

ATTILA JAKAB

## **HIGH-RANKING CATHOLIC PRIESTS AND THE ANTI-JEWISH ACT OF 1938: MEMORY POLITICS AND THE REINTERPRETATION OF THE PAST IN TODAY'S HUNGARIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH<sup>1</sup>**

Budapest has had the honour of hosting the International Eucharistic Congress on two occasions: in 1938 and in 2021. As it prepared for the Eucharistic Congress, originally planned in 2020 but postponed to 2021, the Hungarian Catholic Church could have used the occasion as an opportunity to confront its own past and clarify the role of the Catholic Church and the associated media in the creation of antisemitic public opinion. It didn't do this. Instead, it focused on obscuring the responsibility of the Catholic high-ranking priests at the time of the adoption of the first anti-Jewish Act. To this end, the Church History Committee of the Esztergom-Budapest Archdiocese in 2020 published a book whose aim was to refute the generally accepted view that the Catholic high-ranking priests voted for the first anti-Jewish Act in 1938. The Hungarian churches in general deliberately refused to face up to the fact that the Catholic, Reformed and Lutheran high-ranking priests supported the adoption of the anti-Jewish Act. What's more, a year later, in 1939, they also supported and voted through the second anti-Jewish Act. Then, during the deportations of 1944, they did nothing either for the Jews or for those of their own Christian faithful who had been racially categorised as Jews. This book ought to have attempted to reinterpret the past of the Catholic Church, but it failed to do so. At the time of the 2021 Eucharistic Congress of Budapest no historical or social debate took place to discuss the attitude of the Hungarian Christian churches towards the Jews in the Horthy era. This was a missed opportunity that clearly revealed that the churches (especially the Catholic Church) have no intention of facing up to their ugly past.

*Keywords: 1938 anti-Jewish Act, 1938 Eucharistic Congress, József Mindszenty, Jusztinián Serédi, Gyula Glattfelder, Eugenio Pacelli, Antisemitism*

Attila Jakab, Ph.D. – historian, Eötvös Loránd University – Holocaust Memorial Centre Budapest. Email: attilajakab66@gmail.com

---

1 This study is a written version of a lecture given at a conference devoted to memory politics in Central and Eastern Europe and Russia held at ELTE on September 30<sup>th</sup> and October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021.

*Citation:* ATTILA JAKAB, "High-Ranking Catholic Priests and the Anti-Jewish Act of 1938: Memory Politics and the Reinterpretation of the Past in Today's Hungarian Catholic Church", *RussianStudiesHu* 4, no. 2 (2022): 13 pp. DOI: 10.38210/RUSTUDH.2022.4.15

Budapest has twice had the honour of hosting the International Eucharistic Congress: in 1938 and in 2021. Between these two events, there has been – without claiming to be exhaustive – a world war, a cold war, the end of colonialism and the collapse of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe. The world has been in a state of flux for decades; globalisation is now an inescapable fact. The two congresses therefore took place in entirely different historical circumstances.

In his report on the 51<sup>st</sup> International Eucharistic Congress in Manila in 1937, Zoltán Nyisztor (1893–1979) – a well-known figure in Hungarian Catholicism between the two world wars – expressed the following expectations for the forthcoming event in Budapest: “The preparation and propaganda of the Hungarian Holy Year should not be limited to emphasising the Eucharistic idea, but should also be an expression of Hungarian life and values, of the attractive, distinctive and individual characteristics of Hungarian Catholicism. From this point of view, I would strongly recommend that the programme of the Congress should include specific features and institutions of millennial Hungarian Catholicism which have been cultivated only on Hungarian soil and have blossomed from Hungarian souls.”<sup>2</sup>

In Nyisztor’s expectations, the Catholic and the national are inextricably linked. He couldn’t have known that at the time he was writing, Prime Minister Kálmán Darányi (1936–1938) had initiated a debate on the “Jewish question” in Szeged,<sup>3</sup> an issue which effectively determined Hungarian public life until 1945. It was in this social climate of anti-Jewish sentiment that the supreme leadership of the Catholic Church in Hungary proclaimed the start of the Eucharistic Holy Year on 23 May 1937, the aim of which was the purification and betterment of Hungarian Catholics.

