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Central Europe is not Just a 'Meteorological Concept', but a 'Spiritual Kingdom'



Summary

The lessons we learned from the 20th century, more precisely the period that began with the 'Trianon Peace Treaty' and (seemingly) lasted until the change of regime, still have an impact on the life in our region. Central Europe is much more than a meteorological, economic concept: it is a common destiny shaped by struggles against each other and the experience of interdependence. It is a 'spiritual kingdom' that has been able to present the world's most significant philosophers, physicists, musicians, and painters, and at the same time be the center of the bloodiest wars in world history. This 'spiritual kingdom' was also influenced by religious beliefs, including Vatican diplomacy that represented the interests of Catholicism.

Keywords: Central Europe, peace treaties, culture, Vatican diplomacy, values, common history

INTRODUCTION

It is obvious that today the Central European region can give a new impetus to create an applicable interpretation of European history. It is also clear why the latest papal encyclicals (Laudato 'si on the protection of creation or Fratelli tutti on a more just society) have

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come to the fore again to such an extent in both political and public discourse. The recent International Eucharistic Congress in Hungary and the visits of the Pope to Budapest and Slovakia drew attention to the importance of our region in the promotion of interfaith dialogue and peace. In the following study, we examine how strongly Central Europeanness is linked to the principles of Christianity and how these principles can determine the future of the region.

CENTRAL EUROPE

Until the existence of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, it was not necessary to create a separate 'ontology' in order to explain the ethnically and religiously diverse existence of our region. With more and less enthusiasm over the years, the nationalities living here made the region one of the most dynamically developing regions in the world in the early 1900s, in terms of economy, science and the arts. Although there were struggles, under the banner of Habsburg Catholicism, ethnic and religious tolerance was achieved in a way that created a society capable of dynamic development. However, not everyone was happy with this strong state. Archaic structures were swept away by a new wind of liberalism and materialism by the time of World War I.

The impact of "Trianon," the "Vienna Decisions," and the years of socialism on the region has led to the need for reconstruction, or more precisely rediscovery. What these processes have resulted in is today called Central Europe.

But what exactly is this entity? Enthusiastic attempts were made to define this in the early 1990s, but today only the practical-economic aspects that define the V4 collaboration remain. However, it would be timely to look at deeper foundations as well.

CENTRAL EUROPE: A CULTURAL ISLAND OR A SANDBAR?

The political unity of Central Europe disintegrated a hundred years ago as a result of the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. However, the former continental empire has survived in many elements and still exists today. Not only in the exquisite stones of its built heritage, but also in the common cultural heritage of the people living here, which is such a strong link that it can bridge the gaps arising from differing interests that make coexistence difficult. There are plenty of such gaps. It is enough to look at the different demographic interests of the countries in the region: each of them seeks to fill the area it dominates as much as possible with its own ethnicity, marginalizing national minorities. As the region is ethnically mixed and diverse, the national habitat of the people living here almost everywhere extends beyond national borders and the pursuit of exclusivity is a source of serious conflicts of interest. Since the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, many such conflicts have taken place and yet, Central Europe is still united by something.

What is this power? Is it the common culture? Perhaps it is the spiritual link that underpins Central Europeanness and is part of the European culture. We must realize that European culture, which provides European values, is a cornucopia of shades which can

only be seen as a unified, organic whole, an all-encompassing system that interprets all the flavours of life correspondingly. I am thinking not only of the different Byzantine and Roman heritage, or of the different cultural backgrounds of the Protestant and non-Protestant people, but also of the much local, regional specificity in Europe. Unity in diversity – we could say is also part of the European culture but, if there is no unified all-encompassing, general rule, then there is no unity, only similarity. The culture of Central Europe is so diverse that it enriches the great European cultural environment.

A good example of a social reaction stemming from different cultural heritage and sensitivities is the kneeling before international football matches during the anthem, which has recently spread to Western European countries that once had overseas colonies and took their share of the slave business. Viewed from Central Europe, these former slave-holding Western countries gained enormous wealth partly due to the system of slavery. They have enjoyed all its benefits for centuries, and this has contributed, among other things, to the fact that the financial centers of the European continent have moved west – and they are still there. However, Central Europe is free from the heavy racist burden of slavery. There was no social or ethnic conflict between the white and black races, no economic, political or other exploitation here – not least because the black population in the area is minimal.

