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THE INTERPLAY OF RELIGION AND ENVIRONMENT IN FOLK TRADITION

In the course of studies on folk religiosity one can often meet phenomena related to human activities shaping his millieu, building his environment. We speak about the church as centre of sacral life, the cemetery roadside sculptures, chapels, crucifixes etc. but except for the cemetery, they are all dealt with through related customs and traditions or they are examined from an architectural or artistic point of view. Though we often find references to the conditions of construction, setting up or origins of religious objects of the environment in the literature, little attention has been paid to the question of how these objects and buildings of ecclesiastical purposes, mainly objects that fall into the category of provincial art organize the religious life of a given community.

The question of the religion-environment correlation is not, however, totally new and it was raised, though the conception was somewhat different from present views, in the 30's. The notion of „Sakrallandshaft" (sacralland) originally stood for the catchment area of a certain shrine.[1] Such works were published by Hungarian authors as well.[2] *S. Bálint* did not forget to refer to the inspiring force of the landscape, the vicinity in his presentation of Hungarian shrines,[3] and *J. Bárth* analyses the spatial distribution of pilgrimage on the basis of the modern space-conception.[4]

The relationship of religion and environment, however, outgrows this basically geographic attitude. This more complex conception appears

1. *G. Schreiber:* Die Sakrallandschaft des Abendlandes mit besonderer Berücksichtigung von Pyrenäen, Rhein und Donau. Düsseldorf, 1937.

2. *Gy. Jánosi:* Barokk búcsújáróhelyeink táji vonásai. Pannonhalmi Szemle, XIV. 1939. 350—356.; *I. Vámos:* Szentségi táj. Ethnographia, LVIII., 1947. 237—238.; *T. Vanyó:* A plébániatörténet-írás módszertana. Regnum, IV. Pannonhalma, 1940—41. 54.

3. *S. Bálint:* Búcsújárás és település. In: *S. Bálint:* Sacra Hungaria. Kassa, 1944. 44—55.; *S. Bálint:* Boldogasszony vendégségben. Budapest, 1944.

4. *J. Bárth:* Az illancsi tanyák népének hajósi búcsújárása. Népi kultúra— népi társadalom, XI—XII. Budapest, 1980. 59—117.

clearly in the German literature on the geography of religion,[5] and we see it under a different light from the side of the folk tradition as well.[6] All material and topographical elements can be exposed to investigations concerning the environment-religion correlation that carry some religious message and invite the adherents to worship and manifestations of religiosity or simply serve as reminders of his faith. These material elements play an especially important part in the life of those who represent traditional folk religiosity and traditional culture, i. e., peasants.[7]

To connect religion and environment from this aspect may be an important factor of modelling religion not only for ethnographic purposes, but also for other fields. For the main dimensions referred to in research work are generally abstractions based on practical and intellectual manifestations of religious life. Of course, the correctness of this approach is not questionable since the most different branches of religious and social sciences (such are condensed into these models, as sociology and psychology of religion, ethnology and comparative religion, etc.).

But besides the factors mentioned, the structure of religion is also determined by how religiosity appears during everyday life. This temporal and characteristically spatial distribution comprises and forms the whole of religious life and at the same time it is its unseparable constituent we might as well say, its way of existence.

The temporal distribution of religious life in the periods of days and weeks of the ecclesiastical year is more or less determined by the Church and is not an unknown field in Hungarian Ethnography. At the same time, much less attention has been paid to the problems of where and in what circumstances the sacral events take place, how and where the adherent meets objects of the outside world that remind him of his faith or call forth religious reactions in him, viz. certain places, buildings, works of art, in the course of the periods of day, week and year or at moments of his everyday work and other activities.

We can distinguish types of reactions incited by the sacral content of the environment. In the first case definite geographical places (shrines, fountains, springs), buildings, statues or pictures are visited to make supplications, officiate (religious) ceremonies. Shrines visited far between one or a few times a year or not more than once in a lifetime, the church, the cemetery, fall into this category, and sometimes places that are rather

5. See e. g.: *P. Fickeler:* Grundfragen der Religionsgeographie. Erdkunde, I. 1947. 121—145.; *J—F. Sprockhoff:* Religiöse Lebensformen und Gestalt der Lebensräume. Numen, XI. 1964. 85—146.

6. *E. Bartha:* A hitélet néprajzi vizsgálata egy zempléni faluban. Debrecen, 1980. 21.

7. *S. Bálint:* Népünk és a szentírás. Korunk Szava, V. 1937. 425.

places for eventual religious exercise. The second category comprises places and buildings that convey religious meaning for the passers-by though this relationship is to be considered rather eventual in this case. Naturally, these latter can also enter into the first category at certain points of the liturgic year, when certain ceremonies are conducted. This is how the roadside crucifix becomes the prescibed place of the ceremony at the time of celebrations of the cross, and similarly the chapels on occasions of their day of pilgrimage. The same event is even more frequent in the other way round, since the church and the cemetery may also inspire eventual worship.