Social reality was quite different from the expectations voiced above. This supposedly Christian country did not show any spontaneous enthusiasm for the Congress. Even the Catholic priests did not take the preparations seriously. But what will forever mark the 1938 Eucharistic Congress in Budapest is the proclamation of the first anti-Jewish

---

2 NYISZTOR ZOLTÁN, „A manilai eucharisztikus világkongresszus” [The World Eucharistic Congress in Manila], *Magyar Kultúra* 24, no. 8 (20 April 1937): 237.

3 See JAKAB ATTILA, „A zsidókérdésről... mindenki tudja, hogy van” (Darányi Kálmán 1937. április 18-i szegedi beszédének sajtóvisszhangja), in *Holokauszt, csend, beszéd, emlékezet, üzenet (Tanulmányok a holokauszt recepció köréből)*, ed. KELEMEN ZOLTÁN (Szeged: Universitas-Szeged Kiadó, 2019): 131–145.

Act.<sup>4</sup> This law started the legal process that resulted in the systematic disenfranchisement and economic and social exclusion of the Jews in Hungary. The law was initially rejected by Christian Party Members of Parliament because they didn't consider it radical enough. From then on, the "Jewish question" occupied a more important place in the Catholic public press than the Eucharistic Congress itself.

The parish priest of Zalaegerszeg and papal domestic prelate József Mindszenty, later to be Cardinal Archbishop of Esztergom and Primate of Hungary, organised a meeting of Catholic priests on the first days of May 1938 in Budapest. The declaration adopted illustrates very well the ecclesiastical social climate of the time: "We see the Jewish question as a social, economic and ideological question. For fifty years, when the world of usury was at its peak, we and our predecessors sided with Istóczy<sup>5</sup> and later with the People's Party even when virtually everyone in the country was liberal pro-Jewish. It was the Christian Party, which we supported, that brought the only race protection act, the *numerus clausus*<sup>6</sup>, for which it suffers odium to this day."<sup>7</sup>

4 E.g. YEHUDA DON, "The Economic Effect of Antisemitic Discrimination: Hungarian Anti-Jewish Legislation, 1938–1944", *Jewish Social Studies* 48, no. 1 (1986): 63–82.

5 Győző Istóczy (1842–1945), founder of the first Hungarian Anti-Semite Party in 1883. See <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/istoczy-gyozodeg> (Accessed February 2, 2022).

6 "Act XXV/1920, the so-called *numerus clausus* law, which was passed by the Hungarian National Assembly in September 1920, has the dubious merit of being the first antisemitic law of the post-First World War era. With the ostensible aim of reducing the overcrowding of Hungarian universities after the Treaty of Trianon, the law pegged enrolment to the ratio of 'races' and 'nationalities' in the general population. (...) The law's quota of six percent for Jewish students drastically reduced the previous high representation of Jews at university faculties. It also led to the flight of thousands of Hungarian Jewish students (the so-called NC exiles) to universities abroad, robbing the country of many future leading lights of Western academia. Despite the persistent obfuscations and myths surrounding it, historians agree that the law's breach of the principle of equal citizenship paved the way for the openly discriminatory anti-Jewish laws enacted in Hungary in the late 1930s and, ultimately, the Hungarian Holocaust." *The Numerus Clausus in Hungary*, <https://www.vwi.ac.at/index.php/en/96-english-site/research/research-interests/621-the-numerus-clausus-in-hungary> (Accessed July 1, 2022). See *The Numerus Clausus in Hungary: Studies on the First Anti-Jewish Law and Academic Anti-Semitism in Modern Central Europe*. (Research Reports on Central European History, 1), ed. VICTOR KARÁDY and PETER NAGY TIBOR (Budapest: Centre for Historical Research, History Department of the CEU, 2012) (<https://mek.oszk.hu/11100/11109/11109.pdf>; Accessed July 1, 2022).

7 „A katolikus papság a szociális reformokért. Országos értekezleten foglalkozott a kor bajjaival és emlékirattal fordult az illetékesekhez”, *Nemzeti Újság*, 5 May 1938, 5.

