

## LIGHTS AND SHADOWS OF THE 34<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS IN BUDAPEST. THEOLOGICAL, HISTORICAL AND ECCLESIAL BACKGROUND

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**Abstract.** The 1938 Eucharistic Congress in Budapest was held in a complicated historical context, marked by geopolitical changes, the rise of national-socialism and anti-Semitism, and by interconfessional tensions. After an overview of the theological significance of the Eucharistic Congress in a period when the ideas of the liturgical movement were gaining momentum, this paper proposes a nuanced assessment of the Congress, acknowledging the tensions that have overshadowed it. The paper also discusses the significance of the event for Catholics of Latin and Eastern rite, including some reflections on the participation of Roman and Greek Catholics from Transylvania (Romania). In the wake of the 52<sup>nd</sup> Eucharistic Congress in Budapest, this historical overview allows for some lessons for today. As Pope Francis stressed at the concluding Mass of the 2020 Congress [on 12 September 2021], the past needs to be confronted and the looming threat of hatred requires vigilance. Triumphalism should leave place to a life of service and fraternity, drawing its source from the Eucharist.

**Keywords:** 34<sup>th</sup> International Eucharistic Congress, liturgical movement, Hungarian Church, Roman Catholics, Greek Catholic Church, Transylvania, interconfessional tensions, anti-Semitism.

Between 25–30 May 1938, Budapest hosted the 34<sup>th</sup> International Eucharistic Congress, during a period marked by profound historical tensions, but also by significant liturgical developments. More than eight decades later, between 5-12 September 2021, the Eucharistic Congress returned to Budapest, in a period which, while hardly comparable to the thirties, is not exempt of religious and political tensions. The recent event invites a retrospective examination of the first

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Eucharistic Congress held in Budapest, its historical and religious background, and its lessons for today.

This paper explores the 1938 Eucharistic Congress at the intersection between shifting emphases in the understanding of Eucharistic worship outside Mass and of the Eucharistic celebration, held in a difficult ecclesial and political context. While the Congress is often evoked with certain triumphalism, the grave historical context that overshadowed the event cannot be overlooked. The period was marked by the rise of National Socialism, the coming to power of the Arrow Cross Party in Hungary, and the antisemitism inherent to these political factions. Interdenominational tensions were also present, requiring great circumspection in the organization of the Congress. These shadows and tensions must also be considered when examining the spiritual impact and the lights of hope brought about by the Eucharistic Congress. The paper also assesses the significance of the event for Catholics of Latin and Eastern rite and for the Hungarian community, including some reflections on the particular ecclesial situation in Hungary and in Transylvania (Romania), conditions which influenced the participation of Roman Catholics and Greek Catholics from Romania. This examination is concluded with some reflections for today.

### **The theological context of the 38<sup>th</sup> Eucharistic Congress: A Eucharistic Congress at the time of the liturgical renewal**

Eucharistic Congresses are ample events with liturgical, as well as socio-political connotations. From a liturgical perspective, they are related to the worship of the Eucharist outside Mass, a devotional practice of the Western Church affirming the faith in the lasting sacramental presence of Christ under the Eucharistic species. They include therefore aside Eucharistic celebrations proper various forms of Eucharistic worship – adoration and visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and notably festive Eucharistic processions and sacramental benedictions. The devotions linked to the worship of the Eucharist outside Mass reflect a shift in focus from the Eucharistic celebration towards worship and the adoration of the sacramental presence of Christ, of the *epiphania Domini*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> On the understanding of Eucharistic worship outside mass around the time of the Eucharistic Congress: Josef A. JUNGMANN, *Gewordene Liturgie*, Innsbruck 1941, 308.

The focus of Eucharistic Congresses has changed over time. Originally (between 1881 and 1922), aside the sanctification of the believers through Holy Communion, celebrations were meant to openly confess the faith of the Church in the Eucharistic presence of Christ: they were public demonstrations of this faith before an ever more secularized Western society. Between 1922 and 1960, Eucharistic Congresses were increasingly envisaged as instruments of a new evangelization, meant to respond to the ascension of atheism. (It was not until 1960 congress in München that the focus shifted from festive worship of the Eucharist towards Eucharistic celebration, understood as a medium creating and shaping the community.)<sup>3</sup> From this perspective, the message of the 1938-Eucharistic Congress in Budapest was complex. The grandiose public manifestations highlighted both the worship of the Eucharist and the importance of communion. The festivities, leading to the solemn closing procession, were meant to proclaim the faith in the real presence of Jesus under the species of the Sacrament. But several speakers from abroad also stressed the idea of mission and the importance of a new evangelization.<sup>4</sup> To be sure, the Congress was a spiritual enrichment for many Catholics.

On the other hand, the Eucharistic congresses held in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century coincided with the emergence of the liturgical movement and with papal liturgical reforms, which started to refocus the attention on the Mass and on communion. The liturgical movement marked a theological-liturgical shift, reconsidering the place and role of devotional practices and emphasizing the primacy of the Mass over all other forms of devotion. The Eucharist was understood

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<sup>3</sup> Winfried HAUNERLAND, “Die Eucharistischen Weltkongresse“, in Peter PFISTER (ed.), *Für das Leben der Welt – Der Eucharistische Weltkongress 1960 in München* (Schriften des Archivs des Erzbistums München und Freising, 14), Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2010, 23-30; Eucharistie als Mitte der Kirche. Das Grundanliegen von 1960 und seine Aktualität, *MThZ* 62 (2011) 119–130; Josef A. JUNGSMANN, “Statio orbis Catholici – heute und morgen“, in Richard EGENTER, Otto PIRNER, Hubert HOFBAUER (eds.), *Statio orbis*, München, 1961, 81–89; András FEJÉRDY, “Az eucharisztikus kongresszusok szerepe egykor és ma” [The role of Eucharistic congresses once and today], in *Összeköt, nem szétválaszt! Eucharisztikus tudományos konferencia. Esztergom, 2018. november 27-29*, Budapest, 2019, 209–220.

<sup>4</sup> Lajos DOLHAI, *Az Eucharisztia teológiája*, Budapest, 2018, 245-248.

as the bread of life and the great mystery of the Church,<sup>5</sup> effecting a communion of life with Christ.<sup>6</sup> Prominent representatives of the liturgical movement like Lambert Beauduin, Romano Guardini, Josef Jungmann, Pius Parsch concurred in understanding the celebration of the Mass as the focal point of Christian spirituality, and endorsed communion and the active participation of the faithful in the liturgy.<sup>7</sup> Eucharistic adoration was seen as a spiritual path leading to communion, not as its substitute. Both forms of Eucharistic piety had an

<sup>5</sup> Odo Casel, who had a decisive influence on the theology of the Mass at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, defined the liturgy as the celebration of the mystery “kept secret for long ages” (Rom 16,25), revealed in Jesus Christ. Odo CASEL, *Die Liturgie als Mysterienfeier* (Ecclesia orans 9), Freiburg 1922, 45–104. The Benedictine monk from Maria Laach understood Christianity as both a mystery and a spiritual religion.

