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AZ SZTE JGYPK ALKALMAZOTT PEDAGÓGIAI
INTÉZETÉNEK TUDOMÁNYOS FOLYÓIRATA

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**AZ SZTE JGYPK Alkalmazott Pedagógiai Intézetének
TUDOMÁNYOS FOLYÓIRATA**

2019/1–2. szám

MEGJELENIK NEGYEDÉVENTE

SZERKESZTŐSÉG:

**Bíró-Balogh Tamás, Kakuszi B. Péter, Kovács Krisztina,
Nagy László, Tóth Sándor Attila**

E szám vendégszerkesztői:

Tarkó Klára–Pálmai Judit

Felelős szerkesztő:

Tóth Sándor Attila

SZERKESZTŐBIZOTTSÁG:

Fáyné dr. habil. Dombi Alice, SZTE JGYPK, egyetemi tanár

Prof. habil. dr. Svetlana Vegera, Polotsk State University (Belarusz Köztársaság)

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LAPTERV: Sonkodi Rita

**KIADJA: SZTE JGYPK Tanító- és Óvóképző Intézete
(6725 Szeged, Hattyas sor 10.)**

FELELŐS KIADÓ: SZTE JGYPK dékánja (Dr. Döbör András)

SZERKESZTŐSÉG (ÉS A KIADÓ SZÉKHELYE): 6725 Szeged, Hattyas sor 10.

Telefon: (62) 546 212

HU ISSN 2559-9240

Judit Pálmai

**"I WILL BLESS THE HOMES IN WHICH THE IMAGE OF
MY SACRED HEART SHALL BE EXPOSED AND
HONORED."**

**RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OF FAMILIES IN THE EARLY 20TH
CENTURY TEXTBOOKS**

The present paper introduces part of the PhD research of the author and studies primarily the religious education of families as presented in the catholic schoolbooks of the era between the two World Wars. The research method was the complexity of content- and document analysis, enabling simultaneously the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the given topic. The present paper however discusses only the qualitative results obtained during content analysis. The units of analysis were the words and pictures in the schoolbooks.

In the religious education of the period we can often come across with praying and going to church together, which increases the feeling of belonging among the family members, and leisure time spent with praying contributes to deepening relationships and recreation.

In publications issued between the two World Wars the religious education of families largely connected to the religious holidays of the era, and these holidays were perfect occasions for nurturing family relationships. Nurturing family relationship was a central issue for the Hungarian population, the society at that time used all means of stabilizing it. The holidays and the accompanied visits of relatives formed significant proportion of leisure time. Family reunions related to the big turning points of life (christening, marriage, funeral), the solemnity of which was largely dependent on financial status, but these were always celebrated. Good occasions for visiting family members were the three big religious holidays, Christmas, Easter and Whit's Day, as well as the fiesta, the multi-day fairs and the pig-killing. Respect for the big religious holidays is deeply rooted in every Christian man. At that time even those who never visit the church will go. The host treated the visiting relatives and offered accommodation for them. It was a capital offence if the transients did not visit their relatives or acquaintances.¹

Earlier holidays meant the religious fiestas mainly. The big religious feasts required customs and behaviour different from the ordinary. Work was forbidden, visiting the church and consumption of certain meals connected to these happy days. Sunday was also a holiday, and it was also separated from the weekdays in terms of clothing, eating and behaviour. Ignoring the traditions and customs had serious consequences². We can find examples to these

¹ Kósa László: A polgári társadalom korának művelődése I-II. (Education of the Civic Society I-II.) In: Kósa László (Ed.): *Magyar művelődéstörténet* (History of Hungarian Education). Osiris Kiadó, Budapest, 1998. 289–297.

² Tátrai Zsuzsanna: *Jeles napok, ünnepi szokások* (Special days, festive customs). In: Hoppál Mihály (szerk.): *Népszokás, néphit, népi vallásosság* (Folk tradition, Folk belief, folk religiosity). Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1990.

consequences in the studied schoolbooks, for example there was a case, when two families in the village did not respect and followed the customs of Sunday, so they were openly reprimanded in the reading club of the village³. We can find the most important religious and national holidays in the studied documents, but the most frequently Christmas and the relating customs were mentioned. As a second most frequent item, Mothers' (Parents') Day showed up. Men and boys were the main actors in autumn and winter holidays, while women and girls were given more opportunity during the spring and summer holidays⁴.

