

Pajzs és kard. Bangha Béla élete és eszmeisége [*Shield and Sword: The Life and Idealism of Béla Bangha*]. By Tibor Klestenitz. [Hungaria Æterna.] (Budapest: Századvég Könyvkiadó. 2020. Pp. 432. HUF 2.790. ISBN: 978-6-15-516463-7.)

Tibor Klestenitz's monograph on Béla Bangha (1880–1940), a Jesuit priest who had a significant impact on Hungarian Christian society and Catholic public life, and who was one of the prominent personalities of last century's Hungarian Catholicism, examines both his personality and his idealism. The volume outlines church, press, and intellectual history based on sources related to Bangha. Readers can learn about the opinions of the preacher and publicist on various social and political issues. For his book, Klestenitz conducted research on press history, examining both Hungarian and foreign media.

The title of the volume, "Shield and Sword" [*Pajzs és kard*], refers to the column edited by Bangha in the pages of *Magyar Kultúra* [Hungarian Culture] and alludes to the priest's self-perception. As the editor of the column, Bangha discussed current social issues and sought to convince the intelligentsia that the Church could provide answers to contemporary problems. In the introduction, the author reviews the literature that has been written so far about Bangha's life and work, with particular attention to the significance of the rather subjective book published in 1941 by Zoltán Nyisztor, Bangha's former student.

The book follows Bangha's life (b. 1880) from his entry into the Society of Jesus at the age of 15 in 1895 to his death in 1940. Before World War I, Bangha grew up in a middle class family in Nitra (today in Slovakia). His father, István Bangha, a lawyer, was engaged in the struggle to make the voice of Catholics heard in the Hungarian national discourse, which was dominated by Liberals and Protestants. Bangha had health problems and engaged as a journalist at an early age. From 1910, he was mostly active in Budapest. He had extraordinary organizational skills and helped to create a powerful Catholic press with a strong circulation. Among other media, he founded the very influential, intellectual journal *Magyar Kultúra* in 1913, which he edited until his death.

After the end of World War I and through the breakdown of the monarchy, Revolutions (1918/19) and Counter-Revolution in Hungary, Bangha spent a few years in Rome (1923–26), where he organized the International Secretariat of Congregations of Mary and was involved in the founding of the International Catholic Press Union. After his return in 1926, Bangha, who had legitimist convictions, resumed his leading role in the Catholic press organization. The last chapter covers the period between 1926 and his death in 1940. During this time, Bangha was involved in a number of discussions on Hungarian Protestants and the Jewish community. Although he saw the latter negatively, he rejected the racial antisemitic views that became more prevalent among the extreme right-wing groups that were gaining strength during that period.

Despite his leukemia (since 1935), Bangha remained active in various projects and events until his death. He edited the *Katolikus Lexikon* [Catholic Lexicon] and was the main organizer of the International Eucharistic Congress in Budapest in

1938, for which he wrote the hymn *Győzelemről énekeljen* [Sing of Triumph], which was also used at the world event in 2021. Bangha also played a role in organizing Hungarian Actio Catholica, becoming the vice-president of the movement, which was established in Hungary in 1932.

The book presents a nuanced and comprehensive portrayal of Bangha. It shows why Bangha was known in Hungary as the “apostle of the press.” The book is well structured and provides valuable insights into Bangha’s life, work, and views.

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GYÖRGY SÁGI

Titus Brandsma—Briefe an die Familie. Edited by Elisabeth Hense and Esther de Jel. (Münster, Germany: Aschendorff Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, 2021. Pp. 529. 59€. hardback. ISBN 9783402121436.)

Born into a fervently Catholic family in the Netherlands in 1881, Anno Sjoerd Brandsma’s path was set. Of his five siblings, three older sisters and his younger brother entered religious life. Anno honored his father by taking his name, Titus, when he took his vows. When Nazi ideology spread to the Netherlands, Father Titus Brandsma spoke out against it. As a professor and journalist, he used his bully pulpits to criticize Nazi ideology, policies, and practices. As editor of a Catholic press, he refused to publish Nazi propaganda. He helped set up a clandestine seminary and aided Dutch Jews. The Nazis, once aware of his resistance, arrested and imprisoned him. He died of a lethal injection in Dachau concentration camp in 1942. The Catholic Church beatified him in 1985 and canonized him in 2022.

Theologian and associate professor of spirituality Elisabeth Hense, along with Esther de Jel, edited the collection of letters from Titus Brandsma to his family members. The editors chose to group the available letters based on where Fr. Titus was living. Each group begins with an overview of where he was, what he was doing, and key events happening at the time, all of which puts his letters in context.

Of 292 letters in this collection, his wartime letters to his family begin with no. 254. Thus, this is not a tome about Titus Brandsma, the Nazi resister. The volume shows the reader what kind of man Brandsma was. Other than one letter he and his brother wrote to their mother when they were teenagers, the collection holds letters he wrote once he entered religious life as a Carmelite. Early on, he signed his letters “Fr. Titus,” but as time passed, he became less formal and signed his letters “Titus,” “your child Titus,” or “your brother Titus.” He wrote most of the letters to his parents and his married sister and her family.

His tone is matter-of-fact as he writes about his daily life. One can see how much he cared about each of his family members. He appears upbeat even when writing about his health or comforting a family member dealing with a death. None of Brandsma’s letters to his family give any sense of his opposition to the Nazis. He did not want his family to worry about him, a phrase he often used.