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The Vatican and National Minorities

In the present study, I will discuss the declarations of the Holy See and the position taken in the case of national minorities. More precisely, I will talk about individual rights that allow the practice – together with others – of communal ways of life and collective traditions which are closest to the individual's heart (Holló 2000). This analysis does not concentrate on the whole period of the Catholic Church's existence, but only on the last fifty years, more exactly, from the rule of Pius XII to the present. I think this is more than enough to reveal the attitude of the Vatican on the question of national minorities. In some cases – whenever it has seemed necessary – I have made a comparison with the actual situation of the Moldavian Csángós in order to reveal all differences. I did this without trying to offend anybody or to point at anybody, but rather to make people see the abnormal things and to try to remedy them as far as possible.

In the last years, the struggle of the different Churches for human rights has become more and more obvious. The Roman Catholic Church has raised its voice whenever it seemed that human rights were violated. This task is considered as an evangelic mission, as it was stated during the Second Vatican Council: "With its evangelical power, the Church proclaims all human rights, and also admits and appreciates the dynamic of our contemporary world in urging the proclamation of these rights. However, this process has to be imbued with the evangelical spirit."¹ Therefore, through its actions for human rights, the Church wants to serve the best of the individual: first of all as a member in God's country, but also as a citizen of this world.

On Christmas Day, 1941 – and before the Second Vatican Council –, Pius XII formulated his statement in the same spirit in his radio speech², speaking up for the security of national minorities. The previous circumstances had been born from the turbulence among nations. Urging for world peace, the speech emphasised the need of preventing violence from taking over human rights. All government power should be based on rights that serve the interests of the community. It directed the attention of state leaders to the fact, that power must be based on rights, and they should elaborate a new system of rights which respected the rights of each and every individual. The most important elements were compiled into five points (ASS 1942: 16–18). The second point dealt with

¹ Gaudium et spes 41. Lelkipásztori konstitúció az egyház és a mai világ viszonyáról. In: Diós I. (szerk.): *A II. Vatikáni Zsinat dokumentumai*. Budapest, 2000, 605–741. In the following I shall quote the documents of the Council in the well known way, starting with the first words, from the translation named above.

² Pius XII: Nuntius Radiophonicus. The Christmas of 1941. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 34. (1942) 10–21. In the following I shall use the abbreviation AAS.

the existential rights of national minorities, saying that “in a system of regulations built on new moral bases, there is no place for the open or treacherous oppression of national minorities’ cultural or linguistic specificities [...], there is no place for the limitation or forbiddance of their natural evolution. [...] As we consciously respect the rights of the national minorities, we certainly and effectively can ask for the loyal fulfilment of their duties (ASS 1942: 17).

More than fifty years have passed since this message was sent out to the world, but it has still not been met with open minds. The question of national minorities is a moral one, and not a political or personal interest. That is why it obliges the Church and everyone else (who wants to do something about it) to take serious action. As we will see in the following, the Church has always considered this topic as a most important one, and it has been teaching it consequently during the time limits of this study. Even more, if we want to go back to the roots, we can see that Saint Paul always identified himself with the nation he was preaching to: “I became Jewish in front of the Jews in order to gain them for this cause” (I Corinth. 9, 20).

The next Pope who raised his voice in the interest of national minorities was John XXIII. He considered the renewal of church life to be very important. He supported understanding between the world and the Catholic Church and making peace instead of judging. He openly tried to get closer to believers and non-believers equally. He was always optimistic about the future. With his simple, direct style and humour he managed to find a common voice with almost everybody. His each and every action was guided by his commitment to Christ’s Gospel. He is to thank for not having an atomic war.³ He was the one who published his famous encyclical called *Pacem in terris*⁴ on 11 April 1963. In this work he urges peace among nations based on truth, fairness, freedom and love that demands “respecting the order founded by God”⁵. This order can be effectively carried out only by those who respect all human rights. He clearly stated that the state and the Church were destined to serve together the best of mankind. This work has a separate part on the question of national minorities. The author says, “In this question we have to state openly that if something is done against the demographic evolution of a nation, it severely violates fairness, especially if someone strives for the evil annihilation of the same nation.” The point of view of the Holy Father on this topic is more than obvious. Those who hinder the evolution of national minorities in any way sin against the truth. The fact that the Csángó Hungarians had no possibilities to use their mother tongue in every aspect of their lives – in school and in church – is considered a sin against the truth. Accepting the point of view of the Vatican, we cannot say anything but that we must do everything in our power to restore all human rights. Because the truth demands the con-

³ I am thinking here about the crisis from Cuba.

