

SYNODALITY BEFORE THE SYNOD AS THE PATH OF A RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY. THE THEOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL INITIATIVES OF THE SISTERS OF SOCIAL SERVICE IN TRANSYLVANIA IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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Abstract. As the Society of the Sisters of Social Service, an international religious community established in Hungary, celebrates the centenary of its foundation, evoking the early stages of its mission provides an opportunity for re-examining the charism of the society. The success of the Sisters of Social Service, their ability to deal effectively with the challenges of their time, in particular those emerging in the interwar period and during the second world war, was largely due to their modern and open-minded vision. This paper discusses the charism of the society, shaped by Benedictine spirituality and devotion to the Holy Spirit, focusing on two aspects of their activity, their social sensitivity and commitment to social work, and their contribution to the dissemination of the ideas of the liturgical movement. These initiatives also highlight the contribution of women to the mission of the Church before their explicit acknowledgement in contemporary synodal documents.

Keywords: Society of the Sisters of Social Service, community charism, modernity, social work, liturgical movement, synodality, women in the Church.

On 24 November 2022, Pope Francis, meeting with the members of the International Theological Commission, advocated for doing theology in a synodal way: the vocation of theologians is not only an individual endeavour, but also has a communitarian and collegial dimension. To do theology in a synodal manner means fostering the ability to listen, to engage in dialogue, to discern and to harmonise different perspectives. The Pope also pleaded for increasing the number

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of female members, because women bring a different perspective, and they make theology deeper and more 'flavourful'.²

The recently concluded Synod of Synodality highlights the contribution of women to the mission of the Church, envisaging women from different walks of life, working and consecrated women.³ Consecrated women, – whether in contemplative or apostolic life, are a gift, a sign, and a witness. The Report evokes the long history of missionary women, saints, theologians, and mystics, as a powerful source of inspiration for both women and men. It largely focuses (with good reason) on women's call for social and economic justice and ecclesial recognition. While acknowledging their role in the Church, specifically as missionaries and theologians, it does not address women's role in promoting social justice.⁴

In response to these perspectives emphasising synodality and the contribution of women to theology and the mission of the Church, I will highlight some aspects of the charism of the Sisters of Social Service that have marked the history of the Society and have placed them ahead of their time, encouraging them to take this path before the synodal vision of the Church emerged. I will address their commitment to the social question, their social and educational initiatives, but also an issue less often discussed, their contribution to theology and to the liturgical renewal.

The Sisters of Social Service and the social question

Social sensitivity towards the poor and marginalised, commitment to disenfranchised categories have been recently highlighted as a feature of a synodal Church.⁵ Religious communities, whether monastic orders, institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, are a sign of their time in the Church and in

² "Credo che forse sarebbe importante aumentare il numero delle donne, non perché siano di moda, ma perché hanno un pensiero diverso dagli uomini e fanno della teologia qualcosa di più profondo e anche di più 'saporito'." Discorso del Santo Padre Francesco ai membri della Commissione Teologica Internazionale; Christopher WELLS, "Pope: Women Can Give More 'Flavour' to Theology", *Vatican News* (24.11.2022). VÉRTESALJAI László, "Hármas irányelv a II. Vatikáni Zsinat tanítása jegyében" (2023).

³ Synod23 – Relazione di Sintesi della prima Sessione della XVI Assemblea Generale Ordinaria del Sinodo dei Vescovi (4–29 ottobre 2023) e risultati delle Votazioni, 9, *Bolletino* (28.10.2023).

⁴ Synod 23, 9, Convergenze (c) and (d).

⁵ Synod23, 4.

society. Those communities that reimagine lifestyles and implement new forms of service and proximity to the poor are particularly significant.⁶ Such communities provide answers to the specific, often unprecedented questions of their time. The ability of a community to transpose its charism and mission in life in a way that benefits fellow humans is a mark of its authenticity.

The social question was such a pressing issue in the early the 20th century, when the Society of the Sisters of Social Service was founded, while the Catholic Church was still striving to find responses to this challenge. The wide social gap between employers and workers following the industrial revolution, the lack of ethical principles in an economy based solely on free competition, the increasingly difficult life of workers marked out the worker question as one of the most stringent problems. Since the late 19th century several economic and sociopolitical initiatives and ideological approaches sought solutions to these issues. The trade union movement, increasingly linked to the socialist party, or the Marxist scientific socialism that emerged as a political response to the need to improve the condition of workers were prominent attempts.