As it prepared for the Eucharistic Congress, originally planned in 2020 but postponed to 2021, the Hungarian Catholic Church had an opportunity to confront its own past and clarify the role of the Catholic Church and the associated media in the creation of antisemitic public opinion. It didn't do this. Instead, it focused on obscuring the responsibility of the Catholic high-ranking priests at the time of the adoption of the first anti-Jewish Act. To this end, in 2020 the Church History Committee of the Esztergom-Budapest Archdiocese published a book edited by the head of the Diocesan Archives, András Hegedűs, and entitled: *“He Became a Companion of Our Wandering’: The 1938 Eucharistic World Congress in Budapest.”*<sup>8</sup>

The authors and the editor undertook to present the events of the congress in detail, the work that went into preparing for it and organising it, and what it left in its wake, using the tools of historical science, art history and architecture. The editor, András Hegedűs, clearly stated the aim of the volume: to change how the Congress of 1938 is remembered, freeing it from misconceptions and Marxist historical interpretations.<sup>9</sup> Only one worthwhile historical monograph had previously been written on the Congress of 1938 – Jenő Gergely's *World Eucharistic Congress in Budapest – 1938*.<sup>10</sup>

The primary purpose of the volume edited by Hegedűs, is quite clear: to refute the generally accepted view that the Catholic high-ranking priests voted for the first anti-Jewish Law. The editor argues that the minutes of the session of the Upper House of Parliament don't include a list of participants. According to him, the exact reconstruction of events shows that the Catholic bishops didn't participate in the session of the Upper House (May 24, 1938), therefore they didn't vote for the bill.

Hegedűs expressed this opinion in an interview published on the Catholic website *Hungarian Courier*. The title of the interview comes very close to a falsification of history: “Strengthening the Church on the Eve of Suffering.”<sup>11</sup>

---

8 „Vándorlásunk társa lett”. Az 1938-as Eucharisztikus Világkongresszus Budapesten, ed. ANDRÁS HEGEDŰS, (Esztergom–Budapest: Esztergom-Budapesti Főegyházmegye Egyháztörténeti Bizottsága, 2020).

9 „Az 1938-as Eucharisztikus Kongresszus történeti szemmel” <https://www.iec2020.hu/hu/hirek-sajto/az-1938-eucharisztikus-kongresszus-torteneszi-szemmel> (Accessed February 2, 2022).

10 GERGELY JENŐ, *Eucharisztikus Világkongresszus Budapesten – 1938* (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 1988).

11 „Mege erősíteni az Egyházat a szenvedések előestéjén – Könyv az 1938-as eucharisztikus kongresszusról,” <https://www.magyarokurir.hu/hirek/megeerositeni-az-egyhzat-szenvedesek-elorestejen>

The question is: what kind of suffering? In Nazi Europe the Church, as an institution, was never persecuted. Several Christian figures – even clergymen, monks and nuns – were persecuted, even murdered, but the institution itself was not targeted.

This is even truer for Horthy's Hungary, where the churches were integrated into political and social power. In Horthy's Hungary no one even thought to persecute the churches or cause them any suffering.<sup>12</sup> According to the historian Jenő Gergely, "The part played in society by the Catholic Church, its economic position and its participation in state power unambiguously proved that it represented an organic part of the administration. It identified with [the administration's] political mentality and political actions. The church, in fact, identified itself with power, which had become more comprehensive in the Horthy era than ever before. (...) ...there was hardly any area of Hungarian civil society, state, economy or public life where the Catholic church did not play a part in some form. In this way the church had become a consolidating factor, a power maintaining the regime, and as a result, it enjoyed both the blessings and odium of participation in power. That odium became a real burden when the power was dissolved, and the civil system was condemned to fall."<sup>13</sup>

The coincidence of the Eucharistic Congress and the first anti-Jewish Act, which came into force on 29 May 1938 – while a solemn mass was celebrated at Heroes' Square by the papal legate Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli (the future Pope Pius XII), who had high hopes for a "Christian" Hungary – shocked no one, neither in society nor in the churches. In this solemn celebration one could see the symbiosis of the State and the Church under the auspices of a triumphant Catholicism. Zsigmond Mihalovics<sup>14</sup> formulated this in these terms: "Our country is still imbued with the spirit of Saint Stephen. We are a Christian state in the true and proper sense of the word. Our nation and our state know and recognise the transcendent world order according to the revealed truth. It views the state and the nation itself in subordination to it. It seeks to live in cooperation with the Church as the earthly body

---

desek-eloestejen-konyv-az-1938-as-eucharisztikus-kongresszusrol (Accessed February 2, 2022).