⁴ Peace on Earth

⁵ *Pacem in terris*. XXIII János pápa enciklikája (1963), In: Tomka M.–Goják J. (szerk.): *Az egyház társadalmi tanítása. Dokumentumok*. Budapest, 1993. 105–161. In the following I shall quote the document in the well known way, starting with the first words, from the translation named above.

dition for everyone to live with his/her own goods and rights, which is at the same time the most elementary expression of love.

His Holiness continues, “It is in concordance with the law of fairness if the leaders of the states give serious help to the members of the national minorities in order to reach normal human conditions, and that stays for their language, culture and economic situation as well.” (*Pacem in terris*: 95–96). I think that one can conclude from this quotation the position taken by the Church in this question. All persons in the position of effective power have the duty to pay special attention to minorities. And this goes doubly for the clergy.

The Ecclesiastical Educational Office rejects all endeavours regarding “enforced assimilation” into another nation or culture, because of the values of belonging to a certain nation. Opposite to this, it would like to assure the integrity and evolution of cultural identification of each nation on its own territory. This is what stands for Paul VI in his encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, published on 26 March 1967. Similarly to his predecessors, he urges all nations not to give up their national and cultural identity and their own specificity. “All nations – wealthy or poor – have their own culture as a legacy of their ancestors, [...] and also have some superior – artistic, scientific and religious – manifestations of their spiritual life. Because all these carry real human values, it would be a shame to waste them. [...] The very nation that would endure this would throw away the best parts of itself, including the meaning of life” (*Populorum Progressio*: 40). From all this everyone can understand why we – Csángó Hungarians – fight: not for power, not for being liked, but for the opportunity to become what we were once born, in front of God and in front of the people. So we could confess our faith in the way our ancestors did, because if we waste any of what we have inherited, we will do wrong. To avoid this, we ask for the admittance of the right of using our language during public mass.

According to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, the fact that “man can reach real and complete decency only by culture, that is by the further development of the goods and values of nature” is deeply rooted in the condition of being an individual (*Gaudium et spes*: 53). Under the term “culture” we mean first of all mother tongue, nationality and confession. The Council also gives directions to be followed by those in power in the case of culture: “his task is not to define what culture is, but to create the conditions and to help every person, even the members of the minorities, to live a cultured life” (*Gaudium et spes*: 59). The cause of indigence for several nationalities stands in their cultural deprivation and in the denial of the right to their own culture (cf. *Compendio*: 557).

John Paul II underlines further on that “a man ties its own personal and internal identity to the nation he is a part of, and he wants his work to be done together with his compatriots in order to help common welfare” (*Laborem exercens*: 43). As the meeting of two different persons can enrich both of them, the presence of a minority inside another nation can enrich that nation and they can enrich each other. Just think about discovering each other’s customs. An illustrative example can be the practice of the nearby Romanian and Csángó villages, where the inhabitants pay their respect to teach other by visiting on their feasts. John Paul II openly stands for the right of nations and nationalities to cultural identity, which is people’s due as individuals and as members of a certain

community. “The consciousness we are talking about refers to each and every person, and also to nations and nationalities which, forming a specific human and cultural entity, carefully watch over the conservation of this legacy and over keeping and developing it.” (*Sollicitudo rei Socialis*: 25.)

His message, made public on the Day of peace in 1989, deals entirely with the conditions of national minorities. He underlines the fact that the condition of peaceful coexistence is respect for minorities’ rights. National minorities have the right first of all to exist, then to “keep and to develop their own culture” (ASS 1989: 98), which includes their language, confessional belief and the practice of religious rituals. This is how the right to religious freedom was proclaimed, according to which everybody should practice his/her religion freely, in the language and by the ceremonies he/she inherited. The subtitle of another speech is as follows, “If you want peace, respect the conscience of every man” (AAS 1991: 410). The admittance of this very right is the most important gain and duty of a nation which really wants to assure the well-being of individuals and of society (ASS 1989: 466).