<sup>6</sup> Odo Casel evoked the early Christian understanding of the Eucharist, as “medicine that brings immortality, an antidote that allows us not to die but to live at all times in Jesus Christ.” (cf. IgnEph 20.2. *The Apostolic Fathers* I, tr. Bart Ehrman (LCL 24), Cambridge, MA, London, 2003). For that reason, the Kyriake, the day of the Lord, on which the Eucharist was celebrated, was the culmination of God’s redemptive work, a symbol of the new Christian way of life. Odo CASEL, *Art und Sinn der ältesten christlichen Osterfeier*, *JL* 14 (1934) 1–78 (56).

<sup>7</sup> On the goals of the liturgical movement in the writings of its pioneers: Lambert BEAUDUIN, *La piété de l’Église. Principes et faits*, Louvain, 1914, esp. 50–51; Pius PARSCH, *Was ist Liturgie?* Referat bei der 1. Volksliturgischen Tagung in Klosterneuburg 1927, in idem, *Liturgische Erneuerung. Gesammelte Aufsätze*. Klosterneuburg bei Wien 1931 (Lit. Praxis 1) 7–18; Romano GUARDINI, “Papst Pius XII. und die Liturgie”, *LJ* 3 (1956), 125–139. For scholarly analyses: Basilius EBEL, “Ausgangspunkte und Anliegen der religiösen-liturgischen Erneuerung in ihren Anfängen”, in *Erneuerung der Liturgie. Schwierigkeiten, Wünsche, Vorschläge. Gesammelte Aufsätze* (LuM 14), ed. Theodor Bogler, Maria Laach, 1954, 25–40; Benedikt REETZ, “Die Zielsetzungen der liturgischen Erneuerung in der Gegenwart”, in the same volume, 41–63; Ferdinand KOLBE, *Die Liturgische Bewegung*, Aschaffenburg, 1964, 31–53; Otto NUSSBAUM, “Die Messe als Einheit von Wortgottesdienst und Eucharistiefeier”, in idem, *Geschichte und Reform des Gottesdienstes. Liturgiewissenschaftliche Untersuchungen*, ed. Albert GERHARDS – Heinzgerd BRAKMANN, Paderborn, 1996, 19–48; Birgit JEGGLE-MERZ, *Erneuerung der Kirche aus dem Geist der Liturgie. Der Pastoralliturgiker Athanasius Wintersig/Winterswyl* (LQF 84), Münster, 1998, esp. chapter 3. Theologische Grundlinien (215–343); Martin KLÖCKENER – Benedikt KRANEMANN, “Liturgiereform – Grundzug des christlichen Gottesdienstes. Systematische Auswertung”, in *Liturgiereformen. Historische Studien zu einem bleibenden*

ecclesial dimension as well: communion and Eucharistic devotion transformed the worshipping individuals into the community of believers.<sup>8</sup> In this theological context, it became increasingly clear that the Mass had to be the culmination of Eucharistic congresses as well.<sup>9</sup> The papal liturgical reforms also influenced Eucharistic spirituality and devotion. The initiatives of Pius X had a major role in emphasizing the centrality of the Mass and the importance of communion.<sup>10</sup>

In the period leading up to the Eucharistic Congress in Budapest, the ideas of the liturgical renewal were quite widely received in Hungary. The Benedictine liturgist Ferenc Xavér Szunyogh had published only five years before the Congress the Hungarian-Latin Missal, a liturgical bestseller<sup>11</sup> allowing Catholics to follow

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*Grundzug des christlichen Gottesdienstes* (LQF 88), ed. Martin Klöckener – Benedikt Kranemann, Münster, 2002, 1083–1108

<sup>8</sup> Josef A. JUNGMANN, Eucharistische Frömmigkeit und eucharistischer Kult in Wandel und Bestand, *TThSt* 70.2, 1961, 65–93; idem, “Gebet vor dem Tabernakel”, *GuL* 40, 1967, 339–347; Karl RAHNER, Eucharistische Anbetung, *RahnerS* XVI, Zürich, Einsiedeln – Köln, 1984, 300–304 (304); Benedikt KRANNEMANN, “Von der Privatmesse zur Gemeinschaftsmesse”, in Martin EBNER, *Herrenmahl und Gruppenidentität*, Freiburg – Basel–Wien 2007, 211–233.

<sup>9</sup> This insight was later reaffirmed by the Instruction of the Sacred Congregation of Rites on the Worship of the Holy Eucharist, *Eucharisticum mysterium* (1967): “In Eucharistic congresses Christians seek to understand this mystery more deeply [...]. they [...] should venerate it through devotions and private prayers, especially by solemn processions, in such a way that *all these forms of devotion find their climax in the solemn celebration of Mass*” (67, emphasis added; see also §30, on other congresses and gatherings). On the other hand, the apostolic letter of John Paul II, *Dominicae cenae* (1980, §3) and the apostolic exhortation of Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum caritatis* (2007, §68) reaffirmed the enduring value of the traditional forms of Eucharistic devotion, including the Eucharistic congresses.

<sup>10</sup> Pius X encouraged the active participation of the faithful in the liturgy through chant (*Tra le solitudini*, *AAS* 36 (1904) 325–329), promoted daily communion (*Sacra Tridentina Synodus*, *ASS* 38 (1905–1906) 400–406), and introduced the first communion of children starting with the age of seven (*Quam singulari Christus amore*, *AAS* 2 (1910) 582). Mózes NÓDA, “Back to the mass!”: The Active Participation of the Faithful in the Liturgy in the Light of Two Transylvanian Preconciliar Episcopal Writings, *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft* 56, 2014, 108–135.

<sup>11</sup> *Magyar-latin misszálé az év minden napjára a római misekönyv szerint*, ed. SZUNYOGH Xavér Ferenc, Budapest, 1933. The Missal had five editions and was sold in more than

the prayers of the Mass in their mother tongue. The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by the emergence of a rich literature in Hungarian, by liturgists like József Korompai, Flóris Kühár, Pál Klinda, Béla Körmendy, Piusz Halász, Polikárp Radó and Benjamin Rajeczky.

All these theological developments should be considered when addressing the historical and theological background of the Eucharistic Congress in Budapest.

Since their launch at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, up to World War II, Eucharistic congresses also reflected the endeavor of the Catholic Church to contend with modernity, to preserve its public presence and influence, against currents of thought and political developments that challenged its authority and a number of its dogmatic and sociopolitical assumptions.<sup>12</sup> The holy years proclaimed by Pope Pius XI<sup>13</sup> and the Eucharistic congresses were also meant to mobilize large numbers of believers and advance the renewal of spiritual life in a society in which the Catholic Church was no longer an unquestionable authority. It is in this context that we should see the role of the Catholic Action, established by Pius X and backed by Pius XI, to encourage the apostolate of lay Catholics in society. The Catholic Action had a major role in the organization of Eucharistic congresses, while its members were also involved in the liturgical movement.<sup>14</sup> In

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100,000 copies. The demand for missals is also indicated by the initiative of Benedikta Balázs to publish a missal with the involvement of the Women's Association; this had three editions (*Misekönyv*, Budapest, 1926, 1929, 1943). Vilma Szabó, a teacher of religion, translated a French missal (*Misekönyv a Missale Romanum szerint latin-magyar szöveggel, liturgikus magyarázatokkal és imákkal*, Paris, 1932).

