

Ecclesiastical Remedies for the Uncertainties of Everyday Life

Introduction

Dániel Bárh 

Special editor of the block

The MTA-ELTE Lendület (“Momentum”) Historical Folkloristics Research Group organized a separate panel at the 16th Congress of SIEF (Société Internationale d’Ethnologie et de Folklore), the world’s largest ethnological and folklore organization, which took place in Brno, Czech Republic, in June 2023.

The panel *Ecclesiastical Remedies for the Uncertainties of Everyday Life – Religious Services Offered by the Lower Clergy in Past and Present* looked at the clerical services available for the uncertainties of everyday life from the modern era to the present. The intention of the two panel organizers (Dániel Bárh, ELTE and Judit Kis-Halas, University of Ljubljana) was partly to present the work of the research team and discuss the results with the international academic community. (About the main goals of the research project cp. Bárh, Dániel. “The Lower Clergy and Popular Culture. Introductory Remarks to a Current Research Project.” *Historical Studies on Central Europe* 1, no. 1 [2021]: 177–212.) In addition, the event provided an opportunity to explore future avenues for research and, in this context, possibilities for cooperation with European experts.

Religious services offered by priests and the clergy within the frames of official Christian religious practice amidst the circumstances of the challenges and insecurities of human life in periods of crisis have occupied a special place among religious responses to such situations. This panel focused on the activity of priests and pastors living in the local communities of various denominations over a time scale stretching from the early modern era to the present day. It explored practices and rituals that pastors employed in their attempts to remedy their believers’ bodily and mental sufferings and tackle the individual or collective crises that emerged in the wake of epidemics, climate change or war. Special emphasis was placed on the broad range of local needs and demands on the variety of attitudes of clerical service providers concerning diseases and healing. Religious and lay forms of healing were present as

parallel offers, particularly since the eighteenth century, leading to a constant choice dilemma or even the option of benefitting from both. Besides the clerical services of a medical nature, the former may include several further areas of human (this-worldly) welfare to which priests and pastors have contributed by mediating religious (other-worldly) power (grace), by sanctifying religious objects or by applying blessings and conducting exorcisms.

Below are two excellent presentations from the panel, written by three Czech historians. The first article examines the regional source material of the lower clergy living and working in local communities in a sensitive and problem-oriented way. The question that guides the study is clear: how can we identify in these special reports the 'communication of norms', and what kind of roles did the lower clergy play in that process in the second half of the eighteenth century? The *'cura animarum'* was a very complex form of clerical activity, and religious services were a most important part of that. The article examines those services from the point of view of the supervisors: it focuses on the patrons of the church. The other article examines the complex phenomena of religious healing and religious services in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Czech Lands. The authors use complex source material (archival-primary and printed-secondary sources as well) for an excellent analysis of three fields: the veneration of miraculous images, apparitions from Purgatory, and vampire incidences. The authors argue that these fields were closely connected in that period. Behind all these phenomena, we can clarify the roles of local needs, the functioning of folklore or popular culture, and the responses and attitudes of the clergy toward them.