12 See for ex. FAZEKAS CSABA, "Collaborating with Horthy: Political Catholicism and Christian Political Organizations in Hungary", in *Political Catholicism in Europe, 1918–45*, ed. WOLFRAM KAISER and HELMUT WOHNOUT (London-New York: Routledge, 2004): 160–177.

13 GERGELY JENŐ, *Katolikus egyház, magyar társadalom, 1890–1986* (Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó, 1989), 55, 73.

14 National Director of the *Actio Catholica* and Executive Director of the General Committee for the Preparation of the 1938 World Eucharistic Congress.

of Christ. It lives in harmony with the universal Church and its head, as well as with the Hungarian Catholic Church, composed of the Catholic faithful and the Catholic high priests of the Hungarian nation. We are free to transmit Christian teachings and to work freely in accordance with them to create a Christian culture. Our freedom of movement is not limited in order to form the social classes and the public life. We are still basically Saint Stephen's country."<sup>15</sup>

In his book, the editor András Hegedűs may even have been right in his claim that the Catholic High-Ranking Priests did not physically vote for the anti-Jewish Act at the Upper House session given that was the day the papal legate, Cardinal Pacelli, arrived at the Eastern Railway Station, after which he participated in a sacramental visit to the Coronation Main Church (or Mátyás Church). In my opinion, however, the attitude of the Catholic High-Ranking Priests on the anti-Jewish Law is more important than the fact of the vote. The book edited by András Hegedűs doesn't say a single word about the fact that the Christian (Catholic, Reformed and Lutheran) high-ranking priests supported the adoption of the anti-Jewish Act, and that their viewpoint was widely reported in the religious and political newspapers of the time.<sup>16</sup>

What's more, a year later the second anti-Jewish Act was also supported and voted through. Then, during the deportations of 1944, the Catholic church did nothing either for the Jews or for those of their own Catholic faithful who had been racially categorised as Jews; it allowed them to be loaded into cattle wagons and sent to Auschwitz. The Reformed and Lutheran bishops did the same.

What happened in reality? In the session of the 24 May 1938 the Upper House of the parliament debated and voted on the final text of the Act, which had been drafted by the Lower House of Parliament. In reality, this session had no real stakes. The debate was already closed. A few days later (on the 29 May), during the events of the Eucharistic Congress, the first Hungarian anti-Jewish Act (the XV<sup>th</sup>) was adopted and enacted. This law, entitled "to ensure a more effective balance in social and economic life", restricted the percentage of Jews in intellectual professions (physicians, engineers, lawyers) to 20 percent and maximised their number to this

---

15 MIHALOVICS ZSIGMOND, „Noblesse oblige”, *Egyházi Lapok* 61, no. 7–8 (August 1938): 161–162.

16 JAKAB ATTILA, „Az ország békéjét és nyugalmát és biztonságát szolgálja.” *A magyarországi egyházi sajtó a zsidótörvények idején (1938–1942)*, (Budapest: Holocaust Dokumentációs Központ és Emlékgyűjtemény Közalapítvány, 2021): 38–66.

amount also in any commercial, financial and industrial companies having more than ten white-collar employees.

In my opinion the question is: from a historical and social point of view what does it mean that the high-ranking Catholic priests weren't present at the last session of the Upper House, and didn't vote physically? András Hegedűs's intention in focusing on a single day, the 24 May 1938 session of the Upper House, is clear: to communicate to Hungarian society and the public that the high-ranking Catholic priests did not vote for the Act; and to suggest by this that they were against it. This is completely wrong.

This book was an abortive attempt at reinterpreting the past of the Catholic Church. At the time of the 2021 Eucharistic Congress of Budapest no historical or social debate took place on the attitude of the Hungarian Christian Churches towards the adoption of the first anti-Jewish Act in 1938. This was a missed opportunity that clearly revealed that the churches (and especially the Catholic church) have no intention of facing up to their ugly past.