However, the institution of slavery also affected Central Europe, but in the opposite way: in the Middle Ages, the raiders of the Turkish Empire (which spanned three continents) dragged hundreds of thousands of the population of Central Europe to Istanbul or even further afield. Mainly Hungarians, but also other peoples living in the territory of the former Kingdom of Hungary, such as Slovaks, Croats and Romanians. Thus, while Western Europe enjoyed the economic advantage of the institution of slavery for centuries (e.g., the Belgian Congo), Central Europe suffered from it for centuries. It is therefore offensive to kneel here (moreover, it is even culturally unusual), which, in contrast to the original Western intent, in this area conveys the message that former colonial empires are forcing the peoples once tormented by the institution of slavery to apologize for the spiritually depressing legacy of slavery. That is, the victim should apologize because the sinner has committed a sin against the victim, and when the victim rejects it, the sinner declares them racists. To avoid this, we would only need to get to know each other better. Tolerance, a European value stemming from Christianity, begins with understanding and not with labelling. For this, however, the ideas of Christianity should be considered as real, living, European values. This is one of the questions that divide Europe: how should the continent relate to its Christian roots? In the West, it has been exceeded in many respects, but not yet in Central Europe.

So what is the Central European Strategy? What made the culture of the people here successful? Understanding. Of course, this was not easy: they went through wars, failures and breakdowns until they recognized this and learned the lesson that in an area so ethnically mixed, there is no other way to live together peacefully.

CENTRAL EUROPE: A REGION VERSUS A SUBREGION?

For a long time, public consciousness has divided Europe, both geographically and politically into two parts: Western Europe and Eastern Europe. This “generous” division is more accepted the more we go to the West. Due to the changes that are taking place, a more complex, more precise definition of the region is needed today. Some Hungarian historians, including István Hajnal¹, Jenő Szűcs², István Bibó³, regard Central-Eastern Europe (Bibó, 2011) an independent region (Szűcs, 1983). The Hungarian historian Emil Niederhauser still considers and accepts Eastern Europe as a historical concept. Central-Eastern Europe, in his view, is only a sub-region, although this sub-region has well-defined characteristics.

The two approaches do not conflict, but rather complement each other and help to better understand the changes that began in the late 1980s. Emil Niederhauser⁴ considers the following to be the most important features of development in Eastern Europe (Niederhauser, 2001):

- The most important characteristic of the region is the varied and mixed ethnic composition. It is noticeable that the number of nations here is much larger than in Western Europe. This fact is also important because it is one of the main drivers of all historical development.
- There are centuries-old traditions of lagging behind the West. Eastern Europe began its path of medieval development later than Western Europe. The Ottoman-Turkish conquest set back the pace of development. The geographical location of the eastern part of the continent is also a decisive factor.
- The national development that began in the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century in Western Europe obscured and softened social contradictions. In Eastern Europe, the differences were recognized in national categories, for example, ‘Hungarian’ meant nobility for Romanians and ‘Romanian’ meant serfdom for Hungarians.
- For the vast majority in the region, state power seems absolutist, limitless, and almost unpredictable.
- In the West, the modern age has deprived rulers of the factor of vocation. The divine vocation in the East was replaced by the revolutionary vocation, the messianic promise of communism. There has really been no change in the way the mechanism works.
- In Eastern Europe, the national momentum is the most important for historical development. However, a peculiar paradox of historical development is that there have been multinational empires in this region for many centuries: the Ottoman, Habsburg, Polish-Lithuanian, and Russian Empires.
- When the concept of the nation-state was born, everyone in Europe followed the French example. Everyone refused to acknowledge that due to the mixed ethnic composition in Eastern Europe, it was virtually impossible to draw precise ethnic boundaries, so a pure nation-state remained unfeasible.
- Catching up with Western Europe and modernization - due to the autocratic nature of the states - meant the top-down modernization process and paternalism in the 18th and 19th centuries. Due to paternalism, parliamentarism remained in an immature state.

