

CHURCH-STATE RELATIONSHIP IN HUNGARY SINCE THE

COMMUNIST TAKEOVER IN 1945.

by

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PREFACE

The aim of the present study is to describe the actual position of the various denominations in Hungary. In seeking for truth, the legislation enacted since 1945 was read in the light of the sum total of official material available, such as decrees, regulations, court decisions, declarations of officials and the general press. Official statements of church leaders were also used wherever available. Methods for the gradual liquidation of the Catholic and Protestant Churches are analyzed in some detail.

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The Constitution of the Hungarian People's Republic of 1949 declared the separation of Church and State.¹ However, the separation of Church and State in present-day Hungary has a meaning different from the American concept. The declaration of separation of Church and State was used in Hungary to dissolve legal ties of a thousand years, to deprive the Church of all its privileges and to subjugate it to a rigid government control.

Prior to the end of World War II, the relationship of Church and State was based upon three principles: first; religious freedom, second; equal status and reciprocity of all recognized and accepted denominations, and third; State patronage for the Churches.

In this paper we shall first investigate the original status and the consequent fate of the Catholic Church, then we turn our attention to other denominations.

1. "Article 54., clause 1 of Law XX/1949, creating the Constitution of the Republic declares: "The Hungarian People's Republic guarantees the freedom of conscience of its citizens and the right to exercise free religious worship". Clause 2. of the same Article sets forth: "In order to safeguard the citizens' freedom of conscience, the Hungarian People's Republic separates the Church from the State". CF.: Washington (D.C.) Legation of the Hungarian People's Republic: The Relationship Between Church and State in the Hungarian People's Republic. (Washington, D.C., n.d.), p.1. Referred to as "The Relationship..." in the paper.

PART I.

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH.

CHAPTER I:

The pre-war era.

In order to obtain an exact picture of the Communist persecution of the Catholic Church in Hungary, and to understand the significance of the destructions carried out by Communism, it is necessary to remember first the eminent position of the Catholic Church in the life of the country before April 1945.

From the moment that the Hungarian nation accepted the Western form of Christianity, the Catholic Church became its teacher, organizer and defender. The history of the Catholic Church in Hungary is the history of the nation; in each age the Church has had a defined and obligatory situation within the Government itself. The Hungarian Constitution contained provisions governing the relationship of Church and State, as well as those between the Government and the Holy See. And because she was ruled for so many centuries by an Apostolic King, who was at the same time Lord Patron of the Catholic Church, Hungary has never in the past had a need of a specific treaty or concordat with the Holy See, as opposed to some other European nations, where adjustments and compromises had to be made.

The Hungarian Hierarchy took part in lawmaking and other Government functions and its members were often required to act as statemen. From the Middle-Ages, the Archbishop of

Esztergom has carried the title of Prince-Primate, a title referring to his worldly as well as to his spiritual authority, and on occasion his responsibility for Government has been second only to that of the King.

The Hungarian clergy fought in behalf of their country; priests, bishops and primates died in the battle. The Holy See itself never abandoned Hungary, and in times of difficulty - as during the Tartar and Turkish invasions - kings and lords, some of them Protestants, looked to Rome for help.

Even the Reformation took a different form in Hungary than in other countries. In Western Europe where Luther was the renewer of German nationalism and of the German language, through which he made his appeal to the masses, a thirty years' religious war was fought. In Hungary, although Protestants and Catholics persecuted one another in the tradition of the times, there was not, properly speaking, a religious war between them, and the impact of Reformation took a milder form than in other countries. As early as the sixteenth century, Protestants and Catholics agreed on an edict of tolerance assuring freedom of religion. ²

There is no more important witness to the absence of such friction between religious groups in Hungary than Louis Kossuth, the hero of 1848, who, after the defeat of the Hungarian revolution against Austria, came to the United States.

In a speech made in New York in 1852, Kossuth, the Calvi-

2. Cf.: Ernst C. Helmreich (ed.), Hungary (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1957), p. 8.

nist and Freemason, paid the highest tribute to the Catholic majority of Hungary, saying that they fought with him in the losing battles for national independence, and that, when in control of Hungary, he had appointed as his Minister of Education, a Catholic bishop. Kossuth, when in power, was the first in a long line of Hungarian Prime Ministers, who were Protestants: for eighty years (1867-1947) they were either Calvinists or Lutherans (the two Tiszas, Bethlen, Daranyi, Goemboes, etc.).³

Basically, the position of the Churches in Hungary - Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist - has not been changed by uprisings and revolutions, and the Jews later acquired the same status as the Christians. It is true that at the end of the eighteenth century, the son of Maria Theresia, Emperor Joseph II, suppressed the contemplative religious orders and confiscated their property, but before he died, he reversed his decision. Later on, when in Germany and France the Catholic Church had to fight against the forces of secularism, the Hungarian Church remained untouched.

Until 1867, national education was almost entirely in the hands of the Churches. After that date, control of the popular education was divided between the Government and the Churches. There was a cordial collaboration between the Government and the Churches in this matter and funds were equitably divided. It is important to remember that the so called "parochial" schools were not those of the Catholic Church a-

3. Cardinal Mindszenty Speaks. (Authorized White Book; London: Longmans, Green and Co. 1949.), p.10.

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lone but of other denominations as well; in fact there were more Protestant parochial schools and teachers, proportionately, than there were Catholic. The teaching of religion - Catholic, Protestant or Jewish - was compulsory in all schools, as well as attendance at the various services.

The denominational schools were supported in various ways. The chief forms of Catholic support were derived from the Bishops, the religious orders, the dioceses, private Catholic foundations, and the so-called "Religious Educational Fund" granted by the State.

The property of the Church was made up of donations received during the centuries: lands, forests, buildings, and, very occasionally, industrial shares.

Most of the landholdings of the Church belonged to the bishops or to the chapter of canons of the dioceses. Many religious orders owned large estates, as did some of the more important parishes. But this wealth was not pooled. The bishops, religious orders, etc., conducted their own separate business operations. In some cases, one diocese was almost actually bankrupt, when, at the same time, another was able to build new churches and institutions. Occasionally, even savings banks were operated by the diocese.

Until 1945 the Church estates remained intact. Revenue from them was used by the Church to maintain the schools, to contribute to the support of the professors and the teachers of religion and the parish clergy, to be used as welfare funds, for scholarships, for maintenance of church buildings and nu-

merous other functions. This situation was not altogether approved in modern times and was subject to criticism from Catholics themselves and from Church leaders, as they declared several times between the two wars. Though there was not even the slightest suspicion ever that these revenues from Church property were used for personal affairs, yet many Catholics felt that it would be more in keeping with the times for an agreement to be made whereby the Church could give up its landholdings to the peasants and receive due compensation from the State in return. Many plans to this end were made prior to 1945. For example, one of the first acts of Joseph Mindszenty upon becoming bishop of Veszprem was to apply to the Minister of Public Worship and Education (whose approval he must receive) for permission to distribute seven thousand acres of episcopal land to the peasants. This request was denied by the Hungarian Nazi Government of the time.⁴ That such programs were not implemented until 1945 must now be a source of regret not only to the Church but to those many other elements in the whole Hungarian social structure.

In addition to the constitutional prerogatives and to its immense patrimonial and cultural wealth, it must be also borne in mind that the Church impressed itself on the nation of its numerical strength. Out of a population of almost ten million inhabitants, the Catholic Church alone in 1945 numbered more than seven million faithful (about 70%), while the other three million were divided as follows: (a) Protestants:

4. Ibid.

2,500,000 (24.5 %); (b) Jews: 440,000 (4.4 %); (c) Orthodox: 60,000 (0.6 %).⁵

From the hierarchic point of view the Catholic Church included three Archdioceses, eight dioceses, two Apostolic Administratures, two Apostolic Vicariates and one Nullius Abbacy. On the whole the parishes numbered 2,265. The number of the secular priests was over 4,000. There were 18 male religious orders, with 187 houses and monasteries, and some 2,500 members of whom some 1,500 priests. Female religious orders and congregations totalled 39, with 456 houses and 7,525 members.

There were more than 5,000 organizations of the Catholic Action, male and female, with about one million enrolled members.

There were about 2,000 Confraternities, Marian Congregations, etc. with about 700,000 members.

The "Kalot" and the "Kalasz" (movements of the young peasants) numbered 700 local organizations with about 100,000 members. They had 20 popular schools attended by some 35,000 young people.

The "Kolping" (an association of business youth) and the "Kioe" (an association of working class youth) had 40,000 members, with about 100 houses and 6 special institutions.⁶

5. Lino Gussoni and Aristede Brunello, The Silent Church (New York: Veritas Publishers, 1954), p. 147.

6. Ibid.

CHAPTER II:

Initial contacts with Communism. The land-reform.

After having presented the above picture of the Hungarian Catholic Church prior to the Communist take-over, we now will attempt to give a short history of Church and State relations under the new era. Tracing the course of religion under the Communists several distinct phases are distinguishable:

- 1./ The relatively free phase from 1945 to June 1948;
- 2./ The initiation of forcible measures against religion (secularization of schools, arrest of the Primate, etc.) from June 1948 to June 1950;
- 3./ The anti-religious campaign from June 1950 to July 1953 (when Imre Nagy became Prime Minister) followed by a new phase of terror from March 1955 to June 1956;
- 4./ Moderately quiet periods from July 1953 to February 1955, and from June 1956 to the revolution;
- 5./ The post-revolution era. ⁷

Initial communist contacts with the Church (from about October 1944 to December 1945) were rather friendly and cautious. In the face of the above impressive organization of the Catholic Church which had, moreover, barely emerged vic-

7. Robert F. Delaney (ed.), This is Communist Hungary (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1958), p. 46.

torious from the struggle waged against it by the Nazi-Fascist government of Szalassi, the Communists did not dare to unleash an immediate frontal attack. In fact the prestige of the Catholic Church at the moment of the "liberation" was very high. It had prevented, through its bishops, the deportation of 200,000 Jews in Budapest, it had opposed the evacuation of the civil population of Transdanubia with its famous "Memorandum" of October 31, 1944, which had led to the arrest of bishop Mindszenty by the Germans.⁸ And it was not forgotten, that even earlier, years earlier, when the racial laws against the Jews were the subject of debate in the Hungarian Upper House, it was the Catholic Church through Cardinal Seregi, opposing vigorously any kind of racial discrimination as incompatible with the spirit of the Hungarian Constitution as well as with the teaching of the Church.⁹

8. Cardinal Mindszenty Speaks, op.cit., pp.217-219.

9. Ibid., p.33. (Cardinal Seregi's classical words -we think- deserve to be cited here: "Since the proposed bill is not explicitly concerned with particular offenses of individuals but is aimed at the whole of the Jewish community, we are dealing, in my opinion, with a question of reprisals which will affect an entire community because of the crimes of individuals. In other words, not only is the offender to be punished but along with him the innocent, who did not partake in the exploitation of our people and is consequently not personally guilty. Any lawful State, and particularly a Christian State, maintains, in accord with the teachings of Christ and the Church, that each individual is personally responsible for his own actions, hence those who have not committed a crime, cannot be persecuted under criminal law. If it be just that the sins of the father should not be visited upon his children, it must follow that a punishment must not be transferred from the one that deserves it to the one that is innocent. (Can. 2219.C.I.C.), unless, of course, the judge finds complicity. In this case, however, the other man can only be punished to the extent of his complicity....."

All this was recognized by the Russians themselves and their attitude toward the Church - at least in the first months - had been sufficiently proper. Even the Hungarian Communist Party tried to bring itself in line with the directives of the commander of the Russian troops, and in this first period it concerned itself with avoiding the slightest shadow of suspicion that it was anti-religious. It proclaimed that there would be no difficulties even for priests to become members of the party. It sought to assist the Church even materially.

Communist leaders made a point of frequently appearing in public in the company of the clergy. The official government photographer was always on the spot to record the friendly relations that existed between Church and State, and such photographs were used later for propaganda purposes.¹⁰ It frequently happened that members of the local party branch went to the parish priest and offered their services for the reconstruction of the church, school, or even the rectory. They refused remuneration for their aid and were content with a written expression of thanks for their generosity. Whenever such a testimonial was received it inevitably appeared the following day in a prominent position in the newspapers.

Under the pretext of wishing to help in social welfare activities the Communists attempted to insinuate themselves into the Catholic organizations. Party members got orders

10. Albert Galter, The Red Book of the Persecuted Church (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press, 1957), p. 199.

even to infiltrate parochial life by getting themselves elected on parish councils. ¹¹

The Church enjoyed special privileges even at the time of the land-reform; while all holdings of more than one thousand hectares in extension were simply confiscated, church-land holdings, on the contrary, in every case were left 100 hectares in extension. In fact, needy churches and parishes obtained new assignments. ¹² Naturally, even thus the Catholic Church became deprived of the greater part of its estates; the bishoprics were allowed to keep only about 143 acres. By this means the Church was suddenly impoverished with serious consequences for her religious, social and cultural activity. ¹³

In a pastoral letter dated May 24, 1945 the Catholic Bishops, and particularly Bishop Mindszenty, expressed deep concern that they might no longer be able to cover the administrative expenses of the Church without their lands, but added a hope that the happiness of the new landowners would console the Church for her losses.

11. Ibid., p.200.

12. "...the (Hungarian) government...left the Catholic Church in possession of a total of 104,310 hectares of land, most of which belongs to the parishes. The government provided not only for the maintenance of the already existing parishes but made possible the establishment of new parishes by giving them land and parsonages!" "The Relationship...", op.cit., p.2.

13. Agrarian reform was considered even before the arrival of the Soviets. Cardinal Seredi as early as in 1939 in the Upper Chamber (Hungarian Senate) declared in the name of the Church that he was in favor of the law under discussion. Mindszenti's position during the German-Nazi era was mentioned above.

"Among the many measures of the present Government - said the above pastoral - " the one most severely affecting our social structure is the agrarian reform. Its constitutional and moral effects have already been made the subject of our discussions with the Government. We should like, however, to deal here particularly with the effects the agrarian reform is likely to have on the Church. The proposed decree would seem to pay due regard to the needs of the Church by promising to facilitate a commutation of the burden of patronages and to establish special commissions which would undertake to investigate the particulars of individual cases. Yet we regret to have to state that this regulation threatens the very existence of ecclesiastical institutions by depriving them of their material foundations. Hitherto seminaries and churches have been supported out of the income of ecclesiastical landholdings. Who is going to support them now? Ecclesiastical administration needs its administrative apparatus and its offices. Who is going to pay for them? Exactly the same problem arises with regard to our old and famous schools. Can all the congregations shoulder these burdens in our impoverished and ransacked country?