<sup>12</sup> Wilfried LOTH, "Katholizismus und Demokratie in Europa", in *theologie.geschichte. Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kulturgeschichte* 5, 2010. <https://theologie-geschichte.de/ojs2/index.php/tg/article/view/473/512> (10. 12. 2021)

<sup>13</sup> During the 1925 holy year, concluded with the proclamation of the Feast of Christ the King (Pius XI, Quas primas, AAS 17 (1925) 593–610), many thousands of pilgrims travelled to Rome.

<sup>14</sup> Klaus GROSSE KRACHT, *Die Stunde der Laien? Katholische Aktion in Deutschland im europäischen Kontext 1920–1960* (Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für Zeitgeschichte, Reihe B: Forschungen, 129), Paderborn, 2016. On the involvement of the Catholic Action in the liturgical movement: Lea LERCH, "Erwünschte Individualisierung? Laien und Klerus in der Perspektive der Liturgischen Bewegung", in Gregor Maria HOFF, Julia KNOP, Benedikt KRANEMANN, *Amt – Macht – Liturgie: theologische Zwischenrufe für eine Kirche auf dem Synodalen Weg* (QD 308), Freiburg, 2020, 87–105.

Hungary, too, the Catholic Action played a major role in the organization of the International Eucharistic World Congress in 1938.<sup>15</sup>

### Historical shadows and religious tensions

The first decades of the twentieth century witnessed the rise of Communism and National Socialism, two ideologies with devastating consequences for Europe. In the thirties, the ascension of Hitler and the spread of national socialist ideas had immediate consequences for Hungary. The thirties were marked notably by the emergence of the Arrow Cross movement and Party.<sup>16</sup> Following the Anschluss of Austria on 12 March 1938, the German Reich became an immediate neighbor of Hungary and an immediate menace.

Pope Pius XI responded to the emergence of totalitarian ideologies with two encyclicals, *Mit brennender Sorge* (1937) and *Divini Redemptoris* (1937), and warning against the threats of Nazism and Communism, respectively.<sup>17</sup> The encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* challenged among others the exaltation of racial superiority and Germanic Neopaganism and criticized the steps taken against

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<sup>15</sup> The Hungarian Catholic Action, established in 1933–1934, was highly active over the first decade of its existence. It organized numerous programs with the participation of Catholic associations like the National Board of Catholic Agrarian Young Men's Associations (Katolikus Agrárifjúsági Legényegyletek Országos Testülete, KALOT), the Federation of Catholic Girls' Associations (Katolikus Leánykörök Szövetsége, KALÁSZ), and the National Association of Catholic Youth (Katolikus Ifjak Országos Egyesülete, KIOE). Programs focused on education, rural environment, and the ecclesial and social role of lay Catholics. The Catholic Action also embraced the liturgical movement and the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. These lay associations had a significant contribution in promoting Christian values in society. Zoltán NYISZTOR, *Az Actio Catholica tíz éve*, Budapest, 1943, 5–51.

<sup>16</sup> On the origins, emergence and rule of the Arrow Cross Part: Margit SZÖLLÖSI-JANZE, *Die Pfeilkreuzlerbewegung in Ungarn: Historischer Kontext, Entwicklung, und Herrschaft*, München, 1989. in <https://open.ifz-muenchen.de/client/#/view/9783486547119> (10. 12. 2021)

<sup>17</sup> *Mit brennender Sorge*, AAS 19 (1937), 148–167; *Divini Redemptoris*, AAS 29 (1937), 87–96.

the Catholic Church in Germany, in violation of the 1933-Concordat.<sup>18</sup> This critique augmented the tensions between Germany and the Holy See.

Although the Vatican and the Hungarian hierarchy repeatedly emphasized the apolitical character of the Congress, Catholics from Germany and Austria could not participate in the event.<sup>19</sup> The German government did not formally prohibit its citizens to attend, but the administrative obstacles to obtaining travel permits made the participation virtually impossible.<sup>20</sup>

The civil war in Spain, the news of the hostilities against the Church in Mexico and Russia also overshadowed the atmosphere of the Budapest Congress. Overall, due to the uncertain political situation, fewer foreign guests attended.<sup>21</sup>

Even under these circumstances, hosting the Eucharistic Congress offered Hungary a kind of national satisfaction: the country re-emerged on the international arena, breaking out of the isolation that followed the lost war and the peace treaty of Trianon, which deprived it of two thirds of its territory.<sup>22</sup> The geopolitical and administrative changes ensuing from the treaty of Trianon had a profound impact on the Catholic Church as well. Of the former twenty-nine dioceses only five remained intact. This explains why the revisionist efforts of the Horthy-regime, aiming to regain the lost territories, were endorsed by Hungar-

<sup>18</sup> Thomas BRECHENMACHER, “Mit brennender Sorge” (Enzyklika, 1937), *Historisches Lexikon Bayerns*, [https://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/Lexikon/Mit\\_brennender\\_Sorge\\_\(Enzyklika,\\_1937\)#Literatur](https://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/Lexikon/Mit_brennender_Sorge_(Enzyklika,_1937)#Literatur), (published 11.11.2019), referring to his Die Enzyklika “Mit brennender Sorge” als Höhe- und Wendepunkt der päpstlichen Politik gegenüber dem nationalsozialistischen Deutschland, in Rupert STRACHWITZ (ed.), *Christen und Nationalsozialismus. Andechser Betrachtungen*, München, 2011, 26-74.

<sup>19</sup> Antal BENKŐ, “Győzelemről énekeljen napkelet és napnyugat”, in idem, *Eucharisztikus Emlékkönyv [Eucharistic Commemorative Book]*, Eisenstadt, 1988, 5-23 (13–14).

<sup>20</sup> Jenő GERGELY, *Eucharisztikus világtalálkozó Budapesten 1938 [Eucharistic World Congress in Budapest 1938]*, Budapest 1988, 85; Tímea KOSZTOLÁNYI, “Magyarország a nemzetközi katolicizmus pódiumán: az 1938. évi Eucharisztikus Világtalálkozó” [“Hungary on the Stage of International Catholicism: The 1938 Eucharistic World Congress”], in *Újkor* (14.09.2018), <https://ujkor.hu/content/magyarorszag-nemzetkozi-katolicizmus-podiuman-az-1938-evi-eucharisztikus-vilagtalalokozus> (downloaded February 15, 2021).

