

Pázmány Péter Catholic University  
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Theses of the PhD  
Dissertation on

**The developement, the golden age and the end  
of patronage, particularly considering the  
parochial life of Kunszentmárton from 1850 until  
1950**

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The title of my dissertation – "The development, the golden age and the end of patronage, particularly considering the parochial life of Kunszentmárton from 1850 until 1950" – shows that I would like to demonstrate the parochial life of a city of the Great Plain, Kunszentmárton, while analyzing quite a nice part of the universal canon law. I share an opinion with János Csohány and I apply this opinion on the academic work of canon law too, when he says: "The task of a historian is to collect the memories of the past with precise work and to reconstruct the lives of people from bygone and recent eras. He does this all, so as to acknowledge the historical truth unconcealed and to reveal it wholly. We must never forget though, that it is sole reconstruction, not a direct percept." I was making an effort to achieve this reconstruction during my work process. I wanted to offer – by quoting thoroughly and exactly from the archives – a document bank for the events of the examined era, from which the reader can not only learn the facts, but the motives of the hearings before, therefore it is easier to see into the often difficult-appearing decision-making process.

When I was creating my dissertation my ambitions were the following:

1. To present the concept of patronage to make evident who could be a patron, what kind of rights and duties a patron had and as well as the method of parting with this Church-given grace.

2. I was also making an effort to present the following: How the actions of the patron influenced in the parochial life of Kunszentmárton the parochial life itself, especially the lives of parochial persons and employees, whether by examining the powers examined by the employer or by presenting the question of payment.

3. One of the nice rights of patrons was the right to elect the parish priest. During the century I examined, I wished to give an authentic cross-section of the measures of the patron by presenting thoroughly the lives and activities of the parish priests who served in the town.

4. Both the 1917 CIC, and the changes in the Hungarian history from 1940 had an influence on patronage and later they lead to its end. I wished to sum up what a great trouble it meant even for the parish, and in addition in the life of the Hungarian Church to take over the burdens of the patrons, considering Church buildings and the financial support of Church employees by presenting this sad process.

1. About the concept of patronage a thorough explanation is found in encyclopedias or in many volumes of specialized literature, but the most authentic and most important definition is given by the Codex of 1917 itself. Accordingly, patronage is a Church-given privilege which is given to the founders of churches, chapels and benefices, or to the legal successors of these founders. In this way the only ground for obtaining patronage is foundation. Besides foundation and donating it is a requirement as well that the founder is Catholic.

Only Catholics could obtain the right of patronage. Neither the age, nor the gender mattered. Instead of infants under the age of seven their legal guardian exercised the right of patronage.

Patronage – as we have read – could also be obtained by corporate bodies. Excommunicated members were not excluded from the rights of patronage, but then until their exemption they could not enjoy honorary rights. The rights of patronage were not entitled to non-Christians, heretics and separatists. One of the angles to classify the rights of patronage is determined by who receives it. Therefore it can be personal or real right of patronage. (*ius patronatus personale, ius patronatus reale*)

The real right of patronage is connected to some land or office or real estate, so the actual owner of time who has these receives patronage, therefore it is entitled primarily to the possession. The personal right of patronage is primarily connected to the person.

Partly, the new Codex wanted the rights of patronage come to an end, if it is possible, by not letting the emergence of such, new rights, or by being diligent to reserve such, existing rights for bishops, and so as to establish, besides the freedom of spiritual power, the freedom of practicing governmental power.

In our country it was remarkably difficult to carry out the intention of the Holy See nationally, because the right of patronage had been imprinted on the mind of general judicial knowledge for almost a thousand of years .

The patron gave the land to build the church and parish, but the manual work was always provided by the believers.

In 1927, the members of the episcopacy and later the primate of Seréd himself, one of the codifiers of the Codex, who was not known for being a fan of particularism, urged themselves the maintenance of the rights of patronage in Vatican because they acknowledged the national and political conditions. In fact, they urge the expansion of these rights. In his explanation he mentioned that the undertaking of the patronage in connection with new, city

parishes was not about new patronages, but about a more intensive care for the old patronage of the own area which went with a significant financial sacrifice.

Because of the financial burdens the city patrons themselves would have willingly evaded this. Supplying city pastors and catechists, maintaining the churches and parishes, and especially the new church and parish constructions went with such financial burdens that seemed to exceed Church reserves without the contribution of the patrons of cities. Because of the poorness of believers they could not possibly think that purely their unselfishness was enough to build the so necessary, new churches. The controversial question was settled on 23 July 1927 by Congregation Concilii: "We have to move to the standpoint of patience at existing patronages while postponing the experiments desired by 1451. canon to more appropriate times and while normally following the canons regulating patronage until then. And to begin the liquidation of patronage, according to the intention of the congregation church patrons ought to set a good example in resignation which lay people ought to follow."