Though we confidently believe in the generosity and the ready devotion of our Catholic people, we are facing the future with the greatest anxiety. May God grant that the happiness of the new landowners may console the Church for her losses and worries!" 14

When the agrarian reform became law, however, the Church became by no means compensated by the happiness of the new landowners. The reform proved to be a poorly camouflaged prelude to the creation of collective farms - agricultural properties owned and exploited by the State. Communists, regardless of aptitude for farming or the validity of their claims, received virtually all the land which was redistributed. The State fared even better. By July 1, 1946, it was the owner and manager of fully eighth of the landed property in Hungary. 15 The new peasants were, it is true,

14. Cardinal Mindszenty Speaks, op.cit., pp.48-49.

15. George N. Schuster, Religion Behind the Iron Curtain (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1954), p. 173.

compelled to make payments at regular intervals to amortize the cost of the land assigned to them. However, the money thus collected went into the State Treasury. By the beginning of 1948, the owners of one-hundred acre estates, who had previously been affluent, were being pushed to the wall; for all farms larger than fifteen acres were taxed so heavily in grain and produce that it was utterly impossible to meet the levies. When a farmer succeeded in doing so, he found that he was forced to sell his surplus at prices fixed by the Government; and these were so low that he was unable to make both ends meet and was forced into bankruptcy. Foreclosures became the rule.

As for the Church, although the land reform laws promised a compensation "in accordance with the capacity of the State" no such compensation has ever been effectuated. To what extent this measure deprived the Churches of their main sources of temporal existence may be seen from the following figures: According to the official statistics for 1935, 1,006,311 catastral holds from a total of 16,081,844 catastral holds of agricultural area including forests,¹⁶ covering the entire country, were owned by the churches and by various denominational schools and institutions.¹⁷

And yet the land reform laws, drastic as they were, could be defended in principle. The unjust distribution of

16. One catastral (=cadastral) hold equals 1.42 acres.

17. Vladimir Gsovski, Church and State Behind the Iron Curtain (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), p., 85.

land and property had long been a seething problem in Hungary. The Church - at least on the parochial level, did not suffer any basic financial loss, for all the parishes down to the smallest village community assumed the task of furnishing the necessary provisions for the clergy. The laity brought food to the seminaries and to the bishops' residences and gifts -at the beginning- were made so generously that cathedrals which had been neglected for centuries at a time when the Church owned large estates were now refurnished, as in Eger and Vac. ¹⁸

The struggle was brought out into the open by the Government itself, beginning in July 1945, preceding the general elections of autumn 1945. Organisation of debates against religion were favored by the Communist Party throughout the country. The former anti-clerical groups were restored to favour. Communist papers and periodicals began to represent the Church as "reactionary" and "the enemy of the people". ¹⁹

Such was the atmosphere immediately preceding the general elections of autumn 1945. It was not without apprehension that the Church faced the possible results, and the Primate, Archbishop Mindszenty, felt obliged to address a special Pastoral Letter to the faithful. In it he recalled

18. Delaney, op.cit., p. 48.

19. The Communist Hungarian Democratic Youth published on June 9, 1945 a Manifesto containing violent attacks on St. Stephen, "a criminal blinded by incense..., who created the thousand year old system which has sullied our whole history in a loathsome way". Cf.: Galter, op.cit., p. 203.

the "goodwill of the Church towards the rising democracy in Hungary," but went on to denounce the abuses and impositions of the new régime:

"The erection of the life of the State can only proceed, in the future, on the principles of democracy. We have already joyously welcomed the democratic idea in our previous letter. Truly the world has suffered enough under tyranny. For years tyranny robbed mankind of its holiest rights, took away its freedom of conscience, took away decency in moral life, and ruthlessly trod upon the rights of parents in the education of their children. Tyranny also denies the concept that the individual has a right to self-realization, a right to the development of his personal abilities and inclinations.

The cornerstone of a true democracy is the recognition of the fact that all natural rights are inviolable and that no human power can alter or invalidate them. True democracy exerts every effort towards the end that these demands be fulfilled quickly, even in those countries where, for some reason or other, this may not have been possible before. True democracy inscribes upon its banner: freedom of conscience, the right of parents to educate their children, the right of the worker to develop his abilities according to his own choice and inclination. What is more, true democracy put an end to slave labor.

We believe firmly that these ideas and ideals are designed to shape a better and more beautiful world; we believe also that mankind would thus come nearer to its goal; and we believe, therefore, that these ideals are in harmony with the Divine Will, which desires that every man accept, in full freedom, the priceless gift of Redemption and Divine grace offered to all.

This joy and belief moved us to give our approval, in our pastoral letter of May, to establish the new Hungarian democracy. True, even at that time we had some misgiving, but preferred to look upon the good that was made evident in places, and trusted that it might mature and grow; we believed in the polite words that the leaders of the new democracy uttered publicly about the Church and its work: fine promises that often were realized in deeds. This we saw, on this we built.

We regarded the transgressions and excesses that occurred

as merely the offshoots of a newly beginning order, and believed that these faults and vulgarities would disappear as soon as the new order had taken root.

Our waiting was long and patient! Ofttimes we felt that at last we must speak, but we did not wish to obstruct the new development. We had no desire to hamper, by any public pronouncement, the zealous and strenuous efforts of well-intentioned individuals. But now, before the elections, we can no longer remain silent.

We must state bluntly that we are aware of many features in Hungarian public life that are sharply opposed to the pure ideas of democracy. We must declare that no Christian voter may cast his vote for a program that includes a new suppression, a new despotism, and the abrogation of natural laws. It is with great pain that we must agree with the words of the English Foreign Minister when he said that it would appear in Hungary that one totalitarian dictatorship was being relieved by another.²⁰

We are most profoundly distressed by the fact that the present temporary government has greatly overstepped its authority and deeply wounded the feelings of the Christian population, by questioning the principle of the indissolubility of marriage. It was precisely for this point that we fought so ardently in the past; it was precisely in this pledge that we held hope for a Hungarian rebirth. There is hardly a government in the whole world which holds such frivolous views on that matter as those which are expressed in the

20. The Cardinal here is obviously referring to Mr. Bevin's words, who on August 20, 1945 during a debate on foreign policy expressed dissatisfaction with electoral developments in Central-Europe: "... the impression we get from recent developments -said the British Foreign Secretary- is that one kind of totalitarianism is being replaced by another (in Bulgaria, Rumania and Hungary). The Governments set up do not impress us as being sufficiently representative to meet the requirements of diplomatic relations. Our views as to what constitute free elections are well known and any election held with all the restrictions and exclusions laid down...would entirely counter to our conception of free election! Cf.: Manchester Guardian, Aug. 21, 1945.

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new Hungarian matrimonial law. ²¹ And yet one cannot regard this as a human error, or a simple lapse, since the core of the matter is a vital concern of natural law. What may we expect from parties or groups who dare to destroy a fundamental pillar of social life? Can we expect that these men, if they accede to power, will ever respect the principles of natural law if already, before they are legally in power, they tamper with a law which every man who has a sense of morality and loves his country regards as a most important principle? ²²

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21. No single-volume presentation of the new Hungarian matrimonial legislation is available to date. The following articles, however, can throw some light on the corresponding matter: Andor Magyar, "A kozos megegyezes szerepe a hazassag felbontasanal az uj csaladjogi torveny alkalmazasaban" (The Role of Mutual Consent in the Dissolution of Marriage Under the New Code of Domestic Relations). Jogtudomanyi Kozlony, (Budapest) No.3, March 1954: pp. , 95-97.; Ferenc Bacso, "Hazassagi jogunk az uj csaladjogi kodex es az uj polgari perrendtartas tukreben" (Our Marriage Law as Reflected by the New Code of Domestic Relations and Code of Civil Procedure). Jogtudomanyi Kozlony (Budapest) No.6., June 1952: pp., 249-257.; Laszlo Szegedi, "Az uj hazassagjogi rendelet" (The New Decree on Marriage). (Budapest: Egyetemi Nyomda, 1945) Imre Zajtai, "Les regimes matrimoniaux du droit Hongrois"; Revue Internationale de Droit Compare; No.3. (August-September 1949) pp., 274-295.
22. A more recent publication on the Hungarian situation thus sums up the matrimonial legislation of the Hungarian People's Republic: "A law introduced several years ago continues to regulate divorce proceedings in Hungary. It gave all the authority to the judge to determine whether a marriage should be dissolved or not. There is no such thing as the common consent of the two parties, even admitted adultery does not compel the judge to dissolve a marriage. Characteristically there is one good reason for divorce: divergence in ideology. Imagine a judge in the United States declaring a marriage contract to be dissolved on the basis that the man is a Democrat and the woman a Republican! Still in Hungary, where the judge, according to the law, has primarily to consider 'the interest of the society' this is the chief concern. If either of the two partners stated that the maintenance of marriage became impossible because he (or she) is a faithful Communist, while the other is hostile to this doctrine, the judge will dissolve the marriage without further deliberation" Delaney, op.cit., p.34.

We must further point out that some of the decrees of the Land Reform Act are worded as if they were bent upon the total destruction of a particular class of society. Voices have been raised saying that these regulations are in punishment for the abuses of Hungarian property owners of the past and in the past. But is this really true? Does it conform with natural law? Is this principle of collective or wholesale condemnation correct? May we, in a society that strives to foster and perfect justice and order, condone the fact that a man be punished for the fault of his brother, that the doubtful sins of omission of the father be visited upon the children? This distribution of the land was motivated by party politics. Our soldiers went away empty-handed!" 23

"We call upon you, beloved of the Faith -the Cardinal concluded- to ponder carefully our words and to give your votes in the elections to those candidates who stand for moral purity, for justice, truth and order, and who will energetically oppose the present sorrowful conditions. Do not be intimidated by the threats of the sons of evil! It is much easier to make a firm stand now against this threat than to

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23. The inadequacies of the otherwise sorely needed land reform are discussed at some length by Ferenc Nagy, former Prime Minister of Hungary, in his memoirs published after his escape to the West. Here we quote a passage to substantiate the Cardinal's claims.: "As soon as the agrarian reform decree was published, -says Mr. Nagy- it began to be executed feverishly in all parts of the country. In some localities the big estates were parceled out in a few hours without the benefit of surveyors or experts. In some places the committees sought to do the job more carefully and weighed the merits of the applicants; but then armed Russian soldiers appeared, ordering the committee to distribute the land within three or four days. Of course there was no possibility of planning future roads, or choosing sites for settlements. The applicants did not trouble to consider how the plots would be connected later by roads, or how they could be reached by public utilities. The execution of the agrarian reform was seized upon by the Communist Party as an opportunity for expansion. On tremendous posters it proclaimed that the Communist Party was giving the land. In many districts applicants joined the party en masse in order not to be overlooked. It was true, the Communist-dominated land distribution committees were generally less interested in the applicant's ability and experience as a farmer, than in whether or not he was a party member. Thus men with no farming experience whatsoever - tradesmen, new-fledged policemen, and party officials - suddenly became owners of farms!" Ferenc Nagy, The Struggle Behind the Iron Curtain (New York: The Macmillan Co.) 1948. p. 111.

enter on the path along with irresponsible and unscrupulous elements are trying to force the Hungarian people!"²⁴

The effects of this letter were extraordinary and the people, with a sense of relief, welcomed this really free voice, the only one which had the courage to voice everybody's feelings out loud. The elections which followed, shortly thereafter, marked the open defeat of the Communists, who obtained only 17 % of the votes.²⁵

After the elections the battle continued. Although the Communists were in a minority in the new Government, they relied on the support of the Soviet army of occupation and on their strong position in the Ministry for the Interior to go ahead with their measures calculated to reduce the influence wielded by the Church over the young through her schools and over the adult faithful through her various Catholic Action organizations.²⁶

24. Cardinal Mindszenty Speaks, op.cit.,pp. 60-66.

25. The Smallholders, the only really democratic-minded political party in Hungary after World War II, obtained almost 60% of the seats in Parliament. The results of the general elections were:

	Seats in Parliament:	Percentage:
Smallholder Party	245	59.9
Communist Party	70	17.1
Social Democrats	69	16.9
National Peasants	23	5.6
Civil Democrats	2	0.5

Cf.: Facts About Hungary: A Compilation (ed. Imre Kovacs) (New York: Waldon Press, 1958). p. 58.

26. In the formation of the new Government the victorious Smallholder Party reserved to itself the Ministry for Interior. But Marshal Voroshilov, as President of the Commission of Control set up in Hungary by the victorious nations, by simply manifesting his displeasure, succeeded in preventing this and in causing this position to be occupied by a Communist. Cf.: Galter, op.cit. p. 204.

CHAPTER III

The nationalization of the Catholic schools:

From the beginning of 1946 the Catholic schools came under Communist fire. To suppress them from the outset would have been premature and would have proved a very arduous task. At first the Communists were content to diminish the standing of the Catholic schools in the eyes of the people and gradually to prepare the way for State intervention. To this end the Communist press launched a campaign of vilification, accusing the Catholic schools of "neglecting the children of the people and devoting themselves primarily to the children of the rich!"²⁷

27. Cardinal Mindszenty answered this accusation in a discourse at Kalocsa, May 30, 1946: "There is a rumor that the Catholic schools, especially those directed by the priests, neglected the children of the people and give their main attention to the children of the rich. I heard this accusation time and again in Budapest. Almost as soon as I arrived here I asked for the list of pupils in the Catholic institutions of the district and an indication of the parents' profession in each case. I have been able to gather the following data:

1./ At the Jesuit College only 40% of the pupils belong to the well-to-do class and I include minor employees in this; the other 60% are children of small-owners and workmen;

2./ In the Catholic professional schools the percentages for the same categories are the following respectively: 35% and 65%; in the lyceum and normal schools 17.5% and 82.5%; in the kindergarten the respective figures are 233 and 366.

3./ At the girls' Catholic normal schools the proportion is 104 to 488. All this proves the contrary of what we have been reproached with! Cf.: Uj Ember, May 26, 1946.

It was asserted over and over again that the Catholic schools could not stand comparison with the State schools either for their scholastic equipment or for the quality of their teaching personnel. Besides, the Communist party press accused Catholic schools of lacking the democratic spirit and of evincing the anti-Russian bias of the nation, and therefore being anti Communist. The following passages, quoted from the message accompanying the eventual bill of nationalization of denominational schools help to form an idea of the official attitude.

With the liberation of our country our economic and social life began to develop along a new line. The churches in their changed economic situation were even less able to support their schools than before the liberation. Therefore the economic burden resulting from the right to maintain schools devolved almost entirely upon the public. At the same time the churches retained the right due to them as independent sponsors of schools, to mention merely the most important among these rights, the right of autonomous school administration and the right to publish textbooks. ²⁸

The lack of an orderly relationship between Church and State and the nature of the educational principles of the church schools, which have been substantially retained from the past and which have not even approximately kept pace with the course of the transformation of our economic and social life, have increased the chaos in our public education up to the present time, to a degree which in the eyes of every sober minded observer will appear as a grave impediment to the further sound development of our public education.

Education, however, can be of true value for the individual only if it enables him to adjust himself without difficulty to the life of the community and to undertake to pursue its aims. In other words, the new aims resulting from

28. The denominational schools had to obtain the approval of the Minister for Religion and Public Education for their textbooks.

the planned organization of our economic and social life present an increasing number of new tasks to the educational system.

These tasks can be accomplished only by a uniform plan and direction. Experience has already shown that the autonomous bodies which have concerned themselves with our educational problems (churches, communities, associations, etc.) are not qualified to achieve these tasks. Their lack of qualification is due not only to their inability to secure the necessary financial means, but also to the fact that the economic and philosophical aspects of modern education cannot be separated from similar manifestations of the life of the State. In other words, an effort to separate them would relegate education to a vacuum and also endanger its economic maintenance.

