

3-1984

New Progress by Hungary's Greek Catholic Church

Emmerich András

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree>

 Part of the [Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

András, Emmerich (1984) "New Progress by Hungary's Greek Catholic Church," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 4: Iss. 2, Article 4.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol4/iss2/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University.

NEW PROGRESS BY HUNGARY'S GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH*

by **Emmerich András**

Emmerich András, S.J. (Roman Catholic) has contributed to OPREE previously. Since 1962 he has been the leader of the Hungarian Institute for the Sociology of Religion in Vienna. Author of numerous publications on the position of the church in Hungary, among which are the following co-edited and co-authored with Julius Morel: Hungarian Catholicism Handbook (Vienna: HISR, and Toronto: St. Elizabeth of Hungary Parish, 1983) and Church in Transition: Hungary's Catholic Church from 1945 to 1982 (Vienna: HISR, 1983).

The efforts at renewal being carried out within Hungary's Greek Catholic Church have again met with considerable success. In August of this year in Nyíregyháza, Bishop Dr. Imre Timkó consecrated the new, richly decorated Byzantine-style chapel which was built by the Greek Catholic diocese's seminary. The bishop also blessed the newly renovated seminary building, a three-story building that will house the seminary's professors, and the also newly renovated building for the diocese's central office. The blessing of the buildings was followed by their official opening. With this act, the Greek Catholic Diocese of Hajdúdorog, which is nearing its 70th year of existence and is the largest legally functioning Greek Catholic diocese in Eastern Europe, acquired a modern seminary and central administration building.

The two-day ceremonies surrounding the consecration and blessing of the buildings began on August 16 with a large pilgrimage to Máriapócs, the diocese's most famous pilgrim shrine. In addition to Hungary's College of Bishops, a number of important Church dignitaries from other countries took part in the festivities. The reception which followed was attended by local public officials, as well as by several leading functionaries of the State Office for Church Affairs.

*Reprinted from Emmerich András (ed.) Church in Transition: Hungary's Catholic Church from 1945 to 1982 (Vienna: Hungarian Institute for Sociology of Religion, 1983, pp. 393-403 by permission of the publisher.)

THE ORIENTAL RITE IN HUNGARY

Tribes practicing religion according to the Greek rite already lived within the territory that is now Hungary before the advent of the Barbarian Invasion. At first, the members of the Latin and Greek rites comprised approximately equally large groups. The conscious shift in Hungary toward the Western form of Christianity during the course of the 11th century, and wartime devastation during the 13th and 14th centuries of areas inhabited by Oriental-rite Christians, led to a continual decrease in their numbers in comparison with that of the Latin rite Christians. Toward the close of the 15th century, the Bishopric of Munkács, which originated from a single monastery, became a center for the country's Greek Catholics. In 1595 Pope Clement VIII reduced the bishopric to the status of a district vicariate under the jurisdiction of the Archdioceses of Eger and Esztergom.

From the 13th century on, a great number of Christians belonging to the Orthodox rite immigrated to Hungary from the East and settled in that area of the country. In 1646, four hundred of their priests in Ungvár agreed to unite with the Roman Catholic Church, while retaining their traditional liturgy and the right to continue to choose their own bishops. It was not until 80 years later that the smaller territory of Máramaros, with 200 priests, affiliated itself with this religious union. With time, groups of the Greek Orthodox population of Transylvania also affiliated themselves with the Roman Catholics, and were placed directly under the authority of the Holy See in 1721. The Diocese of Esztergom retained jurisdiction over them only in matters regarding marriage. In the meantime, several Greek-rite bishoprics had been founded in what is now Yugoslavia. These were followed by the establishment of the Diocese of Eperjes in 1806, and that of Szamosújvár in 1856.

The Diocese of Hajdúdorog

Efforts at founding a Hungarian-speaking Greek Catholic bishopric in Hajdúdorog began in 1863. The first such request was unsuccessful. The Common Action Committee was founded in 1868; its goal was to establish a Greek Catholic diocese and secure permission for a

Hungarian-language liturgy.