Even if it seems somewhat self-contained at first sight, this differentiation, if nothing more, enables us to unearth a more hidden dimension of the environment-religion interaction. As a matter of fact, the spontaneous relationship described as the second type is worthy of examination from an ethnographic point of view in spite of its apparently marginal importance in religious life as a whole. Attending the mass of a feast or visiting a well-known shrine has, obviously, a different effect on the religious soul than crossing himself hurriedly or uncovering himself when the bells toll. However, these simple and often outwardly acts are inseparable from folk religious exercise in Catholicism through their recurrence in everyday life, not to speak about the fact that these often automatic manifestations give insight into deeper layers of peasant religious behaviour.

In an earlier work I examined thoroughly the role of the close environment in the religious life of a community in the course of a case study.[8] Exceptional as the conditions were, i. e. you had both a good view of the church from the fields and a community that was conservative in its language, traditions and religion, people leading a peasant life characteristic of the first half of the century got in touch with environmental elements conveying religious message 10—20 times daily according to frequency index. The toll of the Churchbell filling the fields around meant 5 and 10 occasions of the like on weekdays and holidays respectively.[9]

My later on-the-spot investigations have approximately confirmed these data. Since the data collected in the course of field work reflect conditions typical in the first half of the century, and part of recent data also aim at reconstructing this period, we can assume that, in general, environmental elements conveying a religious message were present about 10—20 times on an average day of catholic rural populations leading the

8. *É. Bartha:* op. cit. 38.
9. *B. Gunda:* Ethnographica Carpatho-Balcanica. Budapest, 1979. 289—319.

traditional peasant life. The close neighbourhood; pieces of furniture and decoration, the „cult corner" with its sacral objects („relics") and souvenirs add up to acquired data. These objects evoke the religious tenets with a frequency so far unexplored.

These numerical data are relevant only in comparison with similar information on the frequency of other manifestations of religious life. If we enumerate regular and occasional religious activities of everyday life; the magic use of religious symbols, objects and ceremonies, early morning, noon, and evening prayers supplications before and after work, we can notice that religious activities inspired by places, buildings and other environmental elements discussed above are not much fewer in number than the latter, quite regular ones.

The potential effectuality certain elements of the environment may have on religious life appears from what has been said so far. However, it is worth mentioning the forms in which this force prevails.

Beyond their aesthetic function, the church and the cult corner are the centres of communal and family life respectively: the scenes of the most important community religious ceremonies (e. g. the holy Mass) regular prayers. It is noticeable that through the transformation of the traditional folk housing habits the sacral function of the cult corner is disappearing.[10]

Religious statues and paintings give aesthetic experience as well, though first of all they are meant to introduce and perpetuate the cult of the saint represented.

In addition to the community ceremonies on the given days these works of art also provided possibilities for personal piety and charity. We must not forget that charity may equal any communal or personal piety in the contributor's religious life.

Parishioners cross themselves when passing by crucifixes on the roadside or in the fields and they say a short supplication learned from the prayerbook, or improvised. According to the interviews, the sight of the corpus, or the prayer may often inspire the faithful to a deeper insight into religious thought. Similar forms of worship are related to roadside chapels, which, as a rule, also have their day of pilgrimage.

The churchbell, whose toll fills the entire vicinity and calls for prayer or reverence is a specific factor in the sacral environment. What is more, it equally has informative function telling about deaths or sacral events,

10. See: *M. Kovács:* A harang. Budapest, 1919.

it is used as a sacrament to avoid storms, not to mention the magic ways attached to its definite parts.[11]

The environmental element the most thoroughly explored in ethnographic studies is the cemetery. Investigations on the subject went so far as to almost establish an autonomous discipline. For this reason, I will not discuss this topic here. Nevertheless, mention must be made of an important factor of the environment either as place of residence or as landscape: geographical names. Some of these folk designations are directly inspired by religion or are somehow related to religion or with the Church in most cases. They can be of great interest for several reasons as far as the investigations on religious life are concerned. Firstly, they preserve past religious ideas and cults; they bear evidence of the importance religion had in the name-giving imagination of the people and may provide valuable additional data for ecclesiastical history. This aspect hardly concerns recent religiosity, but the knowledge related to these denominations certainly does, regardless, of course, of its authenticity and reality-content. The religious layer of legends and name-explaining myths concerning geographical places is an important element of local religious life and an organic part of traditional religious imagery and knowledge.

The mutuality characterizing the environment-religion relationship does not end with the influential role the environment plays in religious life. It would be wrong to disregard the fact that the elements discussed are the results of man's religious needs and of his striving to fulfil them. The same needs arising and arriving to fulfilment from time to time result in new religious constructions, mainly buildings of local interest, even nowadays. This side of the matter has already got some literature in Hungary, though the technical and aesthetic approach prevails in these works.