- The fate of Eastern Europe has so far been decided by the great powers. The revolutionary struggles for independence of the people of Eastern Europe are therefore failing with tragic consistency.
- The awakening of national self-awareness has drawn attention to assimilation. Natural assimilation takes place in much larger areas than forced assimilation. Forced assimilation has intensified, in which the great powers played a significant role (Kovács, 2021).
- We must not forget the religious, denominational issue either. In Eastern Europe, the separation of the Western and Eastern Churches caused the first major rupture. The other major line is between Christians and Muslims. To this day, religious differences can also convey political differences.
- Dominant ideas have always come from the West to Eastern Europe. The farther the area is from the starting point, the weaker its impact is. An exception to this was Marxism, which was distorted and intensified in Leninism. This system of ideas denied national consciousness and suppressed it with the slogan of internationalism. This hell machine, built into Eastern European societies, exploded in the 20th century, and its strengthening is still a real threat in our region today.

It is clear that Eastern Europe is also, in our view, a historical concept that we can use from the early Middle Ages, as opposed to a geographical concept independent of time. The concept of Central and Eastern Europe is also a historical concept that can be defined as such from the 10th century. Then those states were formed that protected the areas of Europe that fell west of them as Pannonia protected the Roman Empire by limes. The state formations of Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Croatia and the Balkans have performed this task in different ways and under different conditions through the storms of history. This is the main characteristic and fate of Central and Eastern Europe as a region. Of course, this function does not only follow from the geopolitical situation. The features of Eastern Europe have changed since the 10th century, as the West and the East meet here in our region. The tragedy of the history of the nations living here, including the Hungarian people, is that the current power field has decided which effect should be stronger.

This is why the characteristics that only really characterize this area have emerged. Here are just the most important:

- From a social and economic point of view, Western Europe is constantly keeping the areas to its east to lag behind.
- It can be clearly shown, however, that the countries of the region have always tried to bring in the delay in different ways, depending on their social and economic situation.
- To this day, the West has considered Central Europe, which is a protection zone and also a buffer zone, exclusively from the perspective of its own political interests. Hungarian history, including the 150-year-old Turkish rule, provided good examples of this.
- It is also disadvantageous for us that the small nations of the area are judged according to the influence of the current great power of the region. However, these small nations have an independent national consciousness, have their own historical

identity, and do not want and do not acknowledge the simplistic and homogenizing approach to history and politics. The region became a victim of this when the international political public consciousness reclassified us to Eastern Europe because of the slogan of the socialist camp. Here we have to ask the inevitable question of how to relate to our own history.

History is a process. The last decades cannot be ruled out. Some consider the last half century as a wrong detour and believe we need to go back to the starting point. But this is not feasible for any country in the region, including us. The decades after 1945 caused permanent changes in the structure of our society. Old Hungary has dissolved, and the horizontal and vertical segmentation of society has disappeared. In the meantime, the world, including Europe, has changed: artificially created “welfare” societies have emerged in Western Europe. With their materially oriented, often hedonistic society, they are an example for Central and Eastern Europe: the less educated masses, who consider consumption the most important, want to follow it at all costs, even by living on their own resources and life.

However, it is also a fact that it is precisely because of our experience in Central Europe and our history that we are able to hold on much more strongly to the roots that have held us here in the past centuries, millennia, and which may mean our future.

THE CONCEPT OF EASTERN EUROPE

The concept of Central Europe has a very colorful content, ranging from the Herderian concept of ‘big central (German) authority’ to the V4 cooperation (Mező, 2001). What is common to all definitions, however, is the fact that the region is defined simultaneously by the complexity of diversity, the resulting tension and wealth, and the ability to cooperate. It is clear that this is not simply a geographical concept, but a common culture, a destiny, as described by Milan Kundera in his work ‘The Abduction of the West, or the Tragedy of Central Europe’. The boundaries of this area are ‘imaginary’, until the (typically tragic) events of history require that the boundaries be clearly defined.

This is when Central Europe really grows stronger, representing an idea of common values: in the words of Timothy Garton Ash, a kind of ‘spiritual kingdom’ emerges in history. The words of this kingdom are often heard not in Central Europe, but rather in Cambridge, Freiburg or another continent. Think, for example, of the recent Central Europeanism of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Hans Kelsen, Edmund Husserl, Herzl Tivadar, Martin Buber, or Eder Teller. Maybe it is not even possible to ask whether something or someone is Central European? Rather, the question should be, to what extent is it Central European? After all, our common culture now permeates the whole world to some degree.