What was the attitude of the high-ranking priests and Catholic opinion to the anti-Jewish Act? I can say that it was highly positive. Even if the high-ranking priests were not present at the session held on 24 May 1938, they had expressed their opinion clearly a few days earlier (on 20 May) in the Joint Committee of the Upper House, as was reported by the Catholic daily *Nemzeti Ujság* (National Newspaper), on 21 May 1938.

In this article the cardinal-archbishop Jusztinián Serédi, with a comment and some reservations concerning the baptism, expressly accepted the anti-Jewish Law. Gyula Glattfelder, bishop of Csanád, was also for the law. He even explained his position:

*“There is no doubt that in the worldwide anti-Semitic storm, Jews are reaping what they themselves have sown. The radical Jewish youth in the freethinking and Galilei circles, in the Masonic lodges and destructive presses, have shaken and deadened all religious and moral factors. They have waged a relentless struggle against altar and throne, until, by undermining and overthrowing their authority, they have succeeded in overthrowing the rule of law and with it the security of civil and business life. Historical justice is not always obvious, but there is a logic to events. (...)*

*The public authorities must restore the spiritual balance of the nation with courageous and honest, enlightening and regulating power. From this point of view, it must be applauded that the bill seeks to*

give Christianity a proportionate share in the press. It is only desirable that, if Christian journalists achieve the proportion they rightly claim, *they should ensure the dominance of Christian ethics in the Hungarian press*. For if the Jews are withdrawn from the editorial staff, but what we call the *Jewish spirit*, which disrupts and discredits morality and discipline, remains, the trouble and scandal will only increase.

The best hope that these various concerns about the bill, which are on the minds of many, can be eliminated is offered by that deficiency of the bill which leaves the detailed action in the hands of the government. (...) Perhaps it is this hope that motivates me most to adopt the substantive measures of the bill."<sup>17</sup>

For Hungarian society and the Catholic public there wasn't any doubt that the high-ranking Catholic priests were in favour of the anti-Jewish Act. In fact, they gave a public justification of the law, reported by the contemporary press.

The top echelons of the Catholic priesthood accepted the anti-Jewish bill knowing full well that this would cause widespread consternation at the Holy See. The reason was that the bill, at the time of the Eucharistic Congress, also classified those baptised since 1919 as racially Jewish, denying the baptism. The Holy See's astonishment was reported by István Hanauer, Bishop of Vác (†1942) in a letter dated 1 May 1938 to Primate Jusztinián Serédi: "The Hungarian Jewish law, no doubt through a clumsy article in the *Osservatore Romano*, which compared our Jewish law with the German and Romanian persecution of Jews, caused a general outcry in the Holy See. The Embassy Counsellor Luttor was immediately summoned to the State Secretariat for clarification. During my brief audience, the Holy Father<sup>18</sup> also raised this issue with concern. I tried to reassure him that there would be no such Hitlerian persecution of the Jews in our country and that no atrocities of any kind would be committed. It seems to me that what offended them most, and what they saw as an offence against dogma, just now, at the time of the Eucharistic Congress, is that those who have been baptised since 1919 are counted by law as Jews, and therefore their baptism is not recognised."<sup>19</sup>

---

17 „Serédi hercegprimás, Glattfelder püspök és Imrédy miniszterelnök beszéltek a Felsőház egyesített bizottságában”, *Nemzeti Ujság*, 21 May 1938, 1–4.

18 Pope Pius XI (†10 February 1939).

19 EPL. Cat. D/c-1990/1938. Cited by GERGELY, *Eucharisztikus*, 62.

This astonishment of the Holy See did not disturb the cooperation between the Hungarian state and the Catholic Church at the time of the Eucharistic Congress.

It is interesting to read that – according to a memorandum dated 26 May – before Cardinal Pacelli left Rome, he assured the Chief Rabbi of Rome, David Prato, that during the Budapest Congress he would exert influence on Hungarian Catholics to get the Upper House to reject the bill, or at least to make significant changes to it.<sup>20</sup>

In reality, the bill was adopted by the Upper House on the day of Pacelli's arrival in Budapest. There is no evidence that the cardinal would have tried to do anything about the bill. During the Congress, the anti-Jewish law was certainly not one of his concerns.