In addition to the theoretical contribution of the emergent Catholic social movement and the education of clergy and faithful on social issues, the Catholic Church responded with charitable initiatives, support for workers' organisations and social programmes. Such initiatives are linked to personalities like Frédéric Ozanam in France, Adolph Kolping and Emmanuel von Ketteler in Germany. At the end of the 19th century, Christian trade union movements were established in the United States, in France and Belgium.⁷

In 1891, Pope Leo XIII issued the social encyclical *Rerum Novarum*.⁸ Pius XI returned to the social question in 1931 with the encyclical *Quadragesimo anno*.⁹

⁶ Synod23, 8, Convergenze (d); 10.

⁷ Thomas C. BEHR, "The Nineteenth-Century Historical and Intellectual Context of Catholic Social Teaching", in *Catholic Social Teaching. Volume of Scholarly Essays*, edited by Gerard BRADLEY and E. Christian BRUGGER, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019, 34–65; Franz-Josef STEGMANN – Peter LANGHORST, *Geschichte der sozialen Ideen im deutschen Katholizismus (Geschichte der sozialen Ideen in Deutschland: Sozialismus — Katholische Soziallehre — Protestantische Sozialethik. Ein Handbuch*, edited by Helga GREBING, Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2005, 613–624, 672–674, 685–700, 704–712, 733–736.

⁸ AAS 23 (1890/91) 643–652.

⁹ AAS 23 (1931) 190–216.

Early magisterial statements condemned the views associated with socialism and communism and called for patience and the defence of private property. The Catholic response to the social question was belated and insufficient. The working class embraced socialism, understood as a more adequate defence of workers' interests, and adopted atheistic Marxism.¹⁰ It is probably because of this conceptual distinction and the broader meaning of synod that when Pope Francis announced the Synod of Bishops and the synodal process, it was the neologism synodality that came to the fore, and not, as one might have expected, the Latin conciliarity.¹¹

Emerging Catholic social teaching was received in Hungarian Catholic circles, as well. In Transylvania, between the two world wars, the Catholic press emphasised the importance of the social question and its Christian foundations. In an article written in 1932, Béla Barát pointed to the importance of social protection, moral and cultural education and argued that only selfless intellectuals with a genuine Christian foundation could be credible social and political leaders.¹² József Venczel, one of the leading sociologists of Transylvania, emphasised the importance of social education in the formation of college students, of future intellectuals, alongside ideological and cultural education.¹³

The initiatives of the Sisters of Social Service need be considered in this social and ecclesial context. The roots of the society go back to the Social Missionary Society in Hungary, founded by Edit Farkas in 1908, with the endorsement of Bishop Ottokár Prohászka, to respond to these challenges. The Sisters of Social Service were founded in Budapest in 1923 by Margit Slachta (1884–1974), after

¹⁰ AUGUST FRANZEN, *A History of the Church*, tr. Peter Becker, rev., ed. John P. Dolan, New York: Herder & Herder, 1969, 405–406.

¹¹ The omission of the latter may also be attributed to the historical controversies which divided the Western Church, with the advocates of conciliarism placing the authority of the universal council above that of the Pope (especially after the Western schism). On the background to the crisis: PAUL VALLIERE, *Conciliarism. A History of Decision-Making in the Church*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012, 137–148.

¹² BARÁT Béla, “Az ifjú katholicizmus szociális programja”, *Erdélyi Tudósító* 15.1 (1932) 430–433.

¹³ VENCZEL József, “Értelmiségi-nevelés és a főiskolás mozgalmak”, *Erdélyi Tudósító* 18 (1935) 228–229; ID., “Főiskolás mozgalmaink közszelleme”, in *A falumunka útján. Válogatott írások*, ed. SZÉKELY András Bertalan, Székelyudvarhely – Budapest: Magyar Művelődési Intézet, 1993, 71–78. The education of college students, the formation of intellectuals is primarily a qualitative problem.

parting ways with the Social Missionary Society. Margit Slachta, a schoolteacher from Kassa (present day Košice, Slovakia), from a Hungarian family with Polish roots, was a Christian feminist, social activist, and publicist, to become a member of the Hungarian Parliament, and a rescuer of Jews during World War II.¹⁴

