

Please note:

This is a B-type of interview with a Cistercian priest. In the first part of the interview section B he reports on the events relating to the position of the Catholic church in Hungary. In the second part of the interview he was asked several questions of the "A"-type questionnaire in order to learn about the opinions of a Catholic priest about some questions. This is the interview.

In 1948 when the schools were taken over by the State, I was a teacher at the gymnasium of the Cistercian order in the city of Baja. The law concerning the nationalization of the schools came out in June. A few days later we received an instruction of the Ministry in Budapest that we have to <sup>turn</sup> ~~give~~ over our school to the newly appointed director at the end of July. The new director appeared <sup>and</sup> took over the building of the school however our convent building was left to us. After that date we were not permitted to enter the building of the school and we were watched, particularly our connections with the former students. In the <sup>wake</sup> ~~way~~ of the liquidation of the Catholic school system there was a great scarcity of teachers. Every Catholic teacher received a letter from the Minister of Education whereby he offered us a job for full payment with the State. Although it was not stated in the letter, it was obvious that if we accept this offer we will be transferred into other cities and the members of the order will be dispersed, our convent building will be left empty and will be taken over by the State. Consequently none of the Cistercian teachers applied for a State job. Soon afterwards the Minister issued a new order and laid claim upon a part of the convent building for the purpose of a so-called folk college. A special commission came from Budapest in order to settle this problem

with the leaders of our order. The leader of this commission was a girl and an enthusiastic Communist. She came with a definite plan from Budapest and she told us right away ~~that~~ parts of the convent building she wants to take over. According to the order of the Ministry, the utilization of the convent buildings should be arranged ~~with~~ <sup>through</sup> a ~~common~~ <sup>mutual</sup> understanding of the religious orders and the commission of the Ministry. Our provincial and director referred to this paragraph and tried to get a ~~class~~ <sup>just</sup> settlement. Their efforts however were of no avail. We had to accept the plan as proposed by the commission. The State took over about the half of the convent buildings including premises which were used exclusively for the dwellings of the priests. According to the original order of the Ministry, only those parts of the convent building could be taken over by the State which were used for a boarding school. However the commission transgressed this original meaning ~~and~~ of the order and took over more rooms. In that part of the convent building which was occupied by the State, a folk college was established which was opened in September 1948. Both the students of the folk college and the priests of our order had to use the same courtyard for recreation. I know of many cases where serious troubles arose out of this situation. We were fortunately loved in Baja; the students of the folk college behaved in a ~~fairly~~ <sup>very</sup> friendly way. It was mainly so because many of

those students were our ~~own~~ former students. The situation established in such a way in the summer ~~in~~ 1948 lasted for two years. Except for 18 priests who took up teaching jobs with the State none of the dispossessed priests were teaching during that time. This was done in accordance with the instructions of primate Mindszenti. His policy was to keep the orders together even at the expense of financial difficulties. I think at that time 1000 or 1500 monks left their teaching jobs, for example 170 Cistercians, 300 Benedictines, 300 ~~Premonstratensians~~ <sup>Piarists</sup> 50 from the Premonstratenses order, moreover about 3000 nuns left teaching. There was such a scarcity of teachers that the State had to arrange for 6 weeks summer courses at the end of which the students received a teacher's diploma. The teachers educated in such a way <sup>had</sup> that their rather poor preparation for their profession, even the students ~~noticed~~ <sup>not</sup> noticed/their lack of knowledge. The teachers could not possess a real authority and they often antagonized their students. Our old students would still come and visit us telling us all their complaints. It was a serious problem to care for the financial needs of those priests who were now not receiving any salary. In order to settle this problem the bishops engaged the former regular priests in the usual parishwork and they were paid under the kongrua. This system meant that the secular clergy did not receive its <sup>full</sup> ~~hopeful~~ kongrua since a part of it was <sup>spent</sup> ~~sent~~ on the regular priests. The bishops tried to maintain the <sup>and</sup> convent houses the State paid an annual lump sum for the

