

Hungarian martyrs of the Church of the Faith

II.

Edited by:
Attila Petheő – Ferenc Tömösközi



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J. Selye University
Faculty of Reformed Theology

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Komárom, 2023

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The volume is part of the VEGA 1/0083/20 “The Reformed Christian Church in Slovakia during the years of socialism (1948-1989)”.

Publikácia vychádza v rámci riešenia projektu Vega 1/0083/20 –
„Reformovaná kresťanská cirkev na Slovensku v rokoch socializmu

ISBN 978-80-8122-493-5

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Priests and pastors in the shadow of dictatorship

László Bukovszky¹

Now for the second time, the Department of Historical Sciences of the Faculty of Reformed Theology of Selye János University is organising a conference entitled “Hitvalló egyház magyar mártírjai” (The Hungarian martyrs of the confessing Church), with the undisguised aim of engaging in a dialogue on the dictatorships our historic churches have suffered.²

I consider this initiative to be very important and praiseworthy. The past more than a century in the geographical area I have defined - by which I mean historical Hungary and then Czechoslovakia, which was created on its ruins - has presented the historical Churches with many challenges and trials.

The history of the churches in the 20th century has been influenced by a number of social and political factors. These factors have placed the historic churches in a new social position and function, compared to the previous period. For this reason, I believe that the chronology of events is relatively complex and can be approached from several perspectives. In the reality of the Hungarian Highlands, it differs in several points from the chronology of the general Hungarian church history. Not to mention the fact that in some cases the aspects of the individual historical churches appeared in a completely different shade or were different from one epoch to the other or within the epochs. Nevertheless, I will try to outline the social and political process through which we arrive at the end of the thread of thought given in the title of this lecture: How the Church(es) and their representatives came to stand in the shadow of dictatorships.³

1 PhDr László Bukovszky, Commissioner for Minorities in the Government of the Slovak Republic, historian-archivist.

2 For the written version of the papers presented at the first conference on 4th October, see: Attila Pethő – Ferenc Tömösközi (eds.): *Kik Krisztusban hunytak el, boldogok. Hitvalló egyház magyar mártírjai*. Komárno, 2022.

3 The focus of my writing is mainly on the Catholic Church.

When we talk about dictatorships, it appears to us, in a slightly simplified way, the brief Nazi rule of the Arrow Cross, or the communist dictatorship/socialist regime that gradually built up and consolidated its power after 1945. But if we take a closer look at what lies behind this point, then of course it also includes the brief episode following the change of supreme power in 1918-19, represented by the Bolshevik anti-church terror of the Tanácsköztársaság (Soviet Republic).⁴ And then the deaths and tragedies of our fellow Israelites/Jews are not even mentioned. The fact that Marxist dialectics rejected all forms of religion as idealistic endeavours, and historical materialism portrayed the churches as instruments of spiritual oppression, was at the heart of Bolshevik and, to some extent, Nazi and Arrow Cross church theory. The entire history of the church in the twentieth century has to be seen in a broader social context in order to understand the processes of the short reign of the Arrow Cross in the twentieth century, but especially the almost half century of communist repression. In this way, the trials and tribulations of our churches, our priests, our pastors, and their individual perseverance and suffering can become more nuanced.

The Catholic Church lived for nine centuries in close contact with the secular powers during the “Empire of St Stephen”. In social terms, the “*Extra ecclesiam non est vita*” was valid statement. However, this was counterbalanced by a growing emphasis on the declining influence of religion, and therefore the historic churches, on society in the second half of the 19th century. Part of this process was the Church Policy Laws of 1894–95.⁵

Not only symbolically, the separation of throne and altar continued. The Catholic Church was pushed out of the traditional political arena of the so-called ‘state church’ at the beginning of the 20th century. In fact, on the basis of the above-mentioned ecclesiastical-political laws, this was served by the institutionalisation of a new order of state and church competences. Many contemporaries considered the domestic social order and the foundations of

4a See for example: András Fejérdy (ed.): *A Tanácsköztársaság és az egyházak. Egyházpolitika, keresztényüldözés, egyházi útkeresés*. Szent István Társulat, Budapest. 2020.

5 Miklós K. Török Mihály: *A magyar egyházpolitikai harc története. Az 1847–48. pozsonyi országgyűléstől 1895-ig*. Szent István Társulat, Budapest. 1932, 5–8.; Lóránd Boleratzky: *Az egyházpolitikai törvények evangélikus szemszögből nézve*. In: *Iustum Aequum Salutare*, 2008/2. szám. 17–21.

the throne to have been fundamentally shaken by this process. To sum up what happened in one sentence: The modern separation of church and state in Hungarian society had partially taken place by 1918, but the intertwining of the two remained.⁶

A different situation arose at the end of 1918 (but not only from the national/minority point of view) with the fall of the monarchy and the establishment of the new state of Czechoslovakia. The period immediately after the creation of the new state - Czechoslovakia - is counted as the period of anti-church attacks. Of course, church history was also affected by the political events of the Trianon effect.⁷

Although the constitution of the so-called Masaryk Republic guaranteed freedom of religion, the Czech political elite regarded the high priests of the Catholic Church as subjects and supporters of the Habsburg dynasty. This was not the only reason why they sought to loosen the link between church and state. Covert anticlericalism and anti-religion also had an ethnic dimension in the historical parts of the country (Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia) and in Slovensko, with anti-German and anti-Hungarian sentiments. It was in Felvidék that Hungarian Catholicism - and the Reformed Church - suffered the first serious insults. The demarcation of the southern border of the country erased the boundaries of several existing Catholic dioceses and three historic Reformed districts. This weakened not only the enforcement of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, but also the functioning of the church organisation itself.⁸ A concrete form of anti-Hungarianism was the mass dismissal from office of high priests and other church figures (bishops, monks, priests, reverends), the refusal to recognise their citizenship and their expulsion. See, for example, the personal fates of Count Vilmos Batthyany, Bishop of Nitra; Farkas Radnai, Bishop of Banská Bystrica; László Báthy, Deputy Bishop of

6 György Gyarmati: Egyház, sok rendszer és a történelmi idő. A 20. századi magyar egyháztörténet nézőpontjából. In: Bánkuti Gábor – Gyarmati György (ed.): *Csapdában. Tanulmányok a katolikus egyház történetéből, 1945–1989*. Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történelmi Levéltára – L' Harmattan, Budapest, 2010. 15–16.

7 György Sági (ed.): *A magyar katolicizmus és Trianon*. Budapest, 2023.; István Zombori (ed.): *Trianon és az egyházak*. Budapest, 2022.

8 Alfréd Somogyi: „A babiloni vizek mellől jöttünk, hozzád Istenünk...” A felvidéki reformátusság helyzete az 1918-1923 közötti időszakban. In: István Zombori (ed.): *Trianon és az egyházak*. Budapest, 2022. 43–44.

Trnava; Sándor Párvy, Bishop of Spiš;⁹ or Kálmán Révész, Reformed Bishop of Cistibiscan Church District.¹⁰

The historic churches in Slovakia - also in the Hungarian context - were able to build and develop socially and institutionally in spite of these negative factors. For example, in the summer of 1923, the Synod of Levice proclaimed the establishment of the General Reformed Church of Slovensko and Subcarpatia (but the state registration did not take place), and in 1925 the Theological Seminary in Lučenec and in 1935 the Reformed Teacher Training College in Komárno were founded.¹¹

With regard to the role of the Catholic Church in society, it should be noted that the relationship between the Czechoslovak state, based on civil principles, and the Church was defined by the concordat (*modus vivendi*) concluded with the Holy See in the autumn of 1927. This concordat was relatively short-lived. Essentially, it regulated relations not between the Holy See but between the Czechoslovak state (Foreign Minister E. Beneš) and the Catholic Church in Czechoslovakia.¹²

The first Vienna arbitration brought to an end the era of civil Czechoslovakia of 1918-19 and the first series of ecclesiastical insults. The events of twenty years earlier were positively influenced by the ecclesiastical consequences of

9 András Gianone: Az országos katolikus nagygyűlések és Trianon. In: György Sági (ed.): *A magyar katolicizmus és Trianon*. Budapest, 2023. 31–32.; Margit Beke: Az esztergomi érsekség 1918–1924 között. In: István Zombori (ed.): *Trianon és az egyházak*. Budapest, 2022. 417.

10 Somogyi: *op.cit.*, In: István Zombori (ed.): i.m. 47–49.

11 See: József Puntigán: *A Losonci Teológiai Szeminárium (1925-1939)*. Plectum, 2005.; Attila Petheő – Ferenc Tömösközi: Az oktatási rendszer a két világháború közötti időszakban. In: Zsolt Buza – Zsolt Czike – Attila Lévai – Jákob Széles – Ferenc Tömösközi – Attila Petheő (ed.): *Száz év. A Szlovákiai Református Keresztény Egyház története az önállósulástól napjainkig*. Kulturális és Közművelődési Központ, 2023. 84–86.

12 See: Peter Zubko (ed.): *Modus vivendi v histórii katolícké cirkve v Československu*. Sborník z mezinárodni konferencie. Olomouc, Společnost pro dialog církve a státu, 2005.; Natália Švecová: *Politické súvislosti snáh o vytvorenie samostatnej rímskokatolíckej cirkevnej provincie na území Slovenska v období 1. ČSR*. Slovenská politologická revue, Číslo 4, volume IX., 2009. 118–150; Balázs Csíky: *Szerédi Jusztinián, Magyarország hercegprímása*. Budapest, 2018. 194–195.

the territorial revision of November 1938.¹³ It was also on the church line that the return to the Hungarian reality of the Trianon began. The social influence of the Christian churches was traditionally strong. They legitimised the Christian-nationalist course of the Horthy regime. That is why the role of the churches in society increased after unification. It was very different from before 1918 and during the 'Czech' period. Gyula Szekfű's statement that the situation in Hungary after 1919 was a neo-baroque one is well known.¹⁴ In the meantime, World War II had broken out, and the country, which was on the verge of military collapse, was invaded by the Germans in the spring of 1944. In October, Szálasi's Arrow Cross horde came to power. This was the first time in church-state relations - apart from the period of the Soviet Republic, which is not discussed here - that the Arrow Cross regime made support for the operation of churches conditional on acceptance of and service to the National Socialist movement. Simultaneously, the Arrow Cross authorities required priests to swear an oath of loyalty to the Arrow Cross regime, especially to national leader Ferenc Szálasi.¹⁵ Church leaders faced a historic test with the confinement of Jews in ghettos, their deportation to death camps and the atrocities that followed the Arrow Cross coup. It is a well-known fact that the Christian churches repeatedly emphasised the illegality and illegitimacy of the Arrow Cross regime. On several occasions, if not centrally, then individually, many of them spoke out against the terrible atrocities committed against the Jews. In many cases, however, these have been belated and desperate attempts.¹⁶ Several priests and pastors took an active stand. But it is also true that many church people became servants of the short-lived Arrow Cross regime.¹⁷ Several priests were arrested, mistreated or intimidated by the

13 László Bukovszky: A felvidéki katolikusok helyzete 1945–1948 között. In: Erzsébet Pilipkó – Sándor Fogl Krisztián (ed.): *Hitélet és vallásos kultúra a Kárpát-medencében* 11. Laczkó Dezső Múzeum, Veszprém, 2021. 123–124.

14 Péter Erdősi: Barokk és neobarokk. Két fogalom kölcsönhatása Magyarországon. In: *Korall* (23), 2003. march. 155–156.

15 Margit Balogh: Mindszenty József veszprémi püspök nyilas fogságban. In: Péter Miklós (ed.): *Újragondolt negyedszázad: Tanulmányok a Horthy-korszakról*. Szeged, 2010. 240.

16 Jenő Gergely: *A katolikus egyház története Magyarországon 1919–1945*. Pannonica, 1999. 119.

17 See more example: Károly Hetényi Varga: *Pásztor volt vagy béres? A magyar katolikus*

Arrow Cross for ideological reasons, including Bishop József Mindszenty of Veszprém and Bishop Lajos Shvoy of Székesfehérvár. But there were also others: József Király, the parish priest of Čičov, a former member of the House of Representatives, who managed to escape the march to Dachau by an adventurous route.¹⁸ The Second World War ended in spring 1945. The fact that the region of East-Central Europe, including Czechoslovakia, which was reconstituted on the basis of the 1937 borders, became part of the Stalinist Soviet sphere of interest completely overshadowed the period after 1945. The nascent Czechoslovak people's democracy guaranteed the free exercise of religion. But it was openly committed to a materialist worldview and atheism. It was deeply suspicious of the historic churches. It had reservations about their role in society, their movable and immovable property, their extensive educational and social institutions, and not least their leaders, their bishops. As in the Soviet sphere, the domestic Communist elite sought to suppress and control the churches.¹⁹ This process took place gradually, step by step, from 1945 onwards. After the coup d'état in February 1948, it became fully open. The political rise of the communists brought with it an unprecedented social situation for the historic churches. It was very different from the previous period. State socialism regarded religion and the church as obsolete. They were to be abolished, even destroyed.²⁰ Because of its strong social roots, it became the enemy number one of the regime. Therefore, it used all existing power structures against it. It classified all religious phenomena as "the consciousness of the fallen world", which it was determined to eradicate, on the basis of Marxist-atheist ideology. To make matters worse, after 1945 the Slovak Catholic clergy was collectively accused of collaborating with the Nazis. The

egyház a Harmaik Birodalom árnyékában. Szent István Kiadó, Budapest, 2012.

18 Károly Hetényi Varga: *Papi sorsok a horogkereszt és a vörös csillag árnyékában I.* Lämpás, Abaliget, 1992. 138.; László Bukovszky: *A Csehszlovákiai Magyar Demokratikus Népi Szövetség és a Mindszenty-per szlovákiai recepciója.* Nemzeti Emlékezet Intézete – Fórum Kisebbségkutató Intézet, Budapest – Somorja, 2016. 50.

19 Máté Gárdonyi: *Túlélés – együttműködés – ellenállás. A katolikus egyház stratégiái a „népi demokráciában”.* In: Bánkuti Gábor – György Gyarmati (ed.): i.m. 31–42., Ivan Petranský, A.: *Cirkevná politika na Slovensku v rokoch 1945–1948.* In: András Kocsis (ed.): *Felekezetek, egyházpolitika, identitás Magyarországon és Szlovákiában 1945 után.* Budapest, 2008, 42–43.

20 György Gyarmati: op. cit., In: Gábor Bánkuti – György Gyarmati (ed.): op.cit. 27.

Hungarian-majority southern part of the country had another peculiarity. The broad social transformation was marked by ethnic and economic exclusion imposed on the Slovak Hungarians on the basis of collective guilt.²¹ In 1945, the Czechoslovak authorities expelled or forced several church dignitaries to leave the country. These included the bishop of Košice, István Madarász, dozens of Catholic priests, and Reformed and Lutheran ministers.²² The Church and its followers were subjected to unprecedented and unrelenting violence from 1945. The Communist Party pursued autocracy with the aim of creating ideological unity. This was achieved by taking total control of society and subjugating it to Marxist ideology. The violent transformation of domestic society took place in several stages. The economic, political, educational and, in short, social influence of the churches was broken and relations with the Holy See were severed, since Rome was considered one of the regime's main foreign enemies. It also placed under state control the financial support of priests and clergy. There was even the possibility of the withdrawal of the priests' licence to practice. Paradoxically, in this way the state was able to exert more influence on the priests and pastors than the Church authorities had.²³

After 1945, in comparison with the previous historical periods mentioned, a completely new situation arose in the relationship between the state and the churches. Whereas the separation of church and state had begun in the last years of the 19th century, in the Czechoslovak Republic the Catholic Church (and not only the Catholic Church) was pushed to the brink of losing its prestige, to put it mildly. The so-called Masaryk democracy did everything in its power to weaken the Catholic Church in society. After 1945, however, the communists realised that this process could be brought to a head not by separating church and state, but by separating church and society. The church's function is only meaningful in a social context. According to this logic, the power that wanted to dominate the Church also wanted to control and supervise all denominations, from the bishop's residence to the village parish. Last but not least, it wanted to keep the Church as far away from the believers

21 László Bukovszky: op.cit. In: Erzsébet Pilipkó – Sándor Fogl Krisztián (ed.): op.cit., 126–127.

22 László Bukovszky: op.cit. (2016), 126–127.

23 László Bukovszky: op.cit., In: Erzsébet Pilipkó – Sándor Fogl Krisztián (ed.): op.cit. 127.

as possible.²⁴ The triumvirate of survival-cooperation-resistance emerged from the triumph of the brute force of the party-state within the churches. The communist regime's main concern was the removal of the strongest adherents of their faith from their narrow ecclesiastical and wider social environment. The aim was to drive the Church into a corner by increasing persecution, then it would recognise its power and control.

In this situation, the Catholic episcopate in Czechoslovakia and Slovakia refused to recognise the communist regime. The Archbishop of Prague, Josef Beran, was a contemporary of Mindszenty. He tried to compromise with the regime by adopting an apolitical attitude. As a result, he was interned by the authorities. He was removed from office in 1951.²⁵ To marginalise the Church, the system used every means at its disposal. Those who remained steadfast in their faith were repeatedly broken and imprisoned. The communist regime excluded them from worship and from their wider social environment. It was precisely this attack on the Church and on faith that led many of them to resist, and made them martyrs in the face of the regime's aggressiveness.²⁶ At the same time, however, Communist religious policy succeeded in disrupting the unity of the Catholic Church. From the spring of 1945, the basic aim of the state's ecclesiastical policy was, among other things, to control the clergy as far as possible and to win them over to its purposes. Naturally, this process became more turbulent after February 1948. The Communists sought new 'solutions' to achieve their goal of dismantling the Church from within. Communist church policy had also changed. Instead of destroying the church, it sought to integrate it into a more tightly controlled system. In the summer of 1949, with the effective help of the state, an organisation of openly collaborating clergy was set up against the bishops. This was known as the 'békepap' movement (Priests of Peace), and the State Church Office was established.²⁷ It appeared in direction to the Catholic clergy and believers as a

24 Gábor Bánkuti – György Gyarmati (ed.): op.cit. 10.

25 Stanislava Vodičková: *Uzavírám vás do mého srdce. Životopis Josefa kardinála Berana*. Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury – Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů, Praha, 2009. 235.

26 See, for example, the priests involved in the trial of the Hungarian Mindszenty in Slovakia. (László Bukovszky: A népi szövetség mártír papjai. In: Attila Pethő – Ferenc Tömösközi (ed.): op.cit., 74–90.)

27 For example: Lásd pl. Pavol Jakubčín: *Pastieri v osídlách moci. Komunistický režim a*

powerful tool to force them into the service of popular democracy. Despite the protests of the Vatican and the episcopate, many of the lower clergy joined the movement. They became servants of the communist regime. Not only were the priests of peace loyal servants of the party-state's church policy, but in many cases they were also given representative tasks by the state. The Priest of Peace movement also had a Hungarian dimension in Slovakia, as István Záreczky, a suspect in the Mindszenty trial in Slovakia, was arrested and put into a labour camp for a short time. After his release, he was made a priest and became the national secretary general of the Priests of Peace movement.²⁸

In order to prove its legitimacy, the party-state has turned the clergy, like the elite of other social groups, into a means of running the system. In fact, the church had become a captive of the party-state. An astonishing variety of individual fates has been revealed. Everywhere, a primary goal of the dictatorship was the control and influence of the church leadership by the state security. The State Security, which was the fist of power, also created a series of networks within the Church - a network of people who worked directly and covertly with the authorities, all the way to the Vatican. They supplied the party-state organs with information from a sphere that would have been closed to secular people. Nothing could be more harming to the fallibility of the Christian faith than not facing with this painful reality. The testimony of the tragedies of the Confessing Church was accompanied by the fact of collaboration as a means of survival. This raises a number of moral and dogmatic questions. Some cases are well integrated into the institutional history of the Church and the history of the system, both known and less known. If we really want to look beyond the shadow of the dictatorship and preserve the memory of the victims of persecution and their exemplary perseverance, we must strive for completeness, beyond the simplistic interpretation of resistance versus collaboration, the church of the persecuted versus the church of the agents, in order to have a rounded historical exploration of the fate and role of the church under state socialism. It is only in this way that we will be able to get a full picture of what the shadow of the dictatorship meant for the Hungarian priests and pastors in the Highlands.

katolícki kňazi na Slovensku v rokoch 1948–1968. Ústav pamäti národa, Bratislava, 2012.
28 László Bukovszky: op.cit. (2016) 209.; Ján Pešek: *Aktéri jednej éry na Slovensku 1945–1989*. Vydavateľstvo Michala Vaška, 2003. 354–355.

The party-state's anti-clerical attitude towards the Hungarian minority was certainly linked to the ethnic/national dimension of anti-religion. This had the effect of undermining moral and social values. This is true even if, despite the anti-church policies of the political regimes of the 20th century, which lasted for longer or shorter periods, the traditional characteristics and the continued institutional status of the Church were preserved during the period of hardship. In some cases, our priests and pastors in the Highlands played a powerful role in preserving the Church and the nation during almost half a century of Communist repression. The question now is whether we can do better through the documentation of the personal stories of the martyrs of the Church of the Faith along the lines outlined.

“Politically, he is not an open enemy, but neither is he an open friend.” The forced retirement of Gábor Incze, pastor of Óbuda (1956)

Gábor J. Lányi²⁹

The series of events leading to the retirement of Gábor Incze, the Reformed pastor of Óbuda, is a vivid example of the methods used by the church leadership of the 1950s to oust pastors who did not identify with the new secular, ecclesiastical and social order to the extent they saw fit.

The first half of our study briefly describes the life and studies of Gábor Incze, the main stages of his pastoral career and its character, then describes in detail the processes leading up to his retirement, and finally gives an insight into the events of his rehabilitation, which had a dubious outcome.

1. Incze's early years, war service and studies³⁰

Gábor Incze was born on 17 December 1898 in Nagybánya (today Baia Mare, Romania), where his father was a teacher at the local state grammar school.³¹ Incze completed the first six grades of high school in his hometown, but finished the last two years in Budapest. In 1916 he enrolled at the Reformed Theological Faculty in Debrecen, however he already knew that he will start his service in the Austro-Hungarian Army. After a so called 'military semester' during the summer of 1916, he had an active military period, serving on the Italian and Romanian fronts. In 1917 he was awarded the 'Karl Troop

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30 Source of information on Incze's life and studies: Dunamelléki Református Egyházkerület Püspöki Hivatala, Lelkészi Törzslapok, Incze Gábor

31 Incze Gábor állami törzslapja, Budapest Főváros Levéltára (BFL) [Budapest City Archives] XXIII. 134. ÁEH 1. doboz

Cross' and in November 1918 he was promoted to be a lieutenant. Later his distinguished military record enabled him to lecture at the Royal Hungarian Ludovica Defense Academy as a senior military chaplain in 1942–43. After his discharge after the lost war, Incze continued his theological studies at the Budapest Reformed Theological Academy (1918–1921).³² Scholarships in Scotland³³ and Switzerland³⁴ helped him to acquire his knowledge of English, German and French, and he acquired the desire to cultivate theology at an academic level. Before completing his studies, he served as an assistant pastor for religious education at the Scottish Mission in Budapest (1923-24), was assistant pastor in Tahitótfalu (1926), and during his studies in Strasbourg he was assistant pastor to Albert Kuntz, the president of the Protestant Reformed Church of Alsace and Lorraine.

