

Pázmány Péter Catholic University  
Postgraduate Institute of Canon Law

Theses of the PhD Dissertation on

*“Visitatio canonica”*

*at the*

*Parish of Gyula*

*(between 1715 and 1993)*

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## I. FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE PARTICULAR RESEARCH FIELD, QUESTIONS AND METHODS

The institution of *the visitatio canonica* is the ancient practice of the Church. Visiting the parishes, the bishop faces with the practice of handing on the faith, meets the pastors and the believers. In the beginning, until the system of parishes was founded, the bishop knew every believer, who lived in the town and he directly controlled the life of their souls. With the growth of the population, and with the establishment of the villages, it became necessary that the helpers of the bishop continue the tasks the bishop could not carry on personally. So with the establishment of the system of parishes, the life changed completely.

Most believers lived far away from the bishop. The bishop did not take part in the everyday life as he had other jobs to do as well. He had to take part in the operation of the state. He gave his helpers the job of controlling the parishes. So the deanship came into existence, who got the job of the bishop, and controlled the school and the life of parishes. He also carried out church and court tasks.

After the first millennium, the *Decretum Gratiani* strengthened the responsibility of visitation as the responsibility and obligation of the bishops. The bishop had to take visits every year; he could ask for help only if he was ill. He had to visit the monasteries too. As the obligation of the visitatio and the faith weakened, the Council of Trent summarized the practices of the previous ages again, and appointed that the parish life should be examined: from the faith and moral discipline of the clergy, through the religious lives of the believers, to the maintenance of the church buildings.

In our country, the visitations were impossible especially in the areas occupied by the Turkish. It became significant again after the relief fights. These records give not only the description of the faith life but that of the whole social life as well.

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century the visitations became formal in many dioceses. There were places where people only had to fill in a form and post it.

With the appearance of the CIC (1917) which summarized the old traditions and determined the time of the visits in five years, it became important again in the tasks of the bishops.

The bishops had to visit his diocese, if he was ill, he could ask for help from his helpers. He had to pay attention to the fact that he should go everywhere during five years.

The CIC repeated the previous canons, but on the basis of the doctrines of the second Vatican Council, the pastoral aim of the visits was strengthened. Pope John Paul II writes to the bishops that they should give the administrative control to their

workmates, and they should put emphasis on the relationship of the pastor and the believers.

## II. DISCOVERED ANSWERS FOR OUR SCIENTIFIC QUESTIONS BASED ON THE WRITTEN SOURCES OF THE PARISH OF GYULA

Our research has intended to introduce – through the history of parish Gyula – how the life of the parish changed from its establishment to 1993, till the alteration of the borders of the dioceses.

1. The first establishment of the parish has disappeared. It was first mentioned in 14<sup>th</sup> century. This time there was a flourishing parish in Gyula. The parish had many lands. The village of Apát was completely in the ownership of the parish. Franciscans were settled down by the landlord in the town. The begins had houses as well. The church of the parish belonged to the biggest churches of the country, it was 50m long and 18m broad. Five architectural periods could be shown by the excavation. The Franciscans' church was not too much smaller than the parish churches. Here two architectural periods could be shown. Besides, four smaller churches or chapels could be found in the city. Only the chapel in the castle was preserved for the next generations. In the Medieval schools worked too, where the students were well instructed in Latin. György Szerémi, who later gave the description of the country, including Gyula in his book which was studied in our research.

2. With the appearance of the reformation in the city, the number of the catholic believers decreased, but they were present in the town until the Turkish arrived in Gyula. The spread of the reformation was in connection with the fights against the Turkish. The bishops had no possibility to preserve the faith in their dioceses as they were busy with the affairs of the country. During the 133-year Turkish occupation, there lived catholic believers especially in Gyula. They went to masses to Váradi, and then Jesuit monks visited them. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the catholic faith life disappeared till the liberation of the town in 1696.