The charism of the Society¹⁵ combined Benedictine spirituality and devotion to the Holy Spirit with commitment to the social mission of the Church. The ability to act on the signs of the times was inspired by the devotion to the Holy Spirit, experienced as the Spirit of youthfulness and enthusiasm.¹⁶ Benedictine spirituality,

¹⁴ Ferenc HÖRCHER, “Margit Slachta (1884–1974): Christian Feminism Against Totalitarian Powers”, in Réka MÓNICA CRISTIAN, Anna KÉRCZY (eds.), *Pioneer Hungarian Women in Science and Education II: Pioneer Hungarian Women in Education*, Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2023; Jessica A. SHEETZ-NGUYEN, “Transcending Boundaries: Hungarian Roman Catholic Religious Women and the ‘Persecuted Ones’”, in *In God’s Name: Genocide and Religion in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Omer BARTOV and Phyllis MACK, New York – Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2001 (repr. 2010), 222–242. For the speeches of Margit Slachta in the Hungarian Parliament: Petrás Éva, Schlachta Boglárka Lilla, Szabó Róbert (eds.), *Slachta Margit beszédei a magyar parlamentben*, Budapest: Barankovics István Alapítvány – Gondolat Kiadó, 2021. For a brief overview in the broader context of Hungarian religious life: James P. NIESSEN, “Catholic Monasticism, Orders and Societies in Hungary. Centuries of Expansion, Disaster, and Revival”, in *Monasticism in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Republics*, edited by Ines Angeli Murzaku, London – New York: Routledge, 2016, 86–109 (100, 102, 105). [The title of the volume adopts the imperial perspective of the Soviet Union, obscuring the identity of the countries discussed under this heading.] Niessen refers to SZTRILICH Ágnes, “Slachta Margit és a Szociális Testvérek Társasága,” in *Boldog Salkaházi Sára: Emlékkönyv: 2006. szeptember 17-i budapesti boldoggáavatása alkalmából*, edited by HIDVÉGI Máté, Budapest: Szent István Társulat, 2006, and RÉVAY Edit, *Újrarendülő szerzetesrendek egy megújuló társadalomban*, Budapest – Csíkszereda: Magyar Egyházszociológiai Intézet, 2003. On the history of the SSS in Romania: MURÁNYI Teréz, “Szellemben, irányzatban, szeretetben egyek vagyunk veletek. A Szociális Testvérek Társasága romániai kerületének rövid története”, *Keresztény Szó* 24.8 (2013) 3–4.

¹⁵ Currently organised as a society of apostolic life, the SSS is present in Europe (Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Romania), Canada and the US (California, Buffalo, Miami), in Latin-America (Cuba, Puerto Rico, Mexico), and Asia (Philippines, Taiwan). “Who we are”, <https://2021.sssinternational.org/who-we-are/>.

¹⁶ SLACHTA Margit, *A megszentelő Szeretet küldetésében*, Kolozsvár: Minerva, 1944, 62 (The Spirit of God is youthful).

captured by the motto *ora et labora*, provided on the other hand for the unity of *actio* and *contemplatio*. Daily activity was understood thus a theological locus, an experience of the encounter with God, which encouraged the sister to offer her life to others.¹⁷

The Society was characterised since its inception by modernness, by readiness to deal with stringent issues in innovative ways, by finding ways of living and acting that fitted the needs of contemporary society, with particular attention to families, women, and children.¹⁸ The foundation was inspired by the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. The success of the Sisters of Social Service resided in their ability to provide concrete answers to the sensitive social issues of the early 20th century. To alleviate the social problems, the Society set itself the task to train qualified social workers, and to educate the youth to respond to these problems. Social consciousness involved acting on the principle of prevention, addressing social problems through legislation, and working for the large scale transformation of society through social reforms. Due to these perspectives, the Society has been ahead of its time with regard to the social question and continues to be relevant today.¹⁹

Modernity meant freedom from the slavery of ancient forms, coupled with fidelity to the original essence; in this spirit, the sisters felt bound by love for God and neighbour to apply new means and possibilities in the service of the unchanged essence.²⁰ Modernity and novelty resided thus in their ability to respond to problems emerging in all social strata, from maids to female students, in the university and in politics, in orphanages and children's homes.

¹⁷ DĂNESCU Teodora, FARMATI Anna, HEGEDŰS Enikő, "Lelkiségünk pillérei", in *Jelnek állítottalak... Emlékkönyv a Szociális Testvérek Társasága és Romániai Kerülete alapításának 80. évfordulójára*, edited by FARMATI Anna and GÁBOR Csilla, Csíkszereda: Tipographic, 2003, 8–17 (12).