It is certainly regrettable that the educational principles of many denominational schools are contrary to the democratic aims of the newly established general schools. This was proved in a way clearer than the sun by the following circumstance: The State had prepared new textbooks which conformed with our new educational system and which were inexpensive, were of a high level, and had earned undivided recognition. ²⁹

29. The opposite seems to be true according to competent Hungarian educational authorities. The following quotation should give a little insight into Hungarian textbooks of "undivided recognition": "...the glories of Russia and things Russian are stressed in the new Hungarian textbooks, wherein history particularly is twisted to preserve an illusion of Russian perfection and leadership. Western history is distorted, and Western leadership in any field is ignored or minimized. Leadership in scientific discoveries and inventions is arbitrarily assigned to Russia, and the Russian shadow-men who have been conjured up as geniuses who discovered electricity, the steamboat, the airplane, and almost all modern technology, have now been introduced into Hungarian textbooks...The first communist textbook on Hungarian constitutional law and the constitution of Hungary begins: 'We owe our constitution to the Soviet Union. The starting point of all our successes and achievements is the liberating fight of the Soviet Union and the help that Stalin, the understanding great friend of the Hungarians, gave and still gives us! The first chapter is a reverent eulogy, not of the new Hungarian Constitution, but of the Russian Soviet constitution, accompanied by a poem in

These textbooks were not introduced in the denominational schools but instead instruction was carried out there either without any textbooks at all or, at best, with textbooks that could compete with the State textbooks neither in price nor in level and by their contents only furthered the disintegration of our national education. Besides, the mere fact that in the last school year some hundred thousand school children were without textbooks indicates that the individual autonomous ecclesiastical bodies have neither the necessary means nor the adequate organization to provide their schools with the necessary books. ³⁰

We must stress that this bill by no means affects the present system of compulsory instruction in religion and morals but is exclusively aimed at establishing uniformity in public education. Under the conditions prevailing at the present time only the state is capable of establishing this uniformity which is indispensable to the future of our public education. Only the state has the adequate means to educate the children of our people to love their fellow men, to respect their neighbors and to become familiar with labor. ³¹

its praise. Included in the book is great adulation for the Red Army, a collection of appropriate photographic illustrations, and an utter distortion of recent Hungarian history. The latest edition of this textbook is sprinkled with anti-imperialist slogans, and an incredible deception by the description of the suppression of the workers in the West has been added. It ends on this lyrical note:

Five continents echo the loud oath
As the shout rings o'er the land;
"Here we'll have peace and freedom both,
Comrade Stalin, as you command!" William

Juhasz, Blueprint for a Red Generation (New York: Mid-European Studies Center, 1952). pp. 39-41.

30. Early in the same year one of the most important Catholic organizations, the Saint Stephen Society, was dissolved and its printing shop, the Stephaneum, nationalized, as were all printing shops belonging to the Catholic Church.

31. Gsovski, op.cit., pp. 92-93.

Against similar attacks the Prince-Primate felt compelled to issue his pastoral letter of May 20, 1946. This pastoral letter on the school question brought the smoldering fight into the open, making clear the true issues involved. The following excerpts, showing the Church's stand on the question, are taken from the pastoral letter.

"The Catholic Church founded the schools in this country which are predecessors of the present schools. It was ~~the~~ the Church which instituted schools of her own as early as the first centuries of the ancient Roman Empire, in order to protect the children from pagan influences by which they were taught idolatry and immoral mythological tales.

While the Church was most progressive in the matter of education, the State was slow in this activity and failed to establish schools until much later - in Hungary in the eighteenth century. The Church has still another much more compelling right to the education of youth than her historical right. Her educational mission springs from God Himself. Perhaps this right is not acknowledged by those who do not believe in God and do not accept Christ and His Gospel. For you, Catholics, however, it is an irrefutable law, since you have entered upon the inheritance of Christ.

The right of the Church to schools is entirely in accord with the right of parents to educate their children. What is incumbent upon the parents in all questions of natural life is incumbent upon the Church with regard to supernatural life. Parents come before the State, and their rights were always, and still are, acknowledged by the Church. The prerogative of parents to educate their children cannot be disputed by the State, since it is the parents who gave life to the child.

You Hungarian parents must feel a violation of your fundamental rights if your children can no longer attend Catholic schools because a dictatorial state closes down our schools by a brutal edict or renders their work impossible.

The history of France as well as of Germany shows that juvenile morality declines in a shocking way as soon as the work of Catholic schools is restricted or prohibited. The Catholic schools have brought only blessings to our country. It is our conviction, therefore, that they are indispensable for its reconstruction.

The same is true of religious instruction. It is indispensable for the reconstruction of this country. It is of great importance that religious instruction should provide an introduction to the truths of dogma and morals. In non-Catholic schools, too, an opportunity should be given to Catholic children to learn the truths of our Faith.

Compulsory attendance at religious instruction is consequently the unanimous will of Catholic parents. We make bold to state this since we had ample opportunity to question parents and to receive many indications of their true wishes.

Catholic parents are convinced of their duty to educate their children in a Catholic spirit, since they are responsible for them before God. God has entrusted to them not only the bodies but the souls of their children. On many occasions we have realized how strongly parents feel about this responsibility. As a conscientious father will never allow his child to enter life without training in some profession or craftmanship, so thoughtful parents will never expose their child to the struggles of life without having equipped him with a knowledge of his Faith to arm him against all deceptions, seductions and temptations.

At the front on the battlefield, there was hardly a single soldier, who blamed his parents for having taught him to pray, for surely he found consolation and strength in prayer even in the worst ordeal. Is it your wish, Catholic parents, that some day your children should stand silent without a word of prayer at your deathbed?

This, however, is exactly what you may expect if there is no religious instruction. Those children who are ignorant of the Ten Commandments will not know the

Fourth Commandment. They do not pray for their parents while they live: still less will they do so when they are dead. Let no one tell us that parents should themselves teach religion to their children at home. We know they do not have time to do this amidst the work and toil of the day. That is what the school is for.

We are often told that it is not permissible to put pressure on the conscience of the children, but rather that we should await a child's free decision as to whether he wants religion at all and, if so, what religion. How very short-sighted this is! Nobody questions 'forcing' upon a child writing, reading and arithmetic without asking whether he likes it or not. Only in the matter of religion are these skeptics afraid to infringe upon the child's freedom.

Can one speak of freedom where Catholics are not allowed to have schools of their own? Where no schools are acknowledged except the official ones run by the State? Those official schools of the State where a small minority wants to impose its masterful will upon the majority of the people? This would mean a perpetual state of change in education according to the changes of the political weather. Today this party and tomorrow another - each wanting to establish its lasting control of the schools!"³²

The Government, however, could not give up its principles, since -due to the open hostility of the adult generation towards the ideas of Marxism and Communism- it could expect only from the upcoming generation, the youth of Hungary, the gradual build-up of a 'people's democracy! Nationalization of denominational schools being strongly opposed as it was by the overwhelming majority of parents of children of all denominations, the next logical move was directed toward text monopoly.

Textbook monopoly would have introduced the new ideas

32. Cardinal Mindszenty Speaks, op.cit., pp. 87-93. (Excerpts.)

even into the Catholic schools; it was no wonder, therefore, that it found strong opposition not only by the Hierarchy, but also by members of Catholic lay-organizations. The executive board of the National Association of Catholic Parents issued the following declaration in the only Catholic daily, the Magyar Kurir:

"The National Association of Catholic Parents learned from press reports of the Government's plan to monopolize the publication of textbooks for schools. According to these reports, this plan is sponsored by the left wing parties. The National Association of Catholic Parents demands the cancellation of this plan, since it is essentially dictatorial and a reminder of the dictatorship which has just ended. Surely this motion is entirely incompatible with modern democratic ideas. We vigorously oppose the agitation carried out in unofficial quarters which is clearly aimed at the suppression of freedom of religious education.

It is not our intention to increase the difficulties of our Government. Hence we do not yet think of mobilizing the masses of the people, but we expect that the competent authorities will, after careful consideration of the matter, realize that this plan is utterly undemocratic and entirely ill-timed.

Now in winter, with the lack of food, clothing and fuel, and with rising unemployment, public opinion in Hungary really expects other measures from the Government. Let us not scatter and divide our forces by projects of this kind! The energy which we are compelled to expend against such dictatorial encroachments could be better employed towards constructive democratic ends!"³³

New clashes were prompted over the motion for optional religious instruction in schools - another pet project of the Communist party at this early stage of the game. The Cardinal-along with the Hungarian Hierarchy- made many protests against the movement. He hoped that if the people of Hungary showed

33. Magyar Kurir (Budapest), November 6, 1946.

32

their opposition to these proposed anti-religious regulations, the Communists would be forced to slow down their overall attack. And the people did indeed show their stubbornness. Even from those provinces and cities where the Communists claimed the greatest support, peasants and workers went to hear the Cardinal speak; they acclaimed him and promised to give him their support.

In addition, deputations of workers and peasants, members of Catholic, Evangelical and Reformed Churches, were organized and sent in great numbers to Budapest to protest against optional religious instruction. These delegations often declared that the people willingly bore hunger and cold and much more in the interests of national reconstruction, but they would not tolerate that their children be deprived of their Faith.

A spokesman of the Evangelical community emphasized that the voice of the people was stronger in matters of Faith than the voice of political parties. Therefore the question of the optional religious instruction should be taken off the agenda. Another spokesman of the Reformed Church declared that a democracy particularly required the moral and God-fearing education of the youth. This was the wish and the will of ninety-nine per cent of the population. ³⁴

In January 1948, the newspapers again began to criticize the 'inferior' conditions in Catholic schools, the pitiful state of their teaching personnel, the lack of text-books, etc.

³⁴. Cardinal Mindszenty Speaks, op.cit., p.126.

For all these deficiencies there could be only one solution: the nationalization of all Catholic schools. During the month of May this was the main topic in the Government press and in the Party publications.³⁵ To save appearances and to prove that nationalization was the will of the people, the Communist Party decided to employ "democratic methods!" Meetings were held, signatures collected and petitions in favor of nationalization were presented to teachers, professors, employers, business employees and the laboring class. In case of refusal to sign, employees and laborers were dismissed, students expelled from their schools, professors suspended or transferred.³⁶

Cardinal Mindszenty took a firm stand against this procedure. Some time previously he had authorized a number of bishops to approach Vice-Premier Matyas Rakosi. The negotiations achieved nothing when it came to the question of the denominational schools for which the Catholics demanded the maintenance of the status quo. The school question, then was brought by Cardinal Mindszenty to the people of the country in another pastoral letter of May 11, 1948. The following are

35. Cf.: Kossuth Nepe (Budapest), May 19, 1948 and Nepszava (Budapest), May 1, 1948. Communist propaganda pretended that the nationalization of the schools was merely an administrative matter. Religious instruction would continue to be obligatory. Once the law was voted, this obligation was abrogated by Government decree - as we will show later - on September 5, 1949.

36. Galter, op.cit., p.214.

some of the Cardinal's views on the question: 37

"...demonstrations in important quarters demanding the nationalization of the (Catholic) schools, under the pretext of national education according to their own ideas, greatly increased our anxiety. We should be disloyal in our duty if we did not raise our voices in grave warning.

We have brought weighty reasons to the support of our right, and have disproved unfounded accusations. We have continued this defense with sober calm. Our point of view, however, meets, as it seems, with neither understanding nor cooperation. Hence we feel compelled to continue to fight for the inalienable rights of our Catholic schools.

To emphasize the Church's determination in her stand, the Cardinal openly threatened with excommunication those who should violate the right of the Church to the education of the youth.

The Church has no desire to rely on punishment, for she knows that good will often produces better results than strictness. Encouragement is better than threats and love stronger than force. (Can.2214.,par.2.)

When the salvation of immortal souls is at stake, however, the faithful must understand that the Church may not hesitate to apply stronger means.

If our endeavors should fail, we should find ourselves compelled to apply strict ecclesiastical discipline against those, and their accomplices, who have violated our rights in question, or who have even used force against us, and to issue the painful though necessary decrees! 38

Since the virulent campaign against the schools continued, Cardinal Mindszenty addressed a memorandum to Gyula Or-

37. Cardinal Mindszenty Speaks, op.cit., pp. 162-164.

38. Ibid.

tutay, Minister for Public Instruction. We shall quote this important document as it constitutes a serious indictment of Communist persecution technique:

"Mr. Minister,

Allow me to draw your attention to certain injustices that have been inflicted on us once again, contrary to both natural and divine law.

The State continues to attack our schools and teachers and the campaign grows more intense every day. To-day, May 29, 1948, one can say that the violence of the campaign against the Catholic schools and the Catholic teaching body has reached its maximum.

Both by artifice and violence a ceaseless attempt is being made to induce our professors and teachers to support the nationalization project, contrary to the terms of their oath. And even while extending an invitation to open negotiations, the Minister makes vague propaganda statements accusing our priests and teachers of religion of spreading political hatred rather than the Gospel teaching of love.

I must accept the press accounts of such statements as being true since they have never been denied, and the Minister has already spoken in such terms on other occasions.

Pedagogical meetings are being held one after the other as is shown in the case of Esztergom; one cannot but note their very obvious moral failure. But have the authorities been informed of the precise reaction of public opinion as expressed at these meetings?

So-called inspectors of studies visit educational institutions and by threats, lies and subterfuge induce and even force our teachers to disobey the legitimate ecclesiastical authorities...

Nicholas Toth, member of the administrative commission of the Association of Catholic Parents, was arrested in his home by security police and was gaoled for having defended the rights of the Church in education.

Agents, investigating the status of the personnel in business establishments in the capital, inquire about the schools attended by the children of employees and workmen. They also force the teachers to make a stand against the circulars issued by the episcopate.

In a town in the Great Plain the police beat nine students and forced them to make a 'confession! Using all possible means they extorted from priests a declaration in favor of the parish priest of Bakonykut against the Bishop of Szekesfehervar.

Hatred of the Church is continually stirred up in Parliament, on the radio, in the press and in business offices and industrial concerns. Contrary to the terms of the peace treaty employees are dismissed and students are expelled from the popular colleges solely because of their religious convictions.

The tone of the press grows more vulgar and insulting and in face of this campaign of lies and calumnies the Church finds herself almost in the position of an outlaw. These are "Kulturkampf" tactics...all this means moral compulsion and permanent privation of religious liberty. To meet this onslaught the Minister and the Government fail to afford their protection 'ex officio debita!