Several papers and documents deal with roadside crucifixes but these works, similarly to others on the sacral elements of the environment, are mainly historical in approach. Hungarian works of the sort examine first of all the conditions of origins and construction and the related traditions. The numerous data collected on „origin" myths are of similar character.

11. *E. Kunt:* Flurkreutze in Ungarn. Volkskunst, II. München, 1979. 186—189.; *G. Tüskés:* Útmenti és temetői kőfeszületek Abaliget — Orfu környékén. Ethnographia, XCI. 1980. 98—113.

Considering what has been said above, we must, however, make a distinction as far as origins and construction are concerned since they cast light on an earlier state of religiosity. As a matter of fact, conditions of constructing a chapel reflect a stage of religiosity contemporary or even prior to the construction itself. This fact must be observed in case of reconstructions or renovations as well.

It is an important feature of religious buildings and relics of communal use that they promote the maintenance and preservation of related forms of worship or the need for them. Thus their existence not only leads to eventual religious attitudes and manifestations of faith but they may equally preserve certain ceremonies and collective forms of supplications related to them.

So it is obvious that certain factors of the environment: buildings of religious purpose, first of all, but other buildings and natural phenomena with acquired religious meaning as well, are in manifold interaction with religious life. They were constructed and renewed now and again with personal and collective undertakings and contributions at the settlements and in their environs throughout the centuries, and they accumulated sacral meaning as well as attracted the most diverse forms of supplications. Their construction, dedication, contributions to these costs, religious ceremonies and secular supplications administered there have all become events of collective religious worship. Their aesthetic force, mystic attraction and last but not least their locality are important nuances of personal religious life, and even give religious colouring to everyday life. Short as it is, this relationship established with saying a short prayer or supplication at the roadside chapel with taking care of the place surrounding a crucifix or a sacred picture and decorating them with flowers tear the person away from the monotony of daily work.

Studies on the relationship between man and environment may enrich our present conception of folk religiosity in addition to its illuminating contribution to the History of Art and to religious studies.

Vallás és környezet kölcsönhatásai a néphagyományban

A népi vallásosság tanulmányozása során egyre-másra találkozik a kutató olyan jelenségekkel, amelyek az ember környezetépítő, térformáló tevékenységével kapcsolatosak. Szóba kerülhet a templom, mint a szakrális élet központja, a temető, az útmenti szobrok, kápolnák, keresztek stb. de a néprajzi tárgyú munkákban néhány kivétellel, mint például a temető, ezek elsősorban a hozzájuk fűződő hagyományok révén vagy építészeti, művészeti szempontból kapnak említést. A vallás és a környezet kapcsolatának kérdése már a 30-as években felvetődött; a szakrális táj (*Sakrallandschaft*) egy központ kisugárzási körzetét jelentette. A környezet és val-

lás kapcsolata azonban túlmutat ezen a jórészt geográfiai szemléleten, s a vizsgálatba be lehet vonni mindazokat a tárgyi és földrajzi elemeket, amelyek vallásos jelentést hordoznak, a hívő embert vallásának gyakorlására, kinyilvánítására késztetik, vagy pusztán felidézik számára a hitét.

A környezet és a vallás ilyen szempontú összekapcsolása a néprajzon túl más tudományágak vallásmodelljének is fontos tényezője lehet, az alkalmazott főbb vallásdimenziókat ugyanis elsősorban a hitélet gyakorlati és gondolati megnyilvánulásaiból vonatkoztatják el. A vallás szerkezetének főbb meghatározója emellett az a tagolódás, amelyben az a mindennapi élet folyamán megjelenik. Ez az időbeni és nem utolsósorban térbeni tagolódás amellett, hogy a hitélet egészét átfogja, formába önti, egyúttal elválaszthatatlan része is annak, úgy is mondhatnánk, létezési módja.

A vallás és a környezet kapcsolatát jellemző kölcsönösség nem merül ki a környezeti elemek aktív szerepével, hiszen ezek egyúttal az ember vallásos igényének és erre irányuló tevékenységének eredményei. Fontos sajátosságuk az is, hogy — különösen a közösségi rendeltetésű építmények, kegytárgyak — elősegítik a hozzájuk kapcsolódó vallásgyakorlási formák, illetőleg az erre vonatkozó igények fennmaradását, átmentését. Ilyen módon létezésük nemcsak spontán megnyilvánulások, viselkedésmódok gyakorlásához vezet, hanem konzerválhat bizonyos szertartásokat, közösségi ájtatosságokat is. A környezet és az ember szakrális kapcsolatának vizsgálata művészettörténeti és egyháztörténeti tanulságai mellett új színekkel gazdagítja a népi vallásosságról eddig kialakult képet.

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