Nikoletta HOSSÓ:
Secrets of the first papal visit to Hungary. Politics and Protocol behind the (iron-) curtain.

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by János SALLAI

Back in my college years I remember when I was in Poland for the very first time, Karol Wojtyla was elected Pope taking his predecessor's name to reign as Pope John Paul II for 27 years.

At that time the current political system was still socialist in Poland therefore the election of a Polish Pope had more significance and its message was much more important for the people in Poland and other socialist countries which could be felt and experienced by everyone staying or living in Poland.

Though indirectly but I also participated in the organisation of first papal visit ensuring safety and security of the Pope and his entourage, so I read with great interest Nikoletta Hossó's book which I can highly recommend for everyone to read.

Since Pope John Paul II travelled around the world and of course his home country, Poland therefore anywhere we go to we may come across with relics and reminiscence of the *travelling Pope*'s presence.

The author divided the book into two main chapters: the first part presents the series of relevant political and ecclesiastical policy events in Hungary and the historical path between the break-up and re-establishment of diplomatic relations with the Vatican, including the domestic and foreign policy matters between 1945 and 1991, and also the overcoming of obstacles standing in the way of changes altogether led to John Paul II's first visit to Hungary.

In the second chapter the author has explored the complex process involving national and international cooperation. The comprehensive analysis complemented with authentic photography sheds light on the intricacy of the organization of this visit therefore. The second part includes an in-depth analysis of the papal visit based on archive documents by the

Hungarian Ministry for Foreign Affairs, news resources of MTI (Hungarian News Agency Corp.), personal experiences, memoirs and international resources available in Hungary.

In order to understand and appreciate the significance of this historical visit, the author well depicted and presented the path leading to the arrival of the Pope in 1991, with a detailed, in-depth research on the relations between the Hungarian State and the Hungarian Catholic Church, as well as the ecclesiastical political view of the Hungarian Communist Party, later Hungarian Socialist Workers Party on the existing churches in Hungary.

This rigid and cold relation - which amounted to the "hamstringing" the Catholic Church making them almost impossible to exist - changed in the seventies.
The Italian-Hungarian diplomatic relationship has reached a stage when it has become so intense that finally led to the meeting between Giovanni Spadolini, President of the Italian Senate and Karoly Grosz, Hungarian Prime Minister; their meeting can be regarded as the direct antecedent of the Pope's invitation to Hungary. This chapter greatly helps you to understand how the changing and developing relations between the Church and the Government led to the selected church leaders' loyalty pledge to the single-party state.

Communist Party leader, Janos Kadar' visit to the Vatican in 1977 and the election of the Polish Pope in 1978 meant a whole new direction in the Vatican's politics.
Pope John Paul II as a mediator played in important conciliatory role in the interest of human rights, peace, dialogue and international cooperation and social justice, during which the Church has gone beyond the anticommunist and anti-Soviet perspective.

Visible signs of this *détente* are Pope John Paul II's visits made towards Eastern Europe, which coincided with the preparation process for the change of regime in Hungary; this period's the most important diplomatic events are displayed by the author in chronological order. The pinnacle of this process is the restoration of diplomatic relations with the Vatican and Hungary, which is presented by the author in a separate chapter.

In the second part the author introduces us to world of state and ecclesiastical protocol. In order to understand the series of events of the first Hungarian papal visit in the year 1991, it is also essential to be aware of high level state and church protocol and examine how their rules are applied.

Although several articles and books on papal travels have been published, in her book, Nikoletta Hossó takes us behind the scenes showing the real background of papal visits, the multi-year state and church preparations, the cooperation with the Vatican, and the actual security, protocol issues and organisational tasks of the event without which Pope John Paul II could not have stepped onto the Hungarian ground.

Regarding its structure, the second part of the book consists of five chapters: the first one is the introduction with a brief presentation of the Hungarian Catholic Church and the Roman Catholic Church and an introduction of Vatican diplomacy. The second chapter discusses John Paul II's foreign travels, their general choreography and most important protocol and security issues. The third chapter explains the tasks of preparation, organization and management, while in the fourth chapter the reaction to the papal visit and the significance of the event are presented.
These chapters tell us about the long, arduous and demanding work of the state and church representatives behind the scenes preparing and organising a smooth visit, ensuring the Holy Father's safety, therefore the author has rightfully written that "*as soon as the aircraft left the Budapest airport, local security personnel were able to sigh in relief, as they were no longer responsible for the Pope's safety."*

The Pope's visit was not only in the center of the attention of the Hungarian believers and citizens, but was also in the focus of Central Europe's citizens and moreover, it attracted the attention of the world's press for a few days.

At the end of the book, according to the evaluation of the visit:" *the days of the Papal visit were a difficult but unforgettable period, during which they would have found themselves facing unmanageable problems during both preparations and the actual visit if not for the assistance of Hungarian state organizations. Thanks to the sacrifices and expertise of Hungarians, he wrote, the Vatican Press Office and all reporters received enormous help in their work.*"

This book is not only an interesting manuscript that explores the antecedents of the papal visit but it is also a professional analysis especially useful for those working in high-level event organisation and could be utilized as a guiding tool to help understand the organisational, security and protocol related issues of such elaborate visits

About the authors

János SALLAI

Dr. habil János Sallai, retired Border Guard colonel, currently works as professor at Kodolányi János University College. Graduated from the Miklós Zrínyi Military Academy in 1992 as boarder guard. Two years later he received his dr. univ. degree, with a thesis titled: "*Hungary's borders on the maps from the Conquest to 1947.*" In 2002 he obtained his PhD degree, his thesis this time was written under the title: "*Hungary's state borders and the historic relations of the Hungarian ethnic borders*". The habilitation process took also place at the University of Debrecen, six years later with the scientific work of: "*The Hungarian state border surveillance and ethnic frontier history"*. During his research and educational work the author also served as border officer until the day of his retirement in 2006.