I cannot see how these facts, as well as many others which it would be almost impossible to enumerate, afford a favorable basis for serious peace discussions!"³⁹

Peace discussions, however, were not planned any more by the State. An Article in 'Szabad Nep'described the decree nationalizing the schools as a "measure of self-defense!"⁴⁰ On Government orders the police intervened to disperse any future public demonstrations of protest.⁴¹ Further severe

39. Galter, op.cit., pp. 214-216.

40. Francis Fejto, Behind the Rape of Hungary (New York: David McKay Co., 1957), p. 71.

41. At Sopron several persons, one a priest, Alajos Nemeth, were arrested for their opposition to State control of the schools. At Poespetri during a riot a policeman was

measures were sanctioned and the police were ordered to occupy school buildings. Meanwhile the Government tried to soothe public indignation by holding the episcopate responsible for the lack of progress in the discussions between Church and State.⁴²

At this juncture the Minister for Education introduced the school nationalization bill for immediate discussion in Parliament. The debate began on June 16, 1948 and in spite of the 3,000 telegrams of protest that reached the President's desk, the bill received the combined support of the Communists, Socialists and the other left-wing parties and became law on June 18, 1948 by 230 votes to 63. According to this law, all schools of any kind, kindergartens, student homes connected with any school, were taken over by the Government with the exception of schools which served church purposes exclusively, such as seminaries, divinity schools, deacons' and deaconesses' training schools, etc. The entire personnel of the schools taken over by the Government was transferred to Government service. In fixing the salaries of these teachers the years spent in teaching in denominational schools were considered as Government service. All buildings, premises, and any other property and

killed. This gave the press an excuse to start a new campaign against "ecclesiastical underhand methods". The Minister for Public Instruction, Ortutay, wrote to the Cardinal on June 4, 1948, asking him to stop the fight against the Hungarian "democracy". Magyar Kurir (Budapest), June 6, 1948; Cf.: Galter, op.cit., p.216. note 41.

42. See the letter of the Minister of Public Instruction to Cardinal Mindszenty, June 14, 1948, and the Cardinal's reply on the following day: Magyar Kurir (Budapest), June 15, 1948. Also: Galter, op.cit., p.217.

benefits accruing to the schools were also transferred to the State. In the future a non-state school could be opened or maintained only by special permission of the cabinet. ⁴³

The significance of the nationalization of denominational schools may be seen from the following table of the total number of public and denominational schools in Hungary in 1938. ⁴⁴

SECONDARY AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS:

	Secondary:	Jun.High:	Elementary:
PUBLIC SCHOOLS:			
Government:	67	160	1,282
Village and city:	<u>11</u>	<u>101</u>	<u>827</u>
TOTAL:	78	261	2,109
DENOMINATIONAL SCHOOLS:			
Roman Catholic:	45	80	2,856
Reformed:	24	14	1,079
Evangelical:	11	1	395
Jewish, Greek Orthodox, etc.:	<u>15</u>	<u>41</u>	<u>460</u>
TOTAL	95	136	4,790
GRAND TOTAL:	173	397	6,899

43. Law No. XXXIII of 1948 was enforced by Decree of the Minister of Religion and Public Education No., 8,000 of 1948 V.K.M. (June 27, 1948).

44. Statistical Yearbook, 1938. (In Hungarian) (Budapest: Allami Nyomda, 1939); Cf.: Gsovski, op.cit., p.94.

Church control and supervision were restricted to the teaching of religion. By this law of nationalization the Church lost 3,163 schools (including Catholic kindergartens, not mentioned in the above table) and 177 colleges and other educational establishments (with a total of 600,000 students). The law became effective on June 22, 1948, and that same day a solemn protest, drawn up by the Primate in the name of the Hungarian episcopate, was read in all the churches. The following quotes are taken from this Pastoral Letter:

"That which we, the Bishops of Hungary wished to spare our country, bleeding from a thousand wounds, has become a fact. Our schools and educational institutions have been confiscated. We solemnly protest against this measure in the name of the natural rights of the parents, the educational rights of the Church and in the name of the freedom of religious instruction. Conscious of our duty, we cannot renounce our rights to our schools and institutions, and we shall not fail to demand, by every legal means, the restoration of which we have been robbed.

We protest against the proceedings of the Government which had promised repeatedly and clearly to settle the controversial matters between Church and State by mutual agreement. The question of the schools is one of the most important and decisive in the relationship between Church and State; but before negotiations were opened it was declared by unilateral State decision that the nationalization of the schools should become law. By this, the State has a priori deprived the Church of the opportunity to define its point of view and its reasons in this matter. This one-sided action of the State is simply an ultimatum which leaves to the Church the choice of submitting or refusing. It is by no means an agreement arrived at by bilateral negotiation!" 45

Additional provisions of the nationalization law were the following:

45. Cardinal Mindszenty Speaks, op.cit., pp. 182-185.

- a./ All the debts of the schools were taken over by the Government, and cancelled; the creditors were not reimbursed. ⁴⁶
- b./ The ancient law schools in Eger (Roman Catholic), Kecskemet (Reformed) and Miskolc (Evangelical) were closed on August 30, 1949. ⁴⁷ These law schools had been maintained by the Churches. ⁴⁸
- c./ The theological schools of the Universities of Budapest, Debrecen, and Pecs were separated from the Universities at the end of the school year 1949-1950 and transferred to the respective churches. ⁴⁹

At the very moment of striking this decisive blow at the ~~Catholic~~ Church by the nationalization of the schools, the Communists were anxious to avoid stirring up too much public feeling. At the congress which was held to unify the Communist and Social Democratic Parties, June 12, 1948, Matyas Rakosi was careful to state:

"Religious instruction must continue to play its part in our schools even after nationalization in conformity with the religious sentiment of the Hungarian people!" ⁵⁰

46. Decree No. 750 of 1949 Korm. (In force since January 22, 1949).

47. Decree No. 4,105 of 1949 Korm. (June 26, 1949).

48. See Article 7 of the agreement between the Government and the Reformed Church of October 7, 1948; and Art. 6 of the agreement with the Evangelical Church on December 14, 1948, in our further discussions.

49. Edict No. 23 of 1950; transferring the Divinity Schools of the Universities to the Churches. (The above legislative decrees and all pertinent material are listed in Alexander Kalnoki Bedo's and George Torzsay-Biber's Legal Sources and Bibliography of Hungary (Frederick A. Praeger: New York, 1956); published for Free Europe Committee, Inc. as a research study of the Mid-European Law Project at the Library of the Congress.)

50. Szabad Nep (Budapest), June 13, 1948.

Likewise, the Minister for Education and for Worship, Gyula Ortutay, stated during the course of the parliamentary debate:

"I can say here that religious instruction remains obligatory even in the State schools (and it will be imparted) by the same teachers using the same books and for the same number of hours as before. We therefore guarantee the Church the right to give religious instruction!"⁵¹

The same assurance was given by the General Secretary of the Teachers' Union when he addressed Hungarian teachers on June 17, 1948.⁵² The events that followed show clearly to what extent these declarations were sincere.

The message accompanying the Bill on Nationalization of the non-State Schools⁵³ emphasized that "... (the) Bill by no means affects the present system of compulsory religious education in the schools! Furthermore, in the agreements concluded with the Reformed and Evangelical Churches on October 7, 1948, the Government had explicitly acknowledged that "compulsory teaching of religion in the schools is within the free sphere of church activities!"⁵⁴

51. Galter, op.cit., p. 218.

52. Ibid.

53. Introduced in the Parliament on June 15, 1948.

54. "The Government of the Hungarian Republic recognizes and assures the right of the Reformed Church that in the State schools the obligatory religious instruction will continue to be freely exercised. The question of religious instruction is to be newly organized, especially in consideration of members of free churches and those who are without confession! Cf.: Robert Tobias, Communist-Christian Encounter in East Europe (Indianapolis: School of Religion Press, 1956). p.471.

On September 6, 1949, however, the Presidium of the Hungarian People's Republic issued an edict which reads:

"According to the provisions of Article 54, Law No. XX of 1949 (the new Constitution) relating to the separation of the Church from the State, religious instruction in the schools will not be compulsory!"⁵⁵

Detailed regulations enforcing the law were issued by the Minister of Religion and Public Education.⁵⁶ It was ordered that beginning with the school year of 1949-1950, religious instruction should no longer be compulsory. Parents who desired religious instruction for their children were required to report this to the school before September 15, 1949.

This decree indicates that normally no religious instruction will be given unless the parents expressly ask for it. But the decree was dated September 6th and the deadline for the request was September 15th, so that only a week's time was left to the parents to register their intention. Apart from the obvious difficulties of reporting such intention in due time owing to geographical causes - in the case of the schools in the Great Plain, far away from the parents' residence - another circumstance should be considered. The obligation of the parents to request religious instruction for their children individually offered a welcome opportunity for the Communist authorities to discover individuals - previously unknown to them - who adhered to

55. Gsovski, op.cit., p. 95.

56. Magyar Kozlony (Budapest), September 6, 1949. Cf.: Tobias, op.cit., p. 478.

their religion.⁵⁷ The Communists used all their propaganda to frighten parents and prevent them from registering. The campaign was a total failure. Registration was 100 per cent in the country and 98 per cent in the cities, as a joint pastoral letter of the bishops testified for the Catholic children.⁵⁸ But the Communists continued to obstruct. In some schools they failed to introduce religious instruction on the plea that there were no qualified teachers. In others, they created difficulties to prevent payment to teachers of religion, while universally they organized alternative attractions to lure children away from the religious classes held after school hours.

By the summer of 1950 the Communists felt themselves strong enough to make a further move against religion in education. In a violent attack, in which he denounced specifically the Jewish and Catholic and some of the Protestant leaders, Education Minister Jozsef Revai said a ban on all teaching of religion in secondary schools was about to be imposed and would probably be followed by other measures against the clergy.

57. In a speech delivered before the Central Committee of the Hungarian Workers' Party Revai said: "To send children to Church, to religious instruction in schools... means at the same time, be it intentionally or not, to take a stand against the People's Democracy. Optional religious education in schools is not the final solution of applying democratic principles to this question. We shall change this" Cf.: Gsovski, op.cit., p. 146. Note 44.

58. Gary McEoin, The Communist War on Religion (New York: The Devin-Adair Co., 1951), pp. 124-125.

"We must start a vast work of enlightenment, -Reval said- and in the first place explain our party colleagues and also to all workers that any father who send his child to religion classes, places it in the hands of the enemy and entrusts his soul and thinking to the enemies of the peace and imperialistic warmongers.

A part of our working people believes that participation of children in religious instruction is a private matter which has nothing to do with the political conviction of their parents. They are wrong. To send children to a reactionary pastor for religious instruction, is a political movement against the People's Democracy, whether intentional or not. Optional religious instruction is in this connection not yet the last possibility of realizing the democratic principles. We do not wish to change anything yet in the present order of optional religious instruction, but we emphasize that this order cannot present the clerical reaction with a free hand to agitate the children against the People's Democracy, to influence the children in the schools in a reactionary manner. So far, we have applied the principle of optional religious instruction too liberally, and this we shall also alter". 59

A new decree was to come which made the appointment of teachers of religion in schools subject to the arbitrary decision of the Executive Committees of the local (Municipal, District) Councils (Soviets) dominated by the Communist Party. 60 Moreover, this provision made the position of the teachers of religion dependent upon their individual attitude toward the "People's Democracy and its orders." A religion instructor who was discharged because he was considered as "hostile" could not be reemployed elsewhere. 61

59. Tobias, op.cit., p. 481.

60. Decree No. 1101-11-1 of 1950 V.K.M.

61. "The Executive Committee of the Committee of the Counselors can refuse employment as full-time and hourly-paid teachers of religion to any religious instructor who adopts a hostile attitude towards the People's Democracy or its decrees, or can at any time cancel the

The decree contains provisions further restricting the activities of the teachers of religion to the point of forbidding him to stay in the school building after the time of his classes, or assemble his pupils outside of the school, as, for example, for worship in the church. These provisions also deprive the teachers of religion all disciplinary power over the student. ⁶² In addition, the supervision of religious instruction was transferred from the churches to Government authorities. ⁶³

Thus, contrary to the separation of State and Church proclaimed by the Constitution, the State authorities were empowered to control religious instruction or to suppress it at their pleasure.

The first round in the struggle for the mind of the Hungarian youth was finally won by Communism. The advantage

appointment. One who has been relieved of employment as a religious instructor, cannot be entrusted with the teaching of religion at any other school." Decree Regarding Teachers of Religion of September 19, 1950. Tobias, op.cit., p. 436.

62. "The religious instructor may not be used for any other educational activity at the school (deputizing, supervision during excursions or in recreation breaks, etc.) apart from the teaching of religion. The religious instructor cannot attend conferences of the teaching personnel, and remain in the school building after the teaching of religion." Ibid. Par.5.2. ; "Religious instruction must follow the last teaching class. Religious instruction may only be given in the school building. The teacher cannot assemble the pupils outside the school for any other occupation." Ibid. Par.6.1.
63. The teacher's work for the classes, his plan of work and his class outlines are controlled by the teaching autho-

was exploited with measures designed to curb and suppress religiously motivated organizations, where adult Catholics might find refuge in their fight for their Faith, the State continued to curtail the freedom of the press, and to subject to rigorous censorship all that was said in the name of the Church. The charitable institutions, too, were nationalized. Hospitals, orphanages, homes for the aged, nurseries - all became the property of the Government, which went on to demand that spokesmen for religion sing the praises of the "People's Democratic State." Between the two main milestones of Communist hostility: the nationalization of the denominational schools and the trials of outstanding Church leaders, many phases of the struggle are clearly distinguishable where communistic hatred and greed continued to undermine and finally to completely destroy the thousand year old structure of Hungarian Catholicism. The following pages will acquaint the reader with some of these phases of the struggle.

rities in accordance with the rules regarding all other educators. The director (principal) is responsible for supervision and, to assist him in class supervision, he can call upon the general supervisory authority for teaching, the head of the class, the president of the parents' union and the competent representative of the educational organization." Ibid. Par.6.4.

CHAPTER IV

Suppression of all religious associations and all cultural, social and welfare organizations of the Catholic Church.

In the course of the centuries the Catholic Church in Hungary had given birth to an impressive number of associations, pious unions, congregations, religious, cultural, social, recreational, aid and charitable organizations, which made a notable contribution not only to the religious life of the country, but also to the development of its social, cultural and civic life. Among these organizations the principal ones were:

- a./ The KALOT and KALASZ, the peasant youth movements. They numbered about 700 local organizations with about 100,000 members. They maintained about 200 popular schools, attended by about 35,000 young people. They also had 18 higher schools, a printing plant, newspapers, etc.
- b./ The KIOE, the national association of Catholic workers had about 300 sections, 70 homes and about 30,000 members. Its principal interest was to help young workers in the factories.
- c./ KOLPING, the national association of youth in industry and commerce with 11,000 members, 32 homes and another 6 special institutions for members.
- d./ EMERICANA, the union of university youth with 47 groups, 13 provincial sections and more than 10

thousand members. It was particularly interested in the poorest students for whom it provided meals, lodgings, etc.

e./ DOLGOZO LANYOK, the union of young Catholic woman workers which aided and protected young Catholic girls engaged in heavy work. It had about 200 sections and some 7,000 members.

f./ SEGITO EGYESULETEK, were social mutual aid associations among Catholics with 1,000 unions and about 300,000 members.

g./ ACADEMY OF ST. STEPHEN and the SOCIETY OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS.

These were the two national organizations of scientists and Catholic writers. They owned a large Catholic printing plant, STEPHANEUM, and a large publishing house which each year published numerous volumes of valuable theological and scientific works. ⁶⁴

In addition to all these associations and Catholic enterprises, they were in Hungary more than 5,000 parochial organizations of the Catholic Action, based on a national center with its headquarters in Budapest and many other diocesan centers whose headquarters were with the bishops of each of the eleven dioceses. Established officially in 1939 they had achieved an impressive organization with five main sections: religious, cultural, press, social-welfare and or-

64. Gussoni-Brunello, op.cit., pp. 157-158.

ganizational.