On the day the bill was adopted by the Upper House, Cardinal Pacelli said that he considered Hungary a “great people”, and that: “religion makes the citizens good by teaching them to see in their ruler a ray of God's majesty and to obey the higher powers as they obey Christ”<sup>21</sup>

The anti-Jewish law was accepted not only by the high-ranking priests, but also by Catholic public opinion itself. It was expected to bring a change of spirit and of system in Hungarian economic life; that is, to replace Jews with Christians. This hope was formulated by Dániel Stoltz in *Hungarian Culture*, a journal published by the Jesuits, at the same time as the adoption of the anti-Jewish Act and the Eucharistic Congress. According to Stoltz, “the problem with our economic life is not only that its leaders and managers are overwhelmingly non-Hungarians and non-Christians – and the higher we go, the more oppressive the preponderance – but that the spirit prevailing there is not only foreign but also contrary to both our Hungarianism and our Christianity.”

To effect complete change and renewal, the author says, this “alien” spirit had to be eradicated. Stoltz, who was a master of coded speech, and who never once wrote the word “Jew” in his study, saw – with what might be called “prophetic” foresight – the first anti-Jewish Act as the beginning of a process of “regime change.”<sup>22</sup> He wasn't wrong.

20 CSÍKI BALÁZS, „Jubileumi esztendő és katolikus megújulás a Horthy-korszakban”, in *A 20. század egyház- és társadalomtörténetének metszéspontjai. Tanulmányok a pécsi egyházmegye 20. századi történetéből*, ed. BÁNKUTI GÁBOR, VARGA SZABOLCS and VÉRTESI LÁZÁR (Pécs: PPHF Pécsi Egyháztörténeti Intézet, 2012): 135–157.

21 „Köszöntöm ezt a nagy népet!” – mondotta Pacelli bíboros-legátus a Világkongresszus fogadó ünnepségén” [‘I greet this great people,’ said Cardinal-Legate Pacelli at the welcoming ceremony of the World Congress], *Nemzeti Újság*, 25 May 1938, 3.

22 STOLTZ DÁNIEL, „Százalék és szellem”, *Magyar Kultúra* 25, no. 10 (20 May 1938): 296.

The top-ranking Catholic priests, those who were members of the Upper House, accepted the first anti-Jewish Act, debated and passed by Parliament between 18 and 24 May 1938, without raising serious objections.

As for the second anti-Jewish Act of 1939, they actually voted for it. This law no longer conceived of Jewishness as a religion but as a race. Its aim was the elimination of Jews from economic and social life. The consequences were severe restrictions on Jewish livelihoods.<sup>23</sup>

What can we conclude? The 1938 anti-Jewish Act “enshrined into law the prejudice against Jews, thus legitimising a seriously negative stereotype which no one could now contest.”<sup>24</sup> The Catholic Church has done nothing to combat anti-Jewish prejudice. Neither has the Reformed or Evangelical Church. Just as the Christian churches have not said or done anything about the political use of the adjective “Christian” (used for the designation of non-Jews) or the political misrepresentation of Christianity. In fact, contemporary Hungarian society does not perceive any anachronism between the Eucharistic Congress and the anti-Jewish Act.

To sum up, in 1938 the Christian churches in Hungary as institutions legitimised – “sanctified”, so to speak – institutionalised and legalised racial antisemitism. They did not protest at the beginning of the process, and were active participants in it through their high-ranking priests.

What is happening today, decades later?

We can say that in the Hungarian Catholic Church – and likewise in the Reformed or Lutheran Churches – there does not exist any memory policy about the attitudes of their organisations during the Horthy era vis-à-vis the Jews. Church leaders do not wish to examine their consciences because this would mean questioning themselves about the fact that their predecessors contributed to the poisoning of public opinion, especially through the press, and that they accepted racial categorisation, including of the faithful, as well as remaining silent while Jews were deprived of their rights, were excluded from society, and deported. Deported Christian Jews numbered several tens of thousands.