¹⁸ According to the mission statement, the Sisters of Social Service "focus on the various needs of society, arising from social, religious, economic, cultural, civic and environmental conditions in which we live." The statement highlights the focus on families, women, and children. The Society, "which is called to an active apostolate, also emphasizes the necessity of a life of prayer". "Who we are", <https://2021.sssinternational.org/who-we-are/>.

¹⁹ DĂNESCU, FARMATI, HEGEDŰS, "Lelkiségünk pillérei", 12.

²⁰ DĂNESCU, FARMATI, HEGEDŰS, "Lelkiségünk pillérei", 14 ("aki nem rabja a régi formának, de hűséges a régi lényeghez, az éppen isten- és emberszeretettől indítva érzi kötelességének, hogy az új eszközöket és lehetőségeket beállítsa a változatlan lényeg szolgálatába.").

Formation played an important role. The sisters trained themselves and trained skilled social leaders and workers. In 1933 the Society founded a School for the Training of Parish Sisters in Oradea. In 1939 they established a Social Seminary in Cluj, and shortly thereafter a three-year social college, the Catholic Women's Social Sciences Vocational School.²¹ In 1941, the Report of the Transylvanian District shows that 50% of the sisters were active in social work.²²

Two examples illustrated well the modernity, the entrepreneurial spirit of the Sisters of Social Service in Transylvania. To secure the financial basis of their mission, the Society took over the Central Hotel in Cluj (Kolozsvár) in 1927 and the Excelsior Hotel in Stâna de Vale (Biharfüred) in 1934. The proceeds were used to enlarge their first house in Cluj (Kolozsvár), the Little House, and the chapel, and to purchase the Villa Pax in Marosfő (Izvorul Mureşului).²³ It was not a matter of course for religious communities to rent and operate hotels at the time but this pioneering enterprise undertaken by women supported their social activities and was itself a way of practising social service.

Associations were important pillars of Catholic communities in Transylvania. In the first half of the 20th century they were organised in two large networks. Whereas male devotional and charitable associations belonged under the umbrella of the Transylvanian Roman Catholic National League (founded in 1921), Catholic women's organisations were included in the Catholic Women's Association of Transylvania, established in Arad in 1926. The Sisters of Social Service were active in the latter, in the Social-charitable section and in the Youth section. They also steered several groups for women from different walks in life: the Girls' Clubs, the Circle of College Students, the Circle of Catholic Teachers, and the Association of Working Girls. The Zita-, Catherine- and Martha Circles focused on maids, the St Margaret Circle addressed female university students. The Day of a Thousand Szekler Girls, an event marking out the effort to preserve folk traditions and communal identity, which survives up to present day, was also founded by the Sisters of Social Service.²⁴

The formation provided by the Sisters of Social Service within the Club of Catholic Female University Students of Cluj (Kolozsvár), established in 1929

²¹ MARTON József, *A keresztény jelenkor*, Marosvásárhely: Mentor, 2008, 185.

²² "Az Erdélyi Kerület jelentése", *A Testvér* 12.7 (1941) 5.

²³ MURÁNYI, "Szellemben", 3–4.

²⁴ MARTON, *A keresztény jelenkor*, 187.

also deserves attention. The Sisters recorded the female students enrolled at the University and hosted regular, bi-weekly meetings. Starting with the second year, they offered lectures on ethical, cultural, and social issues. Students visited social institutions and factories, where they learned about the working conditions. They were involved in charitable work in the city, conducted social surveys and helped in soup kitchens. They also participated in the social life of the city. Guest lectures were offered by social, ecclesiastical or cultural personalities – Countess Paula Bethlen, wife of Count György Bethlen, president of the Catholic Women’s Association, Fr. Imre Sándor, educator (later vicar and governor of the diocese of Alba Iulia),²⁵ Áron Márton, at the time the students’ minister (later bishop),²⁶