However the obligations were combined with honorary rights (*iura honorifica*) and the patron was entitled to these as the deserved rights of a benefactor by the Church he favored. Thus the patron was entitled to the welcome of the priesthood (*ius processionis*). During the ceremonies their name was mentioned in the prayers (*ius intercessionum*). They had a separate ornate seat in the church (*sedes in choro*). They were entitled to the incense before the others (*honor turis*). At the rite of sprinkling a congregation with holy water the patron was always the first (*aspersio aqua benedicta*). At Holy Communion he was the first who could partake in the sacrament (*honor panis benedicti es osculum pacis*). The patron was allowed to place his name and family crest on a clearly visible part of the wall in the church (*ius listrae*). It occurred in different ways in Hungary. The crest of the patron was represented on the keystones or other visible, suitable places of the churches.

When the patron died, the Church mourned, thus placed the black flag on the church, had the bells rung and performed Holy Mass. Formerly, in such cases, as a sign of mourn everything had been removed from the altar (*luctus ecclesiasticus*). They possessed the right to bury in their own church.

The general rule is that the bigger mendings and investments had to be financed by the patron and the smaller maintenances had to be financed by the parish priest. Although the practice showed many variances therein as well. It often happened that the painting of a wall or the tiniest purchases or mendings were also asked to be covered by the patron.

Nobody could be forced to maintain Church buildings, but neglecting this could result in losing the rights of patronage. Yet there were patrons who did not always fulfill their

obligations. It was obvious in the absence of the payments of the Church persons or in the postponement of various mendings, but especially it was evident when at the rebuilding of Church buildings they did not show willingness to renovate the run-down funduses.

Because of the obligations of patronage the construction and maintenance of parish churches and the parish are absolutely the obligations of the patron, but the manual work and draft animals were to be provided by the believers from parish.

The patron could only lay down the rights of patronage by finding somebody instead of himself or herself who would have continued carrying the burdens. The requirement was, however, the patron's ability to act, namely he had to be able to resign. It goes without saying that the lack of ability to act did not make the practise of action. If it was about family patronage, the patron could only resign in his own name, but the rights of rest of the family remained.

They lapsed by recall. When this happened the Holy See terminated the benefice in the possession of the patron.

They lapsed by the death of the holder patron, thus the ceaseless patronage in lack of inheritors, the family patronage by the death of the holder family.

The rights of patronage did not lapse simply by not practicing them. Because if the bishop without any contradiction donated the benefice freely – to lay patrons for 30 years, to Church patrons for 40 years. Even in this case as well, the patron only lost the selection rights and the honorary rights otherwise remained continuously intact, as well as the obligation of construction.

Finally, there were some offences that lapsed the rights of patronage. Such as the murder and mutilation of the Church benefactor, a serious assault against the Church benefactor, high treason, heresy, unauthorized misappropriation of possessions connected to benefice and simeoniacal alienation.

2. The patron of Kunszentmárton not only exercised his rights in connection with Church persons, but he found important renovating the sacred buildings of the area and keeping them in good condition. During the century I examined, the spectacular enlargement of the Great Church of Kunszentmárton, the expansion with aisles, the raise of the tower, the inner formation of the church, the construction of the chapels in the graveyard, all hold the memory of the diligent fulfilling of obligations up to this day. Along with this, the religious zeal also increased which moved the people of Kunszentmárton to construct two graveyard chapels. The management of these investments, or at least the supervision was entitled to the patron. The increasing pastoral work made it necessary to form the parish into an appropriate

and worthy apartment of more priests. Financing this investment and keeping it successively in good condition were among the obligations of the patron, as we have seen it before.

This, however, did not exhaust the various tasks of the patrons. They had to take care of the payment and selection of assistants who helped at Church activities. I will present the right to elect parish priests in the following section, but I have to mention here that they also remitted the payment of chaplains, clerks, watches, ringers, sacrists, the bellows operator and the church cleaner.

I present the employment of great cantors who served in Kunszentmárton during this hundred year and the main features of their activities. And since the change of payments were always the source of constant debates and disagreements, I list the written records of measures in connection with payment. The selection of these persons went with great circumspection. Beyond the professional suitability, the certificate of character was also the subject of the examination. The employment of cantors was controlled by a body which was helped by diocesan instructions and a plentiful collection of rules which was about clerical regulations.

3. Perhaps the most important part of my dissertation is the formation and the exercise of the right to elect parish priest. After the redemption, the superiors of the city obtained from the ruler the free right to elect parish priest as a privilege. It had been an exercise for two centuries that the patron himself had chosen the parish priest according to the rules who was later appointed to lead the parish by the archbishop of Eger. According to partial law, in our country to the place of the vacant parish could only apply priests who passed their council exams with good results.

Where the Church still sustained the right of the presentation and the election, it aimed to save its own liberty through choosing from the persons who has been indicated by the Catholic Church itself. It had taken a long time to progress the practise where the patron did not practise the law of the election but he began to practise the law of the presentation. It could easily happen, as in the practise it usually did, that the mob became easily influenced by the different impacts and canvassings, so it could happen that they were against the interests of the Catholic Church.