At the same time, of course, there are areas that can be described in terms of geographical and cultural identity, where Central Europe as an idea of common value is increasingly present (Módos, 2005). It is worth recalling some of the thoughts of György Konrád on the issue, who, as a true Central European, discusses common horrors and common values during the change of regime (Konrád, 1990).

Mass cultures are national. The Central European dream is not a mass cultural phenomenon, but rather romantic and subversive. The concept of Central Europe already transcends and questions the boundaries of the area. There is Eastern and there is Western Central Europe, the cohesion between them is deeper, while their separation from each other is a less significant historical phenomenon. Central Europe still exists as a task for those who live there, tasks that have existed for a thousand years do not tend to disappear without a trace. How can nations living in intermingling learn to live together peacefully? Diversity is given; if we accept reality, we will respect our diversity. Expanding in Central European culture is a natural way for us. The better we know each other, our neighbors, the more we are Central Europeans; not so much through birth but through learning. Who does not want to get to know his neighbors becomes culturally weakened. We mostly went far to study, omitting each other with our attention because we believed we were underdeveloped. We felt that someone like us couldn't be interesting. The more we get rid of our minority consciousness, the more we can marvel at each other. Today we are still a little ashamed of each other as a poor relative. Until we discover each other, we will remain provincial.

What is Central European strategy? It is the strategy of understanding. The more we realize how interesting our Central European neighbors really are, the more interesting we become. Central Europe will exist to the extent it becomes an issue to itself. It is an attractive interest in the many prosperities and unhappiness of the people of the Danube basin. Who can create balance and how between East and West? Central European Literature: East-West or West-East Literature. The East we are analyzing is within us. The westerner who analyzes is also within us. With our eastern side, we mock our western side and vice versa (Konrád, 1985).

Thus we can be sure that our region/culture is not some fiction or, as Peter Handke put it, a 'meteorological concept'. In our region, the past has never been completely erased because it 'bleeds the fabric of history' over and over again. We live here from this past, the past based on classical culture and Christianity. This is a repetitive process in history. In addition to the need for economic cooperation, a thread is emerging that seems to be weak but it is really strong. This thread is the area of Judeo-Christian dichotomy and organic unity. We will look at a minor aspect of this after the Treaty of Trianon.

AN EXAMPLE: CENTRAL EUROPE AS A "SPIRITUAL KINGDOM" AND THE VATICAN DIPLOMACY

The treaties that (apparently) ended World War I not only fundamentally rewrote the fate of individual nations and countries, but also caused serious trauma to the churches. The disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy meant not only the end of an economic power, but also the disintegration of the region's multi-colored but tolerant religious unity. All this was particularly detrimental to Catholicism, and therefore to Vatican politics. According to Vatican diplomat János Csiszárík, the region's Vatican diplomatic networks, which have developed over the centuries, have been replaced by lawyers and journalists (Bertalan–Csiszárík, 2020), so maintaining religious unity and peace has been a major challenge for all church actors.

The conversation recorded by Csiszárík illustrates this situation perfectly:

“When the first French ambassador addressed his self-introductory speech to the Pope, Msgr Canali continued, then, the ambassador in his speech called the long-running and objectionable cult laws intangible, and His Holiness responded to this speech, which was customarily presented to him in advance, without reacting to the impertinence of the French ambassador, with the glorification of France. I was an ear witness of this scene with great sadness. (Msgr. Canali is the ceremonial secretary of the congregatio and, as such, is always an impeccable witness at the reception of heads of state at large diplomatic presentations.) However, Msgr Canali continued, I was just outraged by what I am telling now: On one occasion the whole diplomatic corps was gathered to appear before the undersecretary, the Cardinal. But it’s good that you didn’t have to be there yourself, Msgr., because apart from some excellent personalities, that is, apart from your ambassador, who is an impeccable gentleman, it was a terribly mixed company. It was full of journalists, lawyers and other not very gentlemanlike element. As he went before the company, the Cardinal Undersecretary declared with delight: What would St. Peter, who was surrounded by some poor fisherman, say if he saw this bright congregation?! In the Vatican, they are trembling at the thought that the number of representations could decrease. Sometimes they are more willing to make incomprehensible sacrifices, but let that not happen. Apart from France, Portugal and the Czechoslovak Republic are classic examples of this. The more reckless the ambassadors are, the more they achieve. But will your ambassador tell me, Canali continued, what you are now complaining about? ” No doubt he will tell that, I said, except that he is not very similar to his colleagues in working with the same recklessness. Canali then went on to say: the Czech ambassador, Pallier, is said to be a Mason. The indulgent can easily be neglected here. Nobility is not very suitable for achieving great results. In vain did your ambassador in a company boast that he was the nicest representative in the office next to the Holy See. The less upscale are easier to prosper. The Czech ambassador is constantly in the Vatican and very often visits the cardinals of the congregation.” (Bertalan–Csiszárík 2020).

