

I am 26 years old, born in Tiszántúl in the Eastern part of Hungary. I was ordained in June 1956 in Eger. After this I substituted for a colleague of mine in Ózd for a month and afterwards I worked as chaplain in Tiszaörs. From the middle of September to November 1st, 1956, I was alone at the rectory in Tiszaörs because the old rector had died. I left Hungary on November 23rd.

I completed my theological studies at the Eger seminary. Since the dissolution of most of the theological seminaries in Hungary the Eger seminary gave home also to the students from Vác and also from Hejce where the seminary from the Kassa, Rozványó, and Szatmár truncated dioceses had been before.

Our curriculum remained the old, only in the school-years of 1953/54 and 1954/55 so-called Alkotmánytani Ismeretek, knowledge of the constitution, was introduced with one hour weekly. This was taught by one of the priests and actually it was nothing but a formality in order to comply with the requirements set up by the state.

In the spring of 1955 Gábor Rakolczay was nominated to the post of the rector of the seminary. He was formerly the director of the junior seminary and then became the chancellor. Although many people regarded him as a peace priest, he actually remained a good priest. Only as any other person in leading position, he had to show a good face toward the authorities in order to be able to exist.

Another change in personnel had been in 1952, if I remember the date correctly, when the former Jesuit spiritual director of the seminary was dismissed on government order and a new spiritual director took his place. However, this latter was spiritual director before at the Vác seminary, so that he was a good choice from the point of view of the church for this job.

The spirit among both the students and the faculty members remained the same as before. We could speak openly about everything and felt perfectly secure within the walls of the seminary. There was only one seminarist of whom everybody knew that he was leaning toward the far left. He was from the Vác diocese in the same class with me. We called him among us the békekispap, the little peace-priest. After finishing our school he hardly remained in his chaplainship for six months and already was decorated with the "Order of Labour" and within a year he was promoted and became episcopal secretary. With other words, he made his career in the present system.

His Eminence, the Arch Bishop of Eger, Gyula Czapik, was, of course, a controversial person. Many people within and outside of Hungary resented his role and compromising attitude toward the regime. In fact, he was called often the red Arch Bishop. We, however, who had been in Eger and who had some inside knowledge about the affairs of the church, thought differently. We knew that every

step taken by His Eminence was well thought over and taken ~~then~~ only after a conscientious and anxious scrutiny. He knew what he was doing and why he was doing it. Those persons who knew him from very close, ~~they~~ maintained that Arch Bishop Czapik has saved the church from the catastrophic consequences which would have come out of the tragic situation in which the church found itself in 1949 vis-a-vis the state. I was assured by priests who had been in the closest circle of the Arch Bishop that His Eminence was ready to go to jail any time and follow the examples of Cardinal Mindszenty and Arch Bishop Grösz. But the fate of the clergy and of the Hungarian people was constantly before his eyes and therefore he tried a more difficult way of bargaining and constant mental and verbal struggle with the regime.

The spiritual and mental superiority of Arch Bishop Czapik impressed even the Communists. They felt a certain reverence toward him and His Eminence knew how to handle them and let them feel that he was above them. In fact he never became a tool in the hands of the Communists and did not give in easy to their demands. Often he won his case and saved the church from many dangers. For example, according to my knowledge he saved the very existence of the remaining six seminaries and the integrity in their teaching staff and curriculum by a heavy bargain with the Communists in the course of which he had

to agree to participate in the propagandistic peace conference at Helsinki. This trip of the Arch Bishop which led him outside the iron curtain, posing as one of the propaganda tools of the Communists, was very much resented and condemned by Catholics and non-Catholics on both sides of the iron curtain. However, if my information is correct, by this certainly very grave and, in one way, damaging step, the Arch Bishop had done an invaluable service to the survival of the Catholic Church in Hungary.

Within his own diocese Arch Bishop Czapik succeeded in keeping his authority almost entirely unimpaired. I mentioned already that no peace-priest was in charge in our seminary. In the archiepiscopal palace he had to tolerate a representative of the AEH (Allami Egyházügyi Hivatal), the state office for church affairs who was nicknamed by the people the "bajuszos érsek", the archbishop with the moustache. Although all orders had to pass through the hands of this man he never could exert a real authority because His Eminence has directed everything with rigorous hands and treated him only as a subordinate official. The same applied for the vicar who was nominated by the AEH for the Eger diocese, although there was no need for him, since there had been two auxiliary bishops for the aid of the Arch Bishop. This vicar who was incidentally brought in from another diocese, was treated with thinly veiled contempt and ignored both by

the Arch Bishop and the rest of the clergy.

In the fall of 1955 when Arch Bishop Czapik was already ill, the first great wave of transfers and promotions coming from the AEH took place in our diocese. This time the canon and abbot rectors of the greatest parishes Nyiregyháza, Miskolc, Eger, Mezökövesd, etc. were relieved from their posts and peace-priests were nominated instead.

In Ózd, as in every great industrial center, Communism existed only on paper. People, the workers and especially the miners, have shown their dissatisfaction with the system quite openly and told their opinions freely. The church was always full, in spite of the fact that I was there during the summer, at the high season of vacations and outings.

One of the chief engineers of the mines was called to the Party headquarters where he was accused with going to church every Sunday. The Party secretary asked him in a menacing voice: "Don't you think that more bread would come to your family if you would not go to church?" "I expect our daily bread from God and not from you", was his answer.

The people of Ózd are generally religious and faithful men, in spite of the fact that as every such industrial center, Ózd was also proclaimed a citadel of Communism. I was very frequently called to the sick-bed of people and I could go uninhibited to the hospital. Church-going was not prevented but everything was done by the Party to obstruct the registration of children for religious instruction.