old pensioned teachers of the secular clergy. This lump sum was distributed by the religious authorities and used by the convents. Under ~~same~~<sup>such</sup> circumstances some members of the regular clergy began to take up jobs in manual labour. Many of them learned a trade. The situation of the nuns was even more difficult. They tried to earn their bread through female works such as sewing, crocheting, baking and so on. This was the situation up to June 1950 when the regular clergy was generally deported. At the beginning of June 1950 at the night before ascension day plain-clothes men of the Police appeared in almost every convent house of the country. They showed an order issued by the Ministry of Interior which says<sup>that</sup> the buildings of the convents have to be relinquished, ~~and~~ the members of the convents were ordered to leave ~~their~~ their old home and to settle in certain specified convent buildings. We got 15 minutes only to get ~~rest~~<sup>dressed</sup> and collect the most necessary things we were permitted to take with us. Then the members of the religious orders were put on trucks and were delivered by the Police to their new confinement. The situation was that a certain number about one tenth of the convent houses were left in the possession of the orders and all the priests were confined in those houses; for example if a convent was originally built for 6 to 8 persons now 60 religious persons were crowded into it. The situation was even poorer for the nuns whose houses were poorer

and smaller. In some cases the nuns had to white-wash a pig-sty and established their living quarters there. The man in charge of the deportation of the clergy was Veres János ministerial counselor in the Ministry of Interior. The whole operation was carried out in a complete secrecy. In some cases the plain-clothes men forced the door or a window and sneaked in while the religious people were sleeping. They blocked all the exits, then they awakened the prior of the house and conveyed him the order of the Ministry. What they really wanted was that the civilian population should not know of the deportation and should not come to the help of the religious persons. Some of the plain-clothes men carrying out the deportation orders were of a loud mouth, most of them however tried to behave in a human way. The plain-clothes men got strict orders and did not know very much about the operation either. The truck driver for example did not know what will be the destination of his transport. He got a written order only a few hours later in another city. There were convent houses where the religious persons tried to resist. In such cases the policemen explained that they were ordered to use force. The believers did their utmost to support the deported clergy. Since there was no <sup>regulation</sup> ~~privatization~~ concerning their livelihood they were fed for several weeks out of the voluntary gifts of the believers living nearby. It should be mentioned

that the most important convent houses were left in the possession of the orders for instance Zirc, Pannonhalma and other convent houses in Budapest. The leadership of the orders tried to contact the ministries in Budapest and get some explanation; however, it was impossible to reach them and no answer was received from there. One can understand this whole operation when one remembers the speech delivered by Rákosi in January 1949 where he declared that unless the churches come to a compromise with the State the State will find its ways and means to break the Catholic Church. The deportation of the regular clergy was a great pressure in the hands of the State to force the bishops to bow before the system. In August 1950 at the request of the provincials of the religious orders /archbishop Grösz tried to initiate negotiations with the State. He had a meeting with Rákosi. When the archbishop mentioned the problem of the religious orders, Rákosi mentioned the problem of a compromise between Church and State. He made it quite clear that the problem of the religious orders will not be solved unless the bishops signed the agreement prepared by Rákosi. After a few days this agreement was indeed signed officially in the name of the Hungarian Bench of Bishops. The essence of this agreement was that the bishops declared the Catholic Church will not ~~plouk the~~ ~~xxxxxx~~ ~~form~~ of the Communist system. At that time archbishop Grösz and many other leaders of the Church thought that this

agreement will satisfy the Communist leaders. However, then it pretty soon turned out that the Communists had further aims concerning the Church. In the summer of 1951 the movement of the peace priests became very strong. About the same time arch/bishop Grósz was arrested and charged, then arch/bishop Szapik had to carry out further negotiations with Rákosi. The result of this negotiations was a second agreement between Church and State. As an outcome of this agreement the Church ceded most of the convent houses to the State; on the other hand many regular clergymen were permitted to return to Parish. <sup>1</sup> Some other regular clergymen took up jobs in teaching as it was recommended by the leaders of the Church. The agreement did not force the clergymen to teach. It was up to everybody to make his own choice. At the same time the government promised to solve the problems of the clergy. In July 1951 the kongrua was indeed increased. From this time on, however, it was paid only to those secular and regular clergymen who were permitted by the government to receive it. In the way of a second agreement the State organized the so-called State Office for Church Affairs or in Hungarian Állami Egyházi Hivatal which became the main bulwark of the peace priests. The number of the actual peace priests has been very small, however, many priests were forced to join one of the Communists' mass organizations, and they became silent members of the peace



