

LISZT FERENC ACADEMY OF MUSIC
Doctoral School - Church Music department

SZENT VAGY, URAM! (HOLY IS THE LORD!)
CONGREGATIONAL HYMNAL
PHILOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

BY

JUDIT SZABÓ KATONÁNÉ

DLA dissertation abstract

Adviser: TARDY LÁSZLÓ

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Szent vagy, Uram!, the most significant congregational hymn collection which still dominates the Roman Catholic service repertoire, was published in 1931. The publication was edited by Arthur Harmat and Sándor Sik.

The target of this paper is to philologically process all 306+24 songs in the hymnal.

The method of analysis invited not only primary sources but also employed findings of other related areas such as hymnology and ethnomusicology.

I. Music of the Roman Catholic Church; history of the hymn tradition in the first half of the century

In order to understand the genesis of the congregational hymn collection, *Szent vagy, Uram!*, in fact, it is necessary to learn about the history of the hymn. Furthermore, it is important to locate the exact place of the hymn within the liturgy according to the rulings of the church. Research is far from being finished on these questions yet, hence, this study relies mainly on already published information. As a result, findings suggest that the use of hymns was always determined by the church. Congregational hymns were allowed to be sung during both paraliturgy and *missa lectan*. Despite the latter fact, however, hymns started to appear in *missa sollemnis* and *missa cantata* services by replacing liturgical songs.

In Hungary, one of the major effects of the European Cecilian Movement at the end of the nineteenth century was publishing a general and common congregational hymn collection which led to “*Szent vagy, Uram!*”.

Around the turn of the century there were several thousands of printed and handwritten hymnals in use, however, this study only examines the officially approved printed versions. Even though our narrow research scope still contains the widest variety of materials, yet, it is clearly understandable why there was an urgent need of a professionally edited hymn collection.

II. Artur Harmat, the editor.

There is only one memoir published about Artur Harmat. His life and legacy have not been written up yet. After examining the

memoir, his articles, his interviews it is doubtless to say that he was a major figure of church music of his time.

Besides being a composer, educator and church musician he had done major research in church music, on the area of congregational hymns in particular. He published his first edition of hymnals along with Sándor Sik in 1924 called *Lyra Coelestis*. This selection was based on a seventeenth century hymnal with a similar title edited by Gyorgy Náray in 1695. Knowing about his ongoing research and knowledge about the topic, the Hungarian National Cecilian Society and the Catholic Cantors Association commissioned Harmat to edit a common congregational hymn collection.

III. Szent vagy, Uram!, congregational hymnal

In order to make any assumptions about Harmat's method of creating the collection it was necessary to study primary source materials like notes and letters from his own legacy. However, it is not available at any public institutions or libraries. Therefore, after serious research a part of his legacy was found in a private collection. This source contains Harmat's notes on his method of collection as well as notes on selection of hymns for SzVU. Also, there are official and private letters, articles, first drafts which all can be linked to the process of editing the collection. In addition, my research was further challenged since all of these materials mentioned were mixed together with different kind of documents, scores, papers and yet again, all were completely unprocessed.

In spite of the circumstances, there is enough evidence regarding to make conclusions about Harmat's work process and his methodology of selecting hymns. His primary goal was to gather all hymns of past centuries and choose the ones aesthetically worthwhile for the collection. Also, it was necessary to omit contemporary hymns used by Harmat's colleagues, although, according to some documents he needed to favor some of them later. The Cantors Association issued a call for hymns composed by contemporary church musicians to consider inclusion to the collection. Harmat's notes and his original documents showed that he needed to leave these out because of the lack of aesthetic and compositional quality. In fact, because of the numerous, rather poor

quality hymns he decided not to include any newly composed hymn to the collection.

On the other hand, Harmat, along with Sik handled texts more freely. They decided if they found a nice melody with a low quality poem they would exchange the text to a nice one.

In general, they always edited text if it was necessary. Most primary documents on textual material were in the Harmat legacy and only a small portion can be found in the Sik legacy. In this study, however, textual analysis of the hymnal is only mentioned not fully developed.

A small portion of this paper deals with the rather vivid reactions to the appearance of the hymnal. My findings were based on church documents, articles as well as on conversations in Harmat's private letters.

IV. Classification and characteristics of the hymns

After analyzing all songs of the hymnal and a careful investigation of their original sources, it became clear that the collection is mostly based on old Roman Catholic hymnals as opposed to Protestant hymnals (Calvinist). In this study, the hymns are gathered into different classes according to style and groupings of Harmat. Each class described in details with examples. Granted, wonderful collective studies of hymnology were used as case studies.

In addition, research was performed on the relationship between hymns and oral singing traditions. As a result, it is certain that Harmat included a very few orally collected songs. Though, by the time folk song collections were finished, procession of data had not started yet. Here again, he made his main selection based on written sources.

The assumption of collaboration with Kodály is based on published writings of Kodály, on findings of other scholars in the Kodály-Archives as well as on my own research of the Harmat legacy. Conclusively, there is no doubt that Kodály himself proofread the songs; however, there is no evidence whatsoever neither on his opinion nor on his input for the subject matter.

V. The life of the collection until today.

After the SzVU was published in 1931 it received mixed reactions. However, this book shortly after its appearance was commonly used and went through several editions within the past half century. It became very popular and was used nationally in Catholic churches. Its first revision started in the 1970's and turned into a new edition in 1985, called "Eneklo Egyhaz" which opened up a new chapter in the history of congregational hymns.

In summary, this study provides a clear view on the methodology and process of how the widely used congregational hymnal was put together by its editors. It is also certain, that standardization and unification of hymns were incompatible with oral folk traditions for both editors. However, further research needs to be done on the role of Kodály and his input on this matter which will be done as soon as the Kodály-Archives will be available for further research.

Also, scholars will understand more on this collection of hymns when investigation of the eighteenth and nineteenth century hymnals will be finished.

The main goal of this study was to gain a deeper understanding on the method of classification of hymns and to find the appropriate place of the hymnal in the history by using all available resources at my disposal.

Publications and talks on the topic:

"The Cecilian Movement in Hungary at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century."
Magyar Egyhazzene XII. Vol. 2-3. (2004/2005) 215-223.

"The road to a common hymnal. Investigation of Roman Catholic Hymnals used at the beginning of the twentieth century." Talk.
"Eneklo Egyhaz", The Twentieth Anniversary of its Appearance. Conference. 12.08. 2005. Budapest, Hungary.