

**Pánczél Hegedűs, János. 2022. *Nem forradalom, hanem szabadságharc: Mindszenty József 1956-os helyzete és tevékenysége* (Not a Revolution, but a Fight for Freedom: The Position and Activities of József Mindszenty in 1956). Budapest: L'Harmattan. 390 pp.**

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It is perhaps not an exaggeration to say that the figure of Cardinal József Mindszenty, prince primate of Hungary, commanded considerable interest during his life and after his death. The cardinal's charismatic persona and his life journey amid the historical storms of the twentieth century serve as a point of reference for all Hungarians. Professional historical research into his role in Hungary could start only after the fall of communism, in 1989, until which time the dominant, Marxist narrative within Hungary was counterbalanced only by works published by Hungarian émigrés abroad. Over the past three decades, historians including János Pánczél Hegedűs have sought to outline a picture of Mindszenty that examines the cardinal's life without bias and based on facts. In his 2022 book *Nem forradalom, hanem szabadságharc: Mindszenty József 1956-os helyzete és tevékenysége* (Not a Revolution, but a Fight for Freedom: The Position and Activities of József Mindszenty in 1956), Pánczél Hegedűs presents the results of many years of research. In its thematic focus and structure, the book builds on an earlier edition of the same work, but the new version provides a broader overview of political history while discussing in more detail some questions answered by its author's recent archival research. The book's virtue is that its approach combines political history with the history of ideas, and even extends into the field of political philosophy when discussing certain concepts (revolution, counterrevolution, and the fight for freedom).

Pánczél Hegedűs's main focus is not primarily the 1956 Revolution, but rather the interpretation of the role of the prince primate in public law, which then leads him to the seemingly narrow topic of examining the history and impact of József Mindszenty's four days freedom during the revolution. Even for Mindszenty's contemporaries, it was not easy to keep track of the accelerated events, but decisions, encounters, and events during this period had notable consequences both short- and long-term. In the case of Mindszenty, it is of particular relevance to talk about the "concentration" of time, since after his release from house arrest, upon arriving in the capital, he found himself at the epicenter of events. This book gives rich insight into the cardinal's intense, activity-filled days. The author describes meetings he had with old acquaintances, priests, diplomats, politicians, domestic and foreign journalists, and even ordinary people in such depth that behind the figure of the primate emerges the image of a high

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priest who returned to his people after long suffering. Mindszenty related to those who visited him with interest and openness. In the Primate's Palace, in Buda, which still bore the scars of World War II, a wide variety of people waited long hours to ply the returned primate with information, ideas, and suggestions. Indeed, the book's recounting of the extensive social network Joseph Mindszenty came to rely on is among its most compelling aspects.

From the outset, the cardinal used the concept of the "fight for freedom" to interpret events, which he saw as an armed fight of the Hungarian nation against the representatives of the fallen totalitarian regime and the Soviet occupying forces. Until the end of his life, it meant a lot to him that he had been freed from his imprisonment by the people and brought back to Budapest, and that he had not regained his freedom by the grace of the authorities. Behind his preference of the term "fight for freedom" over "revolution" was a conscious decision related to Mindszenty's antirevolutionary attitude, which was justified not only by his previous negative experiences (1918/19; 1944; 1945–48) but also by his perception of politics and public law.

This brings us to the heart of János Pánczél Hegedűs's volume, the political credo of József Mindszenty (26–53), which allows us to discover how the author sees Mindszenty's political character. The most significant part of this creed is the skepticism about and rejection of every form of revolution, for revolutions, by abolishing the existing legal order, had created illegitimate situations in which violence, directed not only against society as a whole but also against the Church in particular, broke out and prevailed. Among the "revolutionary achievements," there are many elements—the use of violence as a tool, the suppression of human rights and freedoms, the nationalization of church institutions and estates, and the destruction of traditional Christian values—with which József Mindszenty could not sympathize even in 1918–19, during his early life as a chaplain, and therefore later on, as he came into conflict with the "revolutionary regimes" of the Arrow Cross and the communist dictatorship.

The primate's major problem with the regimes that fundamentally subverted the political-social system was that, in his view, they overturned the order given by God—which he saw embodied mostly in the institution of what he saw as a transcendently legitimated monarchy. This is also the genesis of his vaunted "legitimism"; i.e., his adherence to retaining Hungary's monarchic system, which can be better described as dynastic patriotism, since he remained loyal to the Habsburgs until the death of Charles IV, the last "apostolic" king. Thus, his sense of identification with the institution of the kingdom did not merely reflect his sympathy with a particular political system, but embodied for him the functional structure in which the transcendent was most likely to be able to manifest itself. The primate's political conception also emphasized total unity with Rome (the Holy See) and with the current Pope, and absolute loyalty to the Church, which he considered important to experience both theoretically and practically.

Mindszenty was also sensitive to the needs of the destitute and the poor and attempted to implement the social teaching of certain popes (e.g., the *Rerum Novarum* encyclical issued by Pope Leo XIII in 1891). Sympathetic to the Christian socialist views that had emerged since the second half of the nineteenth century, he made it a priority to reach out to those in need, as he did in October 1956, when the reception and distribution of foreign aid to the country was an integral part of his public activities.

The freed cardinal was assisted by his secretary, Albert Egon Turchányi, who was later severely tortured by the authorities under the regime of János Kádár. In addition to the well-known events of the days of the revolution—e.g., the seizure of the State Office for Church Affairs, the dismissal of the "peace priests" who had collaborated with the communist authorities

and their reassignment to their dioceses—the author also discusses certain less researched topics. For example, we learn that Mindszenty shared with his fellow bishops the text of the radio he was to give the nation on November 3, which would be his first address to the Hungarian people since his conviction years earlier. In that speech, he would have outlined his vision of Hungary's development. Only those bishops and archbishops attended this pre-radio address meeting who remained loyal to Mindszenty, among them the bishop of Vác, József Pétery, who had been recently released from internment; the bishop of Székesfehérvár, Lajos Shvoy; and the archbishop of Kalocsa, József Grósz. Unfortunately, no official record of this meeting has survived, which is why the events can only be reconstructed from the memories of the participants. It is to the author's credit that he did nonetheless manage to reconstruct the meeting from the memoirs and to point out that there was tension between the participants, not exclusively due to the cardinal's evident stress, exacerbated by days of work and little sleep. This is regrettable because it was precisely those bishops in attendance who, to a greater or lesser extent, had suffered mistreatment at the hands of the authorities similar to that of Mindszenty. Despite the tense atmosphere, the prelates were able to reconcile their positions, in the process dealing a severe blow to the "peace priest" movement.

In this book, János Pánczél Hegedűs shows in rich detail how the political movements that gained new strength in Hungary's short-lived days of freedom in the autumn of 1956 developed ties with Mindszenty, and in particular, whether they sympathized with him or not. At dawn on November 4, the Soviet invasion caught Hungary unexpectedly, and, like so many of his compatriots, the cardinal had a short time to decide his fate. He sought supposedly temporary refuge at the United States embassy, near the parliament building, unaware that this would mark the beginning of another ordeal, one that would last nearly a decade and a half.