In this new, constantly changing situation, Catholic diplomacy had a huge task; and the articulation of positions on faith and society has become an inevitable task. Vatican politics in the period between the two World Wars was well characterized by the papal encyclicals and circulars issued at that time. The starting point is the suffering of the world, one of the causes of which, according to Vatican diplomacy, is the crisis of identity in Europe. The Vatican has rightly identified the problem as a global, ideological social problem, therefore the solution must be also global. At the same time, however, it was also identified - although it was never sharply articulated - that one of the roots of the problem was in Central Europe, in the disintegration of the previously effective Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

From 1914 to 1921, Pope Benedict XV issued twelve encyclicals with the following titles: *Ad beatissimi apostolorum, Humani generis redemptionem, Quod iam diu, In hac tanta, Paterno iam diu, Pacem, Dei munus pulcherrimum, Spiritus Paraclitus, Principi apostolorum Petro, Annus iam plenus, Sacra propediem.*

The topics of the encyclicals were: *Appealing for Peace, Proclaiming the Word of God, On the future peace conference, St. Boniface, Children of Central Europe, Peace and Christian Reconciliation, Of St. Jerome, St. Ephraim of Syria, Children of Central Europe, Third Order of Saint Francis, Of Dante, Of St. Dominic.*

It is clear from the list that Benedict XV dealt with both spiritual and direct political issues it is also noticeable that he accurately listed the threats to the world. For our subject it is of particular importance that in the encyclicals *Quod iam diu* (Benedict XV, 1918) and *Paterno iam diu*, the Pope also spoke explicitly about the people of Central Europe and the peace treaty at the end of World War I. He stressed in these documents that the desired peace was only partially achieved, as there are still serious social and societal tensions in each country. He emphasized that the solution required not only political action but also true religiosity and justice in the Christian sense, as 'decisions of unprecedented depth' must be made in the formulation of peace treaties. The Pope stressed that only Christian spirituality could be the foundation that creates unity among nations, just as it did after the fall of the Roman Empire⁵.

It was clear to the Vatican diplomacy that a unified political direction was needed, based on the values of Christianity. This aspiration is also the foundation of Christian social teaching and Christian socialist, Christian Democratic parties, and it will be a fundamental value of the emerging European community.

Although Marxism triumphed in the formation of social order in various forms, Christian values remained unavoidable.

"Corruption was not only common in the industrial class of large cities – other classes also deviated from the paths of the old order and law. Not only did a certain so-called educated classes advance in boundless immorality, but it also armed itself with the weapons of false scholarship to lend the appearance of law to its ungodly course of action. The people of these classes could not stand the external state order, and in order to destroy it, they first had to attack the Christian religion" (Schaeffer, 2006).

It was precisely because of the role of the moral force that it became clear that the state alone was incapable of resolving the social issue. Instead of religion, Marx's theory became more and more a moral guideline. At the same time, in social matters, the church must act autonomously. The Pope declared that in industry man is treated as a machine and they try to "operate" it as cheaply as possible. The church, on the other hand, sees the image of God in man. This can be the basis of true human dignity and the solution to the social issue. Only the community that accepts and experiences that man is a creature, a child of God, can recognize the true essence of human dignity. We cannot allow, he states, the community of people to be replaced by the community of money. 'How could the so-called human rights defined in the constitutions, of which the worker gets so little as long as the power of money oppresses social human rights, help us?' Workers need to be given their own wages, private property is not only a right but also a duty towards the other person. However, the basis of all this can only be pure morality. Ideally, 'the material strength invested in work raises moral strength.' (Schaeffer, 2006:109).