The celebration of name days was traditionally connected to the feast of saints. This time the family did not invite guests, but it was advisable for relatives, friends and acquaintances to visit and say Happy Name Day to the celebrated person. Celebration of birthdays became widespread in Hungary at the beginning of the 20th century, as a civic custom, with no religious bonds. Nobles and peasant families have also celebrated grape harvest and pig killing with inviting guests⁵.

From the beginning of the 20th century the kinship relationships transformed, became narrower, the intensity of keeping contact has changed and space gained more emphasis. Accordingly, relatives living closer to one another keep in touch, while those living far away meet less often. After the traditional peasant farms disappeared, there was less help in work coming from the relatives, but support in taking care of children and old people was still there⁶ (Tátrai, 1990). Family relationships aided individuals in social integration, but these relationships started to dissolve and their caring support were suppressed since the 20th century. As an effect individuals gradually moved to the periphery, showing a weakening social integration⁷.

Religious education

Catholic and very religious parents were depicted in the story of a "Large family". The married couple gets up early in the morning and they pray together. In their prayer they thank God for protecting them and their children. We learn from the story, that the couple has seven children. The mother worriedly looks at them wondering how they will feed and clothe the seven hungry children. The father consoles her, hence, the children sleep calmly, they are healthy, and all have a red cheek. God will take care of them. „As God gave healthy feet, why should we worry about the shoes?” – said the father. After the morning prayer and this conversation, the parents start their work blessed by God, so the big

³ Kozma László and Mihály Ferenc: *Pista és Juliska. Olvasókönyv az elemi népiskolák II. osztálya számára.* (Steve and Julia. Textbook for the 2nd grade of elementary school). Lampel, Budapest, 1926a. 140–142.

⁴ KÓSA, 1998. 290–291.

⁵ Ibid. 290–291.

⁶ TÁTRAI, 1990.

⁷ Utasi Ágnes: Társadalmi integráció és családi szolidaritás (Social integration and family solidarity). *Educatio*, 2002/3. sz. 384–403.

family does not lack anything. „Who starts his/her work with God, usually does it well.” – finishes the writer the story⁸.

In our next story we come across with a religious family again, and we engage with the story during their morning wake up. The children jumped out of bed, dressed up, Leslie had even washed his face by the time their parents came to see them. They went together to kneel in front of the family's cross and started to say their morning prayer together: „The first thought of my heart ...”⁹.



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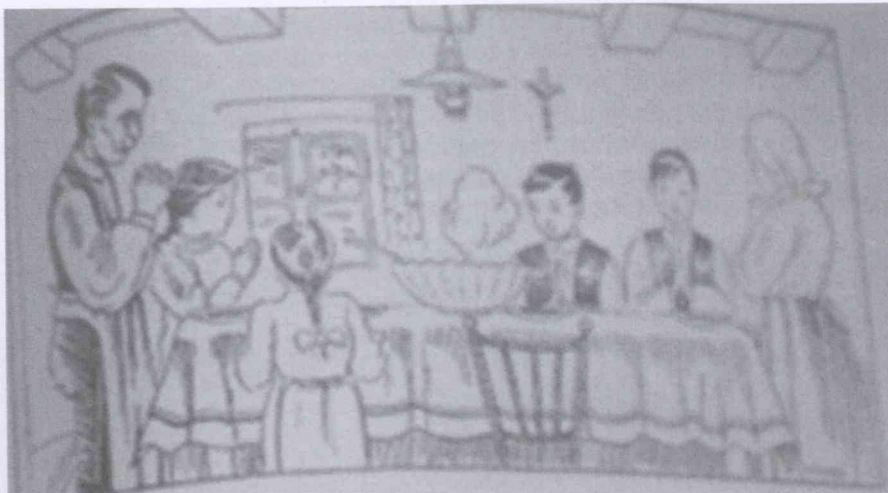
Families observed in the studied course books pray not only in the morning, but during eating together as well. This is illustrated by the story of the Bokor Family. In this family before eating the father drew the cross in the air with his “calloused hand”, the children stood up and started to pray together: „All eyes trust in you, God ...”¹¹

⁸ Mócsy Antal, Petrovác József and Walter Gyula: *Második olvasókönyv a katolikus népiskolák második osztálya számára* (Second textbook for the 2nd grade of catholic elementary schools). Szent István-Társulat, Budapest, 1925. 8-9.

