours covering the whole night became part of the local liturgy since they also comprised adoration and holy mass. The political change in 1989 brought possibilities for the wider spread of the atonement movement. The devotions that had earlier been restricted mainly to private homes, now found a place also within the church religious practice. A survey carried out in 1998⁵⁶ found the presence of some form of atonement devotions in 58 (40%) of the 144⁵⁷ settlements in the Székelyföld region. 80% of

51 <http://engesztelok.hu/irasok-tanulmanyok/879-az-engesztelok-keresztutja> Accessed on 03 September 2015.

52 <http://engesztelok.hu/magyarorszag-engesztelo-hivatasa/155-a-szentlelek-es-maria-egyesített-szeretletangja> Accessed on 03 September 2015.

53 JÁNOSSY 2014.

54 See: BARNA 2000. 47; KESZEG – PETI – PÓCS 2009. 8.

55 For further details, see: FÁBIÁN 2011.

56 For further details, see: FÁBIÁN 2012.

57 The Gyulafehérvár Archdiocese operates parishes in the settlements studied in the Székelyföld region.



Thursday atonement prayer hour held in a private house, around a table decorated like an altar. Korond/Corund, 2002. Photo: Gabriella FÁBIÁN



Thursday atonement prayer hour held in a private house, with the prayer gestures widely used in the charismatic movement. Korond/Corund, 2002. Photo: Gabriella FÁBIÁN

the atonement devotions took place in an ecclesiastical (church, chapel, religious instruction room, prayer room) environment, the rest were held in private homes. But whatever the place, at that time the majority were still paraliturgical occasions. The results of a survey repeated 12 years later show that in 2010 atonement prayers were still said in 79% of the earlier places and new ones had appeared, as a result the spread value of 1998 had fallen by only 2%. A greater change could be observed in their acceptance by the church: in many places they had become part of the liturgy. At the time of both surveys there were settlements, mainly towns, where atonement devotions were held in several places, generally at different times.

A sociology of religion survey⁵⁸ conducted in 2010 helps to give an insight into the extent to which a representative stratum of Roman Catholics in the Székelyföld region with a Roman Catholic majority (84%), specifically in the Csík region⁵⁹ had joined one or other of the atonement movements. The results show that the respondents tended to be members of two prayer communities, the rosary confraternity (29%) and the atonement prayer group (9.8%),⁶⁰ while the participation in certain “modern” spirituality movements⁶¹ remained below 6%.⁶²

The investigations to date reveal little of the prayer practices followed by the atonement communities, or of their prayer repertoire. In the late 1980s the various devotions circulated mainly in manuscript form. A “blue atonement booklet” titled *Engesztelő imaóra* [Atonement Prayer Hour] appeared in 1990, was reissued a number of times, and was widely used.

Following the change of political system, there was a sudden great increase in the offer, providing a rich literature from which to compile the atonement repertoires.

The free practice of religion resulting from the 1989 political change also opened up possibilities for pilgrimages abroad. Among the sites of Marian apparitions, the greatest number visited the Medjugorje shrine, but some went as far as Lourdes and Fatima.

Érd, Homokkomárom and Budapest were foremost among the atonement places in Hungary in the early 1990s, while in the second half of the 1990s Sükösd was the most visited.

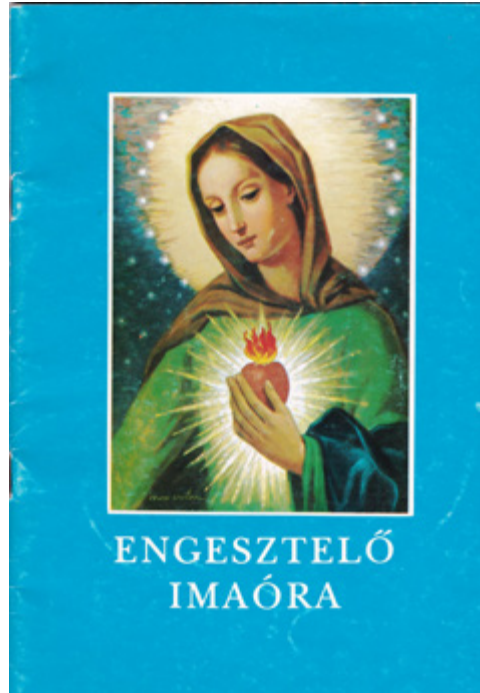
58 The survey by questionnaire of 613 persons examined the religiosity of the Roman Catholic population of 61 settlements in the Székelyföld region. Cf.: FEJES 2014. 4-6; 98-100; 148-151.