<sup>21</sup> András GIANONE, “Eucharisztikus világtalálkozások” [Eucharistic World Congresses], in *Praeconia* 10.1 (2015) 86-89 (89).

<sup>22</sup> Ignác ROMSICS, *The Dismantling of Historic Hungary: The Peace Treaty of Trianon, 1920*, New York, 2002.

ian church leaders. This convergence of purposes explains the close relationship between the Hungarian Catholic Church and the State.

Telling for the ties between the political and the ecclesial sphere is the prominent role held by Regent Miklós Horthy and his wife in 1938, during the Congress and the Saint Stephen Memorial Year, which started in the wake of the Eucharistic Congress. The Governor, although a Reformed, was the patron of the Saint Stephen Year, while his wife, Magdolna Purgly, a Catholic, was the patroness of the Eucharistic Congress.

The celebrations of the Eucharistic Congress as well as the festivities of the Saint Stephen Memorial Year were met with high expectations by Hungarian Catholics. But the event was also marked by interconfessional tensions. Thus, Greek Catholics in Hungary were facing mistrust and prejudice from Latin Catholics. Their national belonging and loyalty to Hungary was questioned. The number of believers dramatically declined, partly because after Trianon large territories of the dioceses were lost, partly due to the increasingly frequent change of rite, a source of conflict with the Roman Catholic hierarchy. The formation of priests was hampered by ecclesial and financial issues. In the absence of a seminary, the formation of priests depended on the good will of the Latin seminaries in Budapest and Esztergom and was facing financial difficulties and rejection. Therefore, Greek Catholics regarded the Congress and the Saint Stephen Memorial Year as an opportunity to seek national recognition and acceptance.<sup>23</sup> During the Congress both Churches were determined to overcome the dissensions and come together in the celebration of the Eucharist. As a sign of rapprochement, an Eastern subcommittee was created along the other preparatory committees, and Byzantine liturgies were included in the program of the Congress. Hungar-

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<sup>23</sup> On the difficulties faced by the Greek Catholic Church in Hungary, the tensions with the Roman Catholic Church and the steps toward reconciliation during the Congress: Tamás VÉGHSEŐ, “Az 1938-as Eucharisztikus Világkongresszus és a magyar görögkatolikusok” [“The 1938 Eucharistic World Congress and the Hungarian Greek Catholics”], in István IVANCSÓ (ed.), *Liturgikus örökségünk 12. Az 1938-as Budapesti Nemzetközi Eucharisztikus Kongresszus 75. évfordulója alkalmából 2013. november 28-án rendezett szimpozium anyaga* [Acts of the Symposium held on 28 November 2013 on the 75th anniversary of the 1938 International Eucharistic Congress in Budapest], Nyíregyháza 2014, 9–15 (9-11).

ian Greek Catholics could therefore sense that as a minority Church they were offered the occasion to share their values with the Latin majority.<sup>24</sup>

The relationship between the Catholic Church and the Reformed Church was also fraught with tensions. Consensus was more difficult, because the Catholic understanding of the Eucharist and the cult of the saints raised doctrinal concerns for Protestants.<sup>25</sup> Bishop László Ravasz of the Danubian [Dunamellék] Reformed Church District advocated an attitude of “total indifference” on the part of the Reformed. The Catholic doctrine of salvation and mediation was unacceptable to Protestants (a probable reference to the belief that the intercessions of the saints, in this case, that of Saint Stephen, could mediate salvation). Nonetheless, the strengthening of Catholic identity through the celebrations did not harm the Reformed, Ravasz argued. Consequently, the Reformed Church was supposed to refrain from any manifestation of religious intolerance.<sup>26</sup> On 8 December 1937, the Budapest Synod of the Reformed Church even decided to hold a service commemorating King Stephen. In his speech in the Upper House, László Ravasz explained that the Reformed valued the greatest Hungarian ruler, but religious considerations prevented them from taking part in his cult. Thus, they could not attend the events organized across the country connected to the veneration of the Holy Right (the major relic of King Saint Stephen).<sup>27</sup>

The Eucharistic Congress was overshadowed in particular by the rise of antisemitism and the adoption of the first anti-Jewish law. On 14 May 1938, Governor Miklós Horthy appointed Béla Imrédy, a Catholic, to form a government, following the resignation of the Reformed Kálmán Darányi. Prime-minister Imrédy pursued the pro-German policy of his predecessor. On 28 May 1938, the Parliament passed the first anti-Jewish law, a bill that had been introduced under Darányi. The Law supposedly meant to promote “a stronger enforcement of the balance in social and economic life” (xv/1938) limited to 20% the number of Jews

<sup>24</sup> VÉGHSEŐ, Az 1938-as Eucharisztikus Világkongresszus és a magyar görögkatolikusok, 13-15.

<sup>25</sup> Kálmán Árpád Kovács, “Katolikus-protestáns felekezeti viták a Szent István-i örökség körül 1938-ban” [Catholic-Protestant confessional disputes about the heritage of Saint Stephen around 1938], *Rubicon* 7-8 (2018), Online Plusz (February 15, 2021).

<sup>26</sup> Cit.: Kovács, “Katolikus-protestáns felekezeti viták a Szent István-i örökség körül 1938-ban”.

<sup>27</sup> Cit.: Kovács, “Katolikus-protestáns felekezeti viták a Szent István-i örökség körül 1938-ban”

in businesses, in certain professions (physicians, lawyers, engineers) and in the media. The House of Representatives voted it on 18 May, the Upper House six days later.<sup>28</sup> The law came into force on 29 May 1938. The leaders of the Christian Churches backed its provisions. The Catholic hierarchy approved the law because, they claimed, it did not frame the prohibitions as a racial, but as a religious issue.<sup>29</sup> Ironically, in the same period, during the Eucharistic Congress, the schools of the Jewish community provided accommodation for 650 Hungarian and Polish guests.

The Eucharistic Congress could not prevent the horrors of World War II, the Holocaust and the coming to power of the Communist regime. The next Eucharistic Congress could not be held until 1952, in Barcelona.

### The 34<sup>th</sup> International Eucharistic Congress: festive lights

The International Eucharistic Congress in Budapest was preceded by two other major events, a national Eucharistic Congress held in 1928, and the Saint Imre Memorial Year in 1930.<sup>30</sup> The Hungarian Bishops' Conference announced the 34<sup>th</sup> Eucharistic Congress in Budapest in a circular letter issued on 17 March 1937.<sup>31</sup> As a preparation for the Congress, the Bishops' Conference proclaimed a holy year, to be held from 23 May 1937 to 24 May 1938. This was doubled by a series of ceremonies occasioned by the 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Saint Stephen, the first king of Hungary.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Yehuda DON, "Hungarian Anti-Jewish Legislation, 1938-1944", in *Jewish Social Studies* 48.1 (1986), 63-82.

<sup>29</sup> GERGELY, *Eucharisztikus világkongresszus Budapesten*, 61.