2. The character of Incze's pastoral ministry

For most of his pastoral career, Incze was a pastor of religious education in Budapest (1928–1943); from 1936 he even served as the director of the Reformed religious education in the capital city. He also enjoyed rotating among the young people at the events of the Soli Deo Gloria Reformed Students' Association, and edited the Reformed magazine for secondary school students entitled 'Our Way'. He also published articles in the 'Calvinist Review' (Kálvinista Szemle), which suggests that theologically he was close to the historical Calvinism of Jenő Sebestyén. This may also be an indication that the focus of his later academic work focused on the literature of the Hungarian Reformation. Incze organized and served as an itinerant pastor to the Hungarian Reformed in Vienna. His church offices (diocesan judge, 1940-43, 1950-55; diocesan archivist, 1943) and his work as a lecturer at the Reformed Theological Academy in Pápa are evidence of the recognition and renown of his service and his person.

32 Ordination exams: 1921; 1923

33 United Free Church College, Aberdeen 1921–22; Church of Scotland University, Aberdeen, 1922–23

34 Strassburg, 1928. January-July

In 1931, Incze received his doctorate 'summa cum laude' in practical theology and canon law from the Faculty of Theology of the Royal Hungarian Tisza István University in Debrecen, for which Bishop László Ravasz congratulated him in his episcopal report.³⁵ Ravasz mentions Incze once again in another episcopal report, also in connection with Incze's academic achievements: "This year he published a new edition of *Praxis Pietatis* by Paul Medgyesi."³⁶ The citation refers to the fact that between 1935 and 1948, Incze, in collaboration with the Bethlen Printing House, as editor of the series "Evangelical Christian (Reformed and Lutheran) Church Writers of the Age of Reformation and Counter-Reformation", published several Hungarian works of outstanding importance for the Hungarian Reformation in new editions.³⁷ In addition,

35 Ravasz László: XI. püspöki jelentés, 1932, in: Kiss Réka – Lányi Gábor (szerk.): *Ravasz 100. Püspöki jelentések*, Budapest, Dunamelléki Református Egyházkerület – Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem – Kálvin Kiadó, 2023, 229.

36 Ravasz László: XV. püspöki jelentés, 1936, in: Kiss Réka – Lányi Gábor (szerk.): *Ravasz 100. Püspöki jelentések*, Budapest, Dunamelléki Református Egyházkerület – Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem – Kálvin Kiadó, 2023, 291.

37 Szemelvények Csikesz Sándor, B. Pap István, Payr Sándor és Zoványi Jenő tanulmányával (1935); Alvinczi Péter: *Az Úrnak Szent Vacsorájáról való reovid intes az Szent Pál apostol tanítása szerint. Egy néhány szükséges kérdésekkel és feleletekkel egyetemben* (1935); Szöllösi Mihály: *Az úrért s hazájokért elszéledett és számkivettett bujdosó magyarok füstölgő csepüje* (1935); Medgyesi Pál: *Praxis pietatis azaz kegyességgyakorlás* (1936); Melius Juhász Péter: *A Szent Pál apostal levelének, melyet a colossabelieknek irt predicacio szerént való magyarázatja* (1937); Nagy Szöllösi Mihály: *Az Isten házában meggyújtott lobogó szövetnek, vagy A lelki pásztorságnak tiszta tüköre... Colosvár 1676* (1937); Polgári Gáspár: *Mérges golyóbis, magyarábban magyar vitéz meggyásolására méltó mérges káromkodása. 1706* (1938); Tarpai Szilágyi András: *Pápsták kerengője, melyet mostan magyar nyelven az igazságszeretőknek kedvekkért ki-ád T. Sz. A. Nyomattatott 1661* (1938); Melius Juhász Péter: *Az Urnac vaczoraiaarol valo koezenséges keresztyéni vallás, 1559* (1939)

Szenczi Molnár Albert művei (1939); Kallai Albert: *Predicatio, melyet az jó emléközetű Druget Homonnai István tizeseges temetsegén praedicállot. Bártfa, 1599* (1940); Otrókoci Főris Ferenc *Hálaadó és könyörgő imádságai. Kolosvárat, 1682* (1940); *Ne féltetek ti a Krisztus igazságát!* Gyöngyszemek a XVI. és XVII. század magyar protestáns irodalmából (1941); Rimaszombati Kazai János: *Zöld olajfaágat szájában hordozó Noé galambja. Bártfa, 1708* (1944); Huszár Gál: *Az Úr Jézus Krisztusnak szent vacsorájáról, kinszenvedéséről és dicsőséges feltámadásáról való prédikációk. Magyaróvár, 1558* (1945); Melius Juhász Péter: *A Krisztus közbenjárásáról való prédikációk.*

Incze has edited volumes on baptismal, funeral and wedding sermons, on prayer, on the relationship of Reformed Christianity to literature and social issues, while he also wrote a church history book for secondary school religious education.³⁸

At the age of 45, after his multifaceted and busy ministry, Incze became the pastor of Nagyvárad (today Oradea, Romania; Nagyvárad was reintegrated into Hungary after the reannexation of Northern Transylvania), perhaps looking for a quieter period. However, less than a year later, in 1944, the Soviet takeover of the city forced him to leave his position in Nagyvárad and he became pastor of Óbuda – perhaps he could rightly hope that he could hold that position until his respectable retirement.

As we can see, Gábor Incze was a pastor with a Western education and orientation, who carried out his pastoral ministry with academic ambition. Incze was very active and mainly associated with the more conservative and nationalist circles of the church, and had a good relationship with the church leadership between the two world wars.

3. The state's perception of Incze in the 1950s

The political assessment of Gábor Incze was preserved in several reports of the ecclesiastical rapporteur of Budapest, who helped the work of the State Office for Church Affairs (ÁEH) in the capitol city. For example, in April 1954, he was accused of “dodging” the instructions of the bishop’s circular letter promoting the communist reorganization of agriculture.³⁹ Also, at the

Debrecen, 1561 (1948)

38 Works by Gábor Incze: *Az Örökkévaló tornácaiban*. Budapest, 1924.; *A református Jókai*. Budapest, 1925.; *Jó az Isten*. Budapest, 1926.; *A magyar református imádság a 16. és 17. században*. Debrecen, 1931. (Különlenyomat a *Theologiai Szemle* VIII. évfolyam 1-4. száma 38. és következő lapjairól); *Keresztyénség és jobbágyság*. Budapest, 1929.; *A munkás jutalma*. Nagybánya, 1932.; *„Az az ember te vagy!”* Budapest, 1933.; *Új „Kis tükör” I–II*. Budapest, 1935–1936.; *Az apostolok*. Budapest, 1936.; *Túl az országhatáron*. 1917–1937. Budapest, 1937.; *Keresztyén egyháztörténet*. Budapest, 1938.

39 BFL XXIII/102c BP Főváros Tanácsa VB TÜK [The Council of the Capital City of Budapest Executive Committee Secretly Administered Documents]-Egyházügyi Hivatal [State Office for Church Affairs] 1953-1960 111. doboz 0018-2/1954 Sándor

Reformed press week in May 1954 (2–9 May), the state expected the clergy present to speak out against the development and testing of the hydrogen bomb. The rapporteur for church affairs noted that while some of them had taken a courageous stand against it (e.g. Sándor Joó), Gábor Incze was part of the group that ‘did not do well on this occasion.’ This group of pastors avoided taking a stand and “did not approach not only the tasks of the state, but even the methods of church government.”⁴⁰

Although there have been several cases of pastors who do not fully identify with the current state and church line being involved in the Patriotic People’s Front (Hazafias Népfront, HNF), the rapporteur for church affairs recommended Incze’s participation with reservations due to his “harmful manifestations, especially in clerical circles.”⁴¹ At the end of 1954, Incze’s name also appears incriminatingly in a report on the pastoral self-study circles. Out of 26 pastors only “the judgments of József Siklós and Gábor Incze, pastors of Óbuda, were objectionable.”⁴²

Another unpleasant case that the ÁEH held Incze accountable for was dubbed “devious baptism”. According to this case, Incze baptized an infant without the parents’ knowledge, at the request of the grandmother. The child’s father, who worked at the HQ of the communist party, wanted the baptism “cancelled” and initiated disciplinary proceedings against the pastor, which the ÁEH said had been started.⁴³

Szerényi’s report on church affairs in Budapest – 3 May 1954.

40 BFL XXIII/102c BP Főváros Tanácsa VB TŰK-Egyházügyi Hivatal 1953-1960 111. doboz 0018-2/1954 Sándor Szerényi’s report on church affairs in Budapest – 1 June 1954.

41 XXIII/102c BP Főváros Tanácsa VB TŰK-Egyházügyi Hivatal 1953-1960 111. doboz 0018-2/1954 Sándor Szerényi’s proposals for pastors to be considered for the local Patriotic People’s Front committee – 8 September 1954.

42 BFL XXIII/102c BP Főváros Tanácsa VB TŰK-Egyházügyi Hivatal 1953-1960 111. doboz 0018-2/1954 Sándor Szerényi’s report on church affairs in Budapest 1 December 1954.

43 There is no trace of a disciplinary action on this case in our church sources. However, when the church government started to take action against Incze at the beginning of 1956, reference was made to this case as well. BFL XXIII/102c BP Főváros Tanácsa VB TŰK-Egyházügyi Hivatal 1953-1960 111. doboz 0018-2/1954 Sándor Szerényi’s report on church affairs in Budapest 3 September 1954.

Incze's political evaluation was shown by a handwritten note on his ÁEH personal record sheet: Incze is "A bachelor, but as capricious as a spinster. He has an impulse to be militant, but he is a coward. When he does argue, he bounces off false trivialities. Politically, he is not an open enemy, but neither is he an open friend. He is not much liked by anyone."⁴⁴

4. Forced job change

Although the state's criticism of Incze dates back to 1954, the first steps towards his replacement were not taken until early 1956. This suggests that the church government, while referring to the ÁEH, initiated the action more for its own purposes, perhaps to get László Szabados from Szeged to Budapest. The latter is suggested by the total lack of state documents about the current case. In Incze's case, therefore, the reference to the ÁEH could only have been a means of intimidation by the church government. At the same time, the church government players in the case, especially Dean Sándor Fekete, were aware that they were dealing with a person whose marginalisation was in line with current church policy and for whom the ÁEH would not shed any tears. The series of events that led to Incze's removal began when on 28 February 1956 the then 58-year-old pastor of Óbuda was summoned to the office by Sándor Fekete, the dean of the Budapest-Northern Reformed Church County. Sándor Fekete was one of the most skillful promoters of the alignment of the Reformed Church with the intentions and ideology of the communist party-state. Fekete's name is associated with the removal and marginalization of several pastors who opposed the party-state's intentions. In their meeting, Fekete informed Incze that Bishops Albert Bereczky of the Danubian, János Péter of the Tibiscan Church Districts and János Horváth, the president of the ÁEH,⁴⁵ had agreed that Incze should be replaced by László Szabados,

44 Incze Gábor állami törzslapja, BFL XXIII. 134. ÁEH 1. doboz

45 Magyarországi Református Egyház Zsinati Levéltára (MREZsL) [Synodal Archive of the Reformed Church in Hungary] 3a fond 22a doboz Konventi Elnökségi Iratok [Presidential Documents of the Convent] – Gábor Incze's letter to the Presidency of the Danubian Reformed Church District – 9 May 1957, 2.

pastor of the Szeged-Petőfitelep Reformed Congregation.⁴⁶ Szabados' area of ministry was primarily the care of the rural territories around Szeged, which at the time could at best be travelled on a motorbike and was a man-trying task even for a young man, not for a man in his 60s with blood pressure problems, two years from retirement.

Fekete stressed that there could be no complaints or objections against the decision, later Gábor Incze described the meeting as "intimidation".⁴⁷ Fekete cited the following issues as the reason for the exchange: Gábor Incze used to visit the resigned bishop László Ravasz; he sang the Hungarian national anthem at funerals; his relations with the authorities were bad and hostile; he organized a "demonstration" in the church in Óbuda on the pretext of the confirmation of László Ravasz's grandson; he organized the funeral of Imre Szabó, the dean of Budapest who had been removed from his post by the new church government; and the case described above: secretly baptizing an infant against his parents' wishes.⁴⁸ Fekete also brought up the fact that church life in Óbuda had deteriorated under Incze's pastorate, with a decline in church attendance and donations. The reference to the decline of congregational life, which was a natural and common phenomenon in the anti-church climate of the early 1950s, was general argument used by Sándor Fekete against pastors. The extent to which this was a forged excuse in Incze's case is shown by the fact that 95 young people had been confirmed in Óbuda the previous year.⁴⁹ On 2 March 1956, Dean Fekete met again with Incze in the presence of Bishop János Péter. At that time Incze was promised that if he succeeded in getting

46 MREZsL 3a fond 22a doboz Konventi Elnökségi Iratok – Gábor Incze's letter to the Presidency of the Danubian Reformed Church District – 28 February 1957, 1.

47 MREZsL 3a fond 22a doboz Konventi Elnökségi Iratok – Gábor Incze's letter to the Presidency of the Danubian Reformed Church District – 3 November 1956.

48 MREZsL 3a fond 22a doboz Konventi Elnökségi Iratok - ad965 - Excerpt from the minutes of the Session meeting of the Reformed Congregation of Budapest-Óbuda, held on 2 December 1956, 2.

49 Dunamelléki Református Egyházkerület Ráday Levéltára (RL) [Ráday Archive of the Danubian Reformed Church District] A1b 513/1956 Excerpt from the minutes of the Session meeting of the Reformed Congregation of Budapest-Óbuda, held on 11 March 1956.

the church elders of Óbuda to accept László Szabados' appointment, he would be provided with a suitable place of service and decent housing in Budapest.⁵⁰ On March 11, 1956, Dean Fekete visited the meeting of church elders (called session) of the Óbuda congregation. Fekete asked the elders to feel free to formally request the replacement of their pastor, because the very next day Bishops Bereczky and Péter were meeting to discuss the matter of Incze's transfer to a congregation in Budapest of similar value to that of Óbuda, instead of the countryside.⁵¹

The next day's meeting never took place, yet on the basis of this misrepresentation the session gave its approval to the exchange of Szabados and Incze. The fact that the elders made their decision in connection with Fekete's promise is also testified by letters of several elders to Albert Bereczky: eg. "we have received a serious promise that Gábor Incze, whom we all love and respect, will be able to find a place in the capital city that will be worthy of his well-earned reputation and literary name, and that will also ensure academic activity."⁵²

4 days after the session's decision, Incze also wrote to Bereczky asking for permission to stay in Budapest. In addition to his health, his nearness to retirement, and the continuation of his research, he could mainly rely on the fact that he was the sole caretaker of his sick sister, with whom he also lived in the same household.⁵³

We do not know whether Incze received any reply to his request from Bereczky. In any case, either because of the negative reply or because of the bishop's silence, Incze, who had already been suffering from blood pressure problems and atherosclerosis, applied for disability pension on 21 March

50 RL A1b 513/1956 Note by Sándor Kéri, councillor of the Danubian Reformed Church District – 24 March 1956.

51 RL A1b 513/1956 Excerpt from the minutes of the Session meeting of the Reformed Congregation of Budapest-Óbuda, held on 11 March 1956.

52 RL A1c 1661/1954 Zoltán Felvinczi Takáts's letter to Albert Bereczky – 14 May 1954; RL A1c 1661/1954 Excerpt from Pál Szilágyi's letter to Albert Bereczky – 24 March 1954.

53 RL A1c 1661/1954 Gábor Incze's letter to Albert Bereczky – 15 March 1954. A much earlier letter from Incze to Bereczky has survived, in which he asks the bishop to obtain foreign medicine for his sister: RL A1c 1930/1951 Incze's letter to Albert Bereczky – 1 June 1951.

1956. According to his later statement he was 'ruined by excitement'⁵⁴ – which is also a fair assumption – but the quick decision was perhaps more due to the fact that he could find no other way of staying in Budapest with his sick sister. We do not know who or what suggested to Incze the possibility of a disability pension. Bereczky left a note after Incze's pension application was submitted, in which he complains that Dean Fekete made a lighthearted promise to the people of Óbuda to keep Incze in Budapest, for the failure of which everyone will blame the bishop, so the good solution may be to arrange disability pension for Incze.⁵⁵

László Szabados was able to take up his post in Óbuda on 28 March 1956,⁵⁶ and Gábor Incze was granted a disability pension from 1 June.⁵⁷ Since the pastoral position of Szeged-Petőfitelep was thus vacant, the Danubian bishop's office proposed the election of Károly Achs, an assistant pastor from Budapest, to the position.⁵⁸

5. Incze's attempt for rehabilitation

The matter was put to rest until October 1956, when several events occurred which led Gábor Incze to request a review of his retirement. Firstly, the state rehabilitation of the Lutheran Bishop Lajos Ordass. Secondly, the rehabilitation decree of the Reformed Convent (highest executive body of the Reformed Church in Hungary) of 20 October 1956, which ordered a review of the cases of pastors who had suffered undignified demotion, presumably for political reasons. Thirdly, the letter of 13 November 1956 written by the head of the provisional church government (Országos Intézőbizottság), László Ravasz, which was formed after the events of 23 October and which, in addition to the possibility of joining the Reformed Renewal Movement (Református Megújulási Mozgalom, RMM), recommended that session

54 MREZsL 3a fond 22a doboz Konventi Elnökségi Iratok – Gábor Incze's letter to the Presidency of the Danubian Reformed Church District – 28 February 1957, 2.

55 RL A1b 513/1956 Albert Bereczky's letter to Pál Veres – 24 March 1956.

56 RL A1b 654/1956 Sándor Kéri's letter to the Bishop's Office of the Tibiscan Reformed Church District – 9 April 1956.

57 RI A1b 622/1956

58 RL A1b 1082/1956 Sándor Kéri's letter to Tibor Bartha – 20 June 1956.

should review the appointment of pastors who had taken their posts during the dictatorial period.

Gábor Incze himself, however, requested a review of his case long before the Convent's rehabilitation decree, on 2 October 1956, which was probably encouraged by the removal of Dean Fekete by Bereczky, or perhaps even by the news of the rehabilitation of the Lutheran bishop Lajos Ordass.⁵⁹ No response to this request has been received.

At the same time, the session of Óbuda, meeting on 2 December 1956 at the call of the provisional church government (Országos Intézőbizottság), not only declared its intention to join the Reformed Renewal Movement, but also raised the case of Incze. It stated that the session's decision to change Incze's position in March had been made "on the basis of the misleading statements of former dean Sándor Fekete" – "Accordingly, the legally elected pastor is still Dr. Gábor Incze."⁶⁰ The minutes of the meeting mention that Fekete had illegally written Incze's name on the invitation to the March 11 meeting, and the meeting's resolution states that Incze himself had asked for his replacement in a live vote, which was not done. Additionally, Dean Fekete also acted unlawfully when he held the handover of the pastor's office on 28 March 1956, when Incze was on sick leave.

At the same time, the elders faced a serious dilemma, as the majority of them were satisfied with the ministry of their new pastor László Szabados, and did not want him to be removed, but at the same time they wanted to settle the Incze case. Therefore they decided that the session "wishes the rehabilitation of Dr. Gábor Incze in such a way that he is not reinstated to the pastoral position in Óbuda, but is given a suitable position and a suitable apartment."⁶¹ Following the decision of the session, the council of the Budapest-North Reformed Church County made the following statement on 24 January 1957: "There is no doubt that Pastor Gábor Incze was unfairly set back when he

59 MREZsL 3a fond 22a doboz Konventi Elnökségi Iratok – Gábor Incze's letter to the Presidency of the Danubian Reformed Church District – 2 October 1956.

60 MREZsL 3a fond 22a doboz Konventi Elnökségi Iratok - ad965 - Excerpt from the minutes of the Session meeting of the Reformed Congregation of Budapest-Óbuda, held on 2 December 1956, 1.

61 MREZsL 3a fond 22a doboz Konventi Elnökségi Iratok - ad965 - Excerpt from the minutes of the Session meeting of the Reformed Congregation of Budapest-Óbuda, held on 2 December 1956, 2.

changed his position. Because the request for replacement and the related decision of the session in Óbuda came about under the pressure of the dean of the time and under the influence of the promise that dr. Gábor Incze's pastoral position in Szeged would be temporary and he would later receive a suitable position in Budapest."⁶² The church county council also concluded that since the presbytery of Óbuda had unanimously voted confidence in László Szabados, the demotion of Incze could not be remedied by reinstating him to his pastoral position. Therefore, he referred the matter to the presidency of the Convent to remedy the material injury to Incze.

Referring to the above findings of the church county, Incze wrote several letters to Bishop Bereczky – who occupied both the chair of the Danube church district and the chair of the Convent – requesting financial compensation and moral rehabilitation.⁶³

Finally, the presidency of the Danubian Reformed Church District – with the signature of the senior dean Zsigmond Bükki instead of Bereczky, who was unable to work due to a stroke – proposed to the Convent that Dr. Gábor Incze be granted moral rehabilitation, while his financial compensation should be that he should remain on retirement due to his officially certified disability.⁶⁴ The last statement of the Convent in the case is: "For possible action on the question of the establishment of moral rehabilitation, the attached file will be returned to the Administrative and Legal Unit."⁶⁵

62 RL BP Egyházmegye Ügyészi Iratok – Excerpt from the minutes of the Council of the Budapest-North Reformed Church County, held on 24 January 1957.

63 MREZsL 3a fond 22a doboz Konventi Elnökségi Iratok – Gábor Incze's letters to the Presidency of the Danubian Reformed Church District – 28 February 1957; 9 May 1957; 30 December 1957.

64 MREZsL 3a fond 22a doboz Konventi Elnökségi Iratok – Zsigmond Bükki's letter to the Presidency of the Reformed Convent – 24 September 1957.; MREZsL 3a fond 22a doboz Konventi Elnökségi Iratok – Memo for the Administrative and Legal Unit – 16 October 1957; In August 1958, there had been no developments in Incze's case – RL A1c 2741/1958 Gábor Incze's letter to Albert Bereczky – 29 August 1958; Incze was told that, due to Bereczky's sick leave, the case could not be dealt with - RL A1c 2741/1958 Church District Councilor's letter to Gábor Incze

65 MREZsL 3a fond 22a doboz Konventi Elnökségi Iratok - Memo for the Administrative and Legal Unit – 16 October 1957.

We have no source as to whether at least this moral rehabilitation has taken place. Gábor Incze died childless in Budapest on 23 September 1966, aged 68.

6. Lessons learned, interesting facts of the case

In the context of Incze's job change, the reference to the intention of the ÁEH on the part of the church government is worth noting. We have seen that there have been several critical reports on Incze by the church rapporteur of the capital, but we have not found any evidence that the state authorities have taken any action against him. This leads to the conclusion that the church government rather wanted to strengthen its own intentions by a presumably false reference to the will of the state, and that its primary motivation was purely personal: to replace Incze, who had many ties to the Ravasz era, with László Szabados, who had shown more willingness to adapt to the new system and, of course, to the new church leadership.

It is also noteworthy that Szabados, who was transferred to Óbuda under pressure from the church government, finally earned the trust of the congregation to such an extent that he led the session into the dilemma that while they voiced the illegality of the job change and wanted reparation for Incze, they still wanted to keep the new pastor who had revived the life of the congregation. This last reminder only serves to highlight the human sides and complexities of these matters, and the hardships and delicacy of their research. Also interesting in this case is the dynamic of the involvement of Sándor Fekete and Albert Bereczky. Sándor Fekete is the protagonist of the case from the part of the church government, and he seems to have a closer relationship with Bishop János Péter of the Tibiscan Church District than with his own, Bereczky. Bereczky's note⁶⁶ that he as the bishop will be blamed for the failure of Fekete's frivolous promise shows the tension between the two, and that Fekete acted too independently in many cases, presumably often deliberately putting Albert Bereczky in an uncomfortable position in order to challenge his authority and even to take over his place in the future.