There were in addition an indefinite number of other expressly religious associations: Marian Congregations, Associations of the Holy Rosary, Associations of the Heart of Jesus, Third Orders, etc., organized in almost all the parishes with thousands and thousands of members. The Guards of the Sacred Heart, for example, were organized in 800 localities and its entire membership included about 170,000 persons.

Even before the struggle for the schools began, the Communist Party launched its first open attack against the Catholic Church, taking the Catholic associations and organizations as its target. The struggle was prepared and stirred up by an intense press and propaganda campaign in which the headquarters of Catholic associations were made to appear as centers of plots and conspiracy. Every day the left-wing press carried long stories about police discoveries of arms caches in the headquarters of some of the principal Catholic organizations. Their members were accused of possessing leaflets and distributing Fascist newspapers and propaganda, or Fascist emblems and decorations and crossed arrows.

In the summer of 1946 a Russian officer was found dead in front of a bar on a Budapest street. The police blocked off the entire neighborhood. Passers-by had witnessed that the officer had been killed by one of his Russian colleagues with whom he had been quarreling over a woman, but overcome by terror, they did not speak up. A conspiracy charge

30

was fabricated and a youth belonging to the Catholic peasant organization, KALOT, was charged with the crime. The murdered officer was made into a martyr and immediately after such a staging, demonstrations were organized demanding the dissolution of KALOT and all other Catholic associations.

General Sviridov, commander of the Russian occupation forces in Hungary, wrote a letter to the Hungarian Minister of Justice, in which, after enumerating all the attentats directed against the Russian army of occupation, he affirmed that such attacks clearly revealed the existence of a veritable conspiracy against the Russian army and from the evidence it could be proved that the guilty and responsible principals were to be found in the Catholic associations and organizations. The Hungarian Government was invited, therefore, in the interests of general security and of democratic freedom, to proceed immediately with the dissolution of all Hungarian Catholic associations. 65

The General's letter to the Ministry of Justice was released in the press and was widely used by Communist propaganda organs. Demonstrations were organized, lists of petitions were circulated among the Communists and other cases were unearthed to lend weight to the accusation against the Catholic associations. In July 1946 the misdeeds of the associations were the dominant theme throughout the Communist press. In the face of such charges the Catholics had no means of defense. The two weeklies called in vain for an inquiry into the inci-

dents alleged. Vain, too, were the appeals made to the Government by the presidents of the accused organizations to protect them from attacks in the press and by the Party organizations.

The Government, although it was then under the presidency of a member of the Smallholders' Party,⁶⁶ yielded to Communist pressure and issued the decree⁶⁷ which gave the Ministry of the Interior (Communist controlled) full liberty to dissolve or maintain organizations according as it judged opportune.

"The Minister of the Interior ordered every association to make a report relative to their activities beginning from January 1, 1939; particularly from the following point of view: did political considerations prevail in their activities or not; did the association take a stand in the issue of war and peace and if so, what stand? The names of the officers, etc. After the report is received, the Minister of the Interior shall decide upon further continuance of the association. If the Minister of the Interior refuses to permit it to continue, the association shall be considered dissolved."⁶⁸

By this decree the Communist Party became the de facto arbiter of the fate of the Catholic organizations and their

66. Ferenc Nagy, then Prime Minister of Hungary thus reflects on the incident: "The commander of the occupation forces demanded that the Hungarian Government take certain measures. The first demand was the immediate dissolution of the Catholic Youth Organizations and the Boy Scouts, accused of being "nests of reaction" where youth were taught to hate the Red army. I consulted with the Minister of the Interior, who indicated that he had already received orders from Soviet officials to disband these organizations" Cf.: Nagy, op.cit., p.242.

67. Decree No. 7330. 1946 M.E.

68. Gyorgy Vadas, Handbook of the Democratic Administration (Budapest: Allami Nyomda, 1947), p. 41.

property. The Ministry of the Interior made liberal use of the powers which it has received. Within a very short time historic associations of great merit in scientific and social fields were dissolved, many of their leaders arrested and their property confiscated. More than ten millions of florins were taken over by the Ministry, or better, by the Communist Party, since the money was passed on to Marxist organizations. ⁶⁹

Many church buildings and Catholic houses of culture were assigned to Communist organizations, hastily, - even before the decree of dissolution appeared - on the basis of a postwar law, according which real properties abandoned by proprietors and not reclaimed by legitimate heirs, could be assigned to third, "private" parties who made a reasonable request for them.

The Cardinal Primate in the name of the Hungarian Episcopate protested vigorously to the President of the Council against this decree. Among other things his letter of July 21, 1946, stated:

"We must solemnly protest against the grave measures, based on mere non-proved suspicions, which have been taken against our associations and against some of their members. We cannot keep silent on this matter any more than on the propagandist publicity." ⁷⁰

The protest of the Bishops, unfortunately, went unheeded and their letter never received a reply. One by one

69. Gussoni-Brunello, op.cit., p. 161.

70. Galter, op.cit., p. 206. note 19.

the various Catholic associations were inexorably affected and those which were allowed to continue had to limit their activity to a purely religious field. Even these Catholic associations that were spared had to restrain their activity within ever-narrowing limits. ⁷¹

In 1948, after two years of uninterrupted struggle against the Catholic associations, still holding out was CARITAS, the great aid organization founded by the Catholic Church in 1944 to come to the aid of thousands of refugees, hungry and needy, which the war had reduced to extreme wretchedness.

CARITAS had carried out an immense program of welfare activity in the immediate postwar period. Thanks to the help which Cardinal Mindszenty had succeeded in obtaining from British, Belgian, Dutch, Irish, Swedish and Danish Catholics, from the Vatican and above all from the great American organization: the National Catholic Conference-War Relief Service, the Hungarian CARITAS had been able to open 126 kitchens and to distribute daily thousands and thousand of bowls of soup. And it was also able to organize winter and summer camps for many thousands of needy children, by sending them to Belgium, Holland and Switzerland - more than 10,000 children benefiting till this action was stopped. ⁷² Naturally, this entire activity had been followed with a jaundiced eye by the Communist Party which feared that by such

71. Uj Ember (Budapest), July 27, 1947.

72. Gussoni-Brunello, op.cit., p. 163.

charitable activity the Catholic Church might acquire "political" influence on those whom it helped.

In the spring of 1948 there began the first press attacks against CARITAS, accusing it of not helping the truly "poor" - that is those supported by the Communists, but the men of list B, that is, those who were dismissed from their former jobs and occupations and were classified as "dangerous" for Hungarian democracy.

On May 6, 1948, an authoritative Government organ accused CARITAS of conducting illegal political activity under the cover of its welfare activities and demanded its suppression. Immediately thereafter the Government, convinced that to suppress CARITAS it would be enough to prevent it from receiving aid from abroad, imposed as its first provision that 80% of the merchandise which came to CARITAS from abroad would have to be passed on to the Government, and the remaining 20% distributed under the surveillance of local commissions, naturally Communist.

The director of CARITAS, Msgr. Mihalovitch ⁷³ who went personally to the Minister of Supplies, Karoly Olt, to persuade him of the absurdity of his conditions, and to make known to him that under such conditions foreign donors would not be disposed to send aid to Hungary, was told dryly that it was not a disposition of the Ministry, but the Government. In short, CARITAS, deprived of aid from abroad and being no longer hopeful of making collections inside of the country,

73. Msgr. Mihalovitch deserves a special mention here, as one of the most outstanding figures of Hungarian Catholicism of the era between the two World Wars. His memorable achievement is the masterful organization of the World Eucharistic Congress of 1938 in Budapest.

since there were already in effect compulsory deliveries of their total products to Government warehouses by the peasantry, had to proceed to the liquidation of its welfare institutions.

The same fate befell the sending of sick and weakened children abroad. At the beginning of March 1948, a transport of children was ready to leave for Holland. The children were already in the train and were waiting for it to leave, but at the last moment the Government prevented its departure because it demanded that the accompanying personnel be composed exclusively by members of the Communist Party.

By now the intention of the Government was clear and, in fact, a few months later the director of CARITAS, Msgr. Mihalovitch was summoned by the Minister of the Interior, Laszlo Rajk who officially invited CARITAS to suspend its charitable activity, saying that "the condition of the people was now so good, that an activity of this kind could be considered superfluous. The State would take care of cases that might eventually arise." 74

Thus by a mere ministerial invitation there ceased the activity of a most worthy organization which had done so much good in the four years of its existence, saving thousands and thousands of persons from death. And the Catholic Church was deprived of one of the most necessary means of carrying out its social work for the relief of the needy.

Almost simultaneously with the dissolution of the asso-

74. Gussoni-Brunello, op.cit., p. 164.

ciations came the liquidation of various foundations and their still remaining assets. Largest of these was the Religious and Educational Fund, now taken into State ownership. This fund originated from the assets of monasteries and convents destroyed during the sixteenth century. It further increased when Joseph II ordered the property of the dissolved monastic orders to be assigned for the promotion of the aims of the Roman Catholic Church. The fund was administered from the beginning by Government agencies, first by the Chancery and later by the Minister of Religion and Public Education. Its main function was to support schools, parishes and other institutions of the Catholic Church. 75

Since the assets of the found consisted largely of landed property, it was practically dissolved after the land-reform of 1945. Certain assets remaining after the land-reform were nationalized by simple orders which were never made public. 76

The nationalization or confiscation of funds administered by the Church required a different treatment. Edict No.2. of 1949 authorized the Government to dissolve a foundation:

- 1./ if its existence would endanger public interest;
- 2./ if it becomes impossible for the foundation to carry out its goal;
- 3./ if its purpose could be reasonably achieved only

75. Gsovski, op.cit., p. 89.

76. Ibid.

by the Government or by municipal or community administration,

- 4./ if the goals of the foundation do not conform to the new situation.

The particular Minister with supreme jurisdiction over the foundations concerned had exclusive jurisdiction over such dissolution of the foundation.

Under this edict numerous hospitals, orphanages, children's homes, and other institutions were confiscated. The following statistical table shows the losses of institutions suffered by the Roman Catholic Church:

	STATUS IN		PERCENTAGE OF LOSS
	1945	1952	
Asylums, homes	191	-	100%
Nursing schools	1	-	100%
Catholic hospitals	9	1	90%
Houses of Catholic Associations	200	-	100%
Newspaper and publishing offices ⁷⁷	50	3	94% ⁷⁸

Two months after the publication of Edict No. 2 of 1949 on Foundations, Edict No. 13 of 1949 authorized the Minister of Religion and Public Education to demand a

77. The question of the press will be discussed in the next chapter.

78. Mathias Annabring, "Die Catholische Kirche im kommunistischen Ungarn", Sudost-Stimmen, Vol.III., No.8. December 1953., p. 20.

detailed report and description of every collection or individual piece of works of art of permanent and public interest from their owners or custodians, including private persons, churches, denominations, religious corporations, or congregations. The Minister was authorized to control or even to expropriate such collections or such works of art. In case of expropriation the Minister of Religion and Public Education shall determine the amount of compensation. No judicial remedy is allowed. Similar regulations were issued a year later concerning archives. 79

Having disposed of the militant Catholics in one sweeping movement, the Communists thought that the way was now open for a greater freedom of motion among the masses. But if the Communists were really to be responsible for the "scientific" formation and direction of the masses, they must control the media of mass communication. Church publications, once a major channel for disseminating information, for guiding public opinion and maintaining the allegiance of believers became the next target on the list of the Communist's agenda.

79. Edict No.29 of 1950; Decree No. 1610-26 of 1950.
(VIII. 8. V.K.M.)

CHAPTER V

Suppression of the press.

Before 1945 the Catholic Church in Hungary had a flourishing Catholic press, more than adequate for the needs of the faithful. Two daily newspapers, eighteen weeklies, twenty-five monthly periodicals, twenty other publications and reviews dealing with current events and an unspecified number of parochial bulletins, etc. served the Catholic reader in Hungary. In all the Catholic press of Hungary had a regular monthly circulation of about one million and a half copies.

By and especially after 1945 the situation changed completely. The Inter-Allied Control Commission, in April 1945, authorized the publication of a purely religious Catholic weekly "A SZIV" (Sacred Heart); in May another weekly of a political-social character was authorized: "Uj EMBER" (New Man), which came out for the first time on August 15th and which was the weekly organ of the Catholic Action. "VIGILIA", a monthly literary review was authorized in 1946. ⁸⁰

Even these few had often met the usual communistic tactics of Government control both direct and indirect. These unwanted church publications often found that they were not on the Government's priority list for paper rations. ⁸¹

80. Gussoni-Brunello, op.cit., pp. 178-179.

81. Meanwhile there seemed to be plenty of paper for Government and Party publications. "SZABAD NEP" the official organ of the Communist Party was, in a few months after the occupation, printed and sold in 700,000 copies - a very large figure compared with the population of Hun-

Printer's unions frequently refused or delayed the setting of type and printing of religious materials, although cleared by Government censors. 82

Editors or editorial staff of these Church journals have been occasionally "detained" or imprisoned on various charges. Due to this and other restrictions the "SZIV" has disappeared from the scene as early as 1950, the montly "VIGILIA" comes out in a reduced format and in the smallest of editions; the only survivor til about 1955 was "UJ EMBER", even though many of its issues have been confiscated and its publication suspended for long periods. Other publications - edited by the so-called peace-priests - came to life later, like the "KERESZT", but these cannot be included among the publications of the Catholic Church and will be discussed along with the pece-priests' movement.

By 1947 Hungarian newspapers were regulated by the following directives:

- 1./ Products of the press, including among these books and non-periodic newspapers, could not be published without the permission of the Minister of information.

gary. Everyone under the control of the regime was obliged to subscribe to the paper. In every single curriculum vitae, in every personnel form one found the questions: "Which papers do you read? Are you a subscriber of Szabad Nep? In Budapest alone twelve dailies were published, plus numerous weeklies, and several periodicals. Even after the liquidation of the Smallholders' and Social Democratic press there remained four other Communist dailies. Delaney, op.cit., pp. 88-89.

82. Tobias, op.cit., p. 52.

- 2./ Such permission is necessary even for the further publication of newspapers which are already being published.
- 3./ The circulation of all products of the press is dependent on the permission of the Minister of the Interior.

In reporting these decrees, the Catholic weekly, "UJ EMBER" could hardly avoid pointing out that these three provisions were in conflict not only with the revelant paragraphs of the 1947 Peace Treaty, but also with the law on the freedom of the press sanctioned and approved by the new Hungarian Constitution of 1946 which read as follows:

"Every individual can, without restriction, publish his own works, and he can freely present himself in public. All printed matter of a political character, publications, manifestos, and leaflets of the parties organized in the Hungarian Independence Front, and works treating of religion, are exempt of any preventative control on the part of State authorities. The Church, as are Directing Committees of the Parties, are directly responsible to the Press Control Commission."⁸³

Cardinal Mindszenty refused to comply with any bill requiring all printed matter and circulars to be approved by the Government before circulation.⁸⁴

It is superfluous to report that the note and issue of "UJ EMBER" containing the above observations, was confiscated and the publication of the weekly suspended for two weeks. In November 1947, however, the suspension lasted four

83. Gussoni-Brunello, op.cit., p. 179

84. Tobias, op.cit., p. 52. "We are compelled to descend into the catacombs...we shall henceforth speak less frequently and only briefly."

weeks because it had published a letter which Cardinal Mindszenty had written to the Prime Minister.