<sup>30</sup> GERGELY, *Eucharisztikus világkongresszus Budapesten*, 30-31.

<sup>31</sup> BENKŐ, "Győzelemről énekeljen", 9-10.

<sup>32</sup> The Saint Stephen Year was launched on 30 May 1938, in the presence of Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli, with a solemn Mass celebrated in front of the Parliament, concluded with the Procession of the Holy Right. Cardinal Justinian Serédi, Archbishop of Esztergom, Prince Primate of Hungary offered the country to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The events included processions with the Holy Right throughout the country. The festivities ended on 31 December 1938 with a Te Deum. *XXXIV. Nemzetközi eucharisztikus kongresszus emlékkönyve [The Commemorative Book of the 34<sup>th</sup> International Eucharistic Congress]*, ed. Kongresszus Előkészítő Főbizottsága, Budapest, 1938, 235-239; GERGELY, *Eucharisztikus világkongresszus Budapesten*, 93; Péter MOLNÁR, "A szeretet köteléke. A 80 éve

The planning for the Eucharistic Congress was entrusted to fourteen subcommittees. The preparations included people's missions,<sup>33</sup> Eucharistic tridua, and adorations, meant to bring (back) large numbers of faithful to communion and Eucharist worship. The Actio Catholica and the National Committee of the Saint Stephen Memorial Year undertook the organization of the congress.

The Congress was held between 25-29 May 1938, under a motto taken from St. Augustine, *Eucharistia, vinculum caritatis*. Pope Pius XI was represented by Secretary of State Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli (soon-to-be Pope Pius XII), accompanied by Deputy Secretary of State Giovanni Battista Montini (the future Pope Paul VI).<sup>34</sup> In his opening speech, Cardinal Pacelli addressed the threefold purpose of the Congress. Celebrations were meant to be manifestations of the faith in the Eucharist. Faith had to find its expression in the worship of Christ, present in the Eucharist. Faith and worship had to be manifested in the deeds of daily life.

Cardinals of Naples, Warsaw, Philadelphia, Mechelen, Paris, Lyon, Turin, Prague, Gnesen (Gniezen), Toledo, and Westminster, and the Patriarchs of Venice and Antioch attended the Congress.<sup>35</sup> Bishops and pilgrims from India, Bolivia, Chile, Egypt, and China were also present.<sup>36</sup> About 25,000 guests from abroad participated in the event. (Many of those registered withdrew because of the threat of war.)<sup>37</sup> The organizing committee reckoned with a total of 553,687 participants.

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megrendezett XXXIV. Eucharisztikus Világkongresszus rendhagyó felelevenítése” [“The Bond of Love. Evoking the 34<sup>th</sup> Eucharistic World Congress held eighty years ago”], *Keresztény Szó* 29.8, 2018, 1–9.

<sup>33</sup> On people's / national or internal missions: Stefan KNOBLOCH, *Volksmission*, *LThk*<sup>3</sup> 10, 2001, 868-869.

<sup>34</sup> *A XXXIV. Nemzetközi eucharisztikus kongresszus emlékkönyve*, Budapest, 1938, 64.

<sup>35</sup> József MARTON, *Az erdélyi katolicizmus 90 éve (1900-1990)* [Ninety years of Transylvanian Catholicism 199-1990], Cluj 2008, 122.

<sup>36</sup> *A XXXIV. Nemzetközi eucharisztikus kongresszus emlékkönyve*, 76–77.

<sup>37</sup> *A XXXIV. Nemzetközi eucharisztikus kongresszus emlékkönyve*, 13. According to other sources, over 50,000 guests from 33 countries have registered. “A 34. Eucharisztikus Világkongresszus Budapesten”, JATE Egyetemi Könyvtár, Szeged, <http://www.bibl.u-szeged.hu/ha/esemeny/euch/index.html>. (15. 09. 2021)

Highlights of the congress included the opening celebration at Heroes' Square (Hősök tere), a Day of Masses (May 25), on which 2,500 Masses were offered,<sup>38</sup> the first communion of children on Ascension Day (May 26) and a naval procession on the Danube on the same day,<sup>39</sup> the soldiers' Mass and the nocturnal adoration attended by 150,000 men (May 27),<sup>40</sup> conferences, the exhibition of the International Caritas on May 28, and the performance of the Christus Oratorio of Franz Liszt at the Opera the same evening.<sup>41</sup> At the closing Mass (May 29), Pope Pius XI greeted the participants on radio.<sup>42</sup> Despite the looming war, the Budapest Eucharistic Congress was a flamboyant celebration marked by great enthusiasm.

Beyond the festive dimension, the Congress also raised high hopes for a true spiritual renewal. Béla Bangha, a prominent Jesuit theologian, author and editor, an enthusiastic promoter of the Eucharistic Congress and a member of the preparatory committee, wished that the event would go beyond ostentatious processions, bringing about spiritual renewal.<sup>43</sup> Jesuit provincial Elemér Csávossy expected that the Congress would engender a Eucharistic spirituality, a spiritual communion with Christ.<sup>44</sup>

### **The Transylvanian presence at the Eucharistic Congress: a complicated matter**

The First World War, the Treaty of Trianon and the ensuing geopolitical changes created a new situation for the Transylvanian Roman Catholic Church. The diocese of Alba Iulia, the largest Roman Catholic diocese of Transylvania, belonging up to 1920 to Hungary, became part of the mostly Orthodox Romania.

<sup>38</sup> A XXXIV. Nemzetközi eucharisztikus kongresszus emlékkönyve, 97-98.

<sup>39</sup> A XXXIV. Nemzetközi eucharisztikus kongresszus emlékkönyve, 128-135, 145-154.

<sup>40</sup> A XXXIV. Nemzetközi eucharisztikus kongresszus emlékkönyve, 155-157, 176-186.

<sup>41</sup> A XXXIV. Nemzetközi eucharisztikus kongresszus emlékkönyve, 201-206.

<sup>42</sup> A XXXIV. Nemzetközi eucharisztikus kongresszus emlékkönyve, 210-221.

<sup>43</sup> Béla BANGHA, *Életünk élete [The life of our lives]*, Budapest 1937, 6 (the Congress was supposed to awaken lethargic and inactive Catholics, opening their hearts to the King of the Eucharist).

<sup>44</sup> Elemér Csávossy, "Az Eucharisztikus Világkongresszus szociális jelentősége" ["The social significance of Eucharistic World Congresses"], *Magyar Kultúra* 25.3, 1938, 67-69 (68).

The integration of the Roman Catholic (mainly Hungarian-speaking) Church into the new state was a difficult process. The political changes, the impact of the 1923 Romanian Constitution and of several laws, – the law on religion (1928), the agrarian laws (1919, 1921, 1922), and the laws on education (1923–1925) –, affected the sustenance of parishes, schools, and other Catholic institutions. The Catholic Church was struggling for its mere survival. The 1927 Concordat between Romania and the Holy See was supposed to remedy the situation, but it also provoked opposition and hostility in Romania.<sup>45</sup> It came into force on 7 July 1929, after a difficult process of ratification. Many of its provisions for the Transylvanian Roman Catholic Church were flawed, leading to objections from both church representatives and minority politicians.