⁹ Nagy T. Perpetua (compilation.): *Betűbokréta. Magyar olvasókönyv a katolikus népiskolák második osztálya számára* (Bunch of letters. Hungarian textbook for the 2nd grade of Hungarian Catholic Elementary schools). Szent István-Társulat, Budapest, 1938. 84.

¹⁰ Nagy T. Perpetua: *Betűbokréta. Új ABC a katolikus népiskolák első osztálya számára* (Bunch of letters. New ABC for the 1st grade of Hungarian Catholic Elementary schools). Szent István Társulat, Budapest, 1936. 84.

¹¹ *Olvasókönyv az osztott és részben osztott katolikus elemi népiskolák IV. osztálya számára* (Textbook for the IV. grade of Catholic undivided and partly divided elementary schools). Szent István-Társulat, Budapest, 1936. 21.



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The caring parents and a religious family appear also in the novel called "Evening in the parental home". The family, after they have finished their supper, washed up and were getting ready for bed. However, before going to sleep, the parents entered the children's room and they told the evening prayer together. Then the father stroked, and the mother wrapped them in a blanket, sometimes they told a tale to them. When leaving the room the parents went on tiptoe, looked back at their children, and said a last prayer for them. The conclusion of the story is: "family life is very beautiful. No one has a better life in the world than the children loved by their parents!"¹²

In an other story we see the family waking up for the Advent mass at dawn. When the clock rings, the parents and Mary are freshly out of bed, but Leslie stays in bed. Though he asked his parents the day before to be waked up, because he would like to go to the Rorate. His father jokes about him changing mind. His mom caresses Leslie gently, who wakes up and after realising the reason for waking him up so early, jumps out of bed. The flat and the water is cold, but "Little Jesus deserves this sacrifice" – thought the boy. Before leaving, the mother draws a cross on the smaller children, to have sweet dreams while they are in the church. The church bell chimes and we can see on the street many eager souls hurrying to the early morning mass¹⁴.

In the next part of the story we see the family on a Friday receiving a pack from the grandfather. The pack was full of pig products. The children were very happy about it and wanted to know which part they will eat. But the father reminded them that it was Friday, when it is not allowed to eat meat. Ildiko asked about the reason of eating no meat on Friday. The father told, that this

¹² Pohárnok Jenő (ed.): *Új betűvetés. Abécés könyv a katolikus népiskolák számára.* (New writing. ABC book for Catholic elementary schools). Szent István-Társulat, Budapest, 1940. 105.

¹³ Pohárnok Jenő (ed.): *Új betűvetés. Abécés könyv a katolikus népiskolák számára* (New writing. ABC book for Catholic elementary schools). Szent István-Társulat, Budapest, 1940. 90.

¹⁴ NAGY, 1938. 55.

was the day when Jesus suffered and died for the sins of mankind, and we have to return such sacrifice. However, it is a much smaller sacrifice, we refuse something from ourselves. „The Church requires us not to eat meat.” At noon then while eating lunch something interesting happened. Lentil soup was for lunch which Leslie didn't really like, but he ate all without saying anything. The second course was pasta with poppy seed, Eve's favourite, but she did not take twice. Ildiko chose a smaller apple from the bowl, and Emery immediately brought everything needed. „They wanted to make the suffering Jesus happy this way”¹⁵.