In February 1948, after the celebrated speech pronounced by the Cardinal at a meeting of the Academy of St. Stephen, the head of the Press Control Commission telephoned the editors of "UJ EMBER" inviting them to take a position against the Cardinal's speech and to publish only a few extracts therefrom with some official comments. The editors of the paper did not accept the invitation, insisting upon its right as a Catholic newspaper to publish the speech in full. The issue carrying the speech went to the printer, but the police prevented its publication, seizing the few copies which were ready.

Regulation of the press became even more severe in 1948, and another decree of the Press Control Commission extended prior censorship not only to printed matter of any kind, but also to any writing reproduced in more than one copy, even if typewritten or multigraphed.⁸⁵ If up to now it had been possible to publish books, notebooks of documents, minutes of meetings, etc., the new decree put an end to these possibilities. Manuscripts were uselessly presented for prior censorship, for in the majority of the cases they were not even returned.

The decree made an exception for pastoral letters and the circulars of the bishops, but it was an exception only in theory, because in practice the communist commissions

85. Gussoni-Brunello, op.cit., p. 180.

located in the printing plants were obliged to show proofs of all printed material to the Press Control Office, without any exceptions, so that the authorities could take measures to sabotage publication or prevent distribution. It was for this reason that the Cardinal was compelled to have most of his pastoral letters multigraphed by trustworthy persons and circulated privately. ⁸⁶

The Bishops of Hungary did not fail to raise their voices against such a provision with a collective pastoral letter published on November 11, 1948, in which they said:

"The Government has issued a decree on the freedom of the Press, according to which no printed matter or lithography can be presented to the public without prior Government consent. Such a decree is anti-constitutional...we have let competent courts to know that we would not submit to such a decree...Rather we will renounce -though our hearts bleed for the faithful- the by now centuries-old possibility, widespread throughout the world, of communicating through the press, and, forced to retire to the catacombs, we shall speak to you with the methods of 450 years ago, but we shall never betray the freedom and independence of the Church." ⁸⁷

In addition to the publication of Catholic newspapers and reviews, the above mentioned decree also affected the publication of Catholic books, studies and monographs.

State authorization for the publication of 33 religious textbooks, required for the study of catechism in the schools, was delayed for two years. Finally, only 19 of these books could be published, but in insufficient numbers, because the authorities had granted only five tons of paper, a quantity

86. Such pastoral were "smuggled" by priests into the provincial districts of Hungary, as not even the mails could be trusted.

87. Gussoni-Brunello, op.cit., p. 181.

which at best was enough for one book only.

On the other hand, as we have already pointed out, (Note 81) there was a veritable flood of Marxist periodicals and publications. The Communist printing plant SZIKRA boasted of having put on sale 860 publications totalling five million copies, in the space of five years.

Another big blow against the freedom of the Catholic press was the nationalization of all Catholic printing plants. These totalled about twenty, including the large printing plant of the STEPHANEUM, so-called because it had been established by the cultural association of the Academy of St. Stephen about a century earlier. Loads of telegrams of protest were sent to the President of the Republic by all the bishops, by the directors of the Catholic Action, by all Hungarian Catholic Communities.

"Indignation over this step is increasingly shown all over Hungary -said the then existing Catholic News Service-telegrams of protest being addressed to the President of the Republic by the Bishops, by the Actio Catholica and by many Catholic associations and organizations (still in existence at this time). These eloquently express the general feeling of indignation. The President is asked in these telegrams to see that the nationalization order be withdrawn in view of the privileged position of the Stephaneum Printing Press, and that attention be paid to the freedom which the Church has been repeatedly guaranteed." ⁸⁸

But appeals, telegrams, attempts to negotiate an exemption from the law for the STEPHANEUM plant were all in vain. The plant passed over into the hands of the State, a Communist worker became its director, and it ceased to be an organ of Catholic thought and culture.

88. Cardinal Mindszenty Speaks, op.cit., pp. 158=159.

But the struggle for the suppression of the Catholic press was not to end here. Using as a pretext the application of a law of the armistice which obliged the Hungarian Government to requisition all "fascist" books, or those which in any way reflected ideologies of the past, an "index" was compiled of all books to be requisitioned.

This "Index" meant not only that such books had to be withdrawn from circulation, but that not even private libraries could keep them. If one were found, its possessor would be sent to a concentration camp. It is needless to say, that such lists were in the main filled with Catholic books, which in one way or another were opposed to Marxist ideology. Voluminous scientific works were banned, even if no more than a single chapter, or a single paragraph, or even a single phrase were anti-Marxist.

Thus were proscribed and removed from circulation, and destroyed, all the works of Bishop Ottokar Prohaszka, a great sociologist of the past century;⁸⁹ the works of Bishop Tihamer Toth, a preacher of world fame whose books have been translated in seventeen languages; the works of Father Bela Bangha, of the Society of Jesus, a great defender of the Faith; the texts on dogmatics by the theologian Antal Schutz; the works of Laszlo Mees, the most popular writer and poet of recent times, some of whose poems had also offended Hitler, and who had barely escaped the prison sentence handed down by a Nazi court by remaining in hiding until the end of the war.⁹⁰

89. George N. Schuster, In Silence I Speak (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1956), p. 33.

90. Gussoni_Brunello, op.cit., p. 182.

A Communist purge commission inspected all the libraries of the Capital, and those of other cities. It entered seminaries, religious convents, and searched everywhere for prohibited books to be removed from circulation.

Not even the celebrated library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences was spared, nor that of the thousand-year old Benedictine monastery of Pannonhalma, nor those of the Cistercian monastery of Zirc, and the Jesuit monastery of Szeged. Not even the famous and valuable library of the Primate in Esztergom. The warehouse of the Catholic publishing firm of Saint Stephen was almost entirely destroyed.

Thus tens of thousands of the best literary and scientific collections were sacrificed, even those containing no books which had fallen in disgrace, but only suspected of a "reactionary spirit" because they were of authors who were famous Catholics or Westernizers. ⁹¹

The VILAGOSSAG, a Marxist daily, in large type and on its first page carried new stories such as this: "In the library of the Benedictine Abbey of Pannonhalma, two freight cars of anti-democratic books were collected." ⁹² In reality they had filled only two trucks, and they carried away not only books prohibited by the political lists, but many others also. All publications which had appeared between the years of 1919 and 1944 were generally subjected to this rule. Along with the books were confiscated all the Catholic reviews published between these dates, such as "Katolikus Szemle, "Elet"

91. Ibid., p. 183.

92. Ibid.

and others.

Sometimes, during these purges, there were almost comic incidents of mental blindness. A Soviet Colonel who boasted of having "extirpated" a million books, had the Baedeker guide books carted away because they carried similar titles: "Fuehrer durch die Schweize" (Guide through Switzerland). The Colonel thought that they were books dedicated to Hitler, the German "Fuehrer." ⁹³ Another ponderous volume of the pre - World War I era, entitled "Index Horti Botanici" was condemned because, according to the same Colonel, it referred to Admiral Horthy, the "Fascist Regent" of Hungary. A French edition of Boccaccio was proscribed because it had been published in Paris in 1942 when the government of the collaborationist Petain was in power. ⁹⁴

93. Schuster, op.cit., p. 33.

94. Gussoni-Brunello, op.cit., p. 183.

CHAPTER VI

Suppression of all outer manifestations of the Faith,
including religious feasts.

Up to 1945, in accordance with a well-established tradition, the State-operated radio stations had always included the broadcasts of religious services and sermons on their Sunday programs because of the importance of the various Churches.

Even after the "liberation" the Government did not break this custom. On the contrary, religious broadcasts were extended even to holidays, and possibilities were offered to Catholics as well as Protestants to use the radio even daily in order to broadcast important religious services.

It was during the first months of 1948, that the State radio began to boycott religious broadcasts more and more, returning sermons that had already been presented to the Government censorship, as "unadaptable" for radio transmission because of their "content", without ever giving specific explanation. ⁹⁵

The radio censorship was not satisfied that the Church should adopt a neutral attitude, but demanded that she lend moral support to the regime and its ideology. ⁹⁶ The Prince-Primate protested against this and, eventually the ecclesiastical authorities themselves decided to suspend religious

95. Galter, op.cit., P. 219.

96. Gussoni-Brunello, op.cit., p. 184.

broadcasts. As a propaganda measure the Communists tried to substitute other religious programs which lacked the authorization of the Catholic hierarchy. 97

On July 10, 1948, the following announcement was published in "Magyar Kurir"; by orders of the Cardinal, in connection with the new restrictions in the field of religious broadcasts: 98

"...in the scheduling of programs the Hungarian Radio recently manifested an ever increasing tendency to limit the freedom of the Church in the promulgation of the word of God. In this regard already, and on many occasions, broadcasts of sermons, sacred music, and the usual half-hours dedicated to religious subjects have been omitted.

It is deplorable that the Hungarian Catholic community is compelled to give up these broadcasts.

Furtermore, we must at the same time take note that these broadcasts of a religious character very often appeared in programs which did not absolutely correspond with the dignity of the numbers of the repertory of a religious character, nor the truths enunciated in this." 99

From that day on, July 10, 1948, every broadcast of a religious character of the Catholic Church was completely suppressed in Hungary. The few radio broadcasts of a more or less religious character which were later transmitted, were never approved by the official Catholic Church. They were, in fact, broadcast for and by exponents of the "Movement of Priests for Peace" under the direct inspiration of the Communist regime and only for the purpose of "faking" the existence

97. Galter, loc.cit.

98. Magyar Kurir, referred to and already quoted several times, was the official publication of Hungarian Catholicism. Its publication was ended by a decree of the Ministry of the interior on November 17, 1948.

99. Gussoni-Brunello, op.cit., pp. 184-185.

of religious freedom in Hungary.

With regard to the Marian Year, which was proclaimed in August 1947, the Communists, at first, did nothing to prevent the religious ceremonies planned for the occasion and continued to make public declarations of their desire to guarantee religious liberty.¹⁰⁰ But they soon began to use various pretexts to prevent the faithful assembling at places of pilgrimage. Speaking in the name of the episcopate, Cardinal Mindszenty addressed a letter of protest on this subject to the Minister of Worship.¹⁰¹

There was no change; and in its abuse of power the Government went so far as to forbid the holding of several religious manifestations, notably the traditional procession in honor of St. Stephen, to supplant which the Communists organized their "Bread Festival" (August 20, 1948) along the route that had already been chosen for the procession. Two years later, St. Stephen's day, the greatest national and Catholic feast of Hungary was abolished and replaced by the "Day of the People's Republic!"¹⁰² St. Stephen's day was mentioned for the first time in Hungarian legislation in 1222,¹⁰³ when the Golden Bull issued by King Andrew II contained the following provision:

"We decree that we shall celebrate the feast of Saint King Stephen each year."

100. More than four million of the faithful are estimated to have participated in the Marian Days organized in the Marian Year.

101. Galter, op.cit., p. 219.

102. Edict No.1 of 1950. (January 25, 1950). Cf.: Gsovski, op.cit., p. 91.

103. Ibid., p. 146. Note 30.

For almost a thousand years this day was celebrated in Hungary in commemoration of her first king as both an ecclesiastical and national holiday. Thus the oldest national holiday was transformed into the holiday of the People's Republic.

Other ecclesiastical feast-days, long commemorated and celebrated in Hungary, also fell victims to Communist legislation. It was declared that Candlemas (February 2nd); Annunciation day (March 25th); the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin (September 8th);¹⁰⁴ the day of the Assumption of Mary (August 15th);¹⁰⁵ Corpus Christi day, and Whitmonday¹⁰⁶ shall be common working days.¹⁰⁷

On December 24th, 1949, the Government forbade traditional Christmas celebrations and extended the observance of Stalin's birthday through Christmas eve. The Communist publishing house distributed thousands of cards depicting the Holy Family with the text overprinted in red: "Christmas is their holiday, ours is the First of May. Christ is their superstition; our hope is socialism."¹⁰⁸

104. Decree No. 3180 of 1948. Korm.

105. Decree No. 55,746 of 1949 Bk.M.

106. Resolution of the Cabinet No. 1,012 of 1952.

107. Gsovski, op.cit., p. 91.

108. MacEoin, op.cit., p. 130. Appropriate (!) season's decorations in the homes were suggested by the Party, representing the workers' determination to go ahead unremittingly with the realization of the goals of the current Five Years' Plan.

Ex-Prime Minister Nagy reported that the Government agents kept lists of names of church-goers, and the students and civil servants were promoted or ousted depending on their religious interest. 109

Communist tactics to disturb public religious ceremonies embraced a whole series of measures from violent police methods to the lowest form of subterfuge. In this connection there are two very significant documents: the first is a secret Communist circular and the other is a public declaration by the ecclesiastical authorities which treats of the Government's abuse of power and deals particularly with certain incidents that took place at the celebration of the second centenary of the Benedictine church at Celldomok (September 11-12, 1948).

The Communist circular, issued on September 9th of the same year, contains the following directives for elementary teachers and local Party secretaries:

- 1./ Discuss the nationalization question with the peasants in their homes. Remind them that the Government has spent a million florins in the province of Vas to revive the schools. Not a word about the Church or the priests.
- 2./ Party secretaries should mingle with groups going in procession or on pilgrimage and should carry on this kind of propaganda among them.
- 3./ Keep repeating that the religious might have continued teaching in the schools if Mindszenty had not prevented them. Elementary teachers should follow the same line and try to make their propaganda convincing.
- 4./ Propagandists and teachers should carry on this type

of propaganda at Celldomok among the men assembled in the hostels. They must try to draw the men away from Mindszenty, but while doing this they must give the impression that they too, are faithful pilgrims. It must not become evident that they are engaged in propaganda.

- 5./ Comrades who are engaged in this work should not wear any Party insignia.
- 6./ Party secretaries and elementary school teachers should in no case permit their friends accompany them. During their work they must be penetrated with the spirit of their role as political propagandists. Let them watch carefully to find out what is being said, how the people react and whether there are any saboteurs at work. If they find anyone of that kind, they must denounce him immediately to the local Party section. ¹¹⁰

In addition to these directives, the Communists also employed the external pressure technique, which the Cardinal denounced in a public statement. The following are some revealing extracts: ¹¹¹

"We are authorized to publish the following statement - Magyar Kurir wrote-: On August 15, 1947, the Hungarian Bishops had proclaimed in Esztergom the Marian Year. Since the Spring of 1948 these pilgrimages have been obstructed by the provocative actions of certain individuals; officials and local authorities.

- 1./ The Hungarian National Railways do not grant any excursion rates for the pilgrimages.
- 2./ Individual pilgrims are frequently denied tickets at the ticket offices. ¹¹²
- 3./ Instead of increasing the number of railway coaches available, the number of cars was frequently decreased.

