

I was ordained for the priesthood in 1952. This was the year when I have finished my studies at the Roman Catholic theological seminary in Szombathely. The next year the seminary was moved, on order coming from the political authorities, to Győr. Thus, beginning with 1952, the seminarists of the Szombathely diocese had to go to Győr and study together with the seminaries of the Győr diocese. The buildings of the former Szombathely seminary were requisitioned by the state for a girls college, however, the former chapel was closed down and not used and the library was left for the use of the church. As long as I was in the seminary, that is until the last year before it was moved to Győr, there was no change in the curriculum of our study. Our superiors and teachers remained the same as before the Communist take-over, so that, within the walls of the seminary, no change was noticeable. The same could not be said for the episcopal palace across the street. There, like in every other diocese, the administration was thoroughly purged and reorganised. The right of disposition, of appointments, transfers, promotions, etc., was taken out of the hands of the bishop and entrusted to a new vicar named by the Communists and the new director of the episcopal chancellery, brought to Szombathely from the Eger diocese and, above all, to the official representative of the state church bureau who was an AVH officer.

They had also a few other peace priests, recruited from both, the secular clergy and the priests of the dissolved religious orders who were willing to work for the regime. However, in our

diocese such were extremely few and mattered little. All in all, we had about 15 of them altogether; 3 or 4 diocesan priests, the rest former monks. Almost all of them had been appointed by the state church bureau to posts in the centre of the diocese, that is in Szombathely itself.

The peace priests, including the vicar and the chancellor, were despised by the rest of the clergy and also by the entire population. Nobody ever greeted them. The vicar who, probably on orders from above, used to accompany the bishop on his tours of confirmation, was so completely ignored by the parish priests and the parishioners everywhere that it almost became unbearably embarrassing and painful for anybody who had some feelings and sensitivity-

Bishop Sándor Kovács of Szombathely enjoyed a considerable personal freedom even during the darkest years of persecution. It is true that he had to bargain real hard very often and was forced to give in on many points in order to save on some others but he admirably succeeded in getting on with the regime under the most difficult circumstances and still not to become a peace priest, with another word, a tool in the hands of the Communists. He was constantly closely supervised. We knew, however, when and where he would take his daily walk and would join him there and talk over our problems under the trees tête-à-tête.

The chancellor was one of the worst and most detested peace priests in the country. However, as I told you before, in our diocese the peace priests could do little harm since the loyal priests and the faithful people formed a formidable and impregnable

block against them. They could harm us only by administrative methods, namely, by unfavourable transfers and demotions and by withholding our salaries but even this did not firten us because our parish communities would never let starve a good priest.

After my ordination in 1952 I received a job as teacher at religion in Zalalövö. This was a place of about 5,000 inhabitants with a school of about 500 pupils. The whole community was a good catholic community and I had an exceptionally easy and pleasant job there.

Although, as everywhere, our teachers had to go from house to house and agitate against parents registering their children for religious instruction, in our village of Zalalövö this was not taken seriously neither by the teacher nor by the parents. As a result about 80to 90% of all children have taken religious instruction from me. I have given 2 hours weekly to each class, so that I had 26 hours weekly, since there were double classes for most grades.

When I went to Zalalövö the children have not had any religious instruction for 2 and 1/2 years already, because their former religion teacher was arrested and jailed. Therefore, I had to begin the cathedism with all the classes anew.

I received only about 50text-books each year for over 400 pupils. There were classes for which I could secure only one or two text-books. However, I was not discouraged because of this but searched the whole community for old religious books and slowly I succeeded in providing at least each 2 pupils with a book. In the last class

I also started to dictate the text for my pupils and asked them to take notes during my lecture. This, of course, couldn't be done with the smaller children, but with the more grown-ups it was tried with good results.

At the beginning of the school year of 1955/56 there was an unprecedented rude interference with the registration for religious instruction in Zalalövö. We never had such a thing before in our peaceful village. The parents were delayed by the most impossible petty bureaucratic chicaneries in the rooms which were on the way to my room where I was waiting for them to register their children for the religious instruction. They did their obstruction so efficiently that only 3 or 4 people could reach my room every hour. Finally a tumult broke out. My door was stormed when closing time approached, but even so, only about 50% of the pupils could take religious instruction that year. I have made protocols about the whole affair and have sent it to all the authorities but no reply ever came back. (You have to know in this connection that children were permitted to be registered for religious instruction only at the beginning of the school-year and then only within a certain, usually very short, period. Those children whose parents failed to do this or, rather, they were unable to do this because of intimidation or such obstruction I just described above, were absolutely forbidden to attend religious instruction classes, and the priest who would attempt to give them such instruction, either in school or outside of it would be severely punished, often with several years of forced labour or jail sentence.)



In 1956 my bishop wanted me to come to Szomathely. The vicar objected - I was not a persona grata with him - and, instead, he tried to bury me in a far-away little village, near the Yugoslav border. Finally, as if by a compromise between the two, I was sent to Sárvar. This is a larger town, with over 10,000 inhabitants, where I became teacher of religion in the gymnasium.

As I was told by the people there, my predecessor had a very hard time with the authorities, but by now we wrote 1956 and things had mightily changed. I could already enter my classes regularly in the official diary of the school and religion was a recognised subject on the curriculum, not as before, when religion was permitted only after the regular classes and was only a grudgingly tolerated and often openly persecuted subject.

During the Revolution the rector of our parish and myself have done everything to restrain the people from acts of brutality and vengeance and thus practically we have saved the life of the AVH men. The AVH headquarters was just opposite of the rectory and because we had been afraid that in case people discover the names of secret informers - of whom many acted only under force of pressure and often bodily torture - they would commit terrible vengeance against them, therefore we let the files of the AVH to be brought over to the rectory and have burned them.

In November and December the new Kadar regime was still weak and the AVH still afraid. So they left the church alone. We have held even great outdoor processions without any police interference. Around February, however, the AVH felt itself again

strong enough to strike out at us. Before March 15th there was a great wave of arrests in all Hungary which hit especially hard the church and the clergy. The rector of my parish was arrested and I was ~~taken~~ taken with him. Both of us were tortured. We were accused of having been the spiritual fathers of the "counter-revolution" in Sarvar. They wanted to know especially what did we do with the AVH files and what did we learn of their contents.

My rector was sentenced for 8 years of prison but I was released and placed under police surveillance only. Finally, I succeeded in escaping from Hungary on March 25th, 1957.

Actually, we did not have time and also did not want to take the trouble to go through the AVH files but, I must admit, we were rather interested in the case of the ecclesiastical informers. We knew that such existed, since the police found out surprisingly much about the internal affairs of the church, but we never knew how this was done. Such informers among the priests were not numerous but still there were everywhere to be found some. How great was then our surprise, but also our sorrow, when we found three priests from our own district who had sent regularly, and quite malicious, information to the AVH about their brothers of the altar!