66 RL A1b 513/1956 Albert Bereczky's letter to Pál Veres – 24 March 1956.

“The Apostle of Hope” – József Mindszenty

Rajmund Fekete⁶⁷

“Communism begins where atheism begins.”

Karl Marx

The Central and Eastern European region is unique. It is unique because, for historical and geographical reasons, it has experienced both totalitarian dictatorships. Most of the peoples living here were under occupation and foreign rule from 1939 to 1991. They were deprived of their sovereignty, their independence was eliminated, they were oppressed, exploited, and they were divided into friends and enemies on the basis of race or class. The peoples of Central and Eastern Europe – whether Latvians, Estonians, East Germans, Poles or Hungarians – collectively experienced a world war, genocide and terror under the shadow of socialism and national socialism. In October 1944 British prime minister Winston Churchill threw our region to Stalin as sacrificial prey, only to discover two years later that the Iron Curtain had come down in the exact locations agreed with the “Generalissimus”. As he would say, “From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste on the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent.”⁶⁸ We, who were once locked behind the Iron Curtain, carry the heavy burden of our shared historical legacy from the twentieth century, and this increases the chances for mutual understanding and a sense of collective identity among us. It is precisely because of this trauma lasting almost a lifetime that we are more understanding of the suffering of one another’s peoples – because in it we see our own pain, anguish and loss. This is why it is worrying to see the tendencies that seem to be taking root in the Western world: belief in God is seen as ridiculous, the nation as obsolete,

67 Rajmund Fekete (Hatvan, 1987) Historian PhD, director of the Institute for the Research of Communism and an external fellow at the Institute for American Studies at the National University of Public Service. Editor at Látószög blog. Email: feketek.rajmund@kommunizmuskutato.hu

68 Winston Churchill first used the term “Iron Curtain” in a message to Truman dated 12 May. MacArthur, Brian (ed.): A XX. század nagy beszédei. Agave, Budapest, 2006. 153–154.

history as at an end, the family as irrelevant, and gender as interchangeable. This is an attempt to redefine identities in the same way that communism did. For communist ideology also promised a new identity, a new type of man, *Homo sovieticus*; and it presented itself as the custodian of the one true and incontestable faith. This is why God and faith were denied, and believers were persecuted. Communism was also a religion. There was a bible: *Das Kapital*, by Marx. Its sacred texts were the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao. Its catechism was *The Communist Manifesto*. Like the Bible, the Marxist historical narrative is a redemption story, but with capitalism as its original sin. Communists, like adherents of theistic religions, believed in redemption and paradise.⁶⁹ The only difference was that communism was promised to come on earth. “It brings back religion from heaven to earth”, writes Ernest Belfort Bax in *The Religion of Socialism*.⁷⁰ But the Soviet model that was implemented – which we Hungarians had the good fortune to build for almost half a century – was a total dictatorship, from the first moment to the last, with its legitimacy provided by terror. The system of communist terror was based on exclusivity, unification and the “monopoly of truth”: one idea, one ideology, one culture, one political current, one party, one leader. All from one centre. The Kremlin in Moscow became the new Rome, while the Christian religion was an obstacle to be overcome in order to introduce a true system of people’s democracy. This is why the churches, the faithful, priests and ministers, and brothers and sisters in monastic orders were persecuted, broken and debilitated, so that in the end they could be completely eliminated. On the ruins a new world, a new society, could then come into being – without God, without religion, and without the Church.⁷¹

The Soviet system wanted to make the elimination of religion a process that could be controlled by central orders and target numbers, just as had been true for the elimination of private enterprise and private property, or for land confiscation. after the November 1945 general election, Mátyás Rákosi – as Minister of State and General Secretary of the Hungarian Communist Party

69 Mária Schmidt: *Korszakhatáron. Közép- és Kelet-európai Történelem és Társadalom Kutatásáért Alapítvány*, Budapest, 2022. 104.

70 Ernest Belfort Bax: *The Religion of Socialism: Being Essays in Modern Socialist Criticism*. Swan Sennenschein & Co., London, 1891. 52.

71 József Mindszenty: *Kommunista arcélek*. Szépmíves, Budapest, 2019. 184.

– was already giving orders to attack the churches. In the following few years, however, the persecution of the churches was more restrained: “We must work carefully, and we must be very careful about how and in what form we attack.”⁷² There were several reasons for this: according to the 1941 census, 65.7 percent of Hungary’s population was Catholic, while the 1949 census indicated that this figure had grown to 67.8 percent;⁷³ the Catholic Church therefore had considerable influence in the social, cultural and educational spheres, and in public life. It was present throughout the country and played an important role in preserving culture and traditions, as well as in the reconstruction of the country after the Second World War. In order to prepare for the subsequent consolidation of their power, Rákosi and his circle were therefore forced to temporarily cooperate with it. As a result, initially the attacks were never openly directed against the Church itself, but against its most “reactionary” representatives and institutions.⁷⁴ The aim was to destroy the Church step by step, using “salami tactics”. The faithful – the so-called “clerical reactionaries” – became second-class citizens, prevented in every way from freely practising their religion, because they were opposed to the one historical truth that communism had given to the people.

The Communist Party saw 1948 as a decisive year in the fight against “clerical reaction”. At a meeting of Hungarian Communist Party functionaries in Budapest on 10th January 1948, Mátyás Rákosi openly declared that clerical reaction must be eliminated by the end of the year. He was not holding back when he said that the authorities see that now is the time for the final stage in the battle against the churches.⁷⁵ Thus the aim of the dictatorship’s church policy in 1948 was to eradicate religion and its intermediaries – the

72 Frigyes Kahler: *A támadás fő irányja: Esztergom. Mindszenty bíboros pere*. Magyarország Mindszenty Alapítvány, Budapest, 1998.

73 According to the 1941 national census, there were 6 122 583 people who professed to be Roman Catholic (*Az 1941. évi népszámlálás. Demográfiai adatok*. Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, Budapest, 1947. 8.). According to the 1949 population figures, 6 240 427 people identified as Roman Catholic (*1949. évi népszámlálás*. Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, Budapest, 1950. 13.).

74 Barbara Bank: *Hangulatok, vélemények Mindszenty bíboros letartóztatása előtt és után*. In: *Vasi Szemle*, 2015/5., 842–854.

75 Csaba Borsodi: *A szerzetesrendek feloszlatása, működési engedélyük megvonása 1950 után*. In: *Magyar Egyháztörténeti Vázlatok*, 2000/1–4. 183–210. 188.

churches – within a foreseeable time period. One of the most important steps in the process of the communist takeover of power was the nationalisation of church schools. The communists therefore launched a campaign for the nationalisation of church schools, and the church was branded reactionary, Nazi or anti-Semitic. On 3rd June 1948 in Pócspetri – a village of around 2,000 inhabitants – a drunken policeman received a fatal gunshot from his own weapon. The Hungarian Communist secret police, the State Protection Department, launched reprisals against the entire village. The whole country was buzzing with the rumour that clerical reactionaries murdered a policeman in Pócspetri. Of course, the incident was not without consequences: the villagers were beaten, the notary was executed, and the parish priest was sentenced to life imprisonment. Pócspetri became “the strongest argument in favour of urgent nationalisation of [church] schools.”⁷⁶ On 20th June 1948 more than 6,500 church schools were nationalised, including more than 5,000 elementary and primary schools; the churches were also ejected from their roles in health care and social care.⁷⁷ In 1949 religious education in schools was also rendered impossible. All these factors deprived the church of one of the most important bases of its secular power and influence. Monastic orders, which had become “redundant”, had their licences revoked and monks and nuns were evicted. Everyone from the Roman Pontiff to the parish priest of the smallest village was declared a cleric or a “black reactionary”. It was made known to them – by imprisonment, execution, exile, murder or blackmail – that they had no choice but to adapt to the conditions dictated by the state party. There was only one person they could not deal with.

76 A főtárgyalás tanulságai. In: Szabad Nép, 12 June 1948. 3.

77 Attila Horváth: A vallásszabadság korlátozása és az egyházak üldözése Magyarországon a szovjet típusú diktatúra idején. In: *Polgári Szemle*, 2014/1–2. 310–335. 318.

The Machine-gun Wielding Prince Primate

“He bore witness of his faith in Christ and the Church, as well as of the love of the fatherland.”

Pope John Paul II

József Pehm was born in 1892 to a peasant family in the village of Csehimindszent. Later, in 1941, he took the name “Mindszenty” as a mark of respect for his native village. He carried his deep religious faith with him from his parents’ home, and later in life his mother was one of his greatest supporters. In 1917 he moved to the city of Zalaegerszeg, where he became a teacher at the state grammar school for boys. The Hungarian Soviet Republic – which lasted less than a year – frowned upon his activities in public life, and the police arrested him on charges of “counter-revolutionary agitation”. In August 1919, immediately after the fall of communist rule, he returned to Zalaegerszeg, where in 1921 he was appointed parish priest – a post he held for twenty-four years. During this time he made huge efforts to modernise the church community. He oversaw the building of the Franciscan church and monastery in Zalaegerszeg, and founded several schools. He was committed to caring for the needy, founding homes for the poor, and supporting village boys from poor backgrounds during their studies. As another initiative to support the poor and involve them in the life of faith, he set up an organisation of “house apostles”, within which parishioners would, in their spare time, visit families in the area and offer help wherever they found the need for it. He was also actively involved in social, religious and welfare issues. During this period he was already trying to raise awareness of the fact that both communism and national socialism posed an enormous threat to the Hungarian Catholic Church and to Hungarian society as a whole. From 1927 onwards – as the episcopal commissioner for the underdeveloped Zala County area in the Diocese of Szombathely – he built nineteen new churches, seven parish buildings, nine places of worship and twelve schools. In 1937 his merits were recognised by the Holy See when it granted him a papal prelacy. In 1944, after becoming Bishop of Veszprém, he spoke out and acted against the concentration in ghettos of Jews in provincial Hungary, and later against their deportation. In return for this he was imprisoned by the Nazi Arrow Cross,

who by that time controlled the country. He was only released in the spring of 1945.

József Mindszenty became head of the Catholic Church in Hungary on 7th October 1945. In him the Holy See appointed a primate who, as US President Ronald Reagan would later say, “stood up to modern political tyranny, Nazism and Communism”.⁷⁸ Archbishopal representative János Drahoš’s reflections on the inauguration of Archbishop Mindszenty were as follows: “When law and order still reigned in Hungary, Providence installed an excellent jurist as Archbishop of Esztergom [...] Now the era of calm reasoning and debate is at an end. The time for battle has arrived. Jack-booted youths with flowing hair are running in the streets with machine guns around their necks. Providence has sent us a machine-gun wielding primate. The real element of Prince Primate József Mindszenty is his fighting spirit.”⁷⁹ Mindszenty stood up for democracy many times and in many places. His astute political awareness is reflected in the fact that – even before relatively democratic elections in the autumn of 1945 – in a circular he stated that “Hungarian life has in fact drifted from one total tyranny to another.”⁸⁰ In this situation he threw all his moral weight behind the fight against violations of human rights. He defended anyone whose human rights were violated, regardless of their origins, nationality, religion or social status. On important issues affecting Hungarians, he took it upon himself to speak out instead of the government and political parties, which were being progressively silenced by foreign occupation and the unfolding communist dictatorship. He closely followed the fate of those who had been arrested or interned, visiting prisons and internment camps. He campaigned for the repatriation of Hungarian prisoners who had been transported to the Soviet Union, and protested both against the expulsion of Germans from Hungary and the persecution of indigenous Hungarians in Felvidék and Vojvodina – north and south of Hungary’s borders, respectively. He also protested against the violent and inhuman atrocities of the Slovak-Hungarian population transfer. The Cardinal took a strong stand against the new dictatorship that

78 Julián Füzér: *Szentnek kiáltjuk! – Emigráns magyarok Mindszenty bíborosról halála 10. évfordulóján*. Katolikus Magyarok Vasárnapja, Budapest, 1987. 58.

79 Margit Balogh: A harc embere. In: *Rubicon*, 2017/4, 18–26. 18.

80 József Mindszenty: *Emlékirataim*. Az Apostoli Szentszék Könyvkiadója, Budapest, 1989. 100.

was gradually being established. He believed that he could not make a deal with the “Evil One”, and therefore – out of consistency of principle – rejected the Government’s actions at every justifiable opportunity. This courageous stand was the basis of his authority and unrivalled popularity. His charisma, social conscience and character united and mobilised his followers against anti-Christian measures. His unparalleled achievement was, on the basis of Catholicism, to successfully create commonality between religion and traditional nationalism for the majority of the Hungarian people.

As communist persecution of the church was in its infancy, he proclaimed the “Year of the Blessed Virgin Mary”, which ran from 15th August 1947 to 8th December 1948. This became one of twentieth-century Hungary’s most prominent series of religious events. He mobilised huge crowds, and in his superbly crafted, passionate speeches he encouraged prayer, atonement and active Christian living. Millions listened to his words. At Mindszenty’s consecration on 21st October 1946, Pope Pius XII told him: “You will be the first of the new cardinals to take up the martyrdom signified by the colour crimson.”⁸¹ He was proved right. The increasingly totalitarian dictatorship was determined to oust Mindszenty, and a smear campaign was launched against him. Although as early as February 1948 Mátyás Rákosi had told his Soviet comrades that he could always find “good psychiatrists who will declare Mindszenty insane”,⁸² his arrest was timed for 26th December that year, in the hope that it would be harder for the news to reach the people on the second day of Christmas. He was arrested on charges of treason, plotting to overthrow the republic, espionage and illegal currency dealing, and was taken to the State Security Authority headquarters at 60 Andrásy út in Budapest. There Lieutenant Colonel Gyula Décsi instructed his thugs to “Teach him to confess!” József Mindszenty’s show trial was preceded by thirty-nine days in detention, during which there were long alternating periods of torture and interrogation. What could not be achieved with ingratiating words was extracted with beatings. As he reported, “There comes a point at which I can’t keep count of the blows. I’m woken up by being drenched with a bucket of water.”⁸³ After these beatings he signed the transcript of a confession, but

81 József Horváth: *Mindszenty bíboros*. Mindszenty Emlékbizottság, München, 1980. 6.

82 Árpád Pünkösti: *Rákosi a csúcson 1948–1953*. Európa, Budapest, 1996. 49.

83 József Mindszenty, 241.

after each signature he added two letters: “c.f.” When Rákosi questioned the meaning of these letters, Gábor Péter, the dreaded leader of the State Security Authority, could only reply that c.f. was “some sort of religious nonsense”. Rákosi’s immediate response was: “No, it’s not religious nonsense; it means ‘not a word of this is true.’”⁸⁴ He was right: c.f. (*coactus feci*) means that a confession has been extracted by force. The punishment for this was another beating. His show trial was engineered, supervised and directed by Rákosi himself, on Stalin’s orders. The proceedings against him were intended to send a message not only to the public at home, but also abroad. Like other show trials, the Mindszenty trial was designed to show how the communist regime punished its enemies, how it created its own ideology of history and truth, what views it held, what it accepted and what it rejected.⁸⁵ And it also showed that the authorities would not shy away from denouncing as a common criminal and sentencing to life imprisonment the Prince Primate, holder of the second most important office after the head of state. So others could expect no mercy. Nor could they expect help from abroad. After all, neither Rome nor Washington helped Mindszenty; why should anyone else expect help? During his show trial there was an unprecedented press campaign, and hundreds of protests and other demonstrations were organised in an attempt to intimidate the Prince Primate – and, through him, the whole country. Because with his every action and every word József Mindszenty reminded Hungarians that they must not give up and must not resign themselves to losing their freedom, because they were stronger than the heavily armed invaders, as God was with them and they were supported by the Virgin Mary. Their Prince Primate’s perseverance and example gave the nation strength and let Europe and the world know that Hungary would stand firm. Through his martyrdom he drew the world’s attention to the conflict between church and state in Hungary and the unscrupulous nature of the system. To this end, he was able to set an example of a new kind of martyrdom: martyrdom without halo or recognition. His patriotism and his loyalty to his people and his church remained unquestioned. Mindszenty believed in the power of prayer and

84 Mi az igazság? Péter Gábor beadványa a börtönben, 10 July 1956. In: *1956-os Intézet*.

Link: <http://www.rev.hu/sulinet45/szerviz/dokument/peter.htm>

85 Mária Schmidt: *Egyazon mércével. A visszaperelt történelem*. Magyar Egyetemi Kiadó, Budapest, 2003. 47–48.

urged us to pray. In his inaugural address at Esztergom in 1945, he said the following: “If we again learn to pray, we will find strength and confidence. I, too, have faith in the prayer campaign of millions, and in my mother’s rosary – which I now clasp even more tightly. Do not lose your faith! Let us hold fast to the unshakeable religion of our hope. Thus we will have strength for the struggle that awaits us. If Our Lord God and Our Mother Mary give me help, I want to be the conscience of my people...”⁸⁶ And so it came to pass. He also set an example when he did not move to the Primate’s Palace in Esztergom, but stayed in Budapest to show that he had become one with the country. As he said, “It is right that the Primate of a ruined country should live in a ruined house.”⁸⁷

He owed his freedom to the 1956 Revolution, of which he became a symbol. In a radio speech on 3rd November he spoke openly of a fight for freedom, saying that the regime was “swept away by the entire Hungarian people” because “the nation wanted to be free to decide how to live.”⁸⁸ But with the Soviet counteroffensive on 4th November he – like the country – lost his freedom again. He was offered asylum by the United States Embassy in Budapest in its building in Szabadság tér (“Freedom Square”), where he spent fifteen years as a de facto prisoner, right up until 1971. As a so-called “positive result” of the policy of détente, under pressure from the Holy See and the Hungarian government he was forced to emigrate. Of this he said: “I am taking up what is perhaps the heaviest cross of my life: I am ready to leave my country to continue my penance in exile for my church and my people.”⁸⁹ In exile he retreated to the Pázmáneum university in Vienna, where – as during his stay at the American Embassy in Budapest – he was under surveillance by the Hungarian intelligence service. On 18th December 1974, less than a week before the twenty-fifth anniversary of his arrest, in an unprecedented move Pope Paul VI stripped him of the title of Archbishop of Esztergom and declared his see to be vacant. Mindszenty took note of the Pope’s decision

86 Margit Beke (ed.): *Egyházam és hazám – Mindszenty József hercegprímás szentbeszédei*. I. Esztergom Főegyházmege, Esztergom, 1991. 16.

87 József Horváth, 24.

88 Tamás Korányi G. (ed.): *Egy népfelkelés dokumentumaiból, 1956*. Lap- és Könyvkiadó Kft., Budapest, 1989. 107–109.

89 István Mészáros: *Mindszenty-leveleskönyv*. Eötvös József Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1997. 56.

and no longer used the title of Archbishop. He did not retire, however: he continued his pastoral activities until his death on 6th May 1975. On 15th May 1975, in accordance with his will, his remains were temporarily interred in the chapel of Saint Ladislaus in Mariazell Basilica. Although Mindszenty's death resolved a series of political and ecclesiastical issues in relations between Hungary and the Vatican, at the same time the Hungarian political leadership and the state security authorities also lost a trump card which, in their words, "in recent years we have often been able to use to repel the Vatican's ambitions."⁹⁰ His ashes were repatriated in 1991 and laid to rest in Esztergom Basilica. In 1989 the Office of the Prosecutor General in Budapest ordered an investigation into a review of Mindszenty's trial and sentencing. He was rehabilitated on 18th May 1990, but full legal exoneration only occurred in 2012. In the Holy See, his beatification is underway, although progress on it is slow and arduous.

The Fall

"Goodbye, Ivan!"

Aurora

In an act which was symbolic of the unconditional disarmament of communism, on 1st December 1989 Mikhail Gorbachev – General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party and leader of the world's greatest atheist power – went on a pilgrimage to Rome with his wife to visit Pope John Paul II of Poland, head of the largest Christian church. This was a modern-day Road to Canossa: a realisation that the war that atheism had waged against Christianity since 1917 had been lost. Faith in God and Christian morality had triumphed over both successive anti-Christian totalitarian dictatorships; because they were inhuman – and even anti-human. The forces of history, long thought to have been buried, had become more modern than ever. Faith in God and religion had defeated communism. Time has vindicated Mindszenty, who in Vienna wrote that "Every individual and every generation of every people must fight

90 ÁBTLL 3.2.9. R-8-009/4. 93. „Vecchio”. Mindszenty tevékenysége, emlékiratai és halála, 1975. június 25.

for their faith again and again. This is God's will. God is young. The future is His. He is not only the knower or jealous guardian of the past, of tradition and of the once great, but the summoner of the new, of the young, and of tomorrow."⁹¹

At his funeral, Cardinal and Archbishop emeritus of Vienna Franz König said of Mindszenty, "He was a martyr who endured physical and spiritual sufferings with wonderful fortitude, in unfailing loyalty to his church and his people. The ideological and political persecution of religion made him a martyr for our modern age."⁹² Mindszenty became the conscience of Hungary, and his life, his faith and his martyrdom are proof that an anti-religious attitude becomes an anti-human attitude sooner rather than later. His courage, his loyalty to the nation and his faith are an example to us all that resisting evil is a duty. The rule of the communists was overthrown by Mindszenty and brave heroes like him, who declared that they were not afraid. It was their overwhelming desire for freedom that fuelled the anti-communist revolution which put them back in control of their own destiny. We owe them a great deal. Among them was Mindszenty, "the Apostle of Hope."⁹³

91 István Mészáros, 91.

92 József Horváth, 6.

93 Full quote from Ulrich Kiss SJ, June 5, 2012: "Name to me one single pontiff in Europe or elsewhere who had, before Mindszenty, journeyed the world as a pastor, desiring personally to console and fortify every Christian from Perth to Stockholm. His chief message was hope. Who only sees him in a political light will never note that he was the apostle of hope."

László Sedivy, the confessing pastor who rescued the Jews

Éva Fritz Beke⁹⁴

László Sedivy was born in Szentendre on 11 November 1870. His parents were János Sedivy, a pastor and teacher of Moravian origin, and Angelika Baranyai. He was educated in his home town and in Vác. He completed his secondary education in Kecskemét. He studied theology in Budapest and Pápa and qualified as a teacher in Nagykőrös. He served as a chaplain in Komoča during his fourth year of theology. In 1894 he passed his first ministerial examination and in 1895 his second. He spent his years as an assistant pastor in the Reformed parish of Svätý Peter. From March 1895 to March 1896 he served as assistant pastor in Neded and then as pastoral teacher in Orechová Potôň. During this time he was invited to lead the missionary Reformed Church in Nitra, which he accepted, but the transfer did not go smoothly.