110. Galter, op.cit., p. 220

111. Magyar Kurir (Budapest), September 14, 1948.

112. At some stations the ticket offices refused to give individual tickets even at the full fare.

- 4./ Omnibuses and coaches were forbidden to carry pilgrims.
- 5./ Trucks that might have carried people were forbidden to carry pilgrims.
- 6./ Even horse-drawn conveyances were put under control in order that the pilgrims could not use them to reach remote shrines. ¹¹³
- 7./ Announcements were made of the billeting of troops, so that no accommodation could be offered to pilgrims.
- 8./ At the celebration at the shrines the use of loud speakers was prohibited. (On those occasions when permission had been granted, it was revoked at the last moment).

Such arbitrary measures heralded the increasing anti-Church campaign which later reached its climax in Zalaegerszeg and in Celldomolk.

It was not enough that the use of loud speakers was prohibited for the celebrations in Zalaegerszeg. A few days before the beginning of the feast, it was announced that all those taking part in the celebration were obliged, without exception, to apply for an identity card, which they must carry with them. Nor was this all. Even cyclists were forced to dismount, and were prevented from taking part in the Marian Congress in Zalaegerszeg, on the pretext of some offense against traffic regulations. ¹¹⁴

These provocative incidents reached their climax in Celldomolk. Under the sponsorship of the Benedictine Order, St. Mary's Church, a famous shrine celebrated its second

113. Veterinary inspections of horses were arranged to prevent pilgrims from arriving in time for the celebrations.

114. Cardinal Mindszenty Speaks, op.cit., p. 194.

centenary. The Hungarian Ministry of the Interior first gave permission for the celebrations to be held on September 11-12, 1948;

"...under the condition that the ecclesiastical authorities in charge of these celebrations take all responsibility for any disturbances which occur in connection with this procession." 115

Having received this decree, the committee for the celebrations made the usual preparations to make the Marian feast as impressive as possible. But on September 9th, two days before the celebrations were scheduled to start, the committee was informed that the following proclamation had been published in the neighborhood of Celldomok:

"According to the regulation of the County Official (9977/1948) and the regulation of the District Official (No. 3427), people are herewith informed, that diseases of the brain and the spine have occurred in the district. In consequence of this, traffic from district to district and from village to village is prohibited between September 8th and October 9th, in order to avoid spreading of this epidemic. In places where examinations by doctors have not yet been carried out, such examinations will take place on the 11th and the 12th of this month. People are ordered, therefore, to stay in their houses on these days." 116

The parish authorities of Celldomok were also notified of the "epidemic" and the planned celebrations were prohibited. In reply to this the committee declared that they were unable, in the short time at their disposal, to inform Catholics in the neighborhood of the prohibition of the celeb-

115. Ibid., p. 195.

116. Ibid., pp. 195-196.

rations, for which permission had been given previously. From villages within an area of from thirty to sixty miles pilgrims were already arriving. Police with machine guns and bayonets were mobilized to fight the "epidemics." The country roads leading to the shrine were blocked by police and anyone who dared to approach, was turned back. The tired pilgrims, most of them arriving on foot, were thus forced to spend the night in the cornfields by the side of the roads until they could return to their homes in the morning.

In spite of all this, the shrine church was so overcrowded in the evening of the celebrations, by mostly local people, that latecomers could not be admitted. Police formed a cordon for a distance of a few hundred yards around the church. During the celebration cars of the fire brigade were driven through the streets and the crowd outside, spraying disinfectants.

It must be added that in the county seat and other towns Army festivities were held at the same time. Those who took part in these festivals had no difficulty in getting transportation facilities by railway or by coach from even the remotest parts of the country. No difficulties were found in arranging dances on the 11th and 12th of September - despite of the "epidemic." The above restrictions were immediately canceled after the celebration of September 12th! ¹¹⁷

But the suppression of manifestations and feasts was only one of the many attacks on the religious liberties, in-

117. Ibid., p. 198.

dividual or collective, of the Hungarian Catholic population.

A protest letter sent to the President of the Council of Ministers, Lajos Dinnyes, on October 24, 1947, by Cardinal Mindszenty, in the name of the entire Hungarian Episcopate, is an exceptionally valuable document which courageously denounced the regime of spying and terror which the Communist Party was trying to install in Hungary. Here is the text in full:

"Mr. President of the Council:

In the conference held on the 8th current, in Vac, the Hungarian Episcopate concerned itself with complaints which several of its members received from the faithful.

a./ Persons who are not in agreement with the program of the Communist Party are compelled to join this party, persons, indeed, whose religious conviction is in incompatible conflict with the program of such a party. Citizens can obtain or hold jobs, or accept jobs, only if they join the party. Membership in the Communist Party has exonerated and exonerates such members from penalties and the purge of list B. These are

118. B list commissions began to function shortly after the end of hostilities. The name arose from the fact that people remaining in the service of the Government were listed under classification A, while those dismissed, relieved, or retired met their fate as classification B. Ex-Prime Minister Nagy thus sums up the working of the B list: "...the work of these commissions was as sorry as could be expected. Each commission consisted of a chairman appointed by me, one member delegated by the minister, whose department was being scanned, and one member delegated by the trade unions. This composition was the result of the left block's earlier stubborn insistence. The Communist and Socialist ministers had compiled in advance lists of all civil servants they wanted to eliminate from their departments, and handed them

facts, which have been openly acknowledged even by other parties and to which, in the Parliamentary session of October 9, a speaker of a party of the coalition made allusion.

Mr. President of the Council! We trust that this state of affairs which offends the rights of democratic freedom will cease with the constitutional order, which we hope will consolidate itself after the elections which have recently been held. It is inadmissible that for the centenary of 1948, when among other things there is also celebrated the abolition of aristocratic privileges, there prevail and are imposed party privileges which mock every equality.

b./ The other complaint is caused by the spying system which is to be observed in the defense section of the State police. In fact, individual agents of the above mentioned section cite, on the basis of fabricated and frivolous charges, against persons and even priests, and with threats try to induce them to become spies in Catholic pious organizations, in Bishops' residences, and to make reports from time to time on what they have seen and heard. There have been cases in which the reports not being satisfactory, the "spies," already morally tortured, were also materially mistreated.

Such procedures can in no wise accord with the Hungarian character, they remind us of the darkest epoch of our history, that of Bach, following the war of independence.¹¹⁹ In the face, furthermore, of church circulars, such procedures are absolutely superfluous, because among us conspiracies are useless things for

to the respective delegates. These men, working hand in glove with the trade union representative, consistently voted against the chairman appointed by the Prime Minister, without discussing the merits or ability of the person involved. While the Smallholder commission members generally attempted, with a measure of success, to clean house by putting all useless jobholders on the B list, the Communist-Socialist combine created havoc in certain departments of the administration by "B-listing" outstanding civil servants, reliable experts, and top executives simply because they were not members of the left-block parties." Nagy, op.cit., p. 260.

119. The war of 1848-1849, under the leadership of Louis Kossuth.

which we have no disposition because we are used to expressing our opinion openly, as our Congress has demonstrated ¹²⁰ and as shown by our newspapers which, unfortunately, so rarely see the light. ¹²¹

Mr. President of the Council! In the hope that in this matter it has been only a case of an excess zeal by subordinate organs, we urge you to use your influence to the end ~~that~~ the deplored abuses cease and all Hungarians may enjoy the benefits of peace without fear and vexations." ¹²²

120. Up to 1948, every year the National Catholic Congress was held in Budapest.

121. Obvious reference to the frequent confiscations of Catholic newspapers.

122. Gussoni-Brunello, op.cit., pp. 185-187.

CHAPTER VII

Dissolution of all religious orders.

By the dawn of 1950 the Party was ready to undertake its next bold venture, which was the suppression of the religious orders. The religious orders everywhere presented the Communists with a formidable obstacle on the way to a scientifically planned society. Monasteries were engaged in welfare, education, evangelization and their own philosophical pursuits. They had a strong spiritual discipline and solidarity in action.

Up to 1948 there existed in Hungary the following:

- a./ 18 male religious orders and congregations, with a total of 187 houses and monasteries and 2,459 members of whom 1,422 were priests.
- b./ 39 female religious orders and congregations, with 456 houses and monasteries and a total of 7,525 sisters. 123

The religious had already been affected, as a matter of course, by being deprived of the nearly 300 schools which they conducted under their auspices, and by various other measures taken against them. Yet so closely intertwined they were with the daily life of the Hungarian people that even the most outrageous propaganda availed very little to discredit them. ¹²⁴

123. Galter, op.cit., p. 234.; Also Gussoni-Brunello, Loc. cit.

124. Some of the religious orders were brought to the country by Hungarian kings in the XIth century and later by the prelates of the Church. Religious orders were mentioned in Hungarian statutes as early as 1092. Later, law

Immediately after the promulgation of the law on the nationalization of the Catholic schools, the Hungarian Communist party began its struggle against the religious orders and their work.

Already, on May 1, 1948, the first skirmishes of the coming struggle took the form of several articles published in various communist papers.¹²⁵ Shortly thereafter the Communist police began to arrest several members of religious orders under the charge of crimes against the democratic regime of the State, for having distributed, as they alleged, publications and circulars inciting to revolt.

On the night of December 20, 1949, police forced open the door of the convent of Lovasberenyaaand despite of the bitter cold, loaded the nuns on a truck and deposited them on the market-place of the town nearest at hand.¹²⁶ Elsewhere monks and sisters had been restricted to small parts of the structures they owned, so that the principal sections of

required the permission of the king for the admittance of new religious orders into the country and the foundation of new monasteries. Joseph II (1780-1790) abolished most of the religious orders. Since he was not a crowned king of Hungary and no Diet was convoked under his reign, his decrees, most of which he repealed himself before his death, were never acknowledged as laws in Hungary. Under his successors all of the abolished orders were gradually restored.

125. Gussoni-Brunello, op.cit., p. 188.

126. Schuster, op.cit., p. 138.

these edifices could be used for whatever purpose the Party desired. Convents were evacuated with only 24 to 48 hours warning. Chapels in the hospitals were kept closed sometimes so that the nuns could not hear Mass. Many nuns were forbidden to aid the sick as early as 1949.

On April 16, 1950, a letter bearing forty-five signatures, chief among which was that of the acting Abbot of the great Benedictine Monastery of Pannonhalma, was addressed to the President of the Republic and his major associates. In this grievance, which were uppermost in the minds of Hungarian religious, found expression, though with dignity and restraint. It is, one thinks, a noble document, - frank, conciliatory and yet tinged with pride in the services rendered by the Religious Orders to the Hungarian people. The platform on which the writers stood was declared to be this:

"Our self-respect prevents us from laying stress on our past services: the two thousand-year-old history of the religious orders, their present status, and the services they have rendered to our society and our people, which cannot be blotted out of the past or eliminated from the present, without causing damage that is beyond justification. All this is public knowledge. We, the monks and the nuns of today, belong to the people, and desire to serve the people in poverty and simplicity. In addition to the lofty principle of religious liberty, our widely known love of the poor is the other justification to which we refer when we ask to be heard." 127

The major grievances for which redress was asked were these:

"...we are often reduced to living as if in a ghetto in our own houses, built with such sacrifice and self-denial, or we are forced to abandon them. Basing itself

127. Ibid., p. 139.

on the law nationalizing the schools, but going quite beyond its limits, the Government has taken away monastic buildings which never belonged to the schools or colleges; our courtyards, gardens, small fruit orchards, furniture, moveable properties and objects of domestic use. They strip us in many localities of our chapels, of our houses for spiritual exercises, of our cultural institutions and of our printing plants.

They impede us in our missions, in our sermons, in our pilgrimages. At every step we are impeded from turning to our faithful for exclusively pastoral purposes, or from visiting the sick. They confiscate our theological schools and our novitiates for the training of our novices; the free movement of the members of religious orders is limited by unfounded suspicions; and we are forbidden activities which are nonetheless permitted to other civil persons. They dismiss nuns employed as nurses from the hospitals en masse, against the wishes of doctors and patients. They offer posts and special privileges to those who abandon their Orders..." 128

In its turn the Hierarchy was compelled to take a position against this sad situation. Among other things its circular letter of May 31, 1950 denounced the fact that

"...members of religious orders are without defense and often find themselves without possibilities of help, completely at the mercy of their very enemies. The disquieting procedures not only do not cease but instead become ever thicker and disconcerting." 129

The specific reply to such charges was made by Jozsef Revai, the Minister of Popular Culture (!), at a meeting of the leaders of the Hungarian Workers' Party, 130 - in a speech which was reported in full in the June 6, 1950 issue of "Szabad Nep". It declared that

128. Gussoni-Brunello, op.cit., p. 189.

129. Ibid.

130. The new official name of the Hungarian Communist Party since 1949.

"...in the People's Democracy there is no need for members of religious orders, because they do not correspond to their vocation, and in fact they sabotage the aims of democracy. It is necessary, therefore, that they immediately be put in conditions wherein it will be impossible for them to injure further the interests of the popular democracy." ¹³¹

On the following day, June 7, 1950, Jozsef Veres, Director of the IVth Section of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, currently Secretary of State, signed the following disposition:

*By virtue of Decree 8130/1948, IV. 6 B.M., par.2, I order your expulsion with the obligation to leave immediately the place of your present residence and to proceed to the place of your forced residence. Reason: Your permanence in the place of your present domicile is dangerous to public order and security.

The present disposition is without appeal. It must be carried out at once by virtue of Law 1929, par.56.

P.S. The place of your forced residence can not be left without special permission. In case of violation, administrative procedures will be initiated." ¹³²

During the night between the 9th and 10th of June such a ministerial decree was delivered by hand to about 320 members of religious orders and to about 600-700 nuns in the southern part of Hungary.

Many policemen of the A.V.O. ¹³³ scaled the wall around the monasteries in order to enter the nuns' quarters; others broke windows, and in other places they literally smashed windows to gain entrance.

131. Szabad Nep (Budapest), June 6, 1950.

132. Gussoni-Brunello, op.cit., p. 190.

133. The Hungarian security police.

In general they allowed only one hour for dressing and packing, but in many localities even this time was curtailed with various harrasments. Only in two or three places was there a more human and curteous treatment. The police did not permit members of the orders to bring bed linen with them, stating that in the new forced residence they would find completely furnished homes. The aged and the ill were ridiculed. They could bring only very little of their personal belongings and only if the bundle did not weigh more than ten pounds. In the majority of the cases the deportees could not even change their shoes or their clothing. Many had to undergo a personal search. All the writings, and even the personal letters of the brothers and the monks were taken away from the religious houses, as well as identification cards and personal notes of all kinds, including prayer-n books and sacred images.

Then they were loaded on and crammed into trucks in which there was little fresh air and even less free movement. During the long deportation trip the unhappy travelers only now and then were permitted to sit on the floor. It was absolutely forbidden to speak during the trip and violators were threatened with the most severe punishments. There was a halt for personal needs only every 6 or 8 hours. The deportees had been forbidden to take food along and during the trip the authorities made no provisions whatsoever for feeding them. Here and there the population provided gifts of food and other necessary items, but in general it

must be said that the transfer was truly savage and inhuman.