59 The Gyulafehérvár Archdiocese classified here the archdeaconate districts of Alcsík and Felcsík.

60 The researcher regards both groups as traditional (as also existing before the political changes of 1989). In addition, the church council, church choir, youth group, women’s association, the group of church cleaners/decorators/repairers were also included in this category. Although atonement prayer groups had also been formed before the change of system, in my opinion in 1989 this religious community could not yet be regarded as traditional.

61 The religious movements launched or revived after the change of system were classified in this group: Cursillo, Scouts, University spirituality, Men’s Association, Fokoláré, Net, Married Couples’ Weekend Movement, Faith and Light, KALOT, Charismatic prayer group, Kolping, Taizé.

62 They participated to a greater extent only in the activity of two of the new religious communities (Scouts - 6%, University spirituality – 2.8%), the rate of participation in the others remained below 1.5%.



Cover of the Atonement Prayer Hour prayer booklet, with an image of Mary linked to the Flame of Love spirituality

In the first decades of the 21st century two shrines attracting visitors from a wider area emerged in Transylvania, one of which was also a place of atonement and became more popular than those in Hungary. From 2000 Szőkefalva and from 2005 Szilágynagyfalu became the most visited atonement shrines of the Szeklers. The Csíktaploca atonement gradually lost its earlier significance and the practice that was followed continuously for 25 years was no longer observed here from July 2012. Nowadays the earlier popular pilgrimages also attract fewer people; since 2008 the introduction of a new prayer greeting Mary on the first Saturday, in addition to the major church year and feast days (Whitsun, the feast on Mary's name day) draws large numbers of pilgrims, especially from the Székelyföld region to the Csíksomlyó votive church.

A few figures from the records kept by a pilgrim from Csík will perhaps give an idea of the popularity of the places of pilgrimage: since 1985⁶³ she has taken part in 213 pilgrimages, close to 80% of which she helped to organise. She visited Érd 8 times between 1990-1992, Sükösd 21 times between 1995-2004⁶⁴, Szőkefalva

63 Before the political changes of 1989, between 1985-1990 she organised pilgrimages by friends and relatives to Máriaradna (on eight occasions) to the "feast day of Hungarians" on 8 September.

64 During this period there was a year when pilgrimages here were organised on three occasions.



Atonement held on the 12th of each month in the Saint Michael Archangel parish church in Érd-Óváros, the altar with statues of Mary carried by the pilgrims. Érd, 1995. Photo: Gabriella FÁBIÁN

86 times since 21 March 1999⁶⁵, Szilágynagyfalu 51 times since 13 August 2004⁶⁶, Medjugorje 14 times since 20 October 2007⁶⁷, Lourdes three times between 2005-2011 and Fatima on two occasions, in 2005 and 2011.

Atonements are held in Szőkefalva on the 17th day of every month since December 1999 following the visions of Rozália Marian (1964-2011).⁶⁸ Mary first appeared on 17th June 1995 to the woman who lost her sight at the age of 30. From autumn 1998 the private “conversations” became public and remained so until their con-

65 They first learnt about the apparitions in Szőkefalva on the occasion of a pilgrimage to Sükösd. From the second occasion on, she organised pilgrimages to every public appearance in Szőkefalva (22 occasions). During this time (1999-2005) the number of pilgrims organised for the trips ranged from 50 to 800. There was also a demand for visits to the atonements held on the 17th of the month, but these involved smaller numbers (less than 50 participants). In recent years she has generally only been able to organise pilgrimages for the anniversary of the appearances.

66 They generally come here on 4-5 occasions a year, for the atonements on the first Saturday.

67 Pilgrimages have been organised here from rural areas since the early 1990s through the intermediary of Hungary. From 1992 a family business here has been organising pilgrimages. They organise trips mainly to Érd and Medjugorje.