The Nitra Mission Church and its pastor

About the foundation of the Mission Church of Nitra on 19 January 1896 we read the following in the first protocol of the congregation:

“In the year 1896 since the birth of our Lord Christ and in the thousandth year since the foundation of our Hungarian homeland, at 11 o'clock in the morning of the 19th day of January, the inhabitants of the town and country of Nitra, who are of the Reformed religion, gathered to consider, according to the promptings of their hearts, which were full of religious feeling, how to found in this town a Christian Evangelical Reformed church in accordance

94 Mgr. Éva Fritz Beke, PhD., Reformed Christian Church of Slovakia, Kálvinista Szemle – Kalvínske hlasy, Komárom, Slovakia. Email: fbevi829@gmail.com

with the teachings of John Calvin. The proceedings of this deliberation are recorded as below in the protocol of this inaugural meeting.⁹⁵

Many tasks lay ahead for the first caretaker of the parish, Dr Endre Ádám, a colonel's doctor, and for the presbyters. A suitable pastor-teacher had to be found after securing a prayer room and an apartment⁹⁶ for the future pastor. In the already mentioned protocol we find the following: Ede Veress, pastor and dean of Búč, informed the newly founded parish that his efforts had been in vain, but then Zsigmond Bajkai, a candidate for the priesthood, would not accept the ministry in Nyitra. The other candidate, Sándor Fekecs, who might have been in line for the post, would only do the job of teacher-pastor in Nyitra just in final case, out of necessity.⁹⁷

László Sedivy was also mentioned - but the dean said he would gladly be placed to Nitra, only if someone could be found to replace him in Orechová Potoň. This could only be done at the end of January 1897, when Imre Csiba, a fourth-year theology student from Pápa, passed his semester exams and entered the service of Orechová Potoň.⁹⁸

95 Protocol of the Reformed Congregation of Nyitra 1. 1896–1897, p. 1. (The translations are from the original text.. Author's note).

96 "In Nitra, the spacious prayer room was created by removing the walls of an apartment in a private house. On the other side of the house it was connected to the parish priest's apartment. In one room of this apartment he conducted the official business of his congregation. This is where, after my arrival, I went to see Pastor László Sedivy". See: Lajos Acsay: Megemlékezés néhai jó Sedivy Lászlóról, a nyitrai református egyház első lelkipásztoráról, manuscript, Nitra, 1957, p. 3.

97 Op.cit. Letter from Ede Veress– 14 December 1896.

98 On the 11th of January 1897: Bishop Antal Gábor informs the administrator that as soon as the dean informs him that he has appointed László Sedivy as missionary pastor in Nitra, he will gladly consecrate the prayer house of the missionary congregation in Nitra. After the consecration of the prayer house, the dean installed Sedivy in his office and gave his inaugural sermon. 17 January 1897: In a letter from Ede Veress, he asked the rector to postpone the consecration of the prayer house and the installation of the pastor to the beginning of February. This was because Imre Csiba, a fourth-year student from Pápa, could only be assigned to Orechová Potoň after passing his semester exams.

Consecration of the prayer house and Sedivy's official inauguration

Instead of dean Ede Veress, - who was busy with other matters - on 14 February 1897, after the consecration of the prayer house by Bishop Antal Gábor, László Sedivy was ordained pastor of the parish of Nitra by Bishop Kálmán Tóth, pastor of Deák and *diocesan notary*. After the festive service, a general assembly was held in the newly consecrated prayer house, presided over by the newly appointed pastor, to hear a report on the circumstances of the congregation's foundation and to elect the first officers, namely 1 senior warden, 1 treasurer, 1 churchwarden and 4 presbyters, of whom 2 are Reformed and 2 are from the Augustinian congregation, as well as some interminable presbyters. A festive lunch was held at the Szarvas Hotel in the afternoon.

Sedivy began his active ministry immediately after his inauguration. The district of the mission church in Nitra was vast. As well as preaching and teaching the religion, the missionary pastor also carried the worries and concerns of the believers on his shoulders. In addition to the Nitra district, he established a number of diaspora churches in the districts of Trenčín, Túróc, Árva and Liptov, and he also established two subdivision churches. He called the believers to come together in larger settlements - Leopoldov, Trenčín, Žilina, Trnava, Vrútky, Handlová. He also ministered in Nové Zámky, Zlaté Moravce and Horša. The worships were held in two places in worship-houses: in Vrútky at the railway workers place, in Handlová at the miners', in Leopoldov at the state prison, while the others were just at private houses.⁹⁹ Sedivy, however, believed that it would be possible to build a church in Nitra! His plan was supported by the trustees and the presbytery. But he was also aware of the financial capabilities of the congregation. He asked for a two-month exemption from his pastoral duties to realise his dream, and "He took up his collection haversack and travelled all over the Highlands. He covered the whole county, especially the county of Nitra, which then stretched west to the Morava River and north to Turiec."¹⁰⁰ The development of the mission church went on well. The church was consecrated on 12 March 1911 as a

99 Lajos Acsay Megemlékezés néhai jó Sedivy Lászlóról, a nyitrai református egyház első lelkipásztoráról, manuscript, Nitra, 1957, 3.

100 Op.cit. Lajos Acsay. 1.

result of Sedivy's diligence and the fervour of the believers.¹⁰¹ Sedivy visited the diaspora churches and *branches* he had founded in the previous period regularly, as much as he could, until his death in 1944!

Sedivy under police surveillance

After the annex in 1938, Nitra remained within the territory of the independent Slovak state. The surveillance of Sedivy began as early as 1939, according to the surviving documents.¹⁰² This is described below in the order in which the documents have been found in the archives. Some of the documents will also be of importance for the events that followed.

On 19 July 1939, the Slovak Ministry of the Interior in Bratislava sent to the Office of the Gendarmerie Command in Nitra a communication written in Slovak¹⁰³, No. 8886/1939, approved by the Minister on 22 July 1939, stating that László Sedivy, a Reformed pastor from Chrudim, was engaged in anti-state activities. The state authorities in Bratislava have been informed that the pastor in question has anti-Slovak views, therefore they have requested an investigation of the matter. He should be expelled from Slovakia with immediate effect if the allegation is true. The authorities in Nitra had 8 days to do an investigation and report back. On 25 July 1939 the letter was posted.¹⁰⁴ On 2 August 1939, in response to a request received under no. 8886/1939, the Nitra Gendarmerie Headquarters reported the results of the investigation under no. 1011/1939. After listing the personal details of László Sedivy and his wife, it is stated that the pastor cannot be expelled under any circumstances, as he has been officially resident in Nitra since 9 September 1925. He and his wife are of Hungarian nationality. They are members of the United Hungarian Party. The person in question has strong Hungarian feelings, but he has not

101 Protocols of the Reformed Church of Nitra, 1897-1921, Volume I, General Assembly of 12 March 1911.

102 Ústav Pamäti Národa, názov archívneho fondu: Ústredňa štátnej bezpečnosti, pôvodná značka archívneho fondu (Institute for the Memory of the Nation, the name of the archive fund: the Headquarters of State Security, the original mark of the archive fund): ÚŠB, inv. č.: 209-396-62, (Hereinafter referred to a ÚPN)

103 The documents in the Slovak language have been freely translated by the author.

104 Op.cit. ÚPN, 8886/1939

participated in any public political events and has not engaged in any anti-state political activities. The person has been registered, and if he engages in any inappropriate activities in the future, he will be immediately reported to the competent authorities in Bratislava.¹⁰⁵ On 7 August 1939 the report was sent. Meanwhile, people in Bratislava were anxiously awaiting the news, thinking that the Nitra authorities had not complied with the request of 19 July. In its ex officio letter no. 10.310 of 4 August 1939, marked “confidential”, the presidency of the Slovak Ministry of the Interior had now personally instructed the commander of the Nitra gendarmerie to comply with the request sent under no. 8886/1939 within ten days.¹⁰⁶

The Gendarmerie Headquarters in Nitra informed the Ministry of the Interior that the request had been granted in document no. 1080/1939 dated 11th August 1939. This report was registered by the presidency of the Ministry of the Interior on the 18th of August 1939 under no. 10787.¹⁰⁷

Based on the above it can be concluded that László Sedivý was under surveillance by the state authorities from that moment on, although, - as we shall see below - after about five months of torture, correspondence, surveillance and psychological pressure, it became clear that he was not the Pastor Sedivý. Among the surviving documents is a handwritten letter from László Sedivý, dated 4 September 1939, written in Slovak, in which he states that he had handed over his radio within 24 hours, as required by Decree 1158/39, although he knew that he, as the owner, had not personally committed any offence. He never abused the radio, so he did not commit an offence. If some complain arrived to the Gendarmerie, it only could have been about something what happened when he was not at home. One such incident was when his relatives did not turn off the radio after the broadcast and the Hungarian national anthem was played. This was heard through the unlocked door of the room by the workers who were having lunch after work in the vineyard that day. The other incident may have occurred when the pastor’s 80-year-old mother-in-law listened to a Sunday service on the radio. She did not turn off the radio before the hymn was played. Sedivý then held a service in the town. He apologised and asked the authorities to drop the case against

105 Op.cit. ÚPN, 1011/1939

106 Op.cit. ÚPN, 10.310/1939

107 Op cit. ÚPN, 1080/1939

him and return the radio, promising to take the utmost care to avoid such an incident in the future.¹⁰⁸ In the case of the radio being confiscated, the minister's wife also wrote a letter to the Ostrava municipality saying that the radio was important to her and that they should consider the fact that her husband had voluntarily handed it in on 31 August when first asked.¹⁰⁹ In any case, the Nitra authorities have been proving their case.¹¹⁰ In December 1939, the Presidium of the Ministry of the Interior, in its reply to document 7239/1939, wrote to Nitra asking to report on the return of the radio equipment belonging to the Sedivy family. Note: Dr. Koso was personally convinced from the documents that it was not the pastor from Nitra, but another Sedivy from Domažlice.¹¹¹ A text dated 27 December 1939, one and a half lines long, testifies that the Sedivy family returned the radio set on 20 November.¹¹²

From the beginning of August the following events took place in parallel with the above-mentioned torture.

According to document no. 2114/39 of 12th September 1939 in the above-mentioned file and the short report attached to it, László Sedivy volunteered for the gendarmerie and wished to take the citizenship oath of allegiance. He would be particularly pleased if this could be done in Nitra, as it would be inconvenient for him to travel to another town for this purpose, given the means of transport available at the time.¹¹³ The Ministry of the Interior replied only at the beginning of November. It stated that the pastor could take the oath of allegiance to the district commander, if he was a Slovak citizen. The protocol about this was supposed to be sent directly to the Ministry of

108 Op.cit. ÚPN, 239, 5 september 1939.

109 Op.cit. ÚPN, 7239.

110 Op.cit. ÚPN, 7239/1939, 10 310.

111 Op.cit. ÚPN, 20719, 11 december 1939.

112 Op.cit. ÚPN, 9744/1939.

113 Op.cit. ÚPN, 2114/1939, stamped 10.310 - a document dealing with his anti-state activities.

Education.¹¹⁴ Later documents - from 1942 - give only an indirect indication of this matter's expiration.

Was Sedivy a Slovak citizen? Had he taken the oath of allegiance in 1939? If so, how did this affect the rest of his life - this will be examined in the following chapters.

The beginning of hard times

As you are well aware, during the Second World War a number of measures were taken against the Jewish population in Slovakia. The laws against them became stricter as the war progressed. We can see that even before the period under our study (1939-1942) there were occasional baptisms of Jews, if we look at the registers of the Christian churches. It can also be said that the motives for these people's abandonment of the religion of their ancestors were quite different from those of their co-religionists who were suffering the horrors of war.

The Jews were sent to the ghettos, forbidden to practise their professions or trades, forced to do labour service, to wear yellow stars on their overcoats, the curfews, the concentration camps, and from there only to the death camps...

When the first - seemingly unbelievable - news of the death camps arrived, many people doubted its veracity. They refused to believe that such a fate could await them. As time went on, uncertainty and fear grew. Fear of the future overshadowed their daily lives. A survivor's recollection of those times: "It was February 1942. There seemed to be an impending tragedy in the leaden skies of a harsh winter. For three years the war had been raging. Fear was alive in everyone, perhaps in the whole world. But the most oppressed were the Jews. Deprived of their rights, they lived their sad lives. They felt that they were on the verge of a terrible catastrophe. Their anxiety was similar to that of the cattle standing in front of the slaughterhouse. News circulated, distorted, transformed, but that was all just expression of bad suspicions. Mothers and fathers looked thoughtfully at their children, their faces written with "when" and "what's going to happen?" It was no different in Nitra, and the writer of these lines is in fact describing the events in Nitra, which were identical to

114 Op. cit. ÚPN, 12345/prez./1939.

those in other towns: the same power, in the same country, with the same mass of people, could only do the same thing... As far as I know, wherever there was a Reformed preacher, he made the same human gesture: he tried to help, which is a Christian duty, which is actually God's commandment! ... (...) The Reformed pastor László Sedivý stood out in this work, who was not afraid of the direct threats he had to hear day after day from certain circles who disagreed with this missionary work and punching in the face everything that is called Christian spirit".¹¹⁵

The spark of hope

The public mood of the time, the philanthropic attitude of the pastors, is very well reflected in the above lines. The work of László Sedivý in saving the Jews is immediately apparent when we look at the register of the Nitra parish. In 1938 two Jews asked for baptism, in 1939 seventeen, in 1940 seventeen and in 1941 twenty-three. In 1940 there were already two hundred and eighty such entries. Mostly people living in Nitra and the surrounding area sought to get baptised, but it was not uncommon for families to come from far away. This period, when deportations to the concentration camps had already begun and the flight from the Jewish religion had almost become a mass hysteria, can also be read in the records of Lajos Acsayos senior. This was triggered by leaked information: those who had been baptised by 16 March 1942 at the latest would be exempt from deportation. At that time, as the caretaker in Nitra described, hundreds of people came to the Christian pastor's office in droves. They wanted to escape. To enter the Catholic Church would have required six weeks of preparation. Time was short, so the masses turned to the Protestant churches. "And there began to flow an endless stream of people towards Pastor Sedivi. Within a week or two the news reached Bratislava, Trnava, Žilina and many outlying villages, almost miraculously."¹¹⁶

Lajos Acsayos writes that mass baptisms began on 10 March 1942 in the same note. The Jews could not go out en masse in the streets during the day. So they

115 Dr. Károly Fodor, Kassa, September 1957, reminiscence, Nyitra Reformed Congregation. 1–2.

116 Op.cit. elder Acsay. 7–8.

went to Laszlo Sedivy's flat up in Zobor¹¹⁷ after dark. The pastor was asked to baptise dozens of weeping men and women. Sedivy was tired after a day's work and his eyesight was not good, so he asked the crowd to come to church in the morning and he would grant their request, as he could not baptise at home. But among the desperate people were many from the countryside. It would have been a problem to return the next day. Faced with this, they begged and begged until he gave in and went down to the city with them. "In a church poorly lit by a few candles, he preached a sermon after reading one or two Bible verses. After a fatherly exhortation, he asked those present if they wished to receive the sacrament of baptism with a pure heart. The sacristan and members of his family were given the christening godparents. After the baptism, they went into the council hall. Each of them had to certify his intention to leave the Jewish religion by means of a notification to the competent district office (výmer). No one was baptised without this certificate. That was how much he respected the authority of the Výmer. He did not want to violate the law (...) After certifying, he entered the fact of baptism in the register and issued the baptismal certificates to those from the countryside who were obliged to leave. This went on until the next morning. But he could not go home. A crowd of new candidates was waiting for him in the church."¹¹⁸ This ministry of probations continued for a number of months. It is not known how many people avoided the death camps by being baptised. But at least there, at the baptismal font, a spark of hope for survival was rekindled.

Several months were spent in this demanding service. It is not known how many avoided the death camps by being baptised. But at least there, at the baptismal font, there was a spark of hope for survival.

After the mass baptisms in March, the number of baptisms fell slightly, but when news of another amnesty in August 1942 began to spread, this time for those baptised before September 1942, Jews once again flocked to the Protestant congregations.

117 This mountain is part of the city of Nitra, and its slopes are still home to vineyards.

118 Op.cit. elder Acsay, 7–8.

The consequences

The rescue of the Jews was nowhere without consequences

The Reformed congregation in Nitra has the memoirs of the daughter of sacristan Mrs. Lajos Rásó, born Erzsébet Matyó, where she describes how she did not suffer as much from the humiliation of the Hungarians when she saw how the Jewish families were treated. She witnessed a mother being dragged away from her children.¹¹⁹ She was told that there would be sent for them the next day. The majority stood by - intimidated - as they watched the cruelty inflicted on their Jewish neighbours. Sedivy baptised the Jews out of his profession and duty, and when he asked the sacristan's wife to be godmother, she asked him: "Do you know, Reverend, that this could be a great trouble?" He answered: "Bözsike, I know, but we have to do everything to save them." This is the status my mother took then, that she would do everything she could, if trouble occurs...¹²⁰ The parents also warned their children that if anyone asked them questions about the pastor, they should not answer anything. Instead, they should send the questioner to their parents. Then one day, people from the Slovak National Security Office (Úrad Štátnej Bezpečnosti Slovenskej krajiny) came to the house and started asking questions about the baptism of Jews. They kept asking the pastor's wife why the pastor baptised Jews, why the wife was a godmother to Jews, how much money or gold Sedivy received from Jews for baptisms, and the family suspected that they and their pastor were in big trouble. A few days later they heard from their friends in Zobor: László Sedivy had been arrested and deported.¹²¹

László Sedivy's file contains an article from the 12th August 1942 issue of the German-language daily paper Grenzbote from Slovakia, in which it reports on a repeated Calvinist baptism scandal and names the wealthy Jewish families who were baptised by the pastor in Nitra in the first days of August. At the end of the short article, he suggested that these Jews had not only obtained permission to travel from Bratislava to Nitra, but also a certificate allowing them to travel throughout Slovakia. This travel permit is in direct violation of all relevant regulations. No Jew is entitled to such a permit. With these lines,

119 Erzsébet Matyó, 11 January 1997, reminiscence. 4.

120 Op.cit. Erzsébet Matyó. 5.

121 Op.cit. Erzsébet Matyó. 5.

he only further inflamed public opinion. In fact, it was a prelude to the events becoming two weeks later.¹²²

On 27th August 1942, at 3.15 pm, a telephone call was received from the State Security Headquarters in Bratislava to the State Security Office in Nitra. The call specified that the Calvinist pastor László Sedivy was to be arrested immediately. At 3.20 pm the commander of the gendarmerie gave the order of the day for Sedivy to be brought in immediately. At 3.45 pm, a telephone call was received in Bratislava from the gendarmerie headquarters in Nitra, saying that the Calvinist pastor Sedivy had been arrested and was to be taken to Illava by the next train. On the same day, the commander of the Illava concentration camp reports to Bratislava that the gendarmerie in Nitra has delivered to the camp the Calvinist pastor Laszlo Sedivy, born on 11th November 1870 in Szentendre, Hungarian citizen, married, living at 9 Martinská Street, Nitra, with a pencil note next to his registration stamp: “Krstil Židov” (he baptised Jews).¹²³

The day after Sedivy’s arrest, on 28th August 1942, an article about baptising Jews was published in *Gardista*, - the official newspaper of the Hlinka Guard, the fascist paramilitary organisation of the first Slovak Republic: “Sedivy the Peacher wants to turn Nitra to Hungarian with the help of Jews - In a few days he turned 717 Jews into Hungarian Calvinists”. The article explains: “Despite repeated warnings, Sedivy did not stop the mass baptism of Jews. He did it without any religious preparation and for profit. He discredited the sacrament of baptism. The baptised Jews enriched the ranks of Hungarians in Nitra by immediately being declared Hungarian citizens. It is possible that Mr Sedivy might have got into trouble as a result of the general outcry that this had caused. He was therefore banned from Nitra. He was placed under protection. The author of the article expresses his hope that Mr Sedivy will not be made a martyr, as was the case with the pastor of Zvolen, Mr Puskás.¹²⁴ Meanwhile, Sedivy was languishing in the Illava camp. A week after his arrest, he was transferred to Bratislava for interrogation. The detainee behaved in an orderly manner in the Illava camp, according to the extradition form.¹²⁵ He

122 Op. cit. ÚPN. 25429/26.8.1942.

123 Op. cit. ÚPN. 26103.

124 Op. cit. ÚPN. *Gardista* – 26239.

125 Op. cit. ÚPN. 26314.

wrote to his family from Bratislava, and his lines were a great joy at home. We know this because his wife replied and wrote back. The reader is also informed about events at home. The pastor's wife and the lawyer were in preparation to visit the minister Tuka in the near future. However, it would be most welcome if the pastor's citizenship was in order, as his future existence depends on it. Here the wife asks for the citizenship application to be sent, which the lawyer can quickly sort out.¹²⁶

The report of László Sedivy's interrogation was written on 15th September 1942, after almost two weeks in Bratislava. After his personal details had been taken, the pastor was informed of the subject of the interrogation and told to answer only the truth. From his answers to the questions put to him, we learn the following: from 1939 and to the end of 1941 he baptised circa 70 Jews from the nearby settlements. For the baptism and the administrative costs he charged each person 20-20 crowns. He also asked everyone to give as much as they could to help renovate and decorate the church. From the seventy people who were baptised, about 9000 crowns were collected. The donated money was entrusted to the church elder, Lajos Acsay, the caretakers of the church. The first mass baptism took place in March 1942. His church leaders gave him no instructions. However, he asked the district magistrate in Nitra, Mr. Fábíán, the district commander, and Dr. Andel, the district inspector, whether he could baptise Jews who came to him with a certificate from the Nitra district office stating that they had left the Jewish Church. Both district magistrates replied that, in accordance with the rules of the Calvinist church, he could baptise people who came to him and had left the Jewish community. He baptised 217 Jews from the settlements in his district in March 1942. However, Sedivy also mentions that when his colleague in Bratislava was undergoing treatment for lung disease in the Tatra mountains, he asked him to be his deputy. He baptised 50 Jews in Bratislava at that time. The protocol also records that the baptisms took place in a church whenever possible, and if there was no church available, the baptism took place in the home of the Jewish family.

The baptisms were reported to the commander of the gendarmerie, Dr Kompiš, who sent two people to the parish to check the names registered. He

126 Op. cit. ÚPN. Letter from Jolán Sedivy to her husband: 9 September 1942.

could not remember the names of all the people baptised, but stressed that Dr Kompiš had all the relevant reports and lists of names.

As far as finances were concerned, he received 70,000 crowns for the baptism of 217 Jews. 50,000 crowns were deposited in the bank by the caretaker Acsay, 20,000 crowns were kept by the pastor himself, 6,000 crowns were used to buy a harmonium, 5,000 crowns were used to buy a bell and 9,000 crowns were kept for other church purposes.

The testimony ends by saying: It did not even occur to him that his behaviour might offend public opinion, since Jews were baptised at the Catholic parish too.¹²⁷

Two days later another interrogation took place. Its content was similar to the typed version of 15 September. A handwritten note was made. On the basis of this note, the Bratislava authorities urgently asked their colleagues in Nitra to verify the accuracy of the information contained in the report, to check all the data on the baptised persons and to send a complete list of names, including their addresses.¹²⁸ As a result, the pastor was sent back to the camp in Illava.¹²⁹ Sedivy's statement that he had told the pastor that he could baptise Jews who had properly left the Jewish religion and that the district office would issue them a certificate to that effect was confirmed by the report from Nitra dated 10th October 1942, based on the request marked 26 386/3 - 1942, which included the gendarmes' report and the list of baptised Jews. BUT! Because the district offices were suspended from dealing with Jewish conversions, the Jews could not obtain such a certificate. As far as the exchange of material was concerned, the arrested person was to be asked whether he had kept such a diary, and if so, where and with whom, because it was not to be found in the parish.¹³⁰ Later, when the State Security of Bratislava received the list, they immediately demanded the deportation of all Jews baptised by Sedivy, on the grounds that their baptism was invalid because they did not have the necessary certificates, and that their entry into the Calvinist Church was therefore illegal.¹³¹

127 Op. cit. ÚPN Protocol, 15.9.1942.

128 Op. cit. ÚPN. 26 386/3 – 1942.

129 Op. cit. ÚPN. 26 386/4 – 1942.

130 Op. cit. ÚPN. 2329/1942.

131 Op. cit. ÚPN. 30 939 /3-1942.

While the authorities corresponded with each other, and reports were received in response to orders and summonses, the physical and mental health of the arrested pastor was failing. Letters written by Jolán Sedivy on 12 October 1942 prove this.