²⁵ Bishop Áron Márton later appointed Imre Sándor his vicar (1939) and after the Second Vienna Award (1940), which split the diocese of Alba Iulia between Hungary and Romania, governor of the Northern part of the diocese, residing in Cluj. Bishop Áron Márton decided to remain in the Southern part (in Romania), at the episcopal see in Alba Iulia. Due to his resistance to the attempts of the Romanian Communist regime to dismantle the Church loyal to Rome, Sándor was tried in 1951 as ‘enemy of the people’ and detained in the infamous political prisons of Bucharest, Jilava, and Râmnicu Sărat. He died in the latter in 1956. FERENCZI Sándor, *A gyulafehérvári (erdélyi) főegyházmegye történelmi papi névtára*, Kolozsvár: Verbum – Budapest: Szent István Társulat, 2009, 389; Andrea DOBES, “Sándor Imre – egy erdélyi vértanú”, *Szabadság* (25.09.2017), <http://szabadsag.ro/-/sandor-imre-egy-erdelyi-vertanu>, referring to Cosmin BUDEANĂ and Jánosi CSONGOR, “Sándor Imre (1893–1956) – destinul unui preot romano-catolic” in *Identități sociale, culturale, etnice și religioase în comunism*, edited by Cosmin BUDEANĂ and Florentin OLTEANU, Iași: Polirom, 2015, 467–481.

²⁶ Áron Márton (1896–1980) was one of the most prominent personalities of the 20th century: students’ minister and orator at St Michael’s Church in Cluj, educator and editor, and from 1938/1939 bishop of the Roman-Catholic diocese of Alba Iulia (Transylvania). As bishop, he stood up against the deportation of the Jews and against the Communist repression of the Catholic Church. He spent several years in prison (1949–1955), in Jilava, Aiud (Nagyenyed) and Sighet (Máramarosziget) and in house arrest (1957–1967). Due to his outspoken critique of all forms of injustice and his extraordinary moral authority, Áron Márton is a legendary figure of the Catholic Church in Transylvania. János SZÓKE, *Márton Áron*. Nyíregyháza: Görög Katolikus Püspöki Hivatal, 1990; Stefano BOTTONI, “Non recuso laborem. Áron Márton e il regime comunista romeno”, in *La Chiesa cattolica dell’Europa centro-orientale di fronte al comunismo. Atteggiamenti, strategie, tattiche*, edited by András FEJÉRDY, Roma: Viella, 2013, 157–172; Michael PHAYER, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930–1965*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000,

Arthur Reischel, teacher and head of the Piarist Gymnasium in Cluj (Kolozsvár), or the poet and publicist Sándor Reményik.²⁷

The social and educational dimension of the work of the Sisters of Social Service and their ability to respond to contemporary questions is well summarised in a sentence from the 1941 report of the Transylvanian District: “Historical circumstances determine historical tasks”.²⁸

The Sisters of Social Service and the liturgical renewal

The first decades of the Society coincided with the peak of the liturgical movement, which sought to place the liturgy in the centre of ecclesial life and spirituality, to make liturgy accessible to all believers, strengthening thereby the sense of communion.²⁹ The liturgy came to be understood as the centre of spirituality, the first and indispensable source of Christian life.³⁰ Liturgy, – Belgian Benedictine Lambert Beauduin argued –, had to nourish everyone; it had to be democratised.³¹ This perspective can be seen as a synodal vision of the liturgy, as walking together, as celebrating together in the community.

106–107; Márton Áron – *Un vescovo sulla via della croce*. Atti della commemorazione organizzata dal Pontificio Consiglio della Cultura in collaborazione con l’Accademia di Romania in Roma; Giovedì, 11 ottobre 2012, Roma, edited by Gergely Kovács, Cluj: Verbum, 2013; [Valer MOGA], “A Prelate Against Communism. Áron Márton, Roman Catholic Bishop of Alba Iulia (1938–1980)”, *Memoria Urbis*, <http://memoriaurbis.apulum.ro/en/story/96>. On his work as educator: Márta BODÓ, “Márton Áron, az ifjúság és a nép nevelője”, *Keresztény Szó* 27.8 (2016) 19–26. On his interventions against the deportation of the Jews: Zoltán TIBORI SZABÓ, “Márton Áron – a népek igaza”. *Keresztény Szó* 26.4 (2015) 19–23.

²⁷ JÁNKY János, “Mozgalmaink”, *Erdélyi Tudósító* 15.10 (1932) 385–389 (390).

²⁸ “Az Erdélyi Kerület jelentése”, *A Testvér* 12.7 (1941) 5.

²⁹ SZUNYOGH Xavér Ferenc, “A szentmise lelke”, *Pannonhalmi Szemle* 10.2 (1935) 118–125.