movement. The actual aim of the State office for Church affairs was to supervise the whole clergy and to watch that the Communist orders should be carried out by the whole clergy. Concerning the first agreement between archbishop Grósz and Rákósi it should be added that it contained one important point concerning the regular clergy. In that point the bishops took notice that the government withdraws its permission of work for most of the regular clergymen. It should be noted that nothing like that as a permission of work from the government has been known in the Hungarian constitution or in economic law. Anyhow after September 1950 most of the religious orders were dissolved and ~~only~~ all their ~~problems~~ <sup>problems</sup> were taken away. Only a few of the teaching orders were left under some respected circumstances. Four religious orders that is the Benedictine, <sup>the</sup> Piarist, the Franciscan and the <sup>English</sup> nuns' order were permitted to keep two schools each. The Benedictines still possessed their two gymnasiums in Pannonhalma and Győr, the Piarists could retain their two gymnasiums in Budapest and Kecskemet; although the Franciscan order was not a teaching order its ~~province~~ of Buda was permitted to exist and they were given two gymnasiums in Esztergom and in Szentendre. Only one nuns' order was permitted to stay on the so-called "Poor Sisters of the School of Our Lady" who got two schools in Debrecen and Budapest. In each of the eight schools left in the hands of the religious orders

the numbers of students who could be admitted to the schools were limited by the State. Moreover the State determined how many novices could be accepted by the orders. This provision of the agreement actually provided for a slow liquidation of the four privileged religious orders. The second agreement signed by archbishop Ozapik was concluded in 1951 when the bishops made an oath of allegiance to the system. The second agreement stated that the clergy wouldn't ~~wouldn't~~ work against the system that they ~~wouldn't~~ <sup>wouldn't</sup> agitate against the agricultural cooperatives and so on. The text of the second agreement looked rather innocent, however, the actual policy of the State against the Church was quite different. The second agreement did not touch upon the most important problems of the Church. This was done by the Communists on purpose by wanting to use the lack of clarity for a further damage <sup>to</sup> of the Church. For example the second agreement did not specify how many regular clergymen should be admitted by the different dioceses into the secular clergy. The government wanted to ~~reduce~~ <sup>reduce</sup> the number of the regular clergymen working in Parish ~~in~~ <sup>in</sup>. Therefore the government pressured the bishops and in August 1951 the bishops were forced to dismiss from religious service the monks above a certain number. In such a way 120 to 150 regular clergymen were dismissed from each dioceses. In the diocese Veszprém which is a small one 77 of them were dis-

missed and one of them was me. This dismissal caused a tremendous personal problem for the priests who had now to live and to work individually. According to a secret order of the government the former priests were not admitted into any clerical or similar work. In many cases they were not permitted to take up the job of a skilled worker either or they were excluded from certain better paying factories. For example no former priest were employed by the Rákósi Works in Gsepel; most of the former priests including myself took up heavy physical work mainly in agriculture or in construction or in road maintenance. It should be mentioned that by that time many of the secular clergymen had to leave their Parish. They were either suspicious from a political point of view or were suspended individually by the State office for Church affairs or by some local authorities, which had nothing to do with the Church. All these former priests were in a very precarious situation. If they got a job in a shop, the Kader secretary had to keep a special ~~special~~ close watch on them and they were not permitted to maintain close contacts with the other workers. The Communist system was afraid <sup>that</sup> these former priests will carry out a secret religious organization at the place of their work. I must mention that our kind workers and generally the ~~workers~~ <sup>laymen</sup> did everything possible to alleviate our situation. The

laymen behaved themselves in many cases very heroically. The situation of the clergy has not changed much since 1951 except for the fact that the number of the former clergymen has gradually increased since that time. Very ~~xx~~ few of the regular clergy went back to teaching since this was a dangerous occupation for them. In December 1951 all community life of the religious orders were stopped <sup>at</sup> for the eight convent houses mentioned above. The former members of the regular clergy were not permitted to live together secretly, and were watched by the police. It was even dangerous when two or three former priests took a room together. The AVO watched the former priests whether they maintained their connections with their old students or parishioners. Similarly it was strictly prohibited to receive any financial aid from the superiors or on the line of the Church. In such a way the monks became from a dis-

ary point of view entirely independent from their superiors. Their life was <sup>still</sup> ~~xx~~ regulated by the Codex Juris Canonici which <sup>they still had</sup> ~~battered~~ individually but <sup>did not re-</sup> ~~their~~ ceive any direction from ~~the~~ superiors in the order. The monks still said a mass but they had to provide for a place of mass individually. They were not permitted to carry out any public ecclesiastical function, they could not say a mass to the believers only at a side <sup>altar</sup> ~~order~~ where nobody was <sup>there</sup>. They said a mass behind closed doors or at times in the early morning or late evening

when no believers were in the church. I was visited two or three times by the AVO people who asked me whether I still say mass.