In the story of the “devout father” we can read about how the father went to the meadow in the morning with his son. The sun has just risen. The father took off his hat, looked up the sky and silently murmured something. This made the boy wander and asked his father, why he took off his hat and what was he murmuring. The father told, that whenever he saw the sun rise, he thought of God, and of all the beauties surrounding him created by the Lord. After this touching revelation the boy told his father with tears in his eyes, that he also loved God¹⁶. The story is important in terms of contemporary religious education, as the documents revealed, religion and going to church was characteristic for women more than for men. The studied school books however transmit a different picture and often depict men during religious practice.

At dawn Farmer Kovacs and his son are heading home after a work well done. Suddenly the church bell chimes. The father and the son, as if doing it on command, take off their hats and start to pray. Apart from the Kovacs family, Farmer Szekeres, who has just appeared from a lane with scythe on his shoulder, has also started to pray upon hearing the bell. But why do people pray as if it was compulsory? – put forward the author the rhetorical question, which he answered at once: “Because of their soul [...] for the true love of Christ”¹⁷.

In the next story we find an example for men practicing religion too. The father was walking with their children when they reached the church. The children asked him to enter the church for a pray, asking God to bless their work. The boys, as usual, demurely took off their hat upon entry. The father has led the children to the sanctuary to pray together. Evie, however, noticed, that the picture of the “smiling little Jesus” was missing. She asked his father about where it was. The father told her, it was not gone, only covered with a lilac curtain, to call the believers' attention to the sufferings of Jesus Christ.¹⁸

Then the father told them about what the parish was. One afternoon, after finishing work, Joseph Bojtor took up his festive garments. His wife, and his son, Steve has also noticed it and asked him about where he was going. As it has turned out, he was going to the parish meeting, because the new vicar would arrive on Sunday and the members of the ecclesia had lot of things to do. Steve did not understand what the parish was, so he asked his mother. The mother, however, told him, that his father was going to explain it to him when he came

¹⁵ Ibid. 106.

¹⁶ MÓCSY, PETROVÁČZ and WALTER, 1925. 111–112.

¹⁷ OLVASÓKÖNYV, 1936. 21.

¹⁸ NAGY, 1936. 85.

home. The boy was eagerly waiting for his father, but he came only very late. Before dinner the father had some time and informed him happily about what the parish was. „Me, your mom, your siblings are all Roman Catholics. There are many Roman Catholic families living in the village.” They together form the Roman Catholic parish. There are villages, where several religions exist, there we can find several different ecclesiae. The parish has leaders, its head is the vicar, who is appointed by the bishop. The father was talking about the difference between the mother church and the affiliation church, and about the tasks of the chaplain, the cantor and the church janitor. Then the issue of church tax was also discussed, which tax is paid by the Catholic citizens of the parish, saying: “who loves the religion pays the parish tax willingly, because he/she knows, everything done for his/her religion is done for the glory of God”¹⁹.

Next the depicting of female figures is discussed. A mother and her daughter went to church on Good Friday to pray. After they left church, Magdalene asked her mother why the church was so sad and dark. The mother then told her about the sufferings of the Lord Jesus, the reason why the church was in mourning. The little girl started to cry upon hearing all those sufferings and Calvary. The mother then consoled the little girl saying, Christ rose from his dead three days after, this way redeeming the world from their sins. This huge happiness is celebrated at Easter²⁰.

Eve, in an other story, was working on her homework. Though she was not really a good writer. Her rows were slant, the letters were confused. She told herself while crying: “I will get a bad mark tomorrow! I do know it!” She also made a big “splotch” to her exercise book, which her mother could hardly remove. The mother saw how difficult it was to create the homework, so she suggested to go together to that person, who could help the little girl. So, the mother led Eve to the family altar, where the following was written with the pearl letters of her father: „I bless the families where my sacred heart is respected. I bless all work of those who respect my heart.” Earlier Eve has never understood these lines, but now, when she needed Jesus’s blessing in her work the most, she clearly understood the content behind the lines. So, together with her mother, they repeated the prayer many times: „Holly heart of Jesus, I trust in you!”. Then they stood up, the mother embraced Eve, they went back to the table, sat side by side and started to write the homework together, which was much easier thanks to the effect of the prayer.²¹

¹⁹ *Olvasó- és tankönyv a katolikus osztatlan elemi népiskolák III. osztálya számára* (Text- and course book for the III. grade of Catholic undivided elementary schools). Szent István-Társulat, Budapest, 1936. 39-40.