In 1898 the Common Action Committee was replaced by a national committee which again requested the establishment of a Greek Catholic diocese. The request submitted was signed by 113 parishes and 568 mission parishes. On May 6, 1912, the Greek Catholic Diocese of Hajdúdorog was finally established by Emperor Francis Joseph, King of Hungary, and was constituted on June 8 of that year by Pope Pius X in the papal bull Christifideles Graeci. The Hungarian parliament officially recognized the new diocese in Legal Article XXXV/1913.

The papal bull lists 162 parishes with 261,000 members as belonging to the new diocese. These parishes were spread throughout six Roman Catholic dioceses. The city of Hajdúdorog was to be the episcopal see. (At present, the center of the diocese is at Nyíregyháza.) Ancient Greek, rather than Hungarian, was designated as the liturgical language of the new diocese. This did not hinder the faithful from continuing to use it as such. As a result of both its many years of use in the liturgy and its de facto recognition by the Second Vatican Council, the Hungarian language was finally accepted as the official liturgical language of the country's Greek Catholic Church.

After the peace treaty at Trianon in 1920, only a small section of the Greek Catholic dioceses of Eperjes and Munkács still existed within the borders of Hungary. This area became an apostolic exarchate in 1923, with Miskolc as its ecclesiastical see. The exarchate has 35 churches and chapels spread out among approximately 25 church communities and their affiliated mission parishes. 30 priests care for the exarchate's ca. 35,000 Hungarian-speaking Greek Catholics. The exarchate has been under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Hajdúdorog since 1960.

According to statistics issued in 1980, the Diocese of Hajdúdorog presently has ca. 150 parishes in which 146 priests care for about 30,000 faithful.

The Effect of the Council Renewal

The resolutions adopted by Vatican II had a significant effect upon Church life in the Diocese of Hajdúdorog. Their importance was summarized by Diocesan Bishop Imre Timkó who said that, "based on the

new and genuine concept of unity and the actual praxis resulting therefrom, the Council resolutions seek to effectively maintain the uniqueness of the Greek Christians. The resolutions do away with motives that support a process of assimilation and dissolution. They enable the Christian Eastern rite faith community, within the fellowship of the Catholic Church, to become the conscious heir and bearer of values which were already inherent to the Eastern rite at the time of its union with the Roman Catholic Church."¹

This aim is also supported by the Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches which contains a provision stating that "like those of the West, the Churches of the East have both the full right, and also the duty, to govern themselves according to their proper and individual procedures which are sanctioned by a rich tradition, harmonize better with the customs of the faithful, and are seen as likely to foster the good of souls." (No. 5) The document goes on to state that "all Eastern rite members should know and be convinced that they can and should always preserve their lawful liturgical rights and traditional ways. . . If they have improperly abandoned their traditional Eastern practices due to temporal or personal circumstances, let them endeavor to return to the traditions of their predecessors." (No. 6)

These provisions have also freed the Greek Catholic clergy from the pressure of being in a position where they were apparently able to demonstrate their equality with Roman rite priests only through imitating or adopting the life style and external forms of the Roman Catholic priesthood. Through the encouragement and increased sense of self-value given them by the Council decisions, the priests of the Hajdúdorog diocese are turning more and more, both in clothing and in their way of life, to the Eastern forms practiced by the Orthodox Churches.

At the same time this development was occurring, the legal aspect of the problem involved in caring for Greek Catholic faithful living in the diaspora was resolved. This problem had arisen through the fact that Greek Catholics who had left their diocesan territory were pastorally cared for in their new surrounding only by Roman Catholic priests, and were in this way wrested from their original Church community. In the

fall of 1968, the Holy See extended the jurisdiction of the bishop of Hajdúdorog to all Greek Catholic faithful, "wherever they might be living within the country." To pastorally care for the faithful living outside of the diocese itself, the Hajdúdorog diocese then organized diaspora parishes with centers in Buda, Pécs, Pest-North, Pest-East, Pest-South, Szeged, and Makó. Each center is responsible for a given area, which is again divided into three sub-areas: the parish area, the more distant affiliate area and, farthest away of all, the diaspora area.