68 In 2005 a special research group was formed to study the Szőkefalva apparitions and phenomena. Cf.: Pócs 2012. 7-8. A number of studies have been published on their results, see, for example: Gyórfy 2009a, 2009b, 2012; PÉTI 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b, 2012a, 2012b; Pócs 2008a, 2008b, 2008c. On the Szőkefalva atonement devotions, see: Gyórfy 2012. 149-151.



“Greeting Mary” on the first Saturday in the Csíksomlyó/Şumuleu Ciuc votive church.
Csíksomlyó/ Şumuleu Ciuc, 2010. Photo: Gabriella FÁBIÁN

clusion on 17 June 2005 when Mary made a declaration as the Queen of Light. On the occasion of her second and third appearances Mary initiated the creation of prayer groups, and the establishment of a “prayer centre”. To meet the requests in practice an atonement community was formed of two different denominations (Roman Catholic, Orthodox), and ethnic groups (Romanian, Hungarian), and night-time atonements on the 17th of each month were introduced from December 1999. In my opinion the ideas for the practical implementation were influenced not only by the local parish priest and his faithful⁶⁹ but also by pilgrims from the Székelyföld region who were in close contact with the seer from the time of the second apparition. A number of them were committed practitioners and disseminators of atonement and they also had experience in launching the devotion practice. In response to a request received in a later message, the devotions on May 17th were proclaimed the day of youth atonement.

A publication⁷⁰ containing the material of the atonements in Szőkefalva between 1999-2011 was also compiled, and published in memory of the seer after her death, and was intended to help the atonement devotions performed in the spirit of the Queen of Light. Separate atonement communities were also formed

69 Cf.: GYÓRFY 2012. 150.

70 JÁNOSSY 2011.

in a few settlements of the Székelyföld region (e.g. Nyárádremete, Szárhegy, the Gyimes villages) to cultivate veneration of the Queen of Light.

In Nagyfalu atonement devotions have been held since October 2004 following the visions of Éva Bara Madarász⁷¹ (1942-2010). Its initiator was given the task in 1987 in Csíksomlyó from the Holy Spirit to work in the spirit of ecumenism, together with her spiritual guide, János Csilik. She was active between 1999-2004 in Érsemjén, where she was co-leader of the local atonement community. In 2002 she moved to Szilágynagyfalu, where from 2004 to 2008 she received supernatural messages from the Holy Spirit. Since 2008, because of the state of her health, her spiritual leader receives the messages and teachings. She died in July 2010. On the basis of her visions, at present atonement devotions are held on the first Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday of every month, and regularly on Thursdays and Sundays, performed according to the instructions received in the supernatural messages. The prayer practice has also been published in printed form.⁷² The devotions are performed not only there but also in a number of atonement communities in the Székelyföld region.

The atonement sacrifice in the Székelyföld region

Special emphasis is placed on atonement practice nowadays on the notion that there is no atonement without sacrifice. Atonement is made at the invitation of Jesus, but it means voluntarily undertaking a sacrifice. Atonement can be achieved by practising various atonement actions. Without covering all aspects, I shall deal with two of these⁷³:

1. prayer
2. penance

The atonement prayer as atonement sacrifice

Regarding their organisation in time, the atonement devotions are linked to a particular time of day, or a particular day of the week or month; their duration varies. The daily and weekly devotions are shorter, lasting one to three hours. The atonements held regularly every month are longer and are organised not only during the day but also at night. On the basis of the surveys described above, it can be said that atonement devotions in the Székelyföld region in private homes are held

⁷¹ The seer published her autobiography in three volumes. BARA MADARÁSZ 2003; 2006; 2008.

⁷² CSILIK – B. MADARÁSZ 2006.

⁷³ Cf.: MAGYAR – HORVÁTH 2006. 76-81.



