

LAUDATION

on the occasion of bestowing the

JUSTITIA REGNORUM FUNDAMENTUM AWARD

on Albin Juhász-Laczik OSB and the Child Protection Programme of Pannonhalma

Albin Juhász-Laczik OSB, headmaster of the Benedictine High School of Pannonhalma, graduated from Pannonhalma in 1994, and went on to study theology in Switzerland and the United States of America. He professed final vows at the age of twenty-six. He obtained an M.A. degree in History, and English Language at the Faculty of Humanities of ELTE, after which he earned a Ph.D. in Law at Pázmány Péter Catholic University. He has been teaching at the Benedictine High School of Pannonhalma since 2007, having served there as a form teacher and dormitory teacher, then as deputy headmaster from 2011 to 2018. He is the editor of *Pannonhalmi Szemle* as well as the editor-in-chief of *Pannonhal-MA* magazine – the latter playing a key role in the management of the school's alumni network. In addition to that, he is also the leader of the Gregorian choir of the friar community and teaches Gregorian music theory and practice in the theological studies programme offered at Pannonhalma.

One of the most prestigious grammar schools of Hungary is embraced by the walls of the Benedictine Archabbey of Pannonhalma. Pannonhalma, as we know it today, has been an educational site for more than a thousand years, even if not in the same form as the present-day school founded between the two World Wars. Thus Father Albin has been managing the grammar school of a monastery that looks back on a thousand-year-long history. The Benedictine grammar school operates in the spirit of the unity of tradition and reform. At the institution, mornings are dedicated to the teaching of academic subjects, but the Benedictine friars also convey to the youth entrusted to their care a certain lifestyle, mentality, and values in harmony with the Benedictine worldview: i.e. the appreciation of community. Education rests on several pillars at the Benedictines, and high quality education is only one of them. That is why this grammar school can maintain such high standards: the Benedictines focus on the individual as a whole.

The way children are treated in a society is an indication of the social sensitivity of society and the level of development of democracy. The ratification of the UN Child Rights Convention, which took place thirty years ago, was a major step forward in the field of the protection of child rights. Besides inalienable human rights, the States Parties to the Convention identify the protection of special children's rights as their main orientation. In consideration of the fact that children do not yet have physical and intellectual maturity, they require particular protection and care.

However, the information revolution of our days tends to intensify – rather than attenuate – the dangers threatening minors. That is why Pope Francis has a genuine concern for children's protection and also why he convened a pontifical commission – shortly after he had assumed office in March 2013 – for the protection of minors. The Holy Father set up this advisory board so that the Church would become a safe home for children, teenagers and vulnerable adults. To quote Pope Francis's words: "... today the Church bears an especially heavy obligation to commit Herself to the protection of minors and their protection in an ever more profound and forward-looking manner..." (excerpt from Pope Francis's address delivered in February 2019 at the Vatican conference on "The Protection of Minors in the Church").

The Pannonhalma Child Protection Programme, spearheaded by Father Albin, is a project of key importance. According to Father Albin, child protection is not a task but an operational culture. The systemic child protection model elaborated at the Benedictine High School of Pannonhalma can provide encouragement and motivation for other institutions as well. In the framework of this programme, the

Benedictines created a protection group of three to hear eventual complaints and conduct a primary investigation of cases of harassment and abuse that anyone can turn to. It has become clear that the mere fact of bringing these problems out in the open solves the majority of them. Moreover, prevention and awareness-raising are also paramount. One of the cornerstones of prevention is to familiarize children with the three “mantras”: 1. Watch out for bad feelings. 2. Have the courage to step out of any situation that feels uncomfortable. 3. Don’t keep a bad secret, keep going until you find someone who will listen to you.

The Benedictines of Pannonhalma have made a long – sometimes painful yet elevating – journey from recognizing school harassment to transforming the functioning of the whole community and establishment. The elaboration of an operation mindful of children’s safety affects numerous segments of the functioning of an institution or a community, and it forces those involved to face up to some fundamental and highly personal issues. Not only did this confrontation bring new lessons regarding the functioning of their own community and school, but it also spurred the Benedictines and the school management to see the question of child protection in a broader context – i.e. what the protection of children means in the Church and in state institutions today.

As a next step, the Benedictine High School of Pannonhalma elaborated – in cooperation with Hintalovon Child Rights Foundation – the “Safe Schools” child protection policies and guidelines based on the experience gathered from school cooperation projects, which will be made available free of charge for Hungarian educational institutions as well. The core idea of the child protection policies is to enable organizations working with children – schools, sports clubs, child protection institutions – to create a safe environment that protects children from becoming victims of harassment or abuse. The policies offer guidance in recognizing child abuse and endangerment, facilitate efficient problem management on the level of the institutions, and create a transparent framework for the institutional handling and follow-up of cases of violence against children.

Through the *Justitia Regnorum Fundamentum* Award, the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights wishes to recognize the exemplary actions of Albin Juhász-Laczik OSB and the entire Benedictine community in the field of child protection. Let us extend our heartfelt congratulations to Albin Juhász-Laczik OSB, and wish him further success in the education and upbringing of the generations to come.

Budapest, 9 December 2019