Furthermore, in his speech at the general meeting of the United Nations, John Paul II outlined once again the rights of nations and nationalities, which are nothing but “human rights”. The elementary right of every nation is the right to exist and the right to its own language and culture through which it can express its specificity. Every nation has its right to organize its own life and to live under its own traditions without stopping anyone else, especially the minorities, to live after the same rights (cf. Giovanni Paolo II 1995: 736). Similarly, at the bishops’ synod of October 1999, at the closing speech of the event, John Paul II intermediated the message of the synod to the leaders of Europe, asking them to make their voice heard whenever human rights, minority and national rights are aggrieved. Make every possible effort to assure a more human future for the next generations, first of all through work and culture (Giovanni Paolo II 1999: 5). I think that I can mention here with a clear conscience that when we raise our voice for the Csángó Hungarians, we want to apply this message, because we only want a more human future for the next generations of the Csángó Hungarians, so they shall not be forced to travel so far and to leave their homes just to learn how to read and write in their native tongue, and to practice the culture in which they were born. The Church is aware of this aspect as well. At the synod of 1988, John Paul II underlined the fact that in clerical education, special attention should be paid to the local cultures, “The education of Christians should seriously deal with local cultures, which represent a part of the educational process and also help to recognize the values of both traditional and modern things. A very special attention must be paid to the cultures inside one nation or nationality. The Church, as the Mother and Teacher of nations, in certain cases tries to save the culture of those minorities that live inside the bigger, larger nations.” (AAS 81: 517)

The Ecclesiastical Educational Office showed its missionary activity in this direction when talking about the pastoral duties of the bishops. Among these we shall mention the request that bishops must pay extra attention to those believers who in some aspects differ from the majority members of the bishopric. “Whatever age, welfare, nationality a person might be, wherever a person might live, even if only temporarily” (Erdő 1997:

canon nr. 313), he/she has the right to pastoral care. Based on this prescription (Erdő 1997: canon nr. 518), the bishop directory states that for these communities the bishop has to organize personalized parishes, all according to the criteria of the believers' confession, language, nationality or other similar criteria. And he must assign priests with proper abilities to do the apostolic work in these places.⁶

I would like to mention here John Paul II's speech delivered to the Romanian Bishops' Corporation, in which he touched upon the question of national minorities as well. He considered cooperation between Romanian bishops necessary, and he pointed out the need to help each other in common problems, so that they can know better each other's spiritual heritage, specifying here a more effective pastoral activity on the minorities living on the territory of their bishopric.

In his speech to the diplomatic corporation of the Holy See, John Paul II talked about the national minorities as endangered ethnic groups on several occasions, saying that clerical diplomats should raise their voice in their interest. He was aware of the fact that in many places minority rights were not respected, in spite of their endeavour to have a dialogue on their rights, and even so, truly serving common wealth (cf. AAS 75: 372). The Church is interested in the fate of all who are oppressed and not taken into consideration because of their national minority condition. This is an unjust situation for them. Fairness demands the respect of the rights of each and every person, especially the rights of the weak and of minorities (cf. AAS 80: 1133).

Concern for the situation of minorities was formulated in the same spirit by Benedict XVI in his speech to the diplomatic corporation. He considered it a regrettable thing that there are states that are proud of their culture of centuries, but they are far away from religious freedom, moreover, they truly oppress national minorities' rights to it (cf. Benedetto XVI 2006). And this stays for the case of the Moldavian Csángós, too, because they have no right to use their mother tongue in the liturgical practice. The former messages are directed to everyone, but their application is in the hands of those who are in the targeted situation.

The example of Christ teaches us that the Church has to defend all the weak, all the wrecked, but also all those who are somehow restricted in their national rights. These people have to make their voice heard so the majority – having the dominant power – does not abuse of all the rights, but interprets them correctly and respects them, helping the welfare of all the inhabitants.

Consequently, this is what we witness when we study the relations between the Church and national minorities. Christ went after the one lost sheep, leaving the ninety-nine behind, because that one sheep was important to Him. Therefore, even if we, Csángó Hungarians are not too many, we are here, we exist. The local clergy has to do everything in its power to help the Csángó Hungarians to have their liturgical practice in Hungarian, because only in this way can it follow the teachings of the Church on the topic of national minorities.

⁶ Cf. *Direttorio per il Ministero Pastorale dei Vescovi „Apostolorum successores”*, 207., 211., Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004.; *Christus Dominus 23*.

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