One of them was addressed to the Prime Minister. In it, the pastor's wife pleads for her husband's release, because he is 72 years old, ill, suffers from muscle cramps at night and has frequent nosebleeds. With tears in her eyes, she begged for mercy for her husband. Witnesses testified that he only baptised Jews who came to him with valid official documents. He would have liked to retire. But no suitable successor could be found. A plea for mercy to the Prime Minister concludes the letter.

Jolán Sedivy's request was forwarded by the Prime Minister's personal secretary.¹³²

In the second letter - addressed to the State Security Centre in Bratislava - the wife asks the authorities to allow her to meet her husband in the presence of an official, especially as her husband is only allowed to write to his family once a month and it would be very important to discuss family matters.¹³³ On 13th November 1942, the Bratislava State Security Centre allowed Jolán Sedivy to visit her husband.¹³⁴ Jolán Sedivy sent František Benushka, the head of the State Security, the following telegram after the visit. "I humbly ask you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to have mercy on my 72-year-old husband, Laszlo Sedivy. We visited him yesterday in Illava. He is very sick and weak. Please release him as soon as possible so that he may not die there..."¹³⁵

It was not in vain that the pastor's wife continued petition the authorities. On 21st November 1942, the Prime Minister's Office also wrote a letter to the headquarters of the State Security in Bratislava. There, it was decided to release the Reformed pastor Laszlo Sedivy from Nitra.¹³⁶ On 25th November 1942 this was realized. The file contains a declaration of honour signed by László Sedivy. It states that the person released will not take part in public events or political meetings for one year, will not write for any newspaper, will

132 Op. cit. ÚPN. 135/1942.

133 Op. cit. ÚPN. 31 145.

134 Op. cit. ÚPN. 31 145/4-1942

135 Op. cit. ÚPN. 1650.

136 Op. cit. ÚPN. 35 499 /4-1942.

avoid large social gatherings, will not criticise state bodies and will even ask his fellow citizens to be patient. He acknowledges that he is released from the concentration camp only on parole, to which he may be returned if his conduct warrants it. The document certifying his release, dated 26th November 1942, is accompanied by this declaration.¹³⁷

One might think that the persecution of László Sedivy would have come to an end with this declaration of release.

Why in December 1942 and January 1943 was she still looking for her husband? Where could László Sedivy have disappeared in the meantime? The authorities try to prove that Jolán Sedivy's request for her husband's release could not be granted on the last pages of the file of the pastor's surveillance, arrest and interrogation (15th December 1942 and 13th and 20th January 1943) because it had already been made on 25th November 1942.¹³⁸

There is a diary in the records of the Nitra congregation. It summarises the events since László Sedivy was taken to Illva on 27th August 1942. The events are listed in chronological order, in short bullet points, and it says: "On the 25.XI. pm. Pastor Sedivy returned from the camp after having been released."¹³⁹

Conclusion

In the above we have tried to shed light on a small part of the events of the Second World War, on some of the human destinies of those who dared to oppose the aims of the great powers, guided only by humanity and love for their fellow man. What happened to the hundreds of Jews baptised by Sedivy? This is the subject of a new research project. In one of the memoirs already quoted, we read that by the time of Sedivy's return from prison, the first act of the tragedy had been played out, 99% of his new followers had been

137 Op. cit. ÚPN. 310-1/42.

138 Op. cit. ÚPN. 38 567/4-1942, 15-435/1942, 1319/4-1943, 2073-1943.

139 The diary of the ecclesiastical work of Lajos Acsay after the cessation of the work of the grand reverend László Sedivy and his transfer to Illava on the 27th of August 1942.

deported...¹⁴⁰ The months of imprisonment were the final seal on the fate of the hundreds of Jews who were baptised by Sedivy.

László Sedivy's fate was sealed by the months he spent in captivity. The tall, powerful man returned emaciated and ill. As Lajos Acsay wrote, he was never the same again. He continued to take care of his followers with great diligence. He continued to preach and give communion. His last major tour was at Pentecost 1944. He died on 16th June 1944. He was buried in the cemetery of Nitra.

On 3rd August 2012, the 100th anniversary of Raul Wallenberg's birth, he was posthumously awarded a Certificate "For Merit" for his humane actions in defending and rescuing his persecuted fellow countrymen of Jewish origin. The certificate was presented to Tamás Ficzer, the Reformed pastor of the church in Nitra, in lack of any living relative, and it has been reminding the congregation since of their former pastor, László Sedivy, who saved the Jews and who believed in the cause of the Jews.

140 Op. cit. Fodor. 2.

Churchmen at the hands of the Gestapo and the Arrow Cross - „the world’s strangest Calvinist congregation”.

Gusztáv Tamás Filep ¹⁴¹

What I have to tell has two parts. They may be loosely connected, but they are both relevant to the theme of the conference. First, I will talk about church people who were martyred during the Second World War, or at least retaliated against by the authorities, not in a comprehensive way, but rather as an introduction, a reminder and a reminder of the theme. It is not about the resistance or lack of resistance of the Church, nor about how many baptismal certificates were issued during the German occupation of Hungary. It is not about how many people from the groups of the persecuted and wanted for death were saved with the help of the Churches, nor about when, where and in what form Church leaders protested against inhumanity. It will be about people who have been victims in one way or another. In the second part, I will talk about the Reformed congregation, the “parish”, that was founded by Hungarian political prisoners in the concentration camp of Mauthausen.

1

Since the regime changes in Central Europe, research on the relationship between churches and dictatorships has naturally shifted its focus to the post-World War II Communist-era examples of standing for the Word (which had previously been off-limits for professional discussion). Although research has since been published on variations of standing up for the Lord under Nazism and its co-ideologies, but this period has understandably been relegated to the background. This is a pity, because the two dictatorships were linked in many ways, and their methods and aims were largely similar. The question of why the persecuted clergy of the communist period, and the churches themselves,

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did not embrace martyrdom earlier, during the reign of Nazism and related regimes, has to be clarified. I will not go into the motifs, as I have said, there was no central resistance by the churches during the Second World War. There is often a certain reluctance in the reading of publications on this subject; it is a subject which has not broken out of the ideological framework. The history of the Reformed Church in Hungary between the two World Wars, which is of particular interest to me, has not yet been published in a monograph that meets academic criteria and treats the subject in a satisfactory manner. Those who point to positive examples are often accused of trying to put the church's failure to confront violence into perspective, or at least to counteract it.

To come to the point: the call for this conference could be read as if it refers to clergy people of Hungarian nationality who were persecuted, or destroyed by the dictatorships that came to power in Hungary, perhaps logically male persons. I do not have the space to give a comprehensive picture, I will only give examples of personal sacrifice and/or suffering. In any case, the first two martyrs I mention do not meet these criteria in several respects. Both were women, the first was not martyred at home, and the second was not Hungarian, but was taken from her service in Hungary to an even more despicable concentration camp set up by the German Nazis. Both of these women died earlier than the others whose deaths will be mentioned shortly.

The first was the missionary Mária Molnár. She was killed on the Admiralty Islands in New Guinea, a year before the Germans invaded Hungary. On 16th March 1943, she was executed by Japanese soldiers on the torpedo boat Akikaze, along with his fellow German missionaries and other foreigners, although most of them were citizens of countries allied to Japan. Those killed included monks and nuns, as well as Chinese, Indians and Burmese. One possible explanation for this is that they were thought to be spies recruited by the Allies, or at least more than one of them.¹⁴²

As far as I know, Jane Haining, the head of the Scottish Mission in Budapest, was the first Hungarian churchwoman to be deported after the German

142 Monograph and edited volume on Mária Molnár: Angéla Beliczay: *„Engem várnak a szigetek.” Tizenöt év a pápuák között. Molnár Mária élete és vértanúhalála.* A Református Zsinati Iroda Sajtóosztálya, Budapest 1987; Konferencia és megemlékezés Molnár Mária születésének 120. évfordulóján. 2006. október 28. Szombathely. Edited: János Puskás. PRТА, Pápa 2007 (Pápai eperfa könyvek 16.).

occupation. The Scottish Mission was a Jewish mission; according to Albert Bereczky, Haining was suspected of being a spy in the eyes of the Germans because of her name and her origins from an enemy country. It is certain that at the beginning of the occupation she helped to rescue people from the Szabadság Square and Pozsonyi Street congregations in Budapest, but she was arrested on 25th April (although she had a letter of protection from the Swiss Embassy) and was not allowed to take even her Bible with her. It is indicative about the weightlessness of the leaders of the Christian churches at the time that, despite the promise of Prime Minister Sztójay, who was approached in this matter by Bishop László Ravasz and Secretary of State Miklós Mester, Haining was not released, even after the intervention of the Governor. On the 22nd of August, the Gestapo informed the Scottish Mission that Jane Haining had died in Auschwitz on the 17th of July. According to Albert Bereczky, her officially documented crimes included working among Jews, crying when she saw the yellow star on the Institute's students for the first time, firing her Aryan housekeeper, listening to English radio, having English visitors, playing politics, visiting British prisoners of war and sending parcels to them. She did not admit just one of these, that she was doing politics.¹⁴³

The conference invitation might also suggest that we should be talking about those who could not be twisted out of their convictions by power, who resisted physical and spiritual violence, who had a choice between right and wrong, and who persevered in faith. In fact, church people who fell into the hands of the authorities because of their role in rescue or organised resistance no longer had a choice when they were arrested. Before that, most of them had had a choice, but this is probably not the case for all of them. Some of them knew from the beginning that they were risking their lives, and others did not directly participate in any illegal action, but may have simply talked back to an official, or cautiously opposed a regulation. Someone could land in a concentration camp for these, I will give you an example below.

After the political turnaround that began in 1989, as I said, there was a flurry of data and important partial studies on the subject. A search on the web for more familiar names and keywords will give you a wealth of information on the subject. However, I would recommend a book published in 1985 as

143 Albert Bereczky: *A magyar protestantizmus a zsidóüldözés ellen*. Református Traktátus Vállalat, Budapest 1945, 38–40. p.

a starting point: Károly Varga Hetényi's book¹⁴⁴, which contains the data that had become known by the time of its publication. Some of this data had been collected by the author himself, of course, and some of it was considered uncertain even by the author himself, in which case he asked his readers for further data. This work is therefore the best starting point. There are more than 150 names of Hungarian clergymen and clergywomen who served in Hungary (or who fled to Hungary, for example French or Polish clergymen) and who were in some way in conflict with the authorities of the time. (There are also accounts of South Slavic priests who were victimised when Hungary invaded the South.) Some escaped, others were simply watched, reprimanded, harassed, others were sent to prison, internment or concentration camps (including some who could not be deported to the Third Reich because the Soviets had already surrounded Budapest, and others who fled by train), and others were murdered. We know (or think) from the book that more than 100 priests were arrested. 10 were executed or murdered, and 15 were sent to concentration camps in the Third Reich. The relevant glossary article in a handbook published shortly afterwards was probably also written by Hetényi Varga (no name or letter under the glossary article, but he is listed among the authors), in which the figures are as follows: "In Hungary more than 100 priests and monks were arrested for anti-war and anti-Nazi activities, for illegally organising and openly opposing the Arrow Cross terror, and for helping to rescue the persecuted. Of these, 35 were in prison in Sopronkőhida and 8 were in prison in Komárom. 10 clergymen were executed, one was persecuted to death. 15 priests were sent to the concentration camp in No".¹⁴⁵ What is certain is that there were explicitly anti-national socialist journals with links to the church long before the World War, the most notable being *Korunk Szava*, founded by Count György Széchenyi. The immediate danger, the concrete threat, was perceived partly in connection with the

144 Károly Hetényi Varga: *Akiket üldöztek az igazságért. Papi sorsok a horogkereszt és nyilaskereszt árnyékában*. Ecclesia, Budapest 1985.

145 Resistance from the churches. In: *A magyar antifasiszta ellenállás és partizánmozgalom. Kislexikon*. Ervin Liptai. Edited by Bassa Endre and Gazsi József. [Közreadta a Hadtörténeti Intézet és Múzeum.] Kossuth Könyvkiadó [Budapest] 1987, [76]–77., here: p. 77. (It should be noted that Varga Hetényi's research also leads to the conclusion that the number of deaths is higher; the author has certainly only quantified the documented cases that have been proven beyond doubt).

strengthening of the “Greater German” idea by church people serving in the communities of German settlements in Hungary, mostly of German origin themselves. In order to avert or at least contain this, Ádám Berencz edited his German-language weekly *Die Donau* as early as 1935, clearly emphasising the neo-pagan character of Nazism in his arguments. In South Transdanubia, other Catholic and Lutheran pastors also took a stand against the German Renaissance, and parish priest József Pór and the theologian Gusztáv Thomka founded the *Hűség a Hazához* (*Loyalty to Homeland*) movement to counteract it. Berencz was arrested by the Gestapo after the occupation in May 1944, and was released through the intervention of Archbishop József Grósz, but was immediately taken out of circulation by the church authorities and placed in the Archbishop’s Palace in Kalocsa.¹⁴⁶ Pór, who had compounded his crimes by delivering food to the Bonyhád ghetto before the deportations, was kidnapped by the Gestapo in October and released in Sopron on 1st April.¹⁴⁷

Simultaneously, there were clear signals from the West about the nature of the Third Reich. Following the Anschluss, the Hungarian priests in Burgenland began to clash with the new regime. In 1938 the Austrian Benedictine priest Ödön Pontiller, of East Tyrolean origin, who had previously served in Bavaria and had been forced to flee, arrived in Hungary via Burgenland; in May 1944 he was captured by the Gestapo, sentenced to death in Berlin on charges including subversion of the armed forces, advocacy of the enemy and slander of the Führer, and executed in Munich.¹⁴⁸

Of course, after the German occupation of Hungary in March 1944, most of the latter were involved in rescuing people or possibly in organised resistance. Among those who rescued people (not only Jews, but also French refugees, Poles, Alsatian soldiers who had fled from the Germans, Hungarian deserters who had to be hidden, etc.) were some of the church workers who had been taken away, arrested or had to avoid detection. Among the rescuers, there is a wealth of literature on the stories of Sára Salkaházi, born in Košice and Vilma Bernovits, also from Košice. (The latter was not a clergywoman, but

146 See also: Károly Hetényi Varga: Berencz Ádám káplán, lapszerkesztő. In *ibid: Akiket üldöztek az igazságért. Papi sorsok a horogkereszt és nyilaskereszt árnyékában.* op.cit., 52–124.

147 See more: Károly Hetényi Varga: Poór (Bauer) József apátplébános. op.cit., 323–383.

148 See more: Károly Hetényi Varga: Pontiller Ödön bencés áldozópap. op.cit., 313–322.

worked as a religious teacher). Together with their guards, they were shot into the Danube. Some of them became part of the organised resistance, such as Ferenc Kálló, a military dean¹⁴⁹ and lieutenant-colonel, who also hid many people in the 11th garrison hospital, Jews, Allied pilot officers, but also produced leaflets. He was murdered by the Arrow Cross without due process. Some were arrested on suspicion of anti-fascist activities, others on suspicion of collaborating with the enemy, the Soviets or Tito's partisans. Others were arrested on suspicion of communist activities, such as József Király, the parish priest and member of parliament from Čičov, who managed to escape from the march to Dachau.

Most of the priests who were deported from Hungary at that time served outside the present borders. After their release, they returned to different countries. Some of them had other nationalities. However, none of them was considered Hungarian in international literature, except for those who returned to present-day Hungary after the war. Among the Hungarian clergy, according to one of our sources, the following were released from the Dachau camp: István Benkő, Roman Catholic doctrine teacher and secretary of the EMSZO, András Coman, Greek Catholic priest, Milán Kizdobranszki, Eastern Orthodox priest, György Novák, Capuchin priest, marquess György Pallavicini, Roman Catholic theologian, Tamás Roszoha, Orthodox priest, János Schmalczl, Roman Catholic parish priest, Emil Szivák, Lutheran pastor, István Sztakics, Orthodox deacon.¹⁵⁰ Two of the three identified as Hungarians, István Eglis and István Benkő, were members of the Inter-Church Workers' Sections (Egyházközi Munkás Szakosztályok) (EMSZO), which cooperated with the Magyar Front, an association of organisations involved in the resistance. They were deported from Hungary along with several of their civilian colleagues. Hetényi was able to interview Benkő, which he published with documentary evidence in his book cited above.¹⁵¹ Eglis wrote down his memories, but in the form of a novel; his book was published

149 See more: Károly Hetényi Varga: Kálló Ferenc tábori esperes. I. m., 243–298. p.

150 Történelmi Tár. Digitális História adatbázis. https://www.tortenelmitar.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9753:19450429&catid=47:esemenytar&Itemid=82

151 Károly Hetényi Varga: Benkő István EMSZO-titkár. In *ibid*: *Akiket üldöztek az igazságért*. op.cit., 19–51.

only a decade ago.¹⁵² The third, György Pallavicini Jr, was not a priest, but only pretended to be one in order to be placed in the camp's priests' block (the only block for clergy in the Reich's camps; clergy were confined here to avoid "poisoning" of the other deportees), but it is a fact that he had been admitted to the Central Seminary in Budapest, but at the time he had been active in the resistance before his arrest. In the Magyar Front he was a representative of the Kettőskereszt Vérszövetség (Two-Cross Blood League). He was also involved in the formation of the Christian Democratic People's Party, which also became part of the organisation. He died in a Soviet prison camp a few years later.¹⁵³ Hetényi Varga mentioned fifteen deported pastors and monks. I see that the Unitarian minister Áron Bónis was not among them. Géza Berey, who was with him in the camp, remembered him in his memoirs.¹⁵⁴ His crime was that he was called to a miner in Győr who had died of smoke poisoning on a deportation train from Komárom. He suggested that the miner should be taken to hospital, as he might die. Instead of this, he was thrown into the wagon.

It is curious that among the deportees were two Reformed pastors. Both died outside the camp, while the others survived the ordeal. Dr. Zsigmond Varga Jr. served the congregation of the Hungarian colony in Vienna. During one of the services in October 1944, a Hungarian Gestapo agent interrupted his sermon. The pastor refused to give in. He reprimanded the confidant and the service continued. A few days later Varga was to be arrested at the Collegium Hungaricum, but he no longer lived there. Two Hungarians were taken away anyway. Perhaps hoping that the other two would be released in his place, the pastor himself reported to the Gestapo. He was accused of being pleased to see German cities bombed by the Allies, of listening to English radio and spreading rumours, and of being generally opposed to National Socialism. He died on 5th March 1945 in Gusen II, a subcamp of Mauthausen. Myocardial insufficiency was the official cause of death. "We know that, despite his suffering

152 István Eglis: *Keresztúton. Egy magyar pap Dachau poklában.* [He is the editor of the text and the author of the footnotes: László Szigeti.] Új Ember, Budapest 2014.

153 For example: Károly Kiss: *A két Pallavicini. Párbuszamos életrajzok* (1.) Magyar Nemzet, 1995. march 18., 18.; (2.) march 20., 14.

154 Géza Berey: *Hitler-Allee.* Gondolat, [Budapest], 1979. First mention of Bónis on pages 152–153.

and the threat of death, he tried to fulfil his pastoral mission and ministry even in the concentration camp, from reports which his fellow prisoners later sent to his father. (...) He had the courage, even in this dungeon of hell, to exhort us to patience and humble submission to the will of God through the faithful witness of Job”.¹⁵⁵

The other was Kornél Nagy, a pastor from Dunaalmás (who came from Deáki). He died in the Haslach concentration camp. According to literature, he denounced Nazi ideas “almost from the beginning”, participated in the rescue of Jews and prisoners. He was also connected with the resistance organised by his son, who was also arrested and later, after his escape, died in an armed struggle. On 30th October 1944 the father was taken to the monastery fortress in Komárom. From there he was transported to the Reich with thousands of other prisoners.¹⁵⁶

Each of the three great Christian churches had martyrs whose ancestors were Jewish or who were born Jewish themselves. However, because of their vocation, they were exempt from Jewish laws or were excluded from the scope of these laws. However, they were unable to save their parents and eventually became victims themselves. I am not saying that their origins may not have played a role in their deaths. But as far as the often fragmentary data can be pieced together, this was not their main crime in the eyes of their murderers. The best-known of these is probably Gábor Ervin, a priest, pastor of the diocese of Esztergom, theology teacher, philosopher, secretary of the Hungarian Holy Cross Association (allegedly related to Heinrich Heine on his mother’s side). According to an informant, he sewed on the yellow star

155 Albert Stein: Ifj. dr. Varga Zsigmond emlékezete. Translated by Dezső Fükő. In: *Theologiai Szemle*, 1981. 2. n., 100–103., here 102. Written by his father, a theology teacher, it was published in the years after the war: *A Krisztus szolgálatában megdicsőült ifj. dr. Varga Zsigmond okleveles református lelkész emlékezete. Életrajzi keretbe foglalta: sen. Zsigmond Varga*. Debrecen 1949.

156 For example: Tamás Majsai: A protestáns egyházak az üldözés ellen. In Szabolcs Szita (ed.): *Magyarország 1944. Üldöztetés – embermentés.*. Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó – Pro Homine – 1944 Emlékbizottság. Budapest 1994, [150]–184, here: 178–179. p., illetve https://wesley.hu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Majsai_A_protestans_egyhazak_az_uldoses_ellen_In_Magyarország_1944_.pdf Ugyanebben a kiadványban lásd még: Hetényi Varga Károly: A magyar katolikus egyház az üldözöttekért (1944–1945), [115]–149.

during the deportations as a sign of solidarity, and was even seen wearing it on the street. I doubt it: The Church authorities would have forbidden it (since, according to the Church, this symbol denotes denomination, not origin). It is likely, however, that Ervin was commenting on the brutal treatment of the Jews who were being driven down the street in front of him. In the immediate aftermath of his death, he was ambushed by Germans who offered him and his two brothers the chance to escape to Switzerland for a fortune in gold. But the Gestapo were waiting for them at the border and killed them as fugitives. At the same time, Gábor Ervin hid Jews and Transylvanian refugees (levente) (or refugee minors) in his own apartment, who were hiding not to be transported to the West. In December, members of the Arrow Cross attacked the house and took them away. Only the maid returned and reported that the philosopher and his mother had been praying while being flogged. They were shot on the banks of the Danube.¹⁵⁷

From the parish was taken the mother of László Remete, a catechist, Lutheran pastor of Jelšava since 1939. Remete is known to have been involved in the Slovak national uprising. However, this probably needs to be clarified. Protecting the Levente-s from being resettled in the West may also have been his main objective. In the summer of 1944 he organised a so-called armed group. He probably also had other contacts with partisans. With the Levente-s he retreated to the mountains. From there he occasionally returned to Jolšva to hold a service, as on 17th December 1944, in Advent. He was arrested, if not in the pulpit, then in the parsonage, and he was handed over to the Gestapo in Banská Bystrica. On the 9th of January 1945 he was shot in the lime kiln in the village of Garamnémetfalva.¹⁵⁸

In particular, we know that he was in contact with Emil Szivák, an evangelical pastor from Jelšavská Teplica. Szivák had previously been deported to Dachau concentration camp.