The Modernization of the Seminary and the Diocesan Central Office

The expansion and renovation of the seminary and the diocesan central office in Nyíregyháza constitute a new milestone in implementing the possibilities created by the Council decisions. The theology professors, who up to now had been living in the seminary itself, have been given a three-story residence. This change goes beyond a simple improvement in the professors' living quarters. The vacated space in the seminary made possible an expansion of that institution's facilities. (It is quite significant that Hungary's Greek Catholic Church has no problem with priestly vocations, as the Latin dioceses have.) Because of the lack of space which had plagued the seminary up to now, many Greek Catholic seminarians were sent to the Central Seminary in Budapest where they were also able to acquire an academic degree at the theological Academy. As a result, the Hajdúdorog diocese has proportionately doubled the number of priests with academic degrees than does the Roman rite diocese in the same territory. In the future, only those Greek Catholic seminarians who will later be involved in scholarly work are to be sent to the Budapest Central Seminary.

From now on, greater emphasis in the training of the seminarians will be placed on the unique aspects and characteristics of the Eastern rite. This was taken into consideration in the construction on the seminary grounds of the Eastern-style chapel with its onion-shaped dome; the chapel will also serve as a liturgical practice room for the seminarians.

The construction costs amounted to 21 million forints (almost one

million US dollars), 10 million of which were contributed by the diocese itself. This sum stemmed partially from contributions by members of the diocese, and partially from contributions by Greek Catholics in other countries, as well as from foreign Church institutions, such as the Sacred Congregation for the Oriental Churches, etc. The organization established by the German and Austrian Bishops conferences, the European Aid fund, contributed eight million forints toward the construction costs. The remaining three million forints are presently listed by the diocese as an outstanding debt.

The Consecration Festivities

The traditional pilgrimage to Máriapócs in connection with the feast of the Assumption also served as a "worthy commencement" of the festivities surrounding the consecration and blessing of the new buildings. Máriapócs is not only one of the largest pilgrim shrines in Hungary, but also the largest pilgrim shrine in the entire world for members of the Greek Catholic Church. It is a national shrine with an international reputation; a cross-section of its visitors shows it to be a pilgrim shrine which is both supraconfessional (Roman and Greek Catholics, Protestants, and members of the Greek Orthodox Church), supraregional (Hungarians, Poles, Slovaks, Germans and, in times past, Russians from the Subcarpathian Mountains, i.e., Ruthenians), and also international (pilgrims from Western Europe and even Americans). The veneration of Mary at this shrine centers around an icon which began to shed tears on November 4, 1696. All who were present observed the miracle and were filled with awe. The miracle was also personally seen and attested to by a Catholic priest, General Corbelli, and two imperial garrison officers who were standing in close proximity to the picture. This miraculous occurrence was subsequently witnessed by several thousand persons. The icon was taken down and carefully examined but, according to the report submitted by the general, it was impossible to find a rational explanation for the occurrence. The icon shed warm, human tears for a period of 14 days. At the order of the emperor and despite the protests of the residents of Máriapócs, the icon was brought to Vienna and placed in St. Stephen's Cathedral, where it remains

enshrined on a beautiful Oriental side altar. In Máriapócs a copy of the icon was made and hung up to replace the original and it was on this copy that the miracle reoccurred on August 1 and 5, 1715. On December 2 and 6, 1905 tears were observed on the picture for the last time. Copies of this picture exist throughout the world. Most of them (especially in North America) are found in the churches of Hungarian emigrants who are members of the Greek Catholic Church.

On August 16 of this year (1982), 60-80,000 persons came to Máriapócs to participate in the festivities and in a mass celebrated at the shrine's open-air altar by Cardinal Lékai and the other Latin rite bishops who were in attendance. In his sermon, the diocese's bishop, Dr. Imre Timkó, spoke of the origins of Marian devotion in the Eastern Church. At the beginning of his sermon, he emphasized the special significance of the festive occasion: "Let us celebrate this feast with one another on this holy Sunday, and in a spirit of thanksgiving give witness to our faith, our trust, and our love, in communion with all who, through their spiritual, moral, and financial support, have helped us achieve an important goal, namely the construction, renovation, and readaptation of our seminary and our central diocesan office. . . . In his mercy, God has blessed us with the chance to carry out this eternal renewal. As a gift in return, He expects from us an inner, spiritual renewal of our souls. Only this can be a genuine and worthy expression of our thankfulness."

