

The beginnings of modern political Catholicism in Hungary The Catholic People's Party (1895-1918)

The Encyclopedia Rerum Novarum, published by Pope Leo XIII in called attention to the socially paradoxical nature of free market capitalism, and opened the way in front of modern political Catholicism. The Constanti Hungarorum, published in 1893, called on people to protest against liberal laws concerning Church politics, and invited the priests and the people to organise in a more enhanced manner.

The political party that represented modern political Catholicism appeared in 1895, as a result of the passing of the kind of laws concerning Church politics that were detrimental to the interests of the Church. The organisers primarily came from the house of magnates (főrendi ház) and the lower ranks of priests. Count Nándor Zichy, a Hungarian aristocrat became the president of the Catholic People's Party. The conservative political force, which stood its ground against the socially insensitive liberal governments, was judging modern society from the perspective of religious morality. Its aim was to bring about the victory of Catholic values, interests and social teachings.

The Catholic People's Party was in the Parliament throughout 5 cycles from 1895 to 1918, and became a member of the government coalition between 1905-1910. The party's success was partly due to the fact that it always strived to become very much embedded in society. It considered the 7 million Hungarian Catholics its basis. Its range of new technological tools, well-defined organisational communication and propaganda activity allowed it to become the first mass political party in Hungary. It published various newspapers which wrote about public life, i. e.: *the Hungarian State (a Magyar Állam)*, *Constitution (Alkotmány)*, *the People's Party (a Néppárt)*, *Newspaper of the People (Népújság)*. By 1912, it established more than 100 Christian cooperatives, Christian Socialist unions, while their mass organisation, the Catholic People's Union consisted of 300 thousand members.

In their 1912 propaganda entitled "The People's Party for the people", the party announced that their most urgent task, beside renewing society from the perspective of religious morality, was to support the classes neglected or more or less destroyed by the liberal system.

National Christian Socialist Party (1907-1918) a step towards democracy

A certain number of supporters of Hungarian Social Catholicism was not satisfied with the conservative pro-governmental stance of the Catholic People's Party, and wanted to strengthen the fight for social reforms. In 1907, these people founded the National Christian Catholic Party, relying on the Christian Socialist unions and cooperatives.

Even though the party was not too successful as far as parliamentary politics go, they had outstanding achievements in the area of social work. In the Hungary of the day, their activities represented a significant step towards Catholic politics becoming a force in democratic politics. They demanded political rights – suffrage, the right of association and the right to strike – for the social layers they represented. As a way of solving the problems of peasants, their social programme recommended the establishment of cooperatives, where peasants could have leased the land they needed. They supported measures to protect workers and fought for free public education. Opposing

the strongly nationalist state politics, they took the side of nationalities, supporting their right to education and free language choice.

The most prominent leader of the party was a man named Sándor Giesswein, whose views represent the direct roots of Hungarian Christian democracy.

The beginnings of modern Christian democratic politics in Hungary

Sándor Giesswein – a „the apostle of love and peace”

The person our foundation takes its name from, István Barankovics, described Sándor Giesswein in the following way in 1947 August, when the birth of the Democratic People’s Party was announced: “Our big forerunner is Giesswein, the pure fountain of democratic Christian politics.”

The priest and the man of science, the public figure committedly representing democracy and the politician wishing to realise the social teachings of the Church was all there in the person of Sándor Giesswein, prelate of Győr. He realised, already in the 1880s, that solving the people’s problems must be a key issue for the Church, so in 1898, he launched a workers’ union movement, which first relied on the teachings of Rerum Novarum, and later spread throughout the country. As a vice president of the National Christian Socialist Party, he took an effort to make sure that everybody hears about the ideas of Christian socialism. He considered it a direction which expresses social truths on the ground of Christian ethics.

The „apostle of peace”:

During the First World War, Giesswein was a leading figure of anti-war movements. His life was defined by thinking in the framework of a unified Europe, and he identified the future of the continent in establishing international organisations, which, as institutions standing above countries, could stabilise the situation of Europe.

The „apostle of love”:

His social sensitivity, coupled by his commitment to democratic ideas, led him to represent the love of Christ disregarding race, class and nation. He resisted both left-wing dictatorship of the proletariat and right-wing nationalism.

He supported the idea of universal suffrag, he fought for the rights of women with Christian feminists, and protested against anti-Semitism.

Soon, workshops were added to the range of activities under his name. At present, the foundation has four workshops: research workshops connected to Israelites, Romas and the Youth, moreover, a so-called “Hidden Dimensions” workshop, the primary aim of which is to shed light on the theoretical and empirical background of issues which are strictly related to the social aims of Christian democracy.

Living up to the challenges of our times, the Barankovics István Foundation launched and operates a website with an indeed very modern layout and rich contents, which features 2-3 new posts every week.

The foundation also created the “Christian Democrat Knowledge Base”, which is an ever expanding source of knowledge introducing the central principles and ideas of Christian democracy, as well as

the important personalities and the history of the Hungarian and European Christian socialist movement.

Some pictures of the work done by the Foundation:

The Foundation published a book entitled *Voyage to the Heart of Europe* by Pascal Fontaine, with additional chapters about the history of Hungarian Christian democracy.

The book was launched on 11 March 2016 in Budapest.

A publication entitled *Protestant Social Ethics* and its book launch (10 March 2016).

Christian Democrat family politics conference (9 March 2016)

Since 2013, 79 teams, 400 students and 70 mentors participated in O:DA competition. The winning teams had the opportunity to attend a study trip in Brussels.