From the reformed pastors, János Erőd had common fate. In '44 the Bishop's Office transferred him to the countryside, apparently as a kind of itinerant

157 See more: Zoltán Frenyó (ed.): *Ervin Gábor emlékezete – Ervin Gábor bölcséleti munkái. Fejezet a magyar neotomizmus történetéből.* L'Harmattan, Budapest 2012.

158 There is also Slovak literature about him. There is also a book about him written in Hungarian: Pál Rédey: *Az elfelejtett ember.* A Magyarországi Evangélikus Egyház Sajtósztálya, Budapest 1978.

pastor, and perhaps even hid him a little. He worked as an assistant pastor in Győr¹⁵⁹, and then, according to one of our sources, he was the head of a boys' boarding school in Komárom, and during the Arrow Cross he hid here in the Timothy House. His sister and his parents were deported. With the Good Shepherd Mission, which was involved in rescue work, Erőd had a kind of cooperation. He was arrested by the Gestapo in Pápa, probably as a suspected spy. It is possible that he was arrested after being denounced. He was executed behind the barracks in Pápa in February 1945, together with his Reformed, "early christian" fiancée (they were not allowed to take the oath).

2.

The "strangest Calvinist congregation in the world" was founded in the main camp of Mauthausen, symbolised by the famous two towers, by Hungarian political prisoners, the so-called prominent ones, who had been arrested immediately or shortly after the German occupation and transported to Austria that spring. Political prisoner - this does not mean non-Jewish: the group included Christians, Jews and atheists alike. The idea for its creation came from a Buda presbyter who was considered Jewish by the Nazis: but according to Hungarian law, he was not. Frigyes Fellner, professor of economics, statistician, member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the House of Lords, was a "good-natured, kind, God-fearing man", writes Károly Rátkai in his book. But his "condition is very worrying".¹⁶⁰ His death was later in the camp. According to Károly Rassay, "his name was his fate". He was supposedly confused with the distillers of the same surname. Who knows? On his way from Győr to Austria, however, he was almost murdered. A group of prominent people were taken by lorry to Oberlanzendorf, and a drunken SS guard first called the legitimist Count Antal Sigray a Jew - who 'only responded with a contemptuous gesture' - and then demanded that Fellner repeat: 'ich bin ein sau-Jude'. The old scholar angrily replied: "I am not

159 Gyula Szombathy: Dr. Erőd János matematikus – református lelkész mártírhalálának története. In *ibid*: Életutak – mártírsorsok – szemelvények a XX. századból. [private addition], Budapest 2009, 86–92.

160 Károly Rátkai: *A két torony. Magyar politikusok Mauthausenben*. [Budapest], Génius [1945], 101.

a Jew, I am a Hungarian nobleman. With “inimitable contempt in his voice”,

after two punches in the face, he said: »Ich bin ein Sau-Jude. Huh? «¹⁶¹
For weeks, until the church was formed, Fellner agitated the others in the camp. Lajos Szentiványi, the leader of the Smallholders' Party, was elected senior elder. Károly Rátkai, the editor of *Esti Kurír*, the newspaper of the liberal Hungarian Freedom Party, was elected senior pastor, and Sándor Hanthó and Paul Mándy were elected elders. Hanthó is the most prominent of the Hungarian Christian leaders. It is certain that the former archbishop (perhaps of Arad county) was a member of the Kossuth party leadership, possibly its leader, before the invasion. Hanthó was a Lutheran, while Mándy, who was a landowner¹⁶² and “an excellent farmer who had studied in Germany”, belonged to the group of Baranya's Jews¹⁶³ rounded up by the Gestapo in Pécs for reasons classified as political, but he could also have been a member of the Reformed denomination, since Rátkai doesn't comment on him otherwise, while he writes that it doesn't matter about Hanthó's Lutheranism: “We have declared that everyone can be a member of the Reformed congregation in Mauthausen: Reformed, Evangelical, Catholic, even a devout Jew, as long as he is a Hungarian”.¹⁶⁴ - The community's only possession was a New Testament given to Rátkai by György Parragi, a Catholic employee of the *Magyar Nemzet*, which had originally belonged to a Hungarian murderer. Public criminals were brought to Mauthausen because Hungarian political prisoners needed a place in Sopronkőhida, and before the Soviet encirclement of Budapest, hundreds of them were transferred there from the main street where they were held. Parragi witnessed the arrival of Hungarian political prisoners at Mauthausen and the confiscation of all their belongings. Apparently, as a 'senior' prisoner,

161 Károly Rassay: Rapszódia mauthauseni hónapjainkról. In Ágnes Bakó – Éva Szabó – Gábor Verő (ed.): *Emlékezések. A koncentrációs táborok felszabadulásának ötvenedik évfordulójára*. Magyar Auschwitz Alapítvány–Holocaust Dokumentációs Központ, Budapest 50–51.

162 Károly Rassay: Rapszódia mauthauseni hónapjainkról. op.cit., 82.

163 He did not live to see the liberation of the camp, according to leading Social Democrat politician Károly Peyer, see Zoltán Hámory: Magyar politikusok börtöntöltelékek közt Mauthausenban. Peyer Károly nyilatkozik a Demokrácia munkatársának a Gestapo elhurcoltjainak sorsáról. *Demokrácia*, 1945. 9. n., 3.

164 Károly Rátkai: A két torony. op.cit., 102.

he 'organised' the book, which would otherwise have been placed in the 'Effektenkammer', the prisoners' personal belongings and clothing store, or in the rubbish. This means that it was only towards the end of the autumn that the community came into possession of this New Testament. Sándor Millok, the editor-in-chief of *Népszava*, writes that a tailor from Tabi - apparently one of the Jews from southern Hungary who were deported to Pécs by the Gestapo because they were unimportant - had a prayer book. When he was not reading it or cleaning the toilet (which was his daily duty), he would swear. He said: "Two Tabi horse herders were also famous swearers. They were also of the prayer type. They were either in prayer, in swearing or in business".¹⁶⁵ Another legendary swearer was Bertalan Pap-Koleszár, the leader of the original group of ten "Aryan" workers in Csepel.¹⁶⁶

We know the most about the existence of the congregation from Károly Rátkai's book¹⁶⁷, which was published shortly after his release, and there is also a small fragment of a memoir, which was not literally copied into his book. The date of the idea of the foundation of the parish can be precisely determined. Rátkai arrived in Mauthausen on 20th May as an eight-day prisoner, when on 'Pentecost afternoon' Professor Fellner asked him in the block yard why they had not held a service that day. According to the story, which may have been completed on this occasion, it was 'Franzl, the godless' Communist - who, according to the article and the book, was not preaching the Word, but he was doing it, who kept Fellner in life for a long time; he kept Fellner alive for a long time with sausages, bread and onions, which he must have fished out of his pockets specially designed for this - told them that they were seeking God in vain in the camp.

After an improvised church service in the block yard, the 'election' of Rátkai took place. Perhaps out of unawareness.

It was punishable by death to hold a church service in a concentration camp. "Do you have any idea how many priests were thrown into the gas chambers because they secretly celebrated mass for their parishioners and did confessions?" - attacked the Hungarians the good communist Czech.

165 Sándor Millok: *A kínok útja. (Budapesttől – Mauthausenig.) Élményregény.* Müller

Károly Könyvkiadóvállalat, Budapest, [1945]. 75.

166 Op.cit. 74.

167 Károly Rátkai: Franzl, az istentelen. *Demokrácia*, 1945. 11. n., 2.

“Anyway, is this your search for God here, among the bloody stones? In this camp there is no God.”¹⁶⁸

There were no Reformed pastor, except Zsigmond Varga, who was sent to the Gusen II subcamp months later. Those who were in the main camp did not even meet him. Otherwise, they had always hoped that they would never be sent to Gusen. They knew it to be the “real death camp”. Rátkai writes: “The possibility of death by beating, typhus, pneumonia, collapsing of work, starvation, threatens us as much as it does anyone else. The only advantage we have - for the time being - is that, according to the Berlin regulations, we cannot be taken to Gusen. There, death is quicker than in the Mauthausen centre. The ratio is: The average age in Mauthausen is three months, while in Gusen it is three weeks. Every old prisoner knows this and repeats it time and time again. We are racing against time.”¹⁶⁹

The existence of the Reformed congregation in Mauthausen is also attested by other witnesses. Millok, a social democrat, also mentions: “We Catholics usually attend the Reformed services on Sundays.”¹⁷⁰ The services are touching, he says. Rátkai fulfils his duties beautifully, his prayers are uplifting, people cry - then five minutes later they are snarling at each other.

And the chief elder reports the facts of the case in batches:

“We, the Reformed, secretly formed *the Reformed congregation of Mauthausen*, of which I was elected chief elder and Károly Rátkai¹⁷¹, who conducted the services with excellent pastoral ability and vocation, was elected pastor. Like the early Christians of the catacombs, we held services in such secrecy, which was attended by several Hungarian Jews usually, and after Rátkai’s moving prayers, most of us returned to our quarters with tears in our eyes. The prisoners were generally of strong religious feeling. When they were released, each one was able to display a religious object which he had kept for twelve months in the midst of so much terror.”¹⁷²

168 Károly Rátkai: *A két torony*. op.cit., 103.

169 Károly Rátkai: *A két torony*. op.cit., 118.

170 Sándor Millok: *A kínok útja*. (Budapesttől – Mauthausenig.) *Élményregény*. op.cit., 113.

171 The original source is wrong: Rátkay.

172 Tizenkét hónap az embertelenség országában. A conversation with Lajos Szentiványi, who had returned from captivity in Germany. *Demokrácia*, 1945. 10. n., 8.

The “rituals” in Mauthausen, according to the “pastor”, were reminiscent of the Calvinist forms of the time. First there were prayers and sermons, then the Biblical texts were incorporated into the prayers. If it was difficult to pray to God for the Hungarian prisoners, Rátkai writes, “without offending the Germans”, “how much more dangerous is preaching”.¹⁷³ In the course of time, on great feast days, there has been a preaching too. The sermon on St Stephen’s Day takes its basic hymn from the Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are those who cry...”. Parragi speaks of the founding king before the service. Rátkai could not avoid alluding to the war, as he writes: “It was impossible to remain within a certain framework in this atmosphere, in this environment and on this day”.¹⁷⁴ All of them are still there at this service.

Later not only those who died are missing.

The greater part of the congregation was Jewish.

The Hungarians are “moved” within the camp, the Jewish political prisoners are separated from the Christians several times, once to another wing of the block, once to another part of the camp. Finally, when the prisoners arrive from the evacuated eastern camps and they could not move in Mauthausen - although many new arrivals are killed by the camp guards - they are all reunited.

At Christmas time - already? - Berlin radio broadcasts church music. No miracle, but perhaps because the Reich is shaking. *Stille Nacht* can only be heard by those who work in an office. After roll call, at six o’clock in the evening, there is a Christmas celebration in the barracks of the prominent Hungarian prisoners. Rátkai reads Part II of the Gospel of Luke, followed by a prayer, or rather a sermon, a prayer of supplication. There is no Christmas tree, of course, but “Advent is accomplished, [...] the Redeemer is born, who is the Lord Christ in the city of David”.¹⁷⁵ Only the Christians can hear the pleas - with the exception of two Jewish “comrades” who had been “stolen back” into the block -, prominent politicians and those who had come from other barracks: the group from Csepel, another count from the inner hospital - Iván Csekonic - , two from Népszava, a captain of the river guard and another military officer, a lawyer from Pécs, a reserve military judge, an optician from Pécs with his nephew and a few others...

173 Károly Rátkai: *A két torony*. op.cit., 102.

174 Károly Rátkai: *A két torony*. op.cit., 111.

175 Károly Rátkai: *A két torony*. op.cit., 181.

In January the Jews were moved to another room in the Christians' block. On Sunday Kornél Frankl came to Rátka to hold a service. The editor's excuse was that he was ill and didn't know what to say, but Frankl embraces him: "You must come."

"The New Testament has been in my pocket all the time. I go into room B. I am immediately joined by Lajos Szentiványi, that brave, warm-hearted friend, by the old Sándor Hanthó, by Zsigmond Nyikos, also a Reformed, and by Szörtsey, Kubányi, Budimác. [...] I made my way to Room B, believing that ten or fifteen people would be there. Then I said a little prayer. When I entered the room, my heart sank: At least one hundred and fifty people were waiting. [...] Suddenly I remembered the first line of an old Calvinist hymn:

- "Eternal God, oh, where, oh where You are?"

"Not many ordained clerics could say they had the experience I had in those holy moments."¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ Károly Rátkai: *A két torony*, op.cit., 190–191.

Twentieth-century Hungarian sources in the Vatican archives – (An overview of the materials that have been recently opened for research, through the example of two archives)

Krisztina Tóth¹⁷⁷

Numerous archives of the Holy See preserve the documents of popes, the central ecclesiastical governing bodies of the Catholic church and their representatives, papal diplomatic missions, synods, and the families, persons, and organisations connected to the papacy and the Apostolic See. They contain valuable resources on the relations between the headquarters of the church and the universal church, how the various nunciatures function, local religious life, and the ecclesiastical policies of various governments. As the relationship between church and state has always played a prominent role in Christian Hungary, the Hungarian source material they hold is extremely varied and rich.¹⁷⁸ At the same time, the documents made available most recently, dating from the pontificates of Popes Pius XI and Pius XII, also provide an insight into the history of the Hungarians who were forced to live beyond the borders of Hungary as a result of the Trianon and the Paris Peace Treaties.¹⁷⁹ Since

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178 I have written a similar paper on the subject, which mostly contains examples that are different from the ones given here: Krisztina Tóth: A magyar egyháztörténet-írás 20. századi vatikáni forrásai. Forrástípusok és hasznosításuk. In: *Az egyháztörténet-írás története Magyarországon*. Miskolc, Miskolci Egyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kar, 2022, 274–286.

179 The material from the pontificate of Pius XI (1922–1939) has been searchable since 18 September, 2006, while the material from the pontificate of Pius XII (1939–1958) has been available since 2 March, 2020. For more information, see: Tóth Krisztina–Tusor Péter: *Inventarium Vaticanum I. A Budapesti Apostoli Nunciatura levéltára (1920–*

2022, the Vatican archival delegate provides assistance in navigating these archives and fonds, assisting the Hungarian researchers visiting the Vatican Archives, no matter what the period or the subject, on a professional basis.

In this paper, I first provide a general overview in which I briefly outline the diverse nature of the various archives of the Holy See that hold sources on twentieth-century Hungarian history and the different research settings they provide. I then present a few guidelines for starting the research and highlight some typical groups of sources from the Holy See archives that are best-known for their twentieth-century Hungarian material, providing one or two examples for each of them. In keeping with the theme of the conference on which this volume of studies is based, I have primarily selected most of the latter from the documents that have become available most recently, on the church policies and victims of twentieth-century dictatorships and ideologies.¹⁸⁰

I. The Vatican Archives – An overview

1. The diverse nature of the repositories, and conditions for research

Several archives in the Vatican contain sources on twentieth-century Hungarian history and have a research staff of at least one person, where qualified researchers can request a research permit if they provide a document certifying their qualifications, an appropriate letter of recommendation, and any other documents specified in the research policies. One of the largest and best-known archives is the Vatican Apostolic Archives, which preserves

1939). Budapest-Róma, Gondolat Kiadó, 2016. xx1–xx11, valamint: Tóth Krisztina: *Vatikáni kutatás a koronavírus árnyékában – XII. Pius frissen megnyitott fondjai*. – digital publication, available at <https://ujkor.hu/content/vatikani-kutatas-koronavirus-arnyekaban-xii-pius-frissen-megnyitott-fondjai>, downloaded on 3 November, 2023.

180 As is clear from the above, the present paper, which is an extended version of the presentation given at the conference “A hitvalló egyház magyar mártírjai II” on 5 October, does not aim to be complete, it rather provides an overview and points out the diverse nature of the sources and the opportunities available for conducting research on twentieth-century Hungarian sources in the Vatican archives.

documents from the Middle Ages to the modern era and is located in Vatican City, on one side of the rectangular Cortile Belvedere. The Historical Archive of the Secretariat of State is located on the other side. It contains documents dating from the nineteenth and the twentieth century, incoming documents from the time the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs was created in 1814, documents from international organisations, various bequests (including, for example, the correspondence of Popes Benedict XV, Pius XI, and Pius XII, the bequest of Agostino Casaroli, and as a separate fonds, the papers of Cardinal Pietro Caprano¹⁸¹). The Vatican also houses the Archives of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, which contains documents related to the dicastery, and the Archives of the Fabbrica di San Pietro, which contains documentation related to the construction of the Basilica of St Peter and the works of art it contains, and which is located in one of the domes of the basilica. The Propaganda Fide Historical Archives, which is located on the campus of Urbaniana University, rather than in the Vatican, is at least as important as the Vatican Apostolic Archives, since it contains most of the documents of the missions conducted around the world. The collection of the Archives of the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches covers a narrower area, which mainly preserves sources related to the Eastern Catholic Churches and is located along the Via della Conciliazione, a wide avenue leading to St Peter's Basilica. The Historical Archives of the Apostolic Penitentiary also preserves documents related to the dicastery and is located in the Palazzo della Cancelleria.¹⁸²

181 He was born in 1759 and died in 1834. He was created cardinal in pectore by the Pope at the consistory of 2 October, 1826, a fact made public at the consistory of 15 December, 1828. Cf. Francesco Raco: Caprano, Pietro. In: *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 19, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana fondata da Giovanni Treccani, 1976. 163–165.

182 In addition to these, the Historical Archives of the Roman Diocese, which is not a Holy See archive in the traditional sense, may also contain some twentieth-century Hungarian references, but since the Pope is also the bishop of the diocese of Rome, it is still connected to the Holy See by several links. Likewise, there are several Hungarian references in the central archives of the religious orders in Rome that are (or used to be) active in Hungary. However, it is not within the scope of this study to go into these in detail.

Each of these archives has different research policies, historians can conduct research in different settings, there are different requirements for what documents need to be presented, and opening hours also vary. For example, while the Archives of the Dicastery for the Eastern Churches has a total of two research spaces, the Historical Archives of the Apostolic Penitentiary has eight, the Historical Archives of the Pontifical Secretariat of State for Propaganda Fide has twenty-two, and the Vatican Apostolic Archives has up to sixty spaces available for researchers. It also varies whether the various catalogues can be consulted on paper only or an internal computer system is also available. In the Vatican Apostolic Archives, for example, a few overview catalogues can already also be consulted on an internal computer system, not only in the Indexes Room, or for example, in the Historical Archives of the Secretariat of State, much of the most recently opened material can be accessed and searched from an internal computer system.¹⁸³ So the research conditions and possibilities vary. The question may arise if there is a limit to what time periods can be researched.

Fortunately, there is not, as in the archives of the Holy See it is now uniformly 9 October, 1958, the date of the death of Pope Pius XII. It is up to the current Pope to decide which time periods can be researched. In 1978, the documents became searchable until the death of Leo XIII,¹⁸⁴ in 1985 until the death of Benedict XV,¹⁸⁵ and in 2006 until the death of Pius XI.¹⁸⁶ Pope Francis then announced on 4 March, 2019 that he would open the fonds of the archives of the Holy See containing documents dating from the pontificate of Pius XII (1939–1958), timing the opening for 2 March the following year, the day the

183 To keep to the limits of this study, I will not go into detail about these differences. If a researcher already knows where they would like to conduct research, as the Vatican archival delegate, I am happy to provide more information.

184 Pope Leo XIII died on 20 July, 1903. *Lattività della Santa Sede nel 1978*. Pubblicazione non ufficiale, Città del Vaticano, 1979. 452. Pope John Paul II made the announcement in his Christmas greetings to the cardinals and members of the Roman Curia on 22 December, 1987.

185 Benedict XV died on 22 January, 1922. *Lattività della Santa Sede nel 1985*. Pubblicazione non ufficiale, Città del Vaticano 1986. 1475. 1476.

186 Pope Pius XI died on 10 February, 1939. *Lattività della Santa Sede nel 2006*. Pubblicazione non ufficiale, Città del Vaticano 2007. 1104. See also: Tóth-Tusor, op. cit. xxI–xxII.

above-mentioned Eugenio Pacelli was elected Pope.¹⁸⁷ At the time, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, research could only be conducted for a few days, and it took several months to allow a limited number of researchers back into the archive. The impact of the pandemic was also reflected in the shorter opening hours, which still remains in effect in many places to this day. However, not all documents dating back to 1958 can be accessed and searched.

The most common reason for this is that they have not yet been processed or digitised, and so no index has been created yet. For example, in the Historical Archives of the Secretariat of State, the Cecoslovacchia series from the time of Pius XII can only be searched until 1952, while the Ungheria series are available until 1953.¹⁸⁸ There are also documents that cannot be researched due to the sensitive, confidential, and secret nature of the topic. For example, the appointments of apostolic governors and bishops are often in this category. These folders are marked in red and are removed from the box before they are made available to the researcher.¹⁸⁹ Documents intended for an internal forum, for example, when the sender of a letter raises a moral dilemma, are not searchable in the Historical Archives of the Apostolic Penitentiary either, for similar reasons.¹⁹⁰ A third reason may be that part of the file has been destroyed. For example, in 1945, Nuncio Angelo Rotta burnt the post-1939 materials of the Apostolic Nunciature in Budapest for fear that they would fall into the wrong hands.¹⁹¹ However, the documents he had sent to

187 Cf. the Holy See Press Office Bulletin. Digital publication, available at <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2019/03/04/0185/00375.html>, downloaded 8 November, 2023.

188 For much more information on these, see the digitally published list of the archives, which shows for which periods the fonds have been processed and are therefore searchable. Available at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/sezione-rapporti-stati/archivio-storico/fondi/materiale-pontificato-pio-xii.pdf, downloaded on 8 November, 2023.

189 These include the appointments of bishops to the sees of Košice, Nitra, Rožňava, and Trnava between the two World Wars, and the appointments of bishops in Transcarpathia in the early 1930s. Cf. Giuseppe Umberto Maria Lo Bianco (ed.): *Archivio della Nunziatura Apostolica in Cecoslovacchia (1920–1950)*. *Indice* 1229. Città del Vaticano, 2008.

190 Kindly provided by Director of Archives Ugo Taraborrelli on 3 October, 2022.

191 Tomislav Mrkonjić (ed.): *Archivio della Nunziatura Apostolica in Ungheria (Archivio della Nunziatura Apostolica di Budapest) aa. 1920–1939*. *Indice* 1235. Città del

the Secretariat of State and to various congregations have been preserved in various locations.

Finally, it should be mentioned that there are archival materials that, by a special decision of the Pope, are open to researchers even after 1958. These include the archives of the Second Vatican Council in the Vatican Apostolic Archives and Agostino Casaroli's bequest, 193 boxes of documents (20 linear metres) in the Historical Archives of the Secretariat of State.¹⁹² The former was made available to researchers by Pope Paul VI in 1967,¹⁹³ while the latter was first kept in the State Archives of Parma and was later transferred to the Archives of the Pontifical Secretariat of State in 2015.¹⁹⁴

2. Advice on how to start your research

We now know which archives of the Holy See may contain Hungarian sources from the twentieth century, as well as which period can be researched. But if we have a specific topic, where and how do we start our research? It depends on the nature of the subject, and the researcher has to consider which body of the Holy See was responsible for the issue, whether the person in question was writing to a particular body of the Holy See, or whether they might have written through the nunciature. The first step is to consult the online index

Vaticano, 2010. 8; Luca Carboni: Nascita e morte delle rappresentanze pontificie e dei loro archivi nell'Europa centro-orientale. Dalla «grande guerra» alla «guerra fredda» (1918–1952). In: *Textus et Studia*. 2015. vol. II, nr. 2, 117–177, 163.