Prayer hour for a children's group on the May youth atonement day.
Szőkefalva/Seuca, 2002. Photo: Gabriella FÁBIÁN



Atonement devotions performed regularly every week in a private house under the influence of the phenomena in Szilágynagyfalu/Nuşfalău. Csíkmenaság/Armăşeni, 2011. Photo: Gabriella FÁBIÁN

mainly on Thursdays, while those in churches tend to be on the first Thursday, the first Friday or the 13th day of the month.⁷⁴

Fewer examples are found of commitment to daily prayer practice. The view that the extent of sacrifice depends on the duration of the devotions and the time when they are performed (day, night) can also be found among the atoners. The vigil is a very ancient deed of penance⁷⁵, this too could explain such a value judgement.

Regarding the spatial organisation, the atonement devotions can be held in an ecclesiastical (church, sacristy, prayer room) or paraliturgical environment. The sacral space of paraliturgical devotions is generally created by temporarily rearranging a room in the house or apartment. In the latter case permanent or temporary cultic/sacral spaces may be created. Rooms serving the purpose of the prayer occasion, respected as a chapel and resembling one in the furnishings are found less often.⁷⁶

In 2009 an atonement community with virtual use of space was formed in Transylvania. The founding members of the Blessed Charles IV of Hungary “remote prayer group” are knights and dames of the Order of the Blessed Lady of Hungarians, Victorious Queen of the World, Holy Crown, who invite all those interested to join them on the second Thursday of every month in prayer for the revival of the Hungarian nation.⁷⁷

A number of rosary devotions that specifically serve atonement are also widespread in the Székelyföld region. They include the Atonement, the Sacrifice and the Mystery of the Five Wounds of the Hungarian People rosary. The Atonement rosary consists of seven tenths, built up from parts of the Sorrowful, the Divine Mercy, the Sacred Wounds, the Deliverance, the Unity, the Flame of Love and the Mother of Tears rosaries, transmitted to a Sopron prayer community by Jesus in 2009.⁷⁸ The Sacrifice rosary consists of five tenths, that Jesus gave to a Hungarian woman in 2005 through “internal hearing”. It is recommended that this prayer undertaken for the physical and spiritual survival and revival of the Hungarian nation be said from three o’clock every Tuesday.⁷⁹ The rosary of the mystery of the five wounds of the Hungarian people is based on the theory of the mystery of the five wounds of the Hungarian people elaborated by an Austrian missionary serving in Hungary with the aim of strengthening the Hungarians’ sense of Marian, Christian identity.⁸⁰

74 This atonement time is linked not only to the Fatima apparition but also to the apparition in Montichiari, Italy. Requests connected to the Rosa Mystica have multiple links to the 13th day (the 13th day of every month – Mary day, 13 July. – Rosa Mystica feast, 13 October – world atonement sacrifice day).

75 <http://lexikon.katolikus.hu/V/virraszt%C3%A1s.html> Accessed on 03 September 2015.

76 A Charbel prayer house where prayers for peace and reconciliation were said on the first and third Saturday of every month for twenty years can be mentioned as an example. Another example is a “chapel” with features most closely resembling the Rosa Mystica cult, that has been used since 1991 for daily rosary community prayers.

77 <http://imalanc.ro/w/kezdolap/tavimacsportjaink/> Accessed on 03 September 2015.

78 <http://oratio.hu/r-olvaso08.php> Accessed on 03 September 2015.

79 <http://oratio.hu/r-nemzet01.php> Accessed on 03 September 2015.

80 The first edition of the prayer booklet on the rosary and the related theory appeared in 2003 followed by an expanded version in 2008. LANG 2003; 2008.



Atonement held together with the Act of Adoration on the 13th of each month in the side chapel of the Zetelaka/Zetea parish church. Zetelaka/Zetea, 2010. Photo: Gabriella FÁBIÁN



Privately owned atonement chapel. Szentegyháza/Vlăhița, 2010. Photo: Gabriella FÁBIÁN



The "altar" in a privately owned Charbel prayer house. Csíkszentdomokos/Sândominic, 1994.
Photo: Gabriella FÁBIÁN



Devotions in a Charbel prayer house, showing the Atonement Prayer Hour prayer booklet and the Flame of Love rosary in use. All the participants are wearing the prescribed white headscarf. Csíkszentdomokos/Sândominic, 1994. Photo: Gabriella FÁBIÁN