In our country, in Hungary the method of the presentation was the following: the vacant parish was announced by the ordinary and he collected the applications at a short notice. Then he marked three out of the nominees and he sent the three names to the elector body who normally presented the first elected name to the ordinary. In the election could only the Catholics vote. In Kunszentmárton, all of the negotiations on the actual affairs of the city were discussed together with the patron's activities. When the municipal council came to

an end of its negotiations about the items on the agenda, the council became a Church-patronage committee. The thorough examination of the council's reports in the archives was difficult because the patron's disposes – in what we were interested - were among the decisions of the village. They weren't kept on separate days and they were not ordered in volumes.

The income from the estates and the yearly determined amount of contribution - in Latin language "deputatum" - (wood, wine, domestic animals, grain etc.) provided the payment of the priest. All clerics received a payment for their service to provide the assurance of a decent clerical living. This payment did not only aim to cover the expenses of the daily clerical life but offered an occasion to foster the Church and the goals of helpful love from the money remained after covering the decent living and fulfilling the obligations .

The source of this regulation is from the 1473rd canon of the Codex 1917 . This regulation - as an obligation - ordered the holders of the clerical goods to give the rest of their salary that is over their decent living to foster the poor people or to offer it for other gracious purposes.

The priest had and has to be exemplary in this case nowadays also. He became a member of an establishment which points to the eternal life with the right utilization of earthly tools and opportunities. Everything becomes the tools of salvation by him. This way the material essentials too. The priest also uses his personality to testify with his exemplary and practise of selfless love and show the people that they should look for the „treasures of the Heaven" (look at Matthew 6:33).

4. The sealing of the dissertation ends with the negotiations of the events in the 1950s. This, however, didn not only mean the end of the dissertation but also the end of a long and nice period which also included the end of patronage.

The practise of the patron's rights became sensible in Kunszentmárton in 1945. The first spectacular moment of this was the radical change of the fondly-practised right of the patron to elect parish priest. Some members of the city-council - who were devotees of the new ideology - already suggested that the phase of the occupation would have to start upwards from below so the town-council would indicate the most suitable person whom the Archbishop would confirm. They suspected that there would be a time to come when the church and the state would be separated.

At the end of the 1940s the spread of ideas of the communist regime was significant in the country. This spread, of course, did not leave neither the estates of the church, nor the clerical affairs such as parish priest elections untouched – as we have seen at the election of

the parish priest . The archbishop of Eger, with regard to the council's decision, without advertising the application, appointed provost Dr. Péter Kiss to priest of Kunszentmárton.

He fulfilled the rectorial duties until his retirement in 1959. The 1950s, which period had a great influence to the Hungarian history, made the provost-priest face a difficult trial.

It is worthy to analyze what kind of features the communist church-policy had.

Its features were characterized in the following administrative measures and political manipulations: 1. The radical land reform, which also covered the major church-lands, deprived the ecclesiastical institution of its traditional economic base. Later took place the confiscation of the smaller parish benefices as well. 2. The anti-religious propaganda, 3. The breaking of the diplomatic relations occurred at different times with different countries. This also meant the cessation of the direct connection between the local churches and the Holy See. 4. The ban of religious associations. After this, the constitutional freedom of religion only covered the tight area of service or nothing. 5. The elimination of religious education. 6. The secularization of church-schools and social institutions. 7. The ban of the „unnecessary" religious orders. In order to ensure the full control that over the Church, the regime established the office of the ecclesiastical relations and the „peace priest" movement.

Pope XII. Pius (1939-1958) responded to the communist Church-policy with definite rejection. On 1st of July 1949 the decision of the St. Officium was given which threatened the believers with excommunication, who „knowingly and freely" join the Communist Party, or publish anti-clerical writings.

The so long desired provision in the Code of Canon law materialised. Gradually, without knowing the exact date, the centuries-old patronage ceased in Kunszentmárton. Because of this elimination an incredible burden was placed on the parish priest and on its council of representatives. The burden fell on the believers who had straitened financial status that they were to maintain the more or less smooth functioning of the parish. The city eased the fulfillment of the patron's burden, and made every effort to eliminate the patronage-obligations as soon as possible. There were also some difficulties in the spiritual life. The building of previously flourishing Catholic Circle „recently was occupied by the EPOSZ and cut the devotional associations out (Congregation of Mary, Altar Society, Heart of Jesus Convention, the Rosary Society, Secular order of St. Francis).

Provost priest Dr. Péter Kiss has already been informed the Archsee of Eger in the mid 1940s with his sad tone letter. One of sentences in this letter reflects very good and accurate the radical transformation of the patron's activity. He wrote to the Archbishop this: „we are further starved..." It was quite an apposite sentence. This featured the coming period.

The payments of ecclesiastics halted, the renovations were cancelled for various reasons, and without decision it was dissolved, so in the city's life it is not binded to a specific day, but the patronage slowly faded out.

Although the Code of Canon law asked for the elimination of the patronage, as we know, in Hungary it tolerated the patrons' activities. While the movements of the parish were not effecting the law of patronage, the people, or groups, who were in church countenance, got rid of it due to the change of political approach.

After that, the parish council of representatives and the parish had to undertake all the tasks, rights and obligations, that had been done by the Church-patronage for nearly two and a half centuries.