192 For the extent of the documents, see: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/sezione-rapporti-stati/archivio-storico/fondi/fondo_spogli_it.html, downloaded on 10 November, 2023.

193 He set up the Archives of the Second Vatican Council on 27 September, 1967. Vincenzo Carbone: L'Archivio del Concilio Vaticano II. In: *Archiva Ecclesiae. Bolletino dell'Associazione Archivistica Ecclesiastica*. 1991-1992. XXXIV–XXXV. [=Vincenzo Monachino: Gli archivi diocesani per la ricerca storica. Atti del XVII convegno degli archivisti ecclesiastici (Roma 16-19 ottobre 1990). Città del Vaticano, 1992.] 57–67, 61.

194 For example: Andrea Tornielli: Le carte di Casaroli sono tornate in Vaticano – digital publication, available at <https://www.lastampa.it/vatican-insider/it/2015/04/15/news/le-carte-di-casaroli-sono-tornate-in-vaticano-1.35272993/>, downloaded on 10 November, 2023.

of the Vatican Apostolic Archives, as it contains the records of many former dicasteries of the Holy See, bodies important in the governance of the universal church or the Papal State, and the diplomatic missions of the Apostolic See.¹⁹⁵ It is also necessary to know how the Roman Curia was organised during the period in question, and if the name and function of the organ of the Holy See in question did not remain the same, which organ took over its functions after the reforms of the Curia,¹⁹⁶ since this will help us identify the fonds that are worth checking in the overview indices. Most of these are only available from the archives, but there are also publicly available indices that can be consulted to start with.¹⁹⁷ If the organisation you are looking for is not listed in the Vatican Apostolic Archives, it is worth considering whether it might be in one of the archives of the Holy See listed in the previous section. If it is, you should ask for a research permit from the archive in question or consult its index. If this is unlikely to be the case, it is possible that the source(s) you are looking for may be in the archives of a successor institution to the Holy See

195 *Indice dei Fondi e relativi mezzi di descrizione e di ricerca dell'Archivio Apostolico Vaticano*. Città del Vaticano, 2023. Also available online at <https://www.archivioapostolicovaticano.va/content/dam/aav/documenti/Indice%20dei%20Fondi%20e%20relativi%20mezzi%20di%20descrizione%20e%20di%20ricerca.pdf> - downloaded on 10 November, 2023. In addition to the above-mentioned sources, the next section will provide more information on the other sources held in these archives.

196 The Apostolic Constitution of 1908, *Sapienti consilio*, for example, may provide assistance (*Constitutio Apostolica Sapienti consilio*. In: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*. 1909. vol. I, nr. 1, 7–19). Niccolò del Re's *La Curia Romana* has been published many times, or for example József Bánk: *Egyházi jog. Az egyházi alkotmányjog alapjai*. Budapest, Szent István Társulat, 1958.

197 It is important to emphasize that these can serve as an initial starting point, but they cannot replace a thorough study of the documents. Examples include Eördögh István: *A Rendkívüli Egyházi Ügyek Szent Kongregációja Levéltárának (Vatikánváros) a magyarországi egyházakra vonatkozó forrásai 1803-1903*. Szeged, Szerzői kiadás, 1992; Tusor Péter–Tóth Krisztina: *Az újonnan megnyitott vatikáni fondok és a magyar történetkutatás*, In: *Magyarország és a római Szentszék. (Források és távlatok). Tanulmányok Erdő bíboros tiszteletére*. Budapest-Róma, Gondolat Kiadó, 2012; Tóth-Tusor, i.m.; Somorjai Ádám OSB: *A Vatikáni Államtitkárság Államközi Kapcsolatok Szekciója Történeti Levéltárában őrzött dokumentumok olasz nyelvű inventáriumának hungarika anyagai*. 1939. február 10.–1948. december 31. Budapest, METEM, 2020.

that is not publicly available. In such cases, the head of the body in question may authorise the search on an exceptional basis.

It is also important to mention that it is usually worth exploring the related sources in several archives of the Holy See and compare the information obtained from these archives with the sources of the state, church and/or private archives of Hungary and the territories belonging to Hungary prior to the Trianon treaty. If you are lucky, and the sources have not been destroyed and are searchable, you can get a comprehensive picture.

A knowledge of foreign languages is essential for reading the sources, especially a knowledge of Italian and Latin, although diplomatic documents were often in French, or after World War II, in English, and the archives of the given nunciature may also contain many documents in the language of the country in question. For example, the Prague nunciature has many documents in Slovak, and the Vienna nunciature in German, although they also hold Hungarian-language documents.

II. The fonds made available most recently, through the example of two Vatican archives

1. Vatican Apostolic Archives

The Vatican Apostolic Archives is one of the largest archives of the Holy See and holds a wide range of documents on a variety of subjects. The archives contain the materials of nunciatures, internunciatures, and apostolic delegations, the archives of the Holy See's representations to international organisations, the materials of congregations, curia, various bequests (e.g. those of popes and cardinals), the archives of synods, the documentation of important events, such as holy years, anniversaries, and centennials (and the commissions that prepared them).¹⁹⁸

If the researcher is interested in the church policy of a government, anticlerical measures, or the fate of individual priests, the absolute starting point is the

¹⁹⁸ I have only highlighted a few of the more typical groups of documents here, for much more, see *Indice dei Fondi...*, op.cit.

archives of the nunciatures, internunciatures, and apostolic delegations, which are mainly located in the Vatican Apostolic Archives.¹⁹⁹ From a Hungarian perspective, the most important of these are those located in Vienna, Budapest, Prague, Bucharest, and Belgrade, especially until the end of World War II.²⁰⁰ However, after this we must look at the nunciatures' records from a much more complex perspective: refugees namely reached many parts of the world and reported to the local nunciature about the fate of Catholics in their home country, who then informed the Apostolic See of these events.

Of these, the Prague nunciature holds 95 boxes, 81 of which contain sources from the period prior to 1939, and 14 refer to the period between 1945–1950. The gap between the two is the period when official diplomatic relations were halted, and Slovakia gained its independence.²⁰¹ Unfortunately, the documents from the 1945–1950 period have a troubled history, and the archive is incomplete. These documents were sent to Rome in 11 boxes in 1949, with the last 3 boxes being sent to Rome by Ottavio De Liva, the Apostolic See's *Chargé d'Affaires* in Czechoslovakia²⁰², via the Italian Embassy in Prague in the days immediately preceding his expulsion from Czechoslovakia. He considered these the most important documents, and therefore worth preserving, but he destroyed most of the material.²⁰³

The material from the period prior to 1939 provides a detailed picture of a number of issues that affected Hungarians: the property issues of the divided dioceses, the expulsion of ordinaries, the appointment of various bishops and apostolic governors, the *modus vivendi*, and the fate of Hungarian-nationality parishioners, monks, and institutions under the new regime.²⁰⁴

199 *Ib.*

200 An overview of the material of the Budapest nunciature was published in 2015 (Tóth–Tusor, *op.cit.*), and as an appendix to our study with Péter Tusor, we published an overview of the Prague nunciature in 2012, which covered the period until the pontificate of Pius XI (1922–1939). Tusor–Tóth, *op.cit.*

201 Giuseppe Burzio was the *chargé d'affaires* of the Apostolic See in Slovakia from 1940 to 1945.

202 From July 1949 to March 1950, Ottavio De Liva was the *chargé d'affaires ad intérim* of the Holy See at the Prague Nunciature. Lo Bianco, *op.cit.* 226.

203 Lo Bianco, *op.cit.* vii–viii.

204 For much more detail see Tusor–Tóth, *op.cit.*

Based on the index, for instance, the pastoral care of Hungarian parishioners may be of interest from the period between 1945 and 1949, in the context of their resettlement, or the issue of the church properties and territories returned by Hungary, the attempt to resolve the situation of the Komárno monastery in 1945, or the description of the persecution of the Greek Catholic Church in Transcarpathia under Communism. Even if this picture is sadly incomplete due to the troubled fate of the nunciature's records, it is still worth looking at, as it highlights the issues that the representative of the Holy See in Czechoslovakia considered to be the most important ones. For example, the archive includes an interesting letter that sheds light on the suffering of the Greek Catholic clergy in Mukachevo: in 1945, Pankratij Pavol Hučko²⁰⁵, a member of the Order of St Basil, visited the monastery in Mukachevo, after which he visited Tódor Romzsa, Auxiliary Bishop of the Greek Catholic Diocese of Mukachevo and wrote to Giuseppe Burzio, the Holy See's representative in Slovakia, about his experiences.²⁰⁶ Romzsa namely asked him to inform him about the situation because the Communists were watching his every move, so he felt like a

205 Pankratij Pavel Hučko (1913–2002) entered the Order of St Basil in 1932. He was ordained a priest in 1938. He was a Greek Catholic parish priest in Prague in 1945. Arrested in 1947, he was convicted in 1948 on charges of conspiracy against the state and aiding the Banderists. He was released after 13 years and later got married. Cf. Daniel Atanáz Mandzák CSsR: *Dokumenty k akcii „P”. Prešovský „sobor”*. Bratislava, Ústav pamäti národa, 2014. 156.; Jozafát Vladimír Timkovič: *Dejiny baziliánskeho monastyra v Krásnobrode od 9. storočia po súčasnosť*. Košice, 2009. 472-477.

206 Since Bishop Miklós Dudás of Hajdúdorog, to whom the Pope had entrusted the Greek Catholic diocese of Mukachevo as apostolic governor, was unable to carry out his liturgical duties there due to transportation difficulties, he was provided with an auxiliary bishop in 1944 in the person of Tódor Romzsa, who was consecrated bishop in Uzhhorod on 24 September, 1944. After the arrival of the Soviet troops in Transcarpathia, keeping in contact between Dudás and Romzsa became increasingly difficult, even ceasing after a while, so in practice he took over the governance of the Greek Catholic diocese of Mukachevo. Cf. Provisio Ecclesiae, In: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*. 1944. vol. XXXVI, nr. 11, 308; *Brevis Schematismus Dioeceseos Munkaciensis Byzantini Ritus in Uzhorod an annum 1945*, available at <https://www.ortutaykozpont.info/sematismusok/>, downloaded on 3 December, 2023; Botlik József: *Kárpátalja – ismét Magyarországé. 1939. március – 1944. október*. In: *Honismeret*. 1997. vol. XXV, nr. 2, 49. On his consecration as a bishop, see for example: *Szegédpüspököt kapott a munkácsi egyházmegye*. In: *Reggeli Magyarország*. vol. VI, nr. 219, 4.

prisoner and was unable to maintain proper contact with most of the Catholic world. All the power was in the Communists' hands, who ordered handing over 65 churches to the Orthodox, against the will of the Greek Catholic parishioners, which was carried out by military force. From the parishes that defended the church against confiscation, even at the cost of bloodshed, they simply expelled the Greek Catholic priests without any justification or any prior judicial action. The bishop himself was also ordered to break all ties with Rome and accept the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox patriarch by the end of January. He would otherwise be persecuted, and the Union would be wiped out in Transcarpathia. A law was passed that if two-thirds of the faithful convert, the new church would own all the property of the old church. The bishop's residence in Uzhhorod was seized for state use, leaving only one room and one bedroom for the bishop. The seminary and the teachers' college were also seized for military purposes. Many of the expelled priests found refuge in Czechoslovakia or Hungary. The Rusyn intellectuals fled. The news was reported on the radio that American senators were travelling to Czechoslovakia following a papal audience: he asked them to at least visit Romzsa to receive objective information.²⁰⁷ The document does not take this thread any further, but as Tódor Romzsa refused to bow to the will of the communist regime, and he remained faithful to his beliefs, two years later, in 1947, he had a not random "accident" after the consecration of the church in Loka, and was poisoned in the hospital.²⁰⁸

207 AAV – Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Vatikán. Arch. Nunz. Cecosl. busta 86, fasc. 680, f. 30rv. Hučko's letter to Giuseppe Burzio, dated 30 August, 1945. On how the diocese functioned at that time and the suffering of the Greek Catholic clergy there, see more recently Konstantin Szabó – István Marosi: "To die for Christ means to live forever". Blessed Tódor Romzsa and the martyrs and confessors of the faith of the Greek Catholic eparchy of Mukachevo, In: *The Trial of Cardinal József Mindszenty from the Perspective of Seventy Years. The Fate of Church Leaders in Central and Eastern Europe*. Città del Vaticano, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2022.

208 A Soviet truck deliberately crashed into a horse-drawn carriage carrying the bishop and his entourage, and the assassins who jumped out of the truck hit them with an iron rod. A passing stagecoach disturbed them, and the injured were taken to hospital. There the recovering bishop was injected with poison. Sister Teofila Manajlós account of the death of Bishop Tódor Romzsa was forwarded by Nuncio Saverio Ritter to Eugenio Tisserant, the Cardinal Secretary of the Congregation for the Oriental Church: Tamás Véghseő (ed.): *Források a görögkatolikusok történetéhez*. Vol. 6: 1939–1972,

In addition to the specific instances, there are also examples of the Communist persecution of the church in general, as detailed in the Slovak bishops' pro memoria of 25 January, 1946, which summarises their grievances to Edvard Beneš, President of Czechoslovakia, and asks for redress. This included, for example, the secularisation of Catholic schools and the confiscation of their property, the appointment of non-Catholic teachers in many schools where the majority of pupils were Catholic, transferring teachers and nuns so that they could not fulfil their teaching duties, the removal of crucifixes, and banning prayer before and after school, as well as Catholic greetings. There also used to be more than 30 Catholic newspapers, now there was one (*Katolícke noviny*), which was not allocated enough paper, so it only consisted of four pages. Catholic associations were banned, their property confiscated, and priests did not receive enough congruence to live on, or the allowances due to other officials. In addition, 41 concentration camps held 20,800 Hungarians, Germans, and a smaller number of Slovaks, including 4,800 children. The inhabitants of these camps were suffering from a lack of clothing, cold, and hunger, and they were often mistreated.²⁰⁹

The other major topic in the files of the Prague nunciature is the Czechoslovak-Hungarian population exchange, the deportation of Hungarians to the Czech Republic, and the deportation of Germans.²¹⁰ The documents of the internunciate of Prague also contain many sources on this: in addition to Mindszenty's letters²¹¹, the nunciature also obtained first-hand information

Nyíregyháza, Szent Atanáz Görögkatolikus Hittudományi Főiskola, 2022. 539–541. See also: István Marosi: "Kárpátok földjének tanítója". Romzsa Tódor (1911–1947) munkácsi püspök vértanúsága. In: "Tanúságtétel, hit és küldetés". Görögkatolikus vértanúk a Kárpát-medencében. Debrecen, Hierotheosz Egyesület, 2020. 35–36.

209 AAV – Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Vatican, Arch. Nunz. Cecoslovacchia, busta 86, fasc. 680, ff. 33-35. The pro memoria was attached by Archbishop Karol Kmetko of Nitra to his letter to the Pope dated 25 January, 1946, *ibid.* f. 32, a copy of which can be found among the nunciature documents.

210 For example: AAV – Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Vatican, Arch. Nunz. Cecoslovacchia, busta 83, fasc. 665.

211 His circular of 15 October, 1945, for example, can also be found in the nunciature archives (AAV – Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Vatican, Arch. Nunz. Cecoslovacchia, busta 86, fasc. 682, ff. 208-212). It contains a letter to his parishioners, to be read out the following Sunday, in which he writes the following about the northern part of his archdiocese, among other things: "Politics interferes with church services through the

about the situation. Raffaele Forni, for example, as a temporary representative in Prague, visited Slovakia in the summer of 1947 on behalf of internuncio Saverio Ritter²¹² to report on the political and religious situation there based on his own experience. Internuncio Ritter wrote to Domenico Tardini²¹³ about this 8-day trip on 11 July, 1947, enclosing Forni's report. In it, he detailed that 70 priests from the apostolic governorship of Trnava were to be deported, which would have left 40 parishes vacant. Ambrus Lazík²¹⁴, Vicar General of Trnava, on behalf of Paul Jantausch, Apostolic Governor of Trnava, negotiated with Jozef Lettrich, President of the Slovak National Council,²¹⁵ who in turn made the concessions subject to three conditions: 1. the Hungarian priest in question would be re-Slovakized, 2. he would not be sent to a racial diaspora,

interference of people who avoid church; the Catholic and Hungarian schools are taken away from the parents, and children are forced to attend foreign schools. They are destroying consecrated statues in front of churches and on the gable of houses. They confiscate family properties, disband associations, smash Hungarian signs. They ransack the ancient archives of the parishes and take away their furnishings. Centuries-old family shrines, hallowed by the joys and sorrows of a long line of ancestors, are plundered, and their inhabitants are driven on the prowl like hunted animals. It is feared that even those who may be allowed to remain due to the outcry of the humane world at large will not have access to a Hungarian priest or a Hungarian school in pure Hungarian villages, and they will thus lose the fundamental human rights that have been joyfully accepted worldwide, including religious freedom, which was explicitly proclaimed by the Atlantic Charter, in the twentieth century. They beat the shepherd to scatter the flock (Mt 26:31), and this flock is the Hungarian people." On Mindszenty's position most recently: Ádám Somorjai OSB: Mindszenty hercegprímás a csehszlovákiai magyarság védelmében. Vatikáni iratok alapján. In: *Levéltári Közlemények*. 2021. XCII, 125–160.

212 He served between 1946 and 1947.

213 In 1935, he was appointed deputy secretary of state, while in 1946 he is listed in the Papal Yearbook as Segretario per gli affari straordinari (Secretary for extraordinary ecclesiastical affairs). Cf. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*. 1935. vol. XXVII, nr. 14, 500.; *Annuario Pontificio per l'anno 1946*. Città del Vaticano, 1946. 734.

214 He became vicar general in 1945 and apostolic governor after the death of Paul Jantausch in 1947. Cf. (–in): Nový trnavský apoštolský administrátor. In: *Katolícke Noviny*. 1947. vol. LXII, nr. 29, 1–2. See also the website of the diocese: <https://www.abu.sk/arcidiejeza/historia-trnavskych-biskupov/>, downloaded on 29 November, 2023.

215 He was President of the Slovak National Council from 1945 to 1948.

and 3. he would prove his loyalty. By this he meant that these priests had to sign a declaration in their own hand that they were not Hungarians but Slovaks. Understandably, many did not agree to this. Moreover, according to Forni's description, the Lutherans took advantage of this situation to expand precisely in these "racial diasporas". Thus, the personal experience of the procurator of the Prague nunciature confirmed the difficulties in providing pastoral care to the Hungarian minority in the Hungarian language and the grievances suffered by the Hungarian priests.²¹⁶

Since the records of the Czechoslovak nunciature only go back to 1949, if we want to research the year 1950 or after, we must study, among others, the post-1939 records of the Vienna Apostolic Nunciature, which have recently become accessible. This is particularly important because the direct contact of the Holy See with the countries behind the Iron Curtain was severed by the expulsion of the nuncios. At that time, the Pontifical Secretariat of State also obtained extensive information from the Apostolic Nunciature in Vienna, as the documents show. Giovanni Dellepiane was internuncio there between 1949 and 1961.²¹⁷ It is important to emphasize that this documentary material has not been available for research for long, since the overview list, which can only be studied from the archive's computers through an internal system, has only recently been completed, and it has not yet been studied much by researchers, so I can only share my own first impressions and experiences about it. Often the copy of the outgoing material sent to the Pontifical Secretariat of State cannot be found here, or if it can, the Vienna nuncio tries to handle the identity of the person from whom the information was received discreetly, perhaps thinking that the mail might fall into unauthorised hands, but also assuring the Secretariat of State that the information comes from a reliable source. Reading the surviving documents, it seems that these informants often did not write about specific individuals but provided a broad picture of the persecution of the church or some well-defined problem.

216 AAV – Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Vatican, Arch. Nunz. Cecosl., busta 86, fasc. 681, ff. 142–154. Reply by Domenico Tardini dated 30 August, 1947, *ibid.* f. 174.

217 When requesting a box, the name of the nuncio must be written next to the box number, as this is how the post-1939 Vienna boxes are distinguished from the earlier Vienna nunciature boxes. Tomislav Mrkonjić: *Archivio della Nunziatura Ap. in Austria. Prospetto Generale*, typed manuscript, 2. (Available from the internal computer system of the Vatican Apostolic Archives.)

As well as giving a picture of the suffering of the clergy, they also provide an excellent insight into the society of the time, the grievances suffered by the kulaks, the enemies of the regime, which affected Slovaks as much as Hungarians. For example, Father B., whose full name and nationality is not mentioned in the report, and about whom we only learn that he was a monk and a trustworthy refugee from Czechoslovakia, gave the following information in 1952: after a few months of internment, he was sent to a central monastery, where 600 religious from all orders were crowded together, and from there he managed to escape to Austria. Before that, he had been hiding in various places for over a year. For a few months he was taken in by a man who farmed 8 hectares. According to the information contained in the letter, this farmer, like others of a similar status, was obliged to supply the state with 2,500 kg of wheat, 2,500 kg of potatoes, 600 kg of beef, 200 kg of pork, 630 eggs, and 1,200 litres of milk at a very low price. If someone failed to produce this quantity, they could buy these products on the black market at a much higher price than what the state paid for them, for example, they could buy an egg for 10 crowns, while the state paid 4 crowns for it. Anyone who failed to meet their obligation was deported. They relied on the authority of the clergy when the agricultural cooperatives were set up, and parish priests were obliged to read out some sermons on peace and other subjects that benefited the government. The informant also named priests who allegedly collaborated with the regime. According to Father B., people were looking to the West for help, and the workers were also disappointed in the Communist regime. "Rascals, drunkards, layabouts, and notorious scoundrels are members of the political committees, and they are shamelessly getting rich. They are taking over the most beautiful houses after they have kicked out the owners."²¹⁸

Father B. also believes that the propaganda of peace is sincere, since the Soviets know that they can only lose the war, and in the event of riots in Europe, they would be unable to control a subjugated, discontented, excessively suffering people. Nevertheless, this does not stop them from starting wars elsewhere. On the other hand, the Soviet Union is using this propaganda as a disingenuous

218 The nuncio's notes: AAV – Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Vatican, Arch. Nunz. Vienna, Giovanni Dellepiane, busta 77, fasc. 6.1 (Pos. XIII-B-20), ff. 367–368. The accompanying letter of 14 December, 1952 to Domenico Tardini: *ibid.* f. 366r. The above quotation: f. 368r.

pretext in case it is eventually forced to withdraw from these countries, trying to make people believe that it is acting in the interests of peace and trying to turn the loss of its position into psychological and propaganda success. And there is considerable danger in this, according to the informant.²¹⁹

Another interesting example, also from the Vienna nunciature: in 1956, the apostolic governor of Burgenland sent a German-language newsletter (of which he regularly received copies) to the Vienna nuncio, which was allegedly written by the apostolic governor of Trnava. It claimed that religious life was operating as usual in Czechoslovakia, trying to make the readers believe that the church was free. The newsletter contains complete or summarised pastoral documents issued by the ordinariates, various news of church life, a review of the press, from which it is clear that the “Catholic press” in Czechoslovakia is limited to a few periodicals. The choice of language reflects the fact that it was not written for the faithful and the priests of the diocese, but for propaganda purposes, and that its content did not correlate with the sad reality. Communism and the Catholic church were incompatible.²²⁰ The Vienna nuncio forwarded the news, together with his interpretation of it, to the Pro-Secretary of State, Domenico Tardini. He himself was convinced that these were propaganda leaflets intended for foreign countries, especially Austria and Germany, and were mailed to several Austrian ordinaries.²²¹

From Tardini’s reply, it appears that similar Italian-language newsletters were sent to Italian bishops, monastic orders, and parishes from Czechoslovakia, and even an article was published in the Information Bulletin of the Roman Vicariate. In it, it was stated that the freedom of the church in this People’s Republic was restricted, just like in others, with special Communist officials controlling the party-compliant behaviour of the clergy and lay people’s

219 Ibid. ff. 367–368. A short letter of reply from Domenico Tardini, thanking him for the information, dated 11 April, 1952: *ibid.* f. 369r.