³⁰ Lambert BEAUDUIN, *La piété de l’Église. Principes et faits*, Leuven: Abbaye du Mont-César, 1914, 47.

³¹ Whereas Benedictines are the aristocrats of the liturgy, Lambert claimed, everybody should be nurtured by the liturgy. In accordance with its etymology, the liturgy should be democratised. Cf. Ferdinand KOLBE, *Die liturgische Bewegung*, Aschaffenburg: Paul Pattloch, 1964, 33; Benedikt KRANEMANN, “Glaubenstradition und Zeitgenossenschaft. Die Liturgiereform des 2. Vatikanischen Konzils im Kontext neuzeitlicher Reformen des Gottesdienstes”, in *Gottesdienst in Zeitgenossenschaft: Positionsbestimmungen 40 Jahre nach*

In Transylvania, the first initiatives of the liturgical renewal were inspired by the *motu proprio* on sacred music *Tra le sollecitudini* of Pope Pius X³² and consisted largely of instruction in liturgical chant. Gyula Glattfelder, the bishop of the diocese of Csanád, established a chant school to enhance the knowledge of Gregorian chant among canons and parish priests.³³ Gusztáv Károly Mailáth, Bishop of Transylvania, moved to renew church music in accordance with Pope Pius X's intention, and was inspired by the Cecilian Movement.³⁴ In 1903, the first course of church music was organised during the pastoral retreat in Csíksomlyó (Șumuleu Ciuc).³⁵ Following the *Tra le sollecitudini*, he introduced the mandatory liturgical formation of priests and cantors.³⁶ He also provided for the liturgical education of the faithful.³⁷

The main ideas of the liturgical movement were promoted in Hungary mainly by the Benedictines, particularly through their extensive publishing activities. Hildebrand Várkonyi published a series of articles concerning the participation in the Mass in the youth magazine *Szent Gellért*. He obtained Lambert Beauduin's permission to translate his works. Ferenc Xavér Szunyogh OSB, the father of the Hungarian liturgical movement, corresponded with Lambert Beauduin, Ildefons Herwegen and Odo Casel. In 1922 he visited Maria Laach and met Odo Casel and

der Liturgiekonstitution des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils, edited by Martin KLÖCKENER and Benedikt KRANEMANN, Fribourg: Academic Press, 2006, 49–72 (60).

³² *Tra le sollecitudini*, AAS 36 (1904) 325–329.

³³ *Havi közlöny* 34 (1911) 791–794 (781). Attendance of the chant school was mandatory, under penalty of a fine. The members of the Chapter and the parish priests protested jointly against the decree.

³⁴ In 1901 he took part in the general assembly of the German Cecilia Association in Regensburg. He strongly supported the activities of the Hungarian Cecilia Association, founded in 1897. In 1903, the diocesan Cecilia Society, founded in Csíksomlyó, elected Bishop Mailáth as its patron.

³⁵ The bishop reprimanded his priests for the poor attendance and the failure to observe the rules of worship “as the holiness and magnificence of the cause” required and ordered their observance.

³⁶ MAILÁTH Gusztáv Károly, “Liturgikus továbbképzés”, Archiepiscopal Archives of Alba Iulia [AAAI] 2360/1903. He called on cantors to take part in continuous formation and to establish church choirs.

³⁷ MAILÁTH, “Liturgikus továbbképzés”, AAI 2360/1903. He instructed the clergy to explain the sacred rites to the faithful in sermons and catecheses, highlighting the magnificence of the liturgy, and endorse the instruction of the youth in chant.

Romano Guardini. Guardini granted him the permission to translate his works into Hungarian. In 1933, Szunyogh published the Hungarian-Latin Missal, provided with introductions and explanations. The liturgical apostolate was organised on the model of the popular liturgical apostolate of Pius Parsch, endorsing the participation of lay Christ believers in the liturgy.

The two female religious communities close to the Benedictines, the Social Missionary Society and the Sisters of Social Service, were actively involved in liturgical apostolate, which was understood as an expression of modern spirituality. The Social Missionary Society opened a liturgical bookstore, manufactured and sold religious objects and liturgical vestments. Their publishing house contributed to the dissemination of liturgical literature.