According to his idea, with the Trianon peace treaty (1920) resulting in the loss of five parts of the country, Hungary received five wounds, that is, it was crucified, thereby reaching the highest degree of atonement sacrifice. Five Hungarian vocations⁸¹ are expressed in the mysteries of the rosary, each fifth bead is followed by a medal bearing the portrait of a historical figure, a person of the church or a saint.⁸²

As far as I know, the atonement practice performed in the sacristy of a parish church in the Székelyföld region⁸³ in the spirit of Christian unity, that is, for ethnic and denominational reconciliation, is unique. The members of their prayer group are women of different ethnic origin (Romanian, Hungarian) and denomination (Orthodox, Greek, and Roman Catholic). Their collective atonement devotions generally last an hour and a half and comprise rosary prayers and reading from scripture. The rosary tenths are said in Hungarian, Romanian and Latin.

81 1. possession of the Holy Crown, 2. being in close connection with the papacy, 3. being Mary's country of atonement, 4. being the bastion defending Europe, 5. being the legacy and property of Mary - Regnum Marianum.

82 Cf.: LANG 2008. 9-113; LENGYEL 2006. 115.

83 The community did not wish the name of the locality to be made public.

The Latin prayers were introduced with the help of a teacher of Latin and Romanian who sometimes takes part in the devotions; it was considered important to introduce them because they regard the Latin language as the purest, in the sense that it is the most free from sacrilegious words. The special feature of this form of prayer is that they not only pray in several languages (both alternately and simultaneously⁸⁴), but also that they learn a given prayer in an unknown language. The difficulty they undertake adds to the value of the sacrifice.



Cover of the prayer booklet presenting the Mystery of the Five Wounds of the Hungarian People rosary.

Penance as atonement sacrifice

Penance is atonement for sins committed. Its main actions can be: persevering performance of the commitments undertaken, patient bearing of difficulties, and fasting, alms-giving, and self-renunciation.⁸⁵ In the first centuries of Christianity, penance had to be done publicly and in cases for years, for grievous sins. "Private penance" was spread in Europe by Irish missionaries in the 7th century.⁸⁶ Mediaeval saints wore various pieces of penitential clothing or belts, slept on hard surfaces or on the ground.⁸⁷ Self-flagellation was at first performed by monks, then

⁸⁴ There are prayers that everyone says in their own mother tongue.

⁸⁵ <http://lexikon.katolikus.hu/V/vezek1%C3%A9s.html> Accessed on 03 September 2015.

⁸⁶ Catechism of the Catholic Church <http://www.katolikus.hu/kek/kek01420.html#K1438> Accessed on 03 September 2015.

⁸⁷ MAGYAR – HORVÁTH 2006. 80.

from the 10th century by devout lay persons. After major epidemics or natural disasters public atonement processions were also held, then under their influence various penitential societies were formed. Flagellation spread throughout Europe in the 13th century,⁸⁸ despite repeated bans the custom survived in Hungary and the Székelyföld region up to the mid-19th century.⁸⁹

A frequent form of penance today is the Stations of the Cross. In the wake of pilgrimages to the Holy Land and the crusades it became a practice in Europe to set up a Way of the Cross. Up to the 16th century the forms set up generally had 7 stations, later this was expanded to 12 or 14 stations.⁹⁰ Together with the rosary, meditational prayers evoking Christ's passion are one of the most effective Catholic prayer practices, full indulgence can be earned with them.⁹¹ They are most often performed during Lent and on pilgrimages.⁹² The Way of the Cross offers a complex – verbal, spiritual, physical – meditation; it depends on the individual which of their different levels he or she is able and willing to experience.⁹³ The ways of the cross are formed in such a way that the topography in itself requires a physical sacrifice that can be combined with certain additional penances. Pilgrimages in the Székelyföld region generally link these practices to a particular shrine, the variant of walking on the knees is generally found in Fatima, walking barefoot in Medjugorje.⁹⁴ The various possibilities for practising atonement sacrifice are generally known and experienced in the different places where there have been Marian apparitions and at atonement places attracting people from a large catchment area. The pilgrimage itself can also be regarded as an atonement sacrifice. The religious actions undertaken on pilgrimages (prayer, Stations of the Cross), can be combined with offers of different degrees of physical hardship and self-denial, resulting in differing commitments. The leader of the community presented earlier and judged to be unique, besides following the example of Christ based on the virtues of obedience, purity and poverty, undertook to serve Christian unity and atonement. She distributed all her wealth and lives in a storeroom in the presbytery where she performs voluntary service. She lives entirely dependent on God, spending most of the day in prayer, often making pilgrimages to places of atonement and Marian apparitions, where she regularly undertakes additional penitence (for example walking the way of the cross on her knees)⁹⁵. For some time now she has taken part in the perpetual Eucharistic adorations organised in the Queen of Peace Greek Catholic church in Temesvár. She has on occasion undertaken nones with atonement devotions on nine successive nights in nine different places of atonement. She regularly takes part in atonement devotions