One of the major causes of the post-World War I chaos, social and political catastrophes, was the strengthening of socialist, communist ethics against Christian ethics. However, the socialist state formations that existed for only a short time only brought even more blood and poverty. The ecclesiastical response to it was worked out by Pope Pius XI.

STILL RELEVANT TODAY: RELIGIOUS UNITY AND PEACE, SOCIAL
VALUES AND THE PROTECTION OF CREATURES – ENCYCLICALS

Pope Pius XI, experiencing the many sacrifices resulting from world unrest, drew attention in 1928 to the fact that only a common religious conviction could preserve a state of fragile peace. In the encyclical called *Mortalium animos* (on “Promoting True Religious Unity”) he wrote: “...of strengthening and of extending to the common welfare of human society that fraternal relationship which binds and unites us together, and which is a consequence of our common origin and nature. For since the nations do not yet fully enjoy the fruits of peace - indeed rather do old and new disagreements in various places break forth into sedition and civic strife - and since on the other hand many disputes which concern the tranquillity and prosperity of nations cannot be settled without the active concurrence and help of those who rule the States and promote their interests, it is easily understood, and the more so because none now dispute the unity of the human race, why many desire that the various nations, inspired by this universal kinship, should daily be more closely united one to another. A similar object is aimed at by some, in those matters which concern the New Law promulgated by Christ our Lord. For since they hold it for certain that men destitute of all religious sense are very rarely to be found, they seem to have founded on that belief a hope that the nations, although they differ among themselves in certain religious matters, will without much difficulty come to agree as brethren in professing certain doctrines, which form as it were a common basis of the spiritual life.” (Pius XI, 1928).

Many encyclicals were issued during the two World Wars. Although these raised important and topical issues, their specific social impact, in the light of the cataclysms, was small. Yet, as a lesson, even today, it is worth elaborating on them.

Thus, Pius XI carried out intensively the legal-theological work of promulgating encyclicals. He issued thirty-one encyclicals between 1922 and 1937, of which the very first one draws attention to peace, the peace of Christ, and among which we find such great ones that warned with full clarity about the impending horror of fascism and communism. It may have been too late. However, it is not too late to learn that the disasters that threaten us can be (theoretically) detected in time and thus prevented.

Encyclicals of Pope Pius XI

Ubi arcano Dei consilio, Rerum omnium perturbationem, Studiorum ducem, Ecclesiam Dei, Maximam gravissimamque, Quas primas, Rerum Ecclesiae, Rite expiatis, Iniquis afflictisque, Mortalium animos, Miserentissimus Redemptor; Rerum orientalium, Mens nostra, Divini illius Magistri, Quinquagesimo ante, Rappresentanti in terra, Ad salutem, Casti connubii, Quadragesimo anno, Non abbiamo bisogno, Nova impendet, Lux veritatis, Caritate Christi compulsi, Acerba animi, Dilectissima nobis, Ad catholici sacerdotii, Vigilanti cura, Mit brennender Sorge, Divini Redemptoris, Nos es muy conocida, Ingravescens malis.

The topics of the encyclicals: On the Peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ, St. Francis of Sales, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Joseph, The Diocesan Relations, Introduction to the Feast of Christ, Catholic Missions, St. Francis of Assisi, The Church Persecution in Mexico, Religious Unity, On the Atonement of the Sacred Heart, On the Promotion of Eastern Studies, On the Promotion of Spiritual Practices, On Christian Education, On the 50th Anniversary of Priestly

Service, on Christian Education, on St. Augustine of Hippo, Christian Marriage, Renewal of Social Order, Italian Catholic Action, The Economic Crisis, The Council of Ephesus, The Sacred Heart, The Church Persecution in Mexico, The Church Persecution in Spain, About the Catholic Priesthood, About Movies, About the Church and the German Empire, About Atheist Communism, About Religious Relations in Mexico, The Rosary.