In Transylvania, the Sisters of Social Service disseminated the ideas of the liturgical movement through their publications. One of their journals, *A Nap* (*The Sun*, 1921–1946) published articles authored by Xavér Szunyogh. In ones of his articles, Szunyogh encouraged the readers to participate in the Mass with full awareness, to celebrate the times of the liturgical year, and pleaded for a celebration of the sacraments understandable to everyone.³⁸ In the internal journal of the Society, *A Testvér* (*The Sister*), the Sisters of Social Service encouraged the improvement of the quality of liturgical life. The official journal of the community, *A Lélek szava* (*The Word of the Spirit*), published the liturgical writings of Benedictine oblate Benedicta Balázs, under the heading “Liturgy: one minute!”. These short writings explained the parts and texts of the Holy Mass.³⁹ Augusta Ikrich,⁴⁰ the founder of the Transylvanian District, discovered the ideas of the liturgical movement in Beuron and became a fervent supporter of the liturgical renewal.⁴¹ The first bilingual, Hungarian-Latin Book of Hours, published in 1936, was compiled by Sister Erzsébet Bokor. The translations of the psalms were taken from Sándor Sík, the translations of the hymns from Miklós Bihari, and the antiphons from the *Szent vagy Uram!* (*You are holy, Lord!*) book of chants.⁴² The Sisters of Social Service also published the Book of Hours for the deceased, in Hungarian.

³⁸ SZUNYOGH Xavér Ferenc, “A liturgikus mozgalom”, *A Nap* 15.5 (1925) 3.

³⁹ FARMATI Anna, “Nihil operi Dei praeponatur”, in *Minden kegyelem!, A 65 éves Jakubinyi György érsek köszöntése*, edited by MARTON József and OLÁH Zoltán, Budapest: Szent István Társulat – Kolozsvár: Verbum, 2011, 544–550 (550).

⁴⁰ MARTON József, “Miért éppen Ikrich Augustza?”, *Keresztény Szó* 24.8 (2013) 8–12.

⁴¹ IKRICH Augustza, “Néhány nap Beuronba”, *A Testvér* 2.1 (1930) 4.

⁴² FARMATI, “Nihil operi Dei praeponatur”, 548–550.

In 1925, the Social Missionary Society and the Sisters of Social Service organised a one-month course for the training of cantors in Cluj (Kolozsvár). The curriculum included topics in liturgy, music theory, harmony, musical forms, music history, music aesthetics, methods of vocal instruction, individual singing, piano, organ, choir, and practical training, with a total of 140 hours of lectures. Students performed cantorial duties at St. Michael's Church, sang with the choir and participated in exercises of group musical performance.⁴³

In 1926, the sisters also organised a social course and a liturgical week, which included lectures on the liturgical movement, its implications for the social question, for the spiritual life of the social worker, and liturgical mass hearing.⁴⁴

Conclusion

The synodal understanding of the Church, which challenges clericalism and emphasises the participation of all the baptised in every aspect of the life of the communities, in a sense rediscovers an ecclesiological vision that marked not only the early Church but has also found many recent expressions. This perspective also acknowledges the contribution of women, in particular of religious women, to the social and theological mission of the Church.

While the Catholic Church hesitantly rediscovers the importance of women in the Church, the Sisters of Social Service have played a significant role in addressing contemporary issues throughout their century-long history. Their charism, their social sensitivity, their modernness inspired by their devotion to the Holy Spirit, their practical sense, have contributed decisively to the prevention and healing of social problems. They have recognised the importance of education, of professional formation, and have given particular attention to the education of women, female students, and young professionals in social work. They have shown notable solidarity and found practical solution to rescue the persecuted, in particular the Jews. Their Benedictine spirituality also played a part in their involvement in the liturgical renewal that preceded and prepared Vatican II. This paper has highlighted mainly their activities related to Transylvania, a region that

⁴³ MAILÁTH Gusztáv Károly, "Kántor tanfolyam Kolozsváron", AAI, 1723/1925.

⁴⁴ WALTER Ilona, "A megszentelő szeretet szolgálatában", in *Jelnek állítottalak... Emlékkönyv a Szociális Testvérek Társasága és Romániai Kerülete alapításának 80. Évfordulójára*, edited by FARMATI Anna and GÁBOR Csilla, Csíkszereda: Tipographic, 2003, 17–63 (38).

is not commonly known as a region that would have had a significant impact on the renewal of the Church. The mission of the Sisters of Social Service continues to be a source of inspiration for women and men in the community.

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