During these difficult years, up to April 1938, the diocese of Alba Iulia was led by Bishop Gusztáv Károly Mailáth (1864–1940), a fervent promoter of the liturgy and a dedicated advocate of the pastoral care of the youth.<sup>46</sup> In view of

<sup>45</sup> The diary of Raymund NETZHAMMER, archbishop of Bucharest between 1905–1924, provides highly interesting insights into the situation of the Catholic Church in Romania, viz. Transylvania, and the negotiations for the Concordat: *Bischof in Rumänien: im Spannungsfeld zwischen Staat und Vatikan* 1–2, ed. Nikolaus NETZHAMMER, Krista ZACH, Südostdeutsches Kulturwerk, München, 1995–1996. For Romanian contemporary assessments: Vasile GOLDIȘ, *Memoriu în chestia Concordatului*, Bucharest, 1927; Onisifor GHIBU, *Nulitatea Concordatului*, Cluj 1935; idem, *Ațiunea catolicismului unguresc și a Sf. Scaun în România*, Cluj 1936 (Ghibu was one of the most vehement opponents of the Catholic Church and staunch critic of the Concordat). For Hungarian contemporary assessments: Elemér JAKABFFY, “A konkordátum”, *Magyar Kisebbség* 8, 1929, 140–155; Imre MIKÓ, *A román kisebbségi statútum*, Cluj, 1938; idem, *Huszonkét év*, Budapest, 1941. For scholarly discussions of the period: Ofelia MILOȘ, *Relațiile statului român cu Sfântul Scaun în a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea*, București, 2010; József MARTON, *Az erdélyi (gyulafehérvári) egyházmegye története*, Cluj, 1994; Mózes NÓDA, “The Historical, Political and Ecclesiastical Background of the 1927 Concordat between the Vatican and Romania”, *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 9.27 (2010) 281–301.

<sup>46</sup> Gusztáv Károly Mailáth had been auxiliary bishop of Ferenc Lőnhárt since 1897, becoming his successor and head of the diocese until 1938. On Bishop Mailáth: Vencel BÍRÓ, *Székhelyi Gr. Mailáth G. Károly [Count G. Károly Mailáth of Székely]*, Cluj, 1940; János KARÁCSONYI, *Gróf Mailáth Gusztáv erdélyi püspök származása [The Origins of Count Gusztáv Mailáth, Transylvanian Bishop]*, Cluj, 1925; Alajos BOGA, *Emlékezés Mailáth püspökre [Recollections of Bishop Mailáth]*, Cluj, 1941; Alfréd ERŐSS, *Mailáth püspök lelki arca [A spiritual portrait of Bishop Mailáth]*, Arad, 1940.

his declining health, on 7 June 1936, the Holy See appointed Adolf Vorbuchner, parish priest of Sibiu, as his auxiliary bishop. Mailáth resigned on 18 April 1938. (He died in Budapest on 18 March 1940). He was succeeded by Adolf Vorbuchner (1890–1938), appointed bishop of Alba Iulia on 28 May 1938. Vorbuchner's ministry lasted only a few months; he died on 10 September 1938 in Vienna.

In the diocese of Alba Iulia, Eucharistic devotion was well established and took institutional forms since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Altar Society was founded as early as 1876 in Kézdivásárhely (Tîrgu Secuiesc). In 1898, Bishop Mailáth founded the central diocesan Altar Society in Alba Iulia, which was relocated to Cluj in 1927.<sup>47</sup> By 1929, ninety altar societies were registered, with a total of 9,076 members. During the 1933 extraordinary Holy Year, Bishop Mailáth introduced the first Thursday holy hour. This devotional fervor explains the enthusiastic reception of the Eucharistic Congress in Transylvania.

Preparations for the Eucharistic Congress followed the provisions of the Catholic Church in Hungary. Bishop Mailáth instructed the priests and faithful about the preparations and the events preceding the Eucharistic Congress (Circular V/1938). A liturgical week was organized in each parish (25–29 May) for those who could not attend the Congress in Budapest. On the evening of May 29 a solemn Mass would be held in each parish and the faithful were encouraged to receive the holy communion.<sup>48</sup> The Eucharistic Week in Cluj (the largest city of the diocese), organized by the deputy parish priest (and future bishop) Áron Márton included lectures on the Eucharist, a mass with holy communion held for the students of Catholic schools, with the participation of the Franciscan, Jesuit, and Piarist fathers.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Archives of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Alba Iulia [AAAI], 5136/1927.

<sup>48</sup> AAAI I.11092 /1938.

<sup>49</sup> *Kolozsmonostori Plébániai Levéltár* [Mănăştur Parish Archives], 104/1938. The detailed program follows. Thus, on May 25 litany and sermon on the *History of the World Eucharistic Congresses* (Chaplain Ferenc Kajtsa); May 26 (Ascension Day), joint Holy Communion for students of Catholic schools; festive Mass, homily on the *Institution of the Eucharist* (Chaplain Antal Jakab [future bishop of the diocese]), litany and homily on *The Theological Meaning of the Eucharist* (Sándor Baumgartner SJ); May 27: litany and homily on *The cult of the Eucharist* (Anasztáz Gábor OFM); May 28: litany and homily *On the Mass* (Hugolin Puskás OFM); May 29: festive Mass, homily *On the Holy Communion* (József Gallov SchP, professor of theology); Holy Communion for adults; litany and

The diocese of Alba Iulia entrusted the organization of the pilgrimage to Budapest to the Transylvanian Roman Catholic People's Alliance (Erdélyi Római Katolikus Népszövetség), a formation with a major socio-political and religious role, founded to promote Catholic faith and interests in a secularized society.<sup>50</sup> The participation of Transylvanian Catholics, Romanian citizens largely belonging to the Hungarian minority, in a Congress held in Hungary required coordination with the Romanian political and ecclesial authorities. The Catholic People's Alliance started advertising the Congress only after the Romanian elections. In a letter from January 16, 1938, József Bálint, the director of the Catholic People's Alliance, informed auxiliary bishop Adolf Vorbuchner of the progress. Senator Elemér Gyárfás, member of the Romanian Parliament and Vice-President of the Catholic People's Alliance, one of the most prominent figures of the Hungarian minority, met Archbishop Alexandru Cisar of Bucharest, who had already informed the Romanian government about the Eucharistic Congress. The Wagon Lits Travel Agency was asked to organize the trip and obtain collective passports for the pilgrims.<sup>51</sup> Special trains departed for Budapest from Braşov, Târgu Mureş, Cluj, Timişoara, Arad and Satu Mare. Congregations in the dioceses of Bucharest and Iaşi also joined the pilgrimage organized by the Transylvanian People's Association. The Greek Catholics, however, were not contacted.