3. After the liberation from the Turkish control, Hungarian settlers could not settle down in Gyula because of the disorganized political situation. Only after the Rákóczi War of Independence in 1715 came the first catholic settlers being led by licenciate János Szatmári. This time the second establishment of the parish took place. The area got into the ownership of the court deliverer János György Harruckern. He became the advowee of the parish. He cared for the settling of new inhabitants. He settled down German-speaking catholic people in the town in 1724, but in a separated part of the town. The church was common with the Hungarian believers, who got the church created from the Turkish mosque when they arrived. The mosque was likely to be the Saint Elek chapel. Short after the church proved to be too small, so it

was pulled down and the landlord had a bigger one built. However, about 40 years later, it also proved to be small because of the increasing number of the believers. That is why János Harruckern had the present church built from 1777 to 1779.

4. The pastoral care of the believers was the task of the rector, but later the German-speaking believers wanted a German-speaking priest; this time the profession of the chaplain was created. The catholic school started not much after the settlement as the cantor had to deal with notarial tasks. The first canonica visitatio of the parish took place in 1725, but there is no records left about it. The bishop of Várad regularly visited the parish and confirmed too. After the extinction of the Harruckern family, the avowson came down to the Wenckheim family. The advowee and the believers cared for the rector and the chaplain. The job of the cantor included the education. A famous teacher of the Catholic Church was Ambrus Petik, who published a book about the description of Békés county in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in the language of students. Ferenc Erkel's father also worked as a cantor-teacher in Némethváros. With the increasing number of the believers, the second and the third chaplain job had to be established. There were several tragedies in the life of the parish after the re-settlement: plague, locusts, hail, fire in 1801, flood in 1854 and cholera.

5. In the life of the parish more significant pastors were present. The first one was István Ravusz, who became the prey of the plague in 1738 while he was looking after the people suffering from the same disease. Another important person was Jakab Hidassy, who cared for the poor. Benedek Göndöcs, who cared for the mankind, dealt with everything, from archaeology to bee-keeping, and helped his believers. He always gave money to the poor.

6. The believers of Némethváros wanted a separate parish for themselves from the beginning. They had possibilities three times, but they always failed because of some reason. They did not manage to get a separate parish, but they got their own church. After long precautions with the financial support of the diocese's authority, the new church was built in the heart of Némethváros in 1866. The people of Gyula longed for a catholic grammar school in their town. After many trials the first secondary school was established in 1905. The World War I affected the believers, especially those, who had hero dead in their families. At the end of the war the bells of the churches were taken away with military aim. As a result of the Trianon treaty, the Diocese of Várad divided into two parts. The Holy See gave the charge of controlling the Hungarian part to apostolic leaders.

7. At the end of the war, Vilmos Apor became the rector of the town, who led the parish with great pastoral enthusiasm. He cared for the poor, the catholic schools, and he settled down male and female monasteries in the town. He was called the rector of the poor. He spent 23 years in Gyula as a rector, which was

significant for everybody. In 1941 the pope appointed him a bishop. He showed his love towards Gyula with the fact that he became a bishop in the mother church of Gyula on 24<sup>th</sup> February 1941. On the last days of the war he died as a bishop while he was defending the women.

8. The World War II and its consequences affected the later life of the parish and the believers. In 1944 people of Jewish origin – among them catholic people as well – were taken to concentration camps. Only few of them survived. In January 1945 more than five hundred German catholic believers were dragged to the Soviet Union, among them several died in concentration camps. With the growing power of the communism the church lands supporting the maintenance of schools were socialized. Church schools were brought under the control of the state too. The catechesis was restricted. They tried to restrict the power of the Church. In May 1948 Maria-days were organized in Gyula with the leadership of the cardinal of Mindszent.

9. The institution of the *visitatio canonica* is very old, but it gives the parishes the possibility of visiting, which helps the bishops fulfil their tasks. In our modern days the telephone and the Internet significantly help the pastoral tasks, but it is essential for the rector and the believers, the bishop and his priests to meet personally.

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#### MY SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS IN THIS RESEARCH FIELD

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