220 AAV – Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Vatican, Arch. Nunz. Vienna, Giovanni Dellepiane, busta 77, fasc. 6.5 (Pos. XIII-B-20), ff. 420r: letter of 2 May, 1956 from the Apostolic Governor of Burgenland to Nuncio Giovanni Dellepiane. Its attachment, the circular in German: ff. 421r-430v. The apostolic governor writes to Cesare Zacchi, secretary of the nunciature, on 1 May, 1956, that it may have been written in German in order to be better understood abroad, therefore, it may have been written for propaganda purposes. *Ibid.* f. 432r.

221 *Ibid.* f. 435r (draft of the letter of 16 June, 1956).

attendance of church. The episcopate was also repressed, the few bishops who were supposed to be free were assisted in their work by “vicars-general” appointed by the government office responsible for cults²²², and the diocesan curia were under the direct supervision of the lay officials sent by the same office, who acted as if they were their lords. Members of religious orders were dispersed or interned, and the Catholic press, Catholic Action, and the governmental organisations had also been suppressed for some time. Meanwhile, atheist propaganda prevailed in schools, party organisations, the press, the radio, and the cinema.²²³ Despite all this, the Communist authorities wanted people to believe that there was complete religious freedom in the country, and they were actively propagating this idea abroad.²²⁴ A third example is the case of Béla Varga, an emigrated priest and former president of the National Assembly²²⁵, who visited Switzerland in July 1947 and spoke to Paolo Bertoli, the first councilor of the Bernese nunciature.²²⁶ He was interested in the Vatican’s opinion on Communism, he wanted to go to Rome to inform the Pope in person, and he wanted to continue the resistance

222 The Information Bulletin, which was launched in 1949, probably refers to the Slovak Church Office here. Cf. Robert Letz: *Az állami egyházpolitika Szlovákiában 1948–1989 között*, In: *Felekezetek, egyházpolitika, identitás Magyarországon és Szlovákiában 1945 után. – Konfessie, cirkevná politika, identita na Slovensku a v Maďarsku po roku 1945*. Budapest, Kossuth Kiadó, 2008. 118.

223 AAV – Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Vatican, Arch. Nunz. Vienna, Giovanni Dellepiane, busta 77, fasc. 6.5 f. 437r.

224 Two versions of the bulletin can be found in the archives of the Vienna nunciature. In the version under f. 439r it is stated that the Trnava bulletin was published in several languages, e.g. French, Italian, German. The nuncio sent the vicariate bulletin to the Austrian bishops for information purposes. Ibid. f. 438r.

225 He was Speaker of the National Assembly from 7 February, 1946 and left Hungary on 2 June, 1947, although he did not resign his position. Shortly afterwards, on 26 June, the government stripped him of his citizenship and confiscated his assets in 1948. Cf. István Vida (editor-in-chief): *Az 1945. évi november 29-re Budapestre összehívott Nemzetgyűlés almanachja. 1945. november 29.–1947. július 25.* Budapest, a Magyar Országgyűlés kiadása, 1999. 637.; László Szűcs (ed.): *Dimnyés Lajos első kormányának minisztertanácsi jegyzőkönyvei 1947. június 2. - szeptember 19.* Budapest, Magyar Országos Levéltár, 2000. 273.

226 He was a councilor of the nunciature between 1946 and 1952. Cf. Laura Gagliardi–Carlo Piacentini: *Archivio della Nunziatura Apostolica in Svizzera (an. 1935-1953). Indice 1225A.* Città del Vaticano, 2020. 1.

in the US at the invitation of Hungarian politicians who had emigrated there. He gave the impression of being an intelligent and capable person, although the councilor said his German was not the best.²²⁷

In addition to the documents of the nunciatures, the documents of the individual congregations are also of interest. Most of these can also be found in the Vatican Apostolic Archives, unless they are part of the archives of the given dicastery or its successor, although not all of them are searchable yet, since many of them have not been catalogued yet. The material of the Congregation of the Council and the Consistorial Congregation may be of interest to us. The former contains the reports from the sixteenth century to 1908, while the latter houses the *ad limina* reports from 1909.²²⁸ For example, the governor of Trnava painted a sad picture of the state of Catholic religious studies in his *ad limina* report of 1948: the state was suppressing Catholic youth associations, young people had to join the Slovak Youth Federation, which, although according to its statutes, was above politics,²²⁹ in practice was controlled by the Communist Party and sought to imbue young people with materialistic ideology. This association organised the so-called communal works on Sundays and holidays, meaning that many people could not attend mass. To avoid this, in larger cities mass was also held early in the morning or in the evening. Those who wished to pursue university studies were obliged to become members of the Communist Party. If they did not, they may not have been able to continue their studies or even be sent to labour camps. Communist ideology and Communist working methods were introduced in all schools. Many people were afraid to speak out against the doctrines of Marxism. However, the true catechist must speak out against the false doctrines of

227 AAV – Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Vatikán, Arch. Nunz. Svizzera, busta 225, fasc. 633.

228 Luciano Cipriani-Alfredo Tuzi (ed.), Vanessa Ferretti (revised and edited) *Congregazione Concistoriale, Relationes Dioecesium, Cappellani Militari, Vescovo dell'esercito e dell'armata. Indice 1169A*. Città del Vaticano, 2015, Introduction (no page number).

229 At a meeting on 16 July, 1945, an agreement was reached to disband religious youth associations. Shortly afterwards, on 6 August, the Office of the Commissioner for Internal Affairs dissolved the Catholic Youth Association and the Lutheran Youth Association. See also: Ivan A. Petranský: *Egyházpolitika Szlovákiában 1945–1948 között*, In: *Felekezetek, egyházpolitika, identitás...op.cit.* 34.

Communism if the students ask about them. This, however, may have resulted in their expulsion from school. All schools were public, but religious education was supervised by the Church. In some cases, they were excluded from the list of state-recognised teachers of religion because they were not teaching in Slovak. However, a law was passed to give back to Hungarians the right to have their own schools, so there was hope.²³⁰

There may also be Hungarian references scattered around in various bequests and other fonds related to specific events. For example, among the papers of Pope Pius XII, which are kept in a separate fonds here and for which an overview inventory was published this year²³¹, we can find a general description of the situation in Czechoslovakia in 1948, written in German, which also includes a description of the pastoral care of Hungarian parishes. The author of the document is unknown. Among other things, it claims that hundreds of Hungarian priests had been expelled and that priest Jozef Straka, the delegate for church affairs, who was officially a member of the Communist Party, had drawn up a plan to remove all Hungarian priests from the parishes, while the inhabitants remained there. However, the church authorities had largely managed to prevent this by the time this source was written, on the grounds that the Hungarian minority could not be treated any worse than the

230 AAV – Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Vatican, Congr. Concist. Relat. Dioec. 891. 1948 ad limina report, 49–51. On 30 September, 1948, a government decree stipulated that children of Hungarian nationality living in Slovakia could be educated in Hungarian. (Árpád Popély [ed.]: *Iratok a csehszlovákiai magyarság 1948–1956 közötti történetéhez I. Válogatás a csehszlovák állami és pártszervek magyar kisebbséggel kapcsolatos dokumentumaiból – Spisy k dejinám MaČarov v Československu v rokoch 1948–1956 I. Výber z dokumentov československých štátnych a stranických orgánov o maČarskej menšine*. Somorja, Fórum Kisebbségkutató Intézet, 2008. 71–72, 125–126.) On 12 October, 1948, the Office of the Commissioner for Education agreed to allow launching Hungarian classes where the parents of at least 30 Hungarian children of mandatory school age requested it, but the children of “re-Slovakized” parents were not allowed to attend these classes. F. Popély Árpád: *A (cseh)szlovákiai magyarság történeti kronológiája 1944–1992*. Somorja, Fórum Kisebbségkutató Intézet, 2006. 152.

231 Giovanni Coco (ed.): *Le „carte” di Pio XII oltre il mito. Eugenio Pacelli nelle sue carte personali. Cenni storici e Inventario*. Città del Vaticano, Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, 2023.

German minority, in which case the pastors could keep their jobs until their expulsion.²³²

An interesting instance of the coexistence of different denominations and nationalities is the case of Milenkó Nagykovácsy, an Orthodox merchant of Serbian nationality living in Budapest, who identified as Hungarian and also used the Hungarian version of his name. He wanted to help the bomb victims, offering them goods worth 1 million pengő. In 1952, however, the same man asked Pius XII for aid from Altmünster am Traunsee, where he had fled.²³³

The material of the first section of the Secretariat of State in the Vatican Apostolic Archives also contains additional information on the suffering of the clergy and the parishioners both before World War II and during Communism. Filing and index books are also available to researchers up to 1938, although after that date only lists compiled retrospectively and grouped around specific titles are available. For example, Paolina Székely, a Hungarian person who had emigrated to the US, made a bequest in 1955 to two churches, Melléte and Kecső, which were originally in Hungary and later became part of Czechoslovakia, but it proved very difficult to get the money: the Secretariat of State suggested that it should be used to buy liturgical items that the parish needed.²³⁴

2. Historical Archives of the Secretariat of State

These archives contain documents dating from the time the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs was created in 1814, as well as documents from various international organizations, and bequests.²³⁵ Among these, the

232 AAV – Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Vatican, Carte Pio XII, Affari Ordinari, busta 3, fasc. 13. ff. 1–24. A German-language status report on the ecclesiastical-religious situation in Czechoslovakia from May 1948.

233 AAV – Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Vatican, Carte Pio XII, Affari Ordinari, busta 7, fasc. 16, ff. 1–4. The letter to the Pope itself was written in German and was dated 24 January, 1952, *ibid.* f. 1r. A newspaper article in Hungarian with photographs of his 1944 donation, *ibid.* f. 4v.

234 AAV- Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Vatican, Segr. Stato, Titoli (1936–2005), Anno 1950-SGG., Titolo: Privati, pos. 7006. ff. 1–12.

235 See also: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/sezione-rapporti-

Congregation for Extraordinary Church Affairs fonds contains a number of reports from the nuncios, including ones on political, bishop appointment, economic, press-related, and pastoral issues. These are significant because they provide a view of the local Catholic Church, the public figures of the time, and the public and political events of the country through the filter of the representative of the Apostolic See in the given country. In addition, several pro memorias, in which a state, an official body, a public figure, a prelate, a pastor, or several pastors express their views at length and support it with arguments, as well as oral notes can be found here.²³⁶ On the other hand, this fonds also contains drafts of letters and notes from the Secretariat of State. They provide an insight into how a letter was drafted, or how the position of the Apostolic See may have evolved, and the Secretariat of State notes provide information on the conversations with the person who contacted the Pontifical Secretariat of State or the circumstances that led to a particular decision.²³⁷ The currently researchable part of the collection is divided into five periods, of which the documents created during the fifth period, during the pontificate of Pius XII, has been further divided into two parts: 1939–1948 and 1949–1958. These contain separate series, for example Ungheria, Austria, Romania, Cecoslovacchia, or Yugoslavia. As in the case of the nunciatures, it is worth going beyond these, especially after World War II, when someone is looking for material related to Hungary, and take a much broader view here, too. The series are divided into positios: some titles occur with several countries, e.g. as Razzismo, Minoranze, Chiese ortodosse, while some are unique. The positios are divided into fascicoli. A given topic should not be approached solely on the basis of a positio, but in a broader context, exploring its antecedents and

stati/archivio-storico/fondi/fondi_it.html - downloaded 12 December, 2023. In the above, I use the shortened version of the name of the archive.

236 A form of official diplomatic correspondence, which is written in the third person singular, usually in French and the legal language of the period, and is of shorter length. See also: Gyula Hajdu (ed.): *Diplomáciai és nemzetközi jogi lexikon*. 2nd, fully revised edition. Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1967, 192; Péter Kovács Lajos (publisher): *Diplomáciai lexikon. A nemzetközi kapcsolatok kézikönyve*. Debrecen, Éghajlat, 2018, 620–621.

237 See more: Krisztina Tóth: *A magyar egyháztörténet-írás 20. századi vatikáni forrásai*, op.cit.

possible consequences, and studying it together with the archival material of related local (Slovak, Romanian, etc.) and Hungarian archives.

From this fonds, I have brought an example from the Cecoslovacchia series, in connection with the hatred of Jews that raged during World War II. By 1943, there were only 20,000 people of Jewish background left in Slovakia, 8,000 of whom had been baptised. Of them, 2,662 were exempted from deportation by law, on the grounds of mixed marriage or some other reason.²³⁸ However, in a speech to the commanders of the Hlinka Guards at Ružomberok on 7 February, 1943, Minister of the Interior Alexander Mach²³⁹ declared that the deportation of Jews, including many Christians, would resume, since, quoting Hlinka, he claimed that “a Jew remains a Jew even if he is baptised by a thousand bishops”.²⁴⁰ Margit Slachta learned of this and immediately travelled to Rome to seek the intervention of Archbishop Francis Joseph Spellmann²⁴¹ of New York, hoping to report about the situation to the Pope. He visited the Secretariat of State on 5 March and handed in her pro-memoria, which she later supplemented with a document detailing the manner and cruelty of the deportation on 8 March.²⁴² The Vatican had already received information about the planned deportations from other sources by then (first from the Apostolic Nuncio in Budapest on 26 February), and this letter had certainly arrived in the Secretariat of State by 2 March.²⁴³ Yet it was only four days later, on 6

238 ASRS – Archivio Storico della Segreteria di Stato – Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati e le Organizzazioni Internazionali, Vatikán, AA.EE.SS. Pio XII, parte I, Cecoslovacchia, Pos. 175, fasc. ff. 613–647: f. 642.

239 He was Minister of the Interior of Slovakia from 1940 to 1945.

240 Cf. ASRS – Archivio Storico della Segreteria di Stato – Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati e le Organizzazioni Internazionali, Vatikán, AA.EE.SS. Pio XII, parte I, Cecoslovacchia, Pos. 175, ff. 613–647: f. 637r.

241 Spellman was Archbishop of New York from 1939 to 1967. Cf. Gerald P. Fogarty: Archbishop Francis J. Spellman’s Visit to Wartime Rome. In: *The Catholic Historical Review*, 2014. C. volume. 1. n. 72–96: 73.

242 ASRS – Archivio Storico della Segreteria di Stato – Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati e le Organizzazioni Internazionali, Vatikán, AA.EE.SS. Pio XII, parte I, Cecoslovacchia, Pos. 175, ff. 592–612: 601–603, 606–610.

243 Cf. ASRS - Archivio Storico della Segreteria di Stato - Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati e le Organizzazioni Internazionali, Vatican, AA.EE.SS. Pio XII, parte I, Cecoslovacchia, Pos. 175, ff. 582–591: f. 587.

March, that Giuseppe Burzio, the Holy See's representative in Slovakia²⁴⁴, was instructed to take the necessary steps with the government to save them if the reports were true.²⁴⁵ Margit Slachta's letter of 5 March thus contributed to the Secretariat of State issuing this instruction. Indeed, although Burzio, the Holy See's representative in Slovakia, did not yet consider it necessary to intervene at the time, when he did, he acted on the instructions of the Secretariat of State of 6 March and received an appointment from the Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs for 7 April. And although he could not persuade the Minister, the Council of Ministers eventually decided to suspend the deportations.²⁴⁶ In light of this, we can say that Margit Slachta's efforts contributed to the rescue of people of Jewish origin in Upper Hungary, including many Christians.²⁴⁷ Another interesting example from the Ungheria fonds concerns the documents about the white martyr Joseph Mindszenty, which were also created during the pontificate of Pope Pius XII, and which answer the question what information the Apostolic See had about Mindszenty's imprisonment and who its informants were. These include a letter written by his mother, widow of János Pehm, on 8 March, 1952, which she sent to an American lady, who forwarded it to József Zágón, who brought it to the Secretariat of State²⁴⁸, and a report by József Vecsey, a diocesan priest from Szombathely²⁴⁹, who

244 Burzio was the Apostolic See's representative in Slovakia between 1940 and 1945.

245 ASRS – Archivio Storico della Segreteria di Stato – Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati e le Organizzazioni Internazionali, Vatican, AA.EE.SS. Pio XII, parte I, Cecoslovacchia, Pos. 175, ff. 582–591: ff. 585r and 588r.

246 ASRS – Archivio Storico della Segreteria di Stato – Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati e le Organizzazioni Internazionali, Vatican, AA.EE.SS. Pio XII, parte I, Cecoslovacchia, Pos. 175, ff. 648–666: ff. 649–652.

247 I have written about this in detail: Krisztina Tóth: Slachta Margit megoldási stratégiái a kor válságtüneteire szentszéki levéltári források nyomán, In: *Járatlan utakon a Lélek vezetésével. Tanulmányok a Szociális Testvérek Társasága magyarországi történetéből*. Budapest, Barankovics István Alapítvány – Gondolat Kiadó, 2023. 133–157.

248 József Vecsey was ordained priest in 1938 (cf. *Schematismus venerabilis cleri Dioecesis Sabariensis pro anno Domini 1947. Sabariae, Typis S.A.Martineum, 1947, 157.*) He also published a separate volume: *Emlékezés Mindszenty bíboros édesanyjára*. Sankt Gallen, 1970.

249 ASRS – Archivio Storico della Segreteria di Stato – Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati e le Organizzazioni Internazionali, Vatican, AA.EE.SS. Pio XII, parte II, Ungheria, pos. 150, ff. 2–4.

accompanied him to the prison and recorded his words, which was forwarded to Rome by the nuncio of Switzerland (Bern) on 11 July, 1952.²⁵⁰ These all reached Rome by a circuitous route (which also shows that sometimes it is not necessarily worth only looking at the series marked with the name of a particular country, since related material may also turn up elsewhere). The letter from Mindszenty's mother is already quite moving, especially the following lines, which make us realize that this is not only the tragedy of a nation and its Primate, but also the tragedy of a mother, a double martyrdom: "I too can say that I share the fate of the martyrs with my son, who may never be free again."²⁵¹ The descriptions of Vecsey and the nuncio of Bern give a complex picture of Mindszenty's health and his relationship with his mother. The Primate's condition deteriorated spectacularly in 1949, and it seemed that the government wanted him to die behind bars as quickly as possible. Archbishop József Grösz of Kalocsa, president of the Hungarian bench of bishops at the time, later tried to intercede for him, and his mother offered to cover his medical expenses. No information was available about him between the fall of 1949 and May 1950, and his mother could visit him in the Vác prison in June. Miklós Dudás, bishop of Hajdúdorog could also visit him and hear his confession, also telling him about the state of the church (the document hints on the fate of several martyred priests). In November 1950, Mindszenty told his mother that he did not need warm clothes and that he was sleeping in a heated room. He also would have liked to meet Miklós Beresztóczy, who had just been elected vicar general of the Archdiocese of Esztergom, but this did not happen. In April 1952, his mother found him in good health again.²⁵² Many previously unknown sources became available for research in the summer of 2022, when the Ebrei fonds were made available to researchers

250 The nuncio's report: ASRS – Archivio Storico della Segreteria di Stato – Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati e le Organizzazioni Internazionali, Vatican, AA.EE.SS. Pio XII, parte II, Ungheria, pos. 150, ff. 21–24. The corresponding note of the Secretariat of State: *ibid.* ff. 25–28.

251 Cf. ASRS – Archivio Storico della Segreteria di Stato – Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati e le Organizzazioni Internazionali, Vatican, AA.EE.SS. Pio XII, parte II, Ungheria, pos. 150, ff. 2–4: 2, 3.

252 ASRS – Archivio Storico della Segreteria di Stato – Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati e le Organizzazioni Internazionali, Vatican, AA.EE.SS. Ungheria, Parte II, pos. 150, fasc. 19–47: 23.

in the same archives. We are working together with several institutions and a Hungarian research team to explore the Hungarian material contained in this collection, and I coordinate the work as the archival delegate. The letters reveal many moving individual stories and the Holy See's efforts to save as many lives as possible and to help those in need.²⁵³

Finally, if you are looking for Hungarian material from the twentieth century, it is also worth looking at the various bequests, for example, Agostino Casaroli's bequest contains many valuable sources on the relationship between Hungary and the Holy See in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.²⁵⁴

To sum up, the Vatican archives have a wide range of fonds in which twentieth-century Hungarian material may be found. Among these, I focused on the possibilities offered by the most recently opened fonds, the exploration of which may provide valuable insights into the relationship between Hungary and the Apostolic See, and between Hungarians and the Holy See during and after World War II. As I have outlined above, the documentary material related to Upper Hungary and Transcarpathia, especially before World War II, is rich, while after 1945 it is somewhat more scarce, but this is compensated by the material in the incoming correspondence held at the Secretariat of State and in the files of various Holy See diplomatic missions. As the above examples show, they provide an excellent illustration of the attitude of Communism towards the Church, the insults suffered by the laity and the clergy who stood by their faith and spoke out in its defence, their persecution and suffering,

253 https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/sezione-rapporti-stati/archivio-storico/serie-ebrei/serie-ebrei_it.html - downloaded on 12 December, 2023.

We plan to present the results of our research in several forums.

254 ASRS – Archivio Storico della Segreteria di Stato - Sezione per i Rapporti con gli Stati e le Organizzazioni Internazionali, Vatican, Spogli, Card. Agostino Casaroli, Pos. 61–64 (relations between the Holy See and Hungary: 1959–1964, 1964, 1967–1995, 1978–1980; pos. 65–71 (Czechoslovakia and Hungary, and newspaper clippings: 1932–1963, 1963–1965, 1965–1968, 1968–1974, 1971–1975, 1975–1996, newspaper clippings: 1951–1988), Several documents from the bequest published by Giovanni Barberini (ed.): *La politica del dialogo. Le Carte Casaroli sull'Ostpolitik vaticana*. Bologna, Il Mulino, 2009.

and the *modus vivendi*, or rather, the *modus non moriendi*. It is therefore certainly worthwhile to study the Vatican sources alongside the documents of the archives of Hungary and the successor states and to establish a more complete picture with their help.



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Hungarian martyrs of the Church of the Faith II.
Maďarskí mučeníci Vyznávajúcej cirkvi II.

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Publisher / Vydavateľ: J. Selye University / Univerzita J. Selyeho
Prepress / Tlačová príprava: Netwoxrkx s.r.o.

First published / Rok vydania: 2023

First edition / Prvé vydanie

Online accesess / Online

ISBN: 978-80-8122-493-5