According to the evidence from 21 April 1938, 1,500 pilgrims from the diocese of Timişoara and 1,000 from the diocese of Satu Mare-Oradea registered for the Congress. Conversely, on the date the document records only 600 Catholics from the diocese of Alba Iulia.<sup>52</sup> (The lower number reflected to a degree the socioeconomic condition of the population.) Others provide higher figure.<sup>53</sup>

The pilgrims from Satu Mare were led by Bishop István Fiedler; those from the diocese of Timişoara were accompanied by Bishop Ágoston Pacha. The diocese of Alba Iulia was represented by Bishop Adolf Vorbuchner. He welcomed

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homily: *The Divine Companion of our wandering on Earth* (Chaplain András Balázs), concluding Te Deum and Eucharistic blessing.

<sup>50</sup> AAAI I.1 2966 /1937. The People's Association requested an official mandate from auxiliary bishop Adolf Vorbuchner. (15 September 1937, AAAI I.1 145 /1937).

<sup>51</sup> AAAI I.1 145 /1938.

<sup>52</sup> 250 from Braşov, 200 from Cluj, 150 from Târgu Mureş. AAAI I.1 145 /1938.

<sup>53</sup> Péter SAS speaks of 2000 participants from the dioceses of Timişoara and Satu Mare, each, and 2600 from the diocese of Alba Iulia. *Az erdélyi római katolikus egyház 1900-1948 [The Transylvanian Roman Catholic Church 1900-1948]*, Budapest 2008, 77.

the pilgrims of the diocese of Alba Iulia in Budapest and celebrated Mass for the believers from Romania.<sup>54</sup> Also attending from Romania were Archbishop Alexandru Cisar of Bucharest and Mihai Robu of Iași. On the fourth day of the Congress, Archbishop Cisar delivered a speech in Romanian. On behalf of the Transylvanian Catholics, dr. Kálmán Cziffra, vice-president of the Roman Catholic People's Alliance was invited to speak.

The Commemorative Book of the congress mentions further personalities from Transylvania: (soon-to-be bishop) Áron Márton, canon Gerő Fejér, former collaborator of bishop Mailáth, Antal Péter, professor of theology and editor of several journals, Árpád Bitay, one of the most important lay personalities of the diocese of Alba Iulia, literary historian, former head of the department of education of the Roman Catholic Status and for a while head of the Department for Minorities in the Romanian government of Nicolae Iorga, Lajos Bilinszky, a dedicated educator and author of numerous textbooks, János Badilla, dean and archpriest of Sibiu, and Paula Bethlen (Jósika), wife of Count György Bethlen.<sup>55</sup>

A striking issue is the absence of the Romanian Greek Catholic hierarchy from the Congress in Budapest. The correspondence of Greek Catholic archbishop Alexandru Nicolescu with Andrea Cassulo, nuncio to Bucharest, points to the intricate ecclesial, national, and political conditions, which determined the Romanian Greek Catholic bishops to stay away from the celebrations.<sup>56</sup> Alexandru Nicolescu, Archbishop of Alba Iulia-Făgăraș, complained to Cassulo about the Hungarian revisionist discourse and the erroneous presentation of the Greek Catholic dioceses of Lugoj, Oradea and Gherla (found on the territory of Romania) as belonging to the Hungarian Catholic Church. Indeed, the data provided by Aurél Vécsey in the 1930-1931 edition of the Hungarian Catholic Almanac was inaccurate. According to the 1927 Concordat, which regulated the organization

<sup>54</sup> SAS, *Az erdélyi római katolikus egyház 1900-1948*, 77.

<sup>55</sup> BÍRÓ, *Székhelyi gr. Mailáth G. Károly*, 264.

<sup>56</sup> TÓTH Krisztina, "Akik nem voltak ott az 1938-as eucharisztikus világtalálkozón. A román görög katolikus püspökök távolmaradása" ["Those who missed the 1938 Eucharistic World Congress. The absence of the Romanian Greek Catholic bishops"], in *Lybicus* (2012-2013) 309-318; KOSZTOLÁNYI, "Magyarország a nemzetközi katolicizmus pódiumán", in <https://ujkor.hu/content/magyarorszag-nemzetkozi-katolicizmus-podiuman-az-1938-evi-eucharisztikus-vilagkongresszus> (15. 09. 2021); following Miklós ZEIDLER, *A revíziós gondolat [The concept of revision of the Trianon Treaty]*, Pozsony [Bratislava], 2009.

of the Catholic hierarchy belonging to the Greek, Latin, and Armenian rite in Romania (art. 2), no diocese could extend beyond the borders of the country, and the seat of the dioceses had to be on the territory of Romania (art. 3).<sup>57</sup> Therefore, in 1930-1931 the Greek Catholic dioceses in Romania no longer belonged under the jurisdiction of the Hungarian Church. Under these circumstances, Archbishop Nicolescu considered that the presence of the Greek Catholic bishops in Budapest would have created the impression that they were returning to the “old fold” (i.e., to the Hungarian Church).<sup>58</sup> This would have been a serious charge against Romanian Greek Catholics, whose national loyalty was questioned by the Orthodox majority. Archbishop Nicolescu also notified Cardinal Eugène Tisserant, Secretary of the Eastern Congregation, who informed then Cardinal Secretary of State Eugenio Pacelli of the problems raised by Nicolescu.<sup>59</sup>

Nonetheless, as attested by documents from the archives of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Alba Iulia, Greek Catholic priests and believers did participate in the Eucharistic Congress with the approval and support of their hierarchy. Nicolae Brînzeu, Provost of Lugoj, who accompanied Greek Catholic pilgrims, emphasized that Greek Catholics had to be discernible as a community during the congress,<sup>60</sup> and provided for the visibility of both priests and believers.<sup>61</sup> In its May 1938 issue, the monthly of the Greek Catholic Diocese of Oradea, *Vestitorul* [The Herald], reported on the Budapest Eucharistic Congress.<sup>62</sup>

### Conclusions and lessons for today

The focus of Eucharistic Congresses has shifted during the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to the insights of the liturgical movement. Following André Haquin, Archbishop Piero Marini, President of the Pontifical Council for International Eucharistic Congresses noted that the Eucharistic movement and the liturgical movement

<sup>57</sup> *Monitorul Oficial* nr. 126/12 iunie 1929, 4479–4486.

<sup>58</sup> ΤÓΤΗ, “Akik nem voltak ott az 1938-as eucharisztikus világtkongresszuson”, 311.

<sup>59</sup> Cit. ΤÓΤΗ, “Akik nem voltak ott az 1938-as eucharisztikus világtkongresszuson”, 310.

<sup>60</sup> AAAl.I.1 145 /1938 (in a letter asking for the list of Greek Catholic priests and believers to attend the congress).

<sup>61</sup> AAAl.I.1 1593 /1938, providing detailed instructions regarding the colour and ornamentation of liturgical vestments (gold or yellow; other colours were not allowed). During the procession, pilgrims were to wear Romanian folk costumes.