My last post at Tiszaörs was at the borderline of the two competing religions in Hungary. The neighbouring town, Kúmadaras, is already Calvinist. Tiszaörs with 3,000 inhabitants is 100 percent Roman Catholic.

The people of Tiszaörs were good people. However,

there was an insidious and ignorant (alattomos, sötétfejű) Party secretary ruling the village. He blindly accepted every Party directive and forced all people to comply with it. He was all the time after me and tried to bother me. Usually he called in my superior, the rural dean, and told him all his complaints against me and gave the directive for me. During the Revolution the people wanted to beat him to death but he succeeded in escaping with his full staff, namely, the chairman of the council, the director of the school, etc., to an unknown place.

The director of the school was a double-dealer, insincere opportunist. Formerly he has been a commander in the Levante movement, the para-military organization of the prewar regime. Now he became the biggest Communist. The villagers were very mad at him.

This man called me once to his office and threatened me with the greatest accusations. For example, that on the day of St. Blase I took those children who were registered for my religious classes and went to church with them and gave them the so-called St. Blase blessing. Then I did not wait in the faculty room for the sound of the bell to begin the religious instruction but I went over already during the intermission to the class and was among the children. On top of this unheard crime I did not return after my class to the faculty room either but I went home together with the children and apparently I was organizing

the children on the street for anti-state activities and what was even more serious I dared to visit the children at their homes. All these constitute the greatest crimes in a people's democracy and the director was threatening me that he would denounce me to the representative of the State Office for Church affairs at the county seat, so that I would get several years in prison. (The AEH had his representative also at the county, not only at each diocese. Our man at Szolnok was a police-corporal who has arrested and thrown into jail my predecessor with the accusation that he was holding up people during harvest time and that he was inciting them against the kolkhozes.)

My job as teacher of religion was a very difficult one. We had about 400 children in the school but only about 1/5 of them could go to religious instruction. At the registration there was a great terror exercised by the Party and the school authorities. Weeks before already the teachers had to go from house to house in order to convince the parents of the undesirability of religious instruction. The convincing was done by open or concealed threats, from which the parents had to understand that great disadvantages would befall them in case they would let their children go to the classes of religion.

The signatures of both parents were needed and one of the parents had to appear personally for the registration. There was a strict time limit, usually one or two



days, in which this could be effected. The parents were held up before my door by the other members of the faculty who talked with each for half an hour or a whole hour and wouldn't let others pass by in order that as few as possible could ever reach my desk.

A representative of the teaching staff was sitting in at all my classes. All my words had been controlled. But what was much worse, the children had to feel in the grades they have received and in the general treatment given to them by the faculty that those who went to religious instruction were not worthy for higher education and would not be allowed to go to higher schools. I myself was treated as an outcast and even those teachers who would have liked to speak with me did not dare to do so because they knew that such attitude would cost them only troubles.

I gave two hours weekly both to the smaller children and also to the older ones. We received only very few text books so that the children had to study from each other's books and from notes taken during my lectures.

Classes for religious instruction were permitted only after the other classes of the curriculum. They were my classes for the older children from one to two p.m. and for the small children from 5 to 6 p.m. At that hour the pupils were all tired already and could not give the required attention to the lectures. Especially hard was this order for the small children, since during the fall and

the winter at that hour it became already dark and the poor little chaps had to go home in the wet, mud, and snow in pitch-dark. All this was done, of course, intentionally, in order to discourage the children and their parents from going <sup>through</sup> all this trouble in receiving religious instruction.

To punish anybody who behaved badly during religious instruction was strictly forbidden. But it was also forbidden to reward somebody for good studying or behaviour. There was no such a thing as giving grades or write reports about the religious instruction classes. There was no examination either. To those who recited their lessons well I gave little devotional pictures of Saints, however, I was reprimanded severely for this and had to discontinue this subversive habit of mine which was greatly endangering the security of the People's Democratic State.

Church functions were not interfered with. However, during state holidays we had to finish every church function before a certain hour, for example, 8 a.m. in order that people should be able to go for the parades. However, in our community outside of the council members and the faculty of the school nobody marched at these occasions.

Church-going in Tiszabors definitely declined during the last years. The reason for this was not ideological. During the great holidays the church was still overflowing with people. The situation was caused rather by the fact

that the peasants could not find time anymore for church-going. They had to work day and night even on holidays, both men and women and even the children in order that they could fulfil their quota for deliveries and after to be able to survive. In addition many of them had to take some extra job in the cities in order not to starve and these people were working their fields late in the night or on holidays when they returned from their city employment. If we consider these facts then it is no wonder that people simply could not come to church anymore for lack of time.

As far as the attitude of the peasants toward the regime is concerned I can only say that the whole village regarded the system with passivity but at the same time with proud contempt. There were hardly any Communists in Tiszaörs.

At the first breeze of the Revolution the entire Party leadership together with the faculty of the school and with all the Communist Party members mysteriously melted into the thin air. Some officers and cadets came over to us from the neighbouring Künmadaras air field and officers' school and called a meeting of the village on which the revolutionary council of Tiszaörs was elected.

The president of the revolutionary council became a simple peasant. He often came to me for advice so that in many respect I became the driving force behind him.

(This time I was alone at the rectory.)

I called a conference of the parents at which we decided to reintroduce the obligatory religious instruction into the official curriculum of our school as it was before the Communist coup d'état. The crucifix which had been removed from the school by the Communists were now carried back from the church in a solemn procession to the school and placed again on the wall of each class.

Very soon after the Revolution my situation became more and more impossible because of my previous role during the Revolution and so I had to leave Hungary at the end of November.