As already mentioned, the papal encyclicals at first sight fell into the category of “never received” literature. However, they set out social truths that should have been taken into account to avoid disasters. Typical examples are “Mit brennender Sorge” (exceptionally written in German) or its counterpart, “Divini redemptoris”. One took a stand against fascism, the other against communism, although too late, which may have been one of the reasons they fell on deaf ears.

Yet, this pastoral, legal, and religious level of the encyclicals has given basic orientation to all members of the Catholic Church. Due to the religious nature of ecclesiastical regulation, there is a fundamental difference between ecclesiastical and secular interpretations of power. It is essential to be aware of this particular way of regulating religions even today, especially because religiously based, but typically non-Christian norms are emerging in the world.

Consideration of religious norms would have been essential between the two World Wars, just as it would be important now to pay attention to papal teaching about, for example, nature conservation, social justice or research ethics. These principles are neither fanatical nor discriminative, but have been in line with Europe’s thousands of years of tradition. For this reason, it is important to keep in mind their values, which are still valid today. An example is the encyclical called *Quas primas*, written by Pope Pius XI in 1925, which introduced the Feast of Christ the King, with the following reasons:

“We referred to the chief causes of the difficulties under which mankind was laboring. And We remember saying that these manifold evils in the world were due to the fact that the majority of men had thrust Jesus Christ and his holy law out of their lives; that these had no place either in private affairs or in politics: and we said further, that as long as individuals and states refused to submit to the rule of our Savior, there would be no really hopeful prospect of a lasting peace among nations. Men must look for the peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ; and that We promised to do as far as lay in Our power. In the Kingdom of Christ, that is, it seemed to Us that peace could not be more effectually restored nor fixed upon a firmer basis than through the restoration of the Empire of Our Lord.

When once men recognize, both in private and in public life, that Christ is King, society will at last receive the great blessings of real liberty, well-ordered discipline, peace and harmony. Our Lord’s regal office invests the human authority of princes and rulers with a religious significance; it ennobles the citizen’s duty of obedience”(Pius XI, 1925).

The “ideological” foundations of the Vatican politics are described in detail in the papal texts as mentioned here. As indicated, this mode of regulation can be of great importance, as it is where the level of regulation of law, morality, and religion is linked (Birher – Homicskó, 2021). However, all this is not worth much if we fail to incorporate the truths expressed in the encyclical into everyday practice.

Central Europe is the region where the ideal of Christianity enshrined in the aforementioned papal encyclicals is still somewhat alive, and it is this ideal that still lays the foundations for the

cultural unity of the region. So it is precisely these aspects that may hold us together in the future. *Common History, Common Values*

The region not only has a historically tense, yet viable tolerance from a religious point of view, but also has a real common awareness of values. The roots of this awareness can be seen in our ability to start again and again in spite of all conflicts. Or more precisely, we cannot proceed separately.

NOTES

- ¹ István Hajnal historian, university professor, member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, doctor of history.
- ² Jenő Szűcs outstanding Hungarian historian of the 20th century, university professor, doctor of history.
- ³ István Bibó internationally outstanding and in Hungary the most important political thinker in the 20th century.
- ⁴ Emil Niederhauser Hungarian historian, cultural historian, university professor.
- ⁵ E una volta che questa Lega tra le nazioni sia fondata sulla legge cristiana, per tutto ciò che riguarda la giustizia e la carità, non sarà certo la Chiesa che rifiuterà il suo valido contributo, poiché, essendo essa il tipo più perfetto di società universale, per la sua stessa essenza e finalità è di una meravigliosa efficacia ad affratellare fra loro gli uomini, non solo in ordine alla loro eterna salvezza, ma anche al loro benessere materiale di questa vita; li conduce cioè attraverso i beni temporali, in modo che non perdano quelli eterni. Perciò sappiamo dalla storia che, da quando la Chiesa pervase del suo spirito le antiche e barbariche genti d'Europa, cessarono un po' alla volta le varie e profonde contese che le dividevano, e federandosi col tempo in una unica società omogenea, diedero origine all'Europa cristiana, la quale, sotto la guida e l'auspicio della Chiesa, mentre conservò a ciascuna nazione la propria caratteristica, culminò in una unità, fautrice di prosperità e di grandezza (Benedict XV, 1920).

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