In 1952 the government issued an order of the power of law, concerning the appointment of bishops and abbots. According to this order as long as no good contact exists between the Hungarian government and Rome, Rome cannot appoint directly ecclesiastical dignitaries but only with the previous approval of the Hungarian government. This order had actually a theoretical significance only since Rome does not appoint Hungarian bishops. As a consequence many of the Hungarian bishoprics are vacant, for example Esztergom is essentially non-occupied. The archbishop of Eger, Czaplak died. The seat of the chief abbot of Pannonhalma is vacant since the May of 1957. It is true that in 1951 ~~four~~ co-adjutors xxxxxx were consecrated from almost every Hungarian dioceses. Those co-adjutors tried to govern their dioceses as far as it is possible. The number of <sup>peace</sup> ~~these~~ priests was known up to 1953. After that under a great pressure, more clergymen were forced to join the peace organization. The clergy in the pastoral work tried to maintain the old connections with the youth for example through religious teaching in the church or through retreats. In 1948 most of the auxiliaries of the parish had to cease their activities for example the Szivgárda, the Legényegylet, and

the boy scout troop. For a while the clergymen tried to organize new associations for example the "association of the altar boys of the parish" or the "Christian Working Youth" organization, the latter was supposed to replace the boy scout movement. After 1950 even such organizations became illegal and were prosecuted by the AVO. From that time on it became an official policy that clergymen cannot participate in organizations other than those approved by the council of peace priests. Between 1948 and 1950 the different church organizations had grown up were liquidated under a constant pressure of the police. The Catholic reading circle or the Credo circle were to exist even longer, but I do not know of any case where they would have existed after 1950. The Catholic press consists of the Review Vigilia, the weeklies Uj Ember and Szivujság and finally the Kereszt, (several times) ~~later~~ <sup>later</sup> being the official organ of the ~~peace~~ peace priests. They worked under very difficult conditions. They do not get the necessary news print and the Szivujság was ~~spended~~ <sup>suspended</sup> for several times. The three ~~forth~~ mentioned papers stayed on the way as prescribed by the disciplin of the church. The Kereszt on the other hand is the official paper of the State office for Church affairs ~~and~~ <sup>and</sup> gets orders both of the system. Rome censored it in the spring of 1956 and shortly there after it ceased publication. The contributors of the Kereszt intended to loosen up

the~~re~~ ecclesiastical discipline and tried to make a propaganda against the legal leadership of the church. Particularly they attacked quite a few times the bishops. The State office for Church affairs instructed several times the bishops to talk about certain things such as the agricultural co-operatives<sup>in</sup> in secular matters to the parish priests. The bishops did not comply with such a request whereupon the ~~XXXXXX~~<sup>Kereszt</sup> attacked them very vehemently. They charged the bishops that they sabotaged the agreement between the Church and State. At the same time the ~~XX~~ people of the Kereszt issued a warning that the State had certain means to force them to keep the agreement. Additionally it should be mentioned that in September 1951 right unexpectedly two civilian persons appeared in each office of the bishops who presented themselves as the delegates of the State office for Church affairs. This two people were actually AVO people who showed an official order and took<sup>the</sup> the seal of the dioceses and instructed certain orders according to the new procedure of the bishoprics. From this time on the two delegates had to read and sign all mail coming to or going from the bishop to anybody. They lived in the palaces of the bishops, they spent their days in his office, they were present if the bishop received somebody, the bishop could not talk even to his own priest without their presence. The religious education went along in the schools according to the

rules up to 1950. In the following years the classes of the religious education were scheduled for such a ~~time~~ time that it was impossible to keep them. Then the clergy initiated religious education in the churches whereby the different age groups were put together and received education in the evening or on Sundays after the mass. In 1951 an order coming from Budapest prohibited religious education in church. This was the time when I was deprived from my work. From this time on religious education could be given in the schools only. Every teacher of religion needed a special permission issued by the Educational Council of the county. The special permission gave way to many abuses for example the local parish priest did not receive the permission but a priest from a far away village who got three or four villages at he was supposed to teach 18 to 20 hours a week. Because of the distances between the villages he was impossible to carry out his job or he could ~~do that~~ <sup>thus</sup> hold <sup>one</sup> class a week. Then many abuses were made of the parents' registration for religious education. Many parents were simply excluded and their children not permitted to attend the religious classes. In one village for example 70 or 80 % of the parents registered their children for religious education, but only 40 % of them were permitted to attend the classes. There were further restrictions concerning the teachers of religion. The teacher was