The closing celebration in the form of a mass according to the Byzantine rite was concelebrated at Nyíregyháza by Dr. Imre Timkó and the other bishops of the same rite who were present as guests. The homily at this mass was given by Cardinal Lékai who recalled that the two apostles of the Slavic peoples, Sts. Cyril and Methodius, whom Pope John Paul II had not all too long ago declared--in addition to St. Benedict--as the patron saints of Europe, had also passed through Hungary on their apostolic journeys. Cardinal Lékai offered Bishop Timkó his congratulations on the completion of the construction projects and then closed his talk by saying: "I would like to express my thanks to the generous benefactors for the financial support which they provided. I would like to thank, too, all contributors for their great willingness

to make sacrifices, and I hope and wish that the new and renovated buildings of my brothers who honor God according to the Byzantine rite will be filled with a new power of the Holy Spirit that will promote the growth and good of our Catholic Church and our Hungarian homeland."

The fact that the entire College of the Hungarian Bishops celebrated in communion with the Eastern Church the latter's latest step forward in the exercise of its unique Eastern tradition constitutes a seldom, and thus all the more welcome, occasion in the life of Hungary's Church. Ferenc Magyar, the chief editor of the Catholic weekly Új Ember, expressed this as follows: "When we see in the procession following the completion of the mass of thanksgiving the bishops, priests, and faithful of both the Greek and Roman rites walking side by side in this spirit of unity. . . , we for the first time become fully aware of the incredible fact that, in this corner of Eastern Europe which has experienced so many stormy times and religious divisions, the children of the same Father no longer let themselves be separated from one another through differences in rites." The common festivities are a witness to the fact that the Hungarian Bishops Conference fully supports the efforts of Hungary's Greek Catholic Church to revive the special rites and preserve the traditions of the Oriental Church in their authentic forms. This moral support on the part of the Roman Catholic bishops effectively contributes to the hopes that the positive situation in which Hungary's Greek Catholic Church finds itself in its post Councilar development can also prove beneficial for the members of the Greek Catholic Church in the other countries of Eastern Europe. (As is remembered, 4.3 million Greek Catholic Ruthenians were forcefully incorporated into the Greek Orthodox Church in 1946, as were also 1.8 million faithful in Rumania in 1948. The 350,000 Catholics of the Greek rite living in Czechoslovakia suffered the same fate in 1950. Although repressive administrative measures were unable to break the stamina of these Churches, there is at present no legal opportunity for a normal, open Church life in these countries. The Greek Catholic Diocese of Krizevci in Yugoslavia is quite small; it does not have more than 50,000 faithful throughout the entire country. The apostolic exarchate which has existed in Poland since 1934 for the Ruthenians and Armenians has

only about 100,000 faithful.) The Diocese of Hajdúdorog is the largest Byzantine-rite Catholic community in Eastern Europe that is able to carry on its activity in a relatively free manner. It is therefore possible that this diocese's development could serve as a model in dealing with the oriental Churches in the other countries of Eastern Europe. The diocesan bishop of Hajdúdorog also hopes to see an ecumenical development take place in his diocese in a different direction: He would like to see the gradual development of a model situation in which, in addition to the complete unity of the Greek Catholic community with the Church in Rome, the genuine values of the Greek Orthodox Church would come to be appreciated in an authentic way, whereby his diocese could function as a bridge in a process of reconciliation between Rome and the faith communities of the Orthodox Churches. The Orthodox faith communities of the Eastern Churches look upon the ties of the Greek Catholic Church with Rome as something negative which is better rejected than imitated due to the inherent danger of "latinization" and centralization along the lines of Roman Church organization. The ecumenical efforts of Bishop Timkó at establishing closer ecumenical ties among the Churches along the lines laid down by Vatican II is most commendable, although such an undertaking will not be easy to carry out.

ENDNOTE

¹Keleti kereszténység, keleti egyházak (Eastern Christianity, Eastern Churches). Budapest, 1971.

ERRATA

Two corrections should be made in Paul Stefanik's letter to the editor in OPREE, Vol. 3, No. 7. The first is that he wrote the letter in 1983 rather than in 1982. The second is that the Slovak Evangelical Church (Augsburg Confession) in Slovakia has 450,000 members rather than 45,000.

In OPREE, Vol. 3, No. 8, page 29, lines 7-8 should read "its own theological faculty in Bratislava."