If it wanted to adopt a real memory policy, the Catholic Church should have asked itself: how could the exclusionary and discriminatory anti-Jewish Act be inserted into the process of promoting the spiritual renewal of Hungarian society during the 1938 Eucharistic Congress?

---

23 See also JAKAB, „Az ország békéjét”, 67–82.

24 PELLE JÁNOS, *A gyűlölet vetése. A zsidótörvények és a magyar közvélemény 1938–1944* (Budapest: Európa Könyvkiadó, 2001): 55.

In my opinion, at that time, in 1938, spiritual renewal and an anti-Jewish attitude were not contradictory. The concept of the “new emancipation” which appeared at that time, wanted, in fact, to restore the pre-1867 situation; before the Jewish emancipation. The ultimate goal was that members of the “Christian-national middle class” take over the economic and cultural role and place of the Jews. As this wasn’t in line with free competition, they had to be helped by legislation. In fact, this was the only way to achieve this.

The Catholic Spiritual Renewal of 1938 and the anti-Jewish Act are, in fact, the starting point for a process aimed at a “change of elite.” Its initiators didn’t come out of the ranks of the Reformed Church by accident. The idea of the pure “racial Hungarian” was strongly present in the Hungarian Reformed Church. The Catholic Church leadership didn’t distance itself from this, but supported it in everything.

Last but not least, the splendour of the Eucharistic Congress in 1938 concealed a moral crisis of both Hungarian society and Hungarian Catholicism behind a highly choreographed stage set. In my opinion it was the same with the 2021 Eucharistic Congress, which was – in fact – a kind of remake of the 1938 Congress. The universal Catholic Church has evolved, while the Hungarian Catholic Church has not moved on: it still represents collusion with political power, social insensitivity, and animosity towards any otherness.

In 1938 Flóris Kűhár OSB (1893–1943), a prominent ecclesiastical personality in the Horthy era, expressed this collusion very persuasively. Unfortunately, his words, even today, have lost none of their relevance.

“We don’t wish to boast, but we believe that every pilgrim to the Congress from abroad must have realized that there is no country in Europe or further afield where Christianity is as pervasive in the life of state and society as it is in our own. The liberal nineteenth century tried to loosen up the millennial-old links between Church and State, by which the kingdom of St. Stephen had educated the Hungarian people to Christianity, but Church and State have never been separated in our country, and in public education, in public administration, in legislation, there is still real cooperation between the two factors of a kind that was never more harmonious in other states even in the Middle Ages.”<sup>25</sup>

---

25 KÜHÁR FLÓRIS, „Az eucharisztikus kongresszus tanulságai”, *Magyar Szemle* 33, no. 2 (June 1938): 106.

## References

„A katolikus papság a szociális reformokért. Országos értekezleten foglalkozott a kor bajaival és emlékirattal fordult az illetékesekhez” [The Catholic Clergy for Social Reform: A National Conference Addressed the Problems of the Age and Sent an Account of it to the Authorities], *Nemzeti Újság*, 5 May 1938, 5.

„Az 1938-as Eucharisztikus Kongresszus történeti szemmel” [The 1938 Eucharistic Congress through the Eyes of a Historian], <https://www.iec2020.hu/hu/hirek-sajto/az-1938-eucharisztikus-kongresszus-torteneszi-szemmel> (Accessed February 2, 2022).  
CSÍKI BALÁZS, „Jubileumi esztendő és katolikus megújulás a Horthy-korszakban” [Jubilee Years and Catholic Renewal in the Horthy Era], in *A 20. század egyház- és társadalomtörténetének metszéspontjai. Tanulmányok a pécsi egyházmegye 20. századi történetéből*, ed. BÁNKUTI GÁBOR, VARGA SZABOLCS and VÉRTESI LÁZÁR (Pécs: PPHF Pécsi Egyháztörténeti Intézet, 2012), 135–157.

YEHUDA DON, “The Economic Effect of Antisemitic Discrimination: Hungarian Anti-Jewish Legislation, 1938–1944.” *Jewish Social Studies* 48, no. 1 (1986): 63–82.