²⁰ MÓCSY, PETROVÁČZ and WALTER, 1925. 127-129.

²¹ NAGY, 1938. 4-5.



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In the next story little Eve is preparing for the first communion. There is only one day left, but she can hardly wait for the “Ascension Day”. The little girl thinks a lot about the feeling when, through the sacrament of the communion, “little Jesus” will take place in her heart too. It is true, that she has siblings and friends too, whom she can be together with, but “little Jesus is different, he is more than all friends or all siblings”. One more day and the first Communion comes. They are sitting together with her mom in the room and they are talking about tomorrow’s long-awaited moment, sometimes they sang a song, for example the one starting as “oh, blessed holy God in the holy Eucharist”, which is Eve’s favourite. Ildiko, the sister of Eve, is listening to them from a distance, finally leaves her doll and snuggles next to her mother, “searching for the reason behind Eve’s shining eyes”²³.

Beside the mother, the godmother also turns up during the religious practices. At the celebration of Candlemas, the godmother asked Elisabeth to join her to the holy mass. Elisabeth flew in joy to the arms of her godmother. On the way they talked about the celebration that day, Elisabeth reported that it was the day of Candlemas Annunciation, when people celebrate the event when the Virgin Mother presented Jesus in the temple of Jerusalem. The godmother commended the little girl for precisely summarising the essence of the celebration. Elisabeth then told her, that in her school she learnt, that “we have to know about our religion everything, just as we have to know the multiplication table.” The reverend said, many people do not like God and religion because they do not know them, which is why it is important to learn about them²⁴.

In the text books of the Horthy era (1919 – 1945) we get a clear description on how “a good child behaves in the church”. When one enters the

²² NAGY, 1938. 5.

²³ NAGY, 1938, 162.

²⁴ POHÁRNOK, 1940. 90.

house of the Lord, crosses oneself with holy water, because one knows, this is the way of declaring oneself Christian. After the crossing he/she goes to his/her place without looking everywhere, hence “the one who wants to see, can see with his/her good heart”. It becomes clear, that laughing and talking in the church is a sin. The above child however knows the proper behaviour, and everyone who sees her commends this God-fearing child, and this example setting behaviour is why “God, her teacher and her parents” love her²⁵.

There is a story “recruiting” for and calling attention to priesthood. In this story a little boy imagines that he is a priest. The children were playing in the yard of farmer Bodor. But one brother, Steve, was not with them. He was hiding in the cellar playing an other game. “He built an altar from a small tub, patched up a cross from corn stalk and placed it on the tub”. He took the bell from the neck of their young horse, rang it and the mass could begin. His parents watched him and were very happy about God touching their son’s soul. Steve studied hard in the elementary, then in secondary school. “The church and the altar were everything to him”. When he finished secondary school his parents gave their consent for him to become a priest, as they had two more sons left, John and Joseph, who could cultivate the land. This way Stephen entered the seminar and finally became a priest²⁶.

To sum up we can say, that families shown in the textbooks of the Horthy era were rather religious, so we can conclude, that raising children in a religious manner was a very important value for the society.²⁷ Families spent considerable time from their leisure time for prayers and visiting services and masses. During religious education the family taught children persistence, abstinence, sacrifice, patience and loving each other, and in the meantime young people acquired many customs, traditions and behaviour norms. Practicing religious behaviour and ceremonies also contributed to mental health promotion and family solidarity.

²⁵ MÓCSY, PETROVÁČZ and WALTER, 1925. 48.

²⁶ *Olvasó- és tankönyv a katolikus osztatlan elemi népiskolák IV. osztálya számára* (Text- and course book for the IV. grade of Catholic undivided elementary schools). Szent István-Társulat, Budapest, 1929. 14-15.

²⁷ Pálmai Judit: „Kézem imára kulcsolom, jó Istenhez fohászkodom.”: Vallási nevelés elemei a 20. század eleji olvasókönyvekben. Docere, 2018/3-4. 97-112.



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