88 KOVÁCS 1974. 47.

89 BÁLINT – BARNA 1994. 139-140.

90 LANTOSNÉ IMRE 1996. 139-140.

91 <http://lexikon.katolikus.hu/K/kereszt%C3%BAti%20%C3%A1jlatoss%C3%A1g.html> Accessed on 03 September 2015.

92 KÖRPICS 2014. 232.

93 Cf.: KÖRPICS 2014. 232-234.

94 Similar examples from Hungary can be found in the writings discussing the practice of atonement. MAGYAR – HORVÁTH 2006. 149-150.

95 I was able to observe this atonement action on a number of occasions in Szőkefalva.

organised in the town, in some cases acting as the leader. Whenever she can, she attends the Eucharistic adorations held in the town's Greek Catholic church on Thursdays and on the first Saturday.

Summing up

The apparitions of Mary in the 20th-21st centuries increasingly draw attention to the sinfulness of people today, making reconciliation with God ever more necessary. The individual vision experiences echo the same messages. In the last thirty years in both Hungary and Transylvania we can observe the spread of movements trying to influence the correction of this disorder. Some also stress that it is the task of Hungary to perform this mission. The influence of the activity of three seers from Hungary (Natália Kovacsics Mária a nun, Erzsébet Szántó Mrs Károly Kindelmann and Mária Rogács Mrs Zoltán Takács), an Italian (Pierina Gilli), an Australian (Little Pebble) and two Transylvanian (Rozália Marian, Éva B. Madarász) seers can be observed in the atonement practice that has arisen in the Székelyföld over the past period of close to 30 years. The devotions have spread to 40% of the church communities in the Székelyföld region. The occasions were at first strictly paraliturgical but since then most of them have been incorporated into the church religious practice and there are also examples of initiatives from above. There has been a proliferation of vision experiences urging atonement, making it almost impossible to continue investigation into the interactions. The current practice is characterised by two kinds of ideology transmitting a denominational and an ethnic reconciliation, and emphasising the individual chosenness of the Hungarian people. It seemed to me to be worth throwing light on atonement practice in the Székelyföld region from the angle of sacrifice. By presenting various examples of two different acts, prayer and penance, I have tried to give an idea of the variety of atonement practice in the Székelyföld region.

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PLACE NAMES IN HUNGARIAN AND ROMANIAN

County abbreviations: BN – Bács-Kiskun, HR – Harghita, MS – Mureş, PE – Pest, SJ – Sălaj

Country abbreviations: HU – Hungary, RO – Romania

Budapest, HU

Csíkmenaság, Armăşeni, HR, RO

Csíksomlyó, Şumuleu Ciuc, HR, RO

Csíkszentdomokos, Sândominic, HR, RO

Csíkszentkirály, Sâncrăieni, HR, RO

Csíkszereda, Miercurea-Ciuc, HR, RO

Csíktaploca, Topliţa-Ciuc, HR, RO

Érd, PE, HU

Homokkomárom, ZA, HU

Korond, Corund, HR, RO

Nyárádköszvényes, Mătrici, MS, RO

Nyárádremete, Eremitu, MS, RO

Sükösd, BN, HU

Szárhegy, Lăzarea, HR, RO

Szentegyháza, Vlăhiţa, HR, RO

Szilágynagyfalu, Nuşfalău, SJ, RO

Szováta, Sovata, MS, RO

Szókefalva, Seuca, MS, RO

Zetelaka, Zetea, HR, RO