FAZEKAS CSABA, “Collaborating with Horthy: Political Catholicism and Christian Political Organizations in Hungary”, in *Political Catholicism in Europe, 1918–45*, ed. WOLFRAM KAISER and HELMUT WOHNOUT (London–New York: Routledge, 2004), 160–177.

GERGELY JENŐ, *Eucharisztikus Világkongresszus Budapesten – 1938* [World Eucharistic Congress in Budapest – 1938], (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 1988).

GERGELY JENŐ, *Katolikus egyház, magyar társadalom, 1890–1986* [Catholic Church, Hungarian society, 1890–1986] (Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó, 1989).

JAKAB ATTILA, „»A zsidókérdésről... mindenki tudja, hogy van« (Darányi Kálmán 1937. április 18-i szegedi beszédének sajtóvisszhangja)” [‘About the Jewish Question... Everyone Knows That There Is One’ (Echoes in the Press of Kálmán Darányi’s Speech in Szeged on 18 April 1937)], in *Holokauszt, csend, beszéd, emlékezet, üzenet (Tanulmányok a holokauszt recepció köréből)*, ed. KELEMEN ZOLTÁN (Szeged: Universitas-Szeged Kiadó, 2019): 131–145.

JAKAB ATTILA, „»Az ország békéjét és nyugalomát és biztonságát szolgálja«. A magyarországi egyházi sajtó a zsidótörvények idején (1938–1942)” [‘It Serves the Peace and Tranquillity and Security of the Country.’ The Christian Media in Hungary at the Time of the Anti-Jewish Acts (1938–1942)], (Budapest: Holocaust Dokumentációs Központ és Emlékgyűjtemény Közalapítvány, 2021).

„»Köszöntöm ezt a nagy népet!« – mondotta Pacelli bíboros-legátus a Világkongresszus fogadó ünnepségén” [‘I Greet this Great People’ Said Cardinal-Legate Pacelli at the Welcoming Ceremony of the World Congress], *Nemzeti Újság*, 25 May 1938, 1–4.

KÜHÁR FLÓRIS, „Az eucharisztikus kongresszus tanulságai” [Lessons from the Eucharistic Congress], *Magyar Szemle* 33, no. 2 (June 1938): 105–107.

„Megerősíteni az Egyházat a szenvedések előestéjén – Könyv az 1938-as eucharisztikus kongresszusról” [Strengthening the Church on the Eve of Suffering: A Book about the 1938 Eucharistic Congress], <https://www.magyarurir.hu/hirek/megerositeni-az-egy-hazat-szenvedesek-elostejen-konyv-az-1938-as-eucharisztikus-kongresszusról> (Accessed February 2, 2022).

MIHALOVICS ZSIGMOND, „Noblesse oblige”, *Egyházi Lapok* 61, no. 7–8 (August 1938): 161–162.

NYISZTOR ZOLTÁN, „A manilai eucharisztikus világtalálkozó” [The World Eucharistic Congress in Manila], *Magyar Kultúra* 24, no. 8 (20 April 1937): 237–241.

PELLE JÁNOS, *A gyűlölet vetése. A zsidótörvények és a magyar közvélemény 1938–1944* [Sowing the Seeds of Hatred: The Jewish Laws and Hungarian Public Opinion 1938–1944] (Budapest: Európa Könyvkiadó, 2001).

„Serédi hercegprímás, Glattfelder püspök és Imrédy miniszterelnök beszéltek a Felsőház egyesített bizottságában” [Primate Serédi, Bishop Glattfelder and Prime Minister Imrédy Spoke in the Joint Committee of the Upper House], *Nemzeti Újság*, 21 May 1938, 1–4.

STOLTZ DÁNIEL, „Százalék és szellem” [Percentage and Spirit], *Magyar Kultúra* 25, no. 10 (20 May 1938): 296–297.

„Vándorlásunk társa lett”. *Az 1938-as Eucharisztikus Világtalálkozó Budapestén* [‘He became a companion of our wandering’. *The 1938 Eucharistic World Congress in Budapest*], ed. ANDRÁS HEGEDŰS, (Esztergom–Budapest: Esztergom-Budapesti Főegyházmegye Egyháztörténeti Bizottsága, 2020).