<sup>62</sup> “Congresul euharistic”, *Vestitorul* 14.8 (1938) 98.

shared some similarities but emphasised different aspects of the Eucharistic Congress: while the first focused on sacramental worship and on the solemn closing procession, the latter highlighted the importance of the communal liturgical celebration of the Eucharist.<sup>63</sup> The 1938 Eucharistic Congress in Budapest was held during a period of transition, in which the ideas of the liturgical movement were starting to gain momentum. This shift in perspective and practice became noticeable at the Eucharistic Congress in Barcelona (1952) and even more at the 1960 Munich Congress, where Joseph A. Jungmann revived the tradition of the *Statio Orbis Mass*.<sup>64</sup>

Eucharistic congresses are solemn professions of faith in Christ who offers himself in the Eucharist. But they also express commitment to divine and human values. The motto of the 1938 Eucharistic Congress, “Eucharistia, vinculum caritatis”, expressed the hope that the worship of Christ present in the Eucharist and the bonds of love would bring peace to a world threatened by hatred and war. Despite the enthusiastic celebration, the ideological battles, the conflicts that opposed nations and religious communities forced the world into the bonds of hatred, culminating with World War II. The interconfessional tensions and the anti-Semitic politics have considerably overshadowed the festive celebrations in Budapest.

The recently concluded 52<sup>nd</sup> Eucharistic Congress in Budapest, announced for 2020, was not threatened by a looming war, but by a pandemic which compelled the postponement of the event to 2021. But this Congress was also overshadowed by the spread of fear, rejection, and hate speech in recent years. In this context, Pope Francis has drawn attention already in 2018 that the Congress was supposed to “foster processes of renewal in Christian communities, so that the salvation whose source is in the Eucharist will find expression in a Eucharistic culture capable of inspiring men and women of good will in the fields of charity, solidar-

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<sup>63</sup> Piero MARINI, “Sono in te tutte le mie sorgenti”. *I Congressi eucaristici e le riscoperte della teologia eucaristica*», Paper presented at the Esztergom conference on the Eucharist, 8 November 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGNeHJoXuYg>, Hungarian trans. “Minden forrásom belőled fakad.” *Az eucharisztikus kongresszusok és az eucharisztikus teológia felismerései*, 3 (downloaded 19 February 2021).

<sup>64</sup> MARINI, *ibid.* See also Reiner KACZYNSKI, “Theologischer Kommentar zur Konstitution über die Heilige Liturgie *Sacrosanctum Concilium*”, in Peter Hünemann, Bernd Jochen Hilberath (eds.), *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*, Freiburg – Basel – Wien, 2004, 1-227 (43-44).

ity, peace, family life and care for creation”.<sup>65</sup> In a similar vein, Archbishop Piero Marini emphasized that the 2020 Eucharistic Congress was not supposed to be only a grandiose manifestation of faith and a tribute to the Eucharist, but also the source of grace for the continuous renewal of the Eucharistic life of the Hungarian Church and God’s entire people.<sup>66</sup> The Congress was not meant to be a display of power and a show of large numbers. It had to turn the attention of Budapest, Hungary, Europe and the world to the encounter of Jesus in the Eucharist, to the saving power of faith, offering a message of hope for a new world founded on service and love, not on power, the message and dream of a new Europe.<sup>67</sup>

This shift away from the temptation of demonstrations of power and the emphasis on fraternity were particularly clear in the message of Pope Francis, delivered at the conclusion of the 52<sup>nd</sup> Eucharistic Congress in Budapest. In his homily at the Statio Orbis closing Mass of 12 September 2021, the Pope invited participants to a life of humble discipleship, inspired by the Cross, far from all triumphalism, committed to the common good.<sup>68</sup> On the same day, his message to the representatives of the Ecumenical Council of the Hungarian Churches and the delegation of the Hungarian Jewish organizations contrasted sharply the triumphalist and anti-Semitic discourse of the 30s. Evoking the metaphor of the bridge, which connects and holds together without merging or absorbing the different sides, Francis stressed the need to resist the destructive temptation to absorb, to isolate, to ghettoize the other. He invited the representatives of the different faith groups to commit to fraternity, countering suspicion, ignorance, and discord, the outbursts of hatred, and the looming threat of anti-Semitism. The

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<sup>65</sup> Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to participants in the plenary assembly of the Pontifical Committee for International Eucharistic Congresses (Rome, 10 November 2018), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2018/november/documents/papa-francesco\\_20181110\\_congressi-eucaristici.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2018/november/documents/papa-francesco_20181110_congressi-eucaristici.html).

<sup>66</sup> MARINI, “*Sono in te tutte le mie sorgenti*”.

<sup>67</sup> Piero Marini az Eucharisztikus Kongresszusról: Nem az erőnket akarjuk megmutatni [Pietro Marini on the Eucharistic Congress: It is not our power we want to demonstrate], Interview, 16 May 2019 <https://www.iec2020.hu/hu/hirek-sajto/piero-marini-az-eucharisztikus-kongresszusrol-nem-az-eronket-akarjuk-megmutatni>. February 19, 2021.

<sup>68</sup> Viaggio apostolico di Sua Santità Francesco a Budapest, in occasione della santa messa conclusiva del 52.mo Congresso Eucaristico Internazionale. Omelia del santo padre, Piazza degli Eroi (Budapest), Domenica, 12 settembre 2021, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/homilies/2021/documents/20210912-omelia-budapest.html>

past suffering and darkness, the misunderstandings and persecutions must be remembered and confronted, the Pope emphasised, and vigilance is required to prevent the past missteps from happening again. The lips of the men of God may not utter words that divide, but only messages of openness and peace, witnessing to the God of the covenant and of peace in a world torn by conflicts.<sup>69</sup>

It took over eight decades for the Eucharistic Congress to come full circle, returning to Budapest. But the 2020 [2021] Congress was not a remake of that of 1938. The liturgical movement has meanwhile found full recognition and the celebration of the Eucharist with the active participation of the people of God was at the heart of the events. The words of Pope Francis have brought healing to the wounds inflicted by hatred in the past and hope for a fraternal world. The imperative of confronting the past and remaining vigilant before the threat of hatred are among the most important lessons to be learnt from the two Eucharistic Congresses in Budapest.

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<sup>69</sup> Incontro con i rappresentanti del Consiglio Ecumenico Delle Chiese e alcune comunità ebraiche dell'Ungheria. Discorso del Santo Padre Francesco (Museo delle Belle Arti), Budapest, 12 settembre 2021, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2021/september/documents/20210912-budapest-consiglioecumenico.html>. (20. 09. 2021). The Pope referred to the Budapest Chain Bridge, the oldest bridge which connects the two parts of the Hungarian capital. The age of the bridge also allowed him to evoke the idea of returning to the roots, to rediscover the common spiritual heritage, but also to remember and cope with the painful past.

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