not permitted to dictate any text, he was not permitted to use any textbook since no religious textbooks were published by the State publishing firm. In many cases a lay-teacher was supposed to be present at the religious classes whose main aim was to create trouble. I know many cases when <sup>the lay</sup> suddenly teacher gave questions to the religious teacher in order to embarrass him. Quite a few of these lay-teachers tried to refute what the religious teacher was explaining. I know of a secret order which promised a special reward for all those lay-teachers who could really disturb the religious education. In 1956 there was a general improvement in the situation of the Catholic Church. Many priests were freed from the jail, many other <sup>ones</sup> ~~ones~~ got an appointment to one of the parishes. It was possible to restore the ecclesiastical discipline. Primate Mindszenty in an order, issued in October 1956, declared illegal the activity of the State Office for Church affairs, unless it is carried out through the official channels; similarly the Primate annihilated many appointments, which were made by the State Office, for example he dismissed appointed vicars and other high church ~~dignitaries~~ dignitaries. In such a way for example Beresztóczy ceased to be the vicar of <sup>Z</sup> Esztergom and he became a pensioned priest. At the present time the archbishop Grösz does not want to serve the policy of the State Office. What he tries to do is similar to the policy of cardinal Wiszinsky from Poland.

Both of them try to find a modus vivendi with the Communist authorities, provided the Vatican approves such a modus vivendi. There is a cold struggle going on between the Church and the State. The situation is far from being settled. The regular pastoral work, the replacement of the clergy has met with many difficulties since 1950. It has been a policy of the Communist, to block the education of novices and their ordination to priesthood. ~~The~~ <sup>case in</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> A ~~case~~ <sup>case</sup> point is the liquidation of the seminary in Veszprém. This notorious case happened in the spring of 1952. What happened was that one ~~novice~~ was corrupted by the AVO and he became a police spy. One day one of the novices put out <sup>the</sup> a picture of Mindszenty on the blackboard with the inscription "Let us pray for him!" It was the private work of one of the novices, but the superiors did not <sup>do</sup> anything about it. The AVO learned about it immediately and arrived on the same afternoon discovering the picture of the cardinal on the blackboard. The AVO immediately started an investigation. One of the superiors of the seminary wanted to take the blame on him. The AVO arrested him, some other superiors and quite a few of the novices. A few days later the seminary was dissolved. This case was a good pretext to liquidate a few months later the seminaries of Kalocsa, Fehérvár and Győr. Just a few seminaries were left for the Church and even <sup>there</sup> the bishop has no more a

freedom to select the professors. The number of admissible novices is determined by the State Office. In every year there are more applicants than places in the seminary. Another order of the State Office ~~is~~ <sup>is</sup> the former novices of the religious orders from the seminaries of the secular clergy. Since 1950 pastoral work ~~parts~~ can be carried out only within the walls of the church. The parish priests are watched in all their activities outside of the church. I can mention one case only. A parish priest was called to a sick person. The local Party secretary sent immediately the teacher after him that he should watch what propaganda the parish priest is carrying out at the sick-bed. The finances of the Church are controlled by the State. Every parish priest has to keep a <sup>cash</sup> ~~XXXXXXXX~~-book, and enter there every income ~~xxx~~ every item of expense. He cannot keep any of the money received but ~~xxxxxx~~ <sup>it</sup> must deposit/on the same day with one of the dioceses' saving banks. His books and <sup>accounts</sup> ~~watchers~~ are controlled by State auditors. The old national shrines lost their significance since no services can be arranged there. In most cases they were taken away <sup>from</sup> ~~by~~ the religious orders <sup>which</sup> ~~who~~ took care of them. There is no reading material for the Catholics. There are no Catholic books published, not even prayer books. The existing libraries of the parishes cannot be used and no parish priest may <sup>lend</sup> ~~borrow~~ a book to any of his parishioners.