On the day after the deportation the police summoned the people and the workers of the locality and told them that short wave transmitters had been located in the monasteries, and that women's undergarments had been found in the rooms of monks and brothers. Moreover, they claimed that there had been many photographs of women on the walls, and that a large sum of money had been found in many instances. In other localities it was announced that large amounts of propaganda literature had been found, inciting to revolution, sabotage, as well as espionage material and immoral books.

But literally nobody believed the Communists. Gifts of food, clothing and bedding poured in from people who could ill afford to make them, into the new forced residences of sisters and priests. As a result of the deportations -quite an unexpected one by the Communists- religious life was intensified in Hungary in an unprecedented way.

On June 11th, 1950, a message addressed to the faithful by the Bishops was read in all the parishes. It summarized briefly the situation in which the religious found themselves, and requested all Catholics to pray for them and assist them whenever it was possible to do so.

The combined protests of the Religious Heads and the Episcopacy yielded no change in the situation. After the first wave of deportations of monks and nuns, the heads of the religious orders and congregations held a joint meeting

on June 17, 1950. On behalf of their deported colleagues, and in order to halt further persecution, they asked for a firmer and more determined attitude on the part of the Hierarchy. In answer to their pleas, Archbishop Grosz called a meeting of the bishops on June 20th. When this became known, a second wave of deportation followed on the night between the 18th and 19th of June. This time about 1500-2000 members of religious orders, men and women, were taken from central and western Hungary. The only difference was now that the religious were not charged with fomenting sedition. It was declared instead, that their removal was in the "general interest." ¹³⁴ Thus were some of the oldest and most venerable of the convents and monasteries of the country emptied and expropriated.

The position of the Bishops in face of this new development was very difficult. By adopting an attitude of intransigence they might only aggravate the evil. The "Mind-szenty complaint" which had been referred to the International Court of Justice at the Hague and to the United Nations' Organization, ¹³⁵ was of no consequence to the Budapest Government. In this painful crisis the bishops needed the advice and the moral support of the Holy Father, but the Hungarian Government had made it impossible for them to have recourse to the

134. Schuster, op.cit., p. 142.

135. Galter, op.cit., p. 236.

Holy See. 136

The Bishops' meeting that followed is of historic importance because agreement was reached that vocal opposition was no longer feasible, and that every possible effort must be made to negotiate with the Government. The text of a strong letter protesting against the treatment meted out to the religious orders was therefore withdrawn. To some members of the Hierarchy this seemed a fateful acceptance of weakness, but others deemed any action desirable which would in some measure stay the progress of persecution. So the Bishops asked for the re-opening of discussions with the Government, hoping that in the atmosphere of the conference chamber they might succeed in finding some solution.

Committees representing both the Church and the Government were appointed. The Church was represented by Archbishop Grosz, Archbishop Czapik, Bishop Hamvas, the Vice-Abbot of the Benedictines, the Provincial of the Piarists, and the Provincial visitator of the Franciscans. The Government appointed a committee of which Rakosi was very much in command, though the membership included persons who were nominally Catholics or Protestants. 137

Negotiations concerning the fate of the religious orders began on June 28th, and there were a number of conferences during July and August. It was the intention of the Government to draw the maximum profit from these meetings with the Bishops.

136. Ibid.

137. Schuster, op.cit., p. 143.

Instead of a free exchange of views the discussions were overshadowed by the threat of violence. To intimidate the episcopal delegation, the Government ordered the third series of deportations between the 10th and 12th of July, 1950

While the discussions were still going on, the Government adopted another expedient to convince the delegates. On August 1, 1950, the Catholic Priests' Peace Movement was officially inaugurated in Budapest. ¹³⁸

Regarding the discussions concerning the religious, the position taken by Rakosi was that, owing to the fact that all welfare and educational activities had been made the responsibility of the State, religious orders were no longer needed. Why should not the Bishops themselves recognize this fact and on their own initiative dissolve the orders? For its part the Government promised, if the Bishops accepted the logic of the situation, to make certain concessions. These were: to permit four hundred priest members of orders to work as secular priests; to employ as teachers in kindergartens, grade schools and secondary schools all qualified religious of both sexes; to admit as nurses, in State hospitals, all Sisters who were trained for the profession; to admit former religious to industrial plants and train them for their new activities; to designate two monasteries as homes for aged and sick religious, and to make pension arrangements for these; and to authorize religious teachers in the eight

¹³⁹. This movement will be discussed in some detail later.

schools made available to the Church, ¹³⁹ provided agreement were reached prior to the end of August.

The Bishops' Committee advanced a series of counter proposals. It pointed out that a number of religious, the contemplative orders among them, did not engage in activities which the State could take over, and ought, therefore, be excepted from the decree of suppression. It also argued that it would be expedient more, in view of the large number of the professed religious, to reduce their number gradually, over a period of years. Finally, the Bishops suggested that emigration to South America or to Africa be permitted. But none of these suggestions were acceptable to the Government. Rakosi maintained that the problem of the religious orders was a political one in terms of domestic policy as well as of international relations, and for this reason the Government was determined to proceed with the suppression. He likewise refused emphatically to consider emigration. On another occasion, the Bishops' Committee sought to propose that just as a number of schools had been set up under religious auspices, so also hospitals should be designated in which nuns were free to work. But Rakosi's position to this suggestion was uncompromising. The nursing sisters would be given employment only if they became "genuine civilians." 140

139. These were: Benedictines for the schools of Pannonhalma and Győr; Piarists for Budapest and Kecskemét; Franciscans for Esztergom and Szentendre; the Sisters of Szeged for the girls' schools at Budapest and Debrecen.

140. Schuster, *op.cit.*, p. 144.

In the end, despite all the weeks of wearisome negotiations, the Bishops' Committee obtained only two concessions. The number of priests who had been members of religious orders and would now be permitted to serve as secular priests, was increased by some two hundred. The other matter which was decided in its favor concerned a question which at first sight seems -perhaps -abstruse, but is of a great consequence in terms of Catholic discipline. The Communists demanded that every monk or nun be required to sign a statement that he or she was leaving the Order and would live as a civilian citizen of the nation. The Committee pointed out that the religious were bound by vows, from which only the Holy See could grant a release. It therefore suggested that the statement should indicate that a religious was leaving a given religious community only, which, of course, he was permitted to do under orders of duress. Rakosi finally consented to adopt this language, though his annoyance was obvious.

Finally an agreement between the Government commission and the Church was signed on August 30, 1950. The agreement re-established eight religious schools (See note 139) but it was clear that the intention of the Government in re-establishing the schools was to have an opportunity to declare all other members of religious orders, who actually did not teach in these schools, as superfluous and thus proceed, as quickly as possible, to their total liquidation.

On September 7, 1950, a few days after the above mentioned agreement, The Presidential Council issued Decree No.

34/1950. In accordance with it about 57 male and female religious orders and congregations were declared dissolved and warned to cease all activity in Hungary. Members were ordered to quit their monasteries within three months. All were forbidden to engage in any pastoral activity, excepting those priests who were permitted to carry out ecclesiastical tasks in the various dioceses, but without their specific religious vestments. All others were compelled to remove their clerical garb, nor could they reside where they had formerly lived as members of religious orders, and not even in their very birthplaces, if they happened to be in the frontier zones bordering on Jugoslavia. 141

141. The decree appeared in "Magyar Kozlony" (the Official Gazette) on September 7, 1950:

"Some days after the signing of the Agreement the Government issued the following legal decree on the question of the religious orders:

- 1./ With the coming into force of the present decree the "permit to function" of the teaching religious orders ceases to be valid in the territory of the Hungarian Republic. This enactment does not affect a certain number of orders of men and women needed to teach in the Catholic denominational schools.
- 2./ The religious orders whose "permit" expires according to section 1, must cease their activity in the territory of the Hungarian People's Republic as soon as this decree comes into force.
- 3./ In agreement with the Minister of Worship and Public Education the Minister of the Interior will draw up a list of religious orders which may continue their activity according to section 1.
- 4./ The present decree comes into force on the day of its publication. In agreement with the Minister of Worship and Public Education the Minister for the Interior will see to its execution, keeping in mind that the members of the religious orders whose "permit" ceases according to the terms of the present legal decree, must leave their former conventual houses within

The action of the Government caused stupefaction and profound sadness in the ranks of Catholics. On September 10th the Hungarian Bishops issued a Pastoral Letter (censored in several places) protesting against the suppression of the religious orders but, naturally, all to no avail. ¹⁴² Previous requests that the Government should permit the disbanded religious to leave the country were equally unsuccessful. Rakosi explained that the Government could not allow the religious to live in exile where they would suffer "profound nostalgic yearnings for the fatherland." ¹⁴³

At the same time, every conceivable precaution was taken to forestall escape from the country. Passports were made impossible to obtain, and the Austrian border was sealed off with a no-man's-land, where barbed wire was strung in zig-zag lines, electrified so that eventual crossing warning flares would be ignited.

But some of the younger religious made the attempt nevertheless, as laymen of various calling likewise did.

three months." Galter, op.cit., pp. 240-241.

142. The Bishops stated that more than 10,000 religious (men and women) belonging to the various orders were about to be forced to return to civilian life. They expressed their profound concern at the Government decrees, that made this necessary and in face of which they could only protest. In spite of this the Bishops asked God's blessing on the agreement while recalling that in their initial requests for discussions with the Government they were concerned only with alleviating the conditions of the religious orders.

143. Galter, op.cit., p. 241.

Sometimes, somehow, people get through, but usually they did not. Those who failed were taken off to the headquarters of the Political Police, where people stood around and starved between "interrogations." These were, of course, efforts to obtain "confessions" based on whatever fancy had previously come into the police officer's head; - efforts that followed a routine pattern of insults and beatings, sleeplessness and starvation. And the end was always prison, for whatever length of time a court or even an individual officer might deem desirable.

And so most men and women simply resigned themselves to staying. "There are sad little tales to relate of some of them. Thus one is told of a graying, once well-known Dominican, who now works in a factory and puts on his old habit for a few minutes every night in his little room, just to say his prayers peacefully and to remember." 144

144. Schuster, op.cit., p. 150.

CHAPTER VIII

Other restrictions of the Hungarian Government concerning religious liberty.

Under this heading various provisions of the Government will be discussed that appeared at various dates since the Communist takeover in Hungary. Each of them represents another step by the Communist Party towards full control of the Hungarian Catholic Church, her priests, her prelates, her innermost religious affairs. While the events discussed here are presented in a chronological order as far as it was possible to do so, certain overlapping in the treatment of the various events was unavoidable.

a. Oath required from the priests.

On October 22, 1949, a new decree ¹⁴⁵ established the oath to be taken by civil servants, members of the armed forces, and persons who were not civil servants but who received contributions from the State treasury in addition to their income. This rule refers to priests, who thus became obliged to take the oath of loyalty. ¹⁴⁶

145. Decree No. 4288 of 1949 M.T. (October 22, 1949).

146. Cf.: A KERESZT (The Cross) III. 11. "A KERESZT" is the organ of the movement of Priests for Peace, organized by certain elements of the Hungarian Catholic clergy.

Up to 1918, only bishops appointed by the Apostolic King in the exercise of his right of supreme patronage ¹⁴⁷ (to be approved by the Holy See) had to take an oath of loyalty to the king. Parochial priests were not considered civil servants and consequently were not required to take an oath, although most of them received a contribution from the State treasury.

The decree of October 22, 1949 provides that those who fail to take the oath within the prescribed time must forfeit State contributions. In addition to the moral binding force of the oath, it could be an aggravating fact, if the priest were accused of a crime against the State, against the people, or against the Law on the Protection of State and Official Secrets. ¹⁴⁸

The oath reads as follows:

"I.....swear loyalty to the Hungarian People's Republic, its people and its constitution; I shall keep official State secrets; in exercising my duties I shall act in the interests of the people and see to it with all my endeavor that my activities promote the strengthening and development of the Hungarian People's Republic." ¹⁴⁹

The decree on the oath was met with strong resistance on the part of the clergy, who were not prepared to take an

147. Gsovski, op.cit., p. 77.

148. Ibid., p. 96.

149. Ibid.

oath of allegiance to the Communist government. The bishops themselves refused to take the oath, but they authorized the priests to take it subject to the same reservations ("in so far as not in conflict with the laws of God, the Church and the rights of man") as authorized by the Czechoslovak hierarchy. ¹⁵⁰ In a circular issued, they declared that they would do the same after having received special permission from the Holy See. ¹⁵¹

It was only as late as July 21, 1951, after Archbishop Grosz, who presided over the Bench of Bishops for the imprisoned Cardinal Mindszenty had likewise been sentenced, and after the position of the bishops itself had been threatened by the retroactive decree requiring Government approval for the appointment of the bishops, ¹⁵² that the remaining Roman Catholic prelates saw themselves forced to take the oath. Thus on the above date the Hungarian Hierarchy - with the sole exception of the Auxiliary Bishop of Szekesfehervar, Msgr. Imre Kisberek - took the following oath before the Presidential Council of the People's Republic of Hungary:

"I swear to be loyal to the Hungarian People's Republic, to its people and Constitution, to observe the Constitution and all lawful constitutional measures, to keep the State secrets, to serve within the limits of my vocation the interests of the people, and by

150. MacElain, op.cit., p. 133.

151. Gsovski, op.cit., p. 97.

152. This will be discussed in some detail shortly.

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every means in my power to strive to contribute to the progressive strengthening of the Hungarian People's Republic." 153

The Bishops' reason for taking the oath was later explained in an article signed by Bishop Bertalan Badalik, and published in the Budapest daily Magyar Nemzet and in the subsequently prohibited Roman Catholic periodical Az Ember. The following excerpt of this article is taken from Kereszt, the Peace Priests' paper, which also published the Bishop's views:

"Why did the Bench of Bishops take the oath? It did so primarily out of love for our country and our people. If we examine the different kinds of relations between the State and the Catholic Church in the course of the 2000 years of its history, then we may establish that the Church has always been loyal to the State as long as it could do so without giving up its principles. And it could not act otherwise because Christ, its founder, claimed this loyalty from the Church. St. Paul, the apostle of the nations who preached the Gospel in the Roman Empire which was utterly opposed to Christianity, admonished the believers of the Church community of Rome with the following words: "Let everybody be subject to the higher authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those who exist have been appointed by God." (Rom.13.1.)

This, however, would be only a negative attitude. The Bench of the Bishops is ready also to contribute in a positive way to the maintenance of the social order and the domestic peace necessary for building up the country. And it actually does so. It is acting so not only for

153. Cf.: A Kereszt (Budapest) August 1, 1951. A previous declaration of loyalty by Archbishop Czapik was commented on by the official organ of the Party, Szabad Nep, on July 5, 1951, in an editorial entitled "Better Late Than Never!" Considering the nightmare atmosphere in which the Episcopate had been plunged by the destruction of the ecclesiastical organization in Hungary, one can say that the oath was extorted under pressure.

the sake of fulfilling a given promise, but by continuing its activity as before. Through the pastoral clergy it teaches the Hungarian people to practice those virtues of the Gospel, without which neither the order of the State nor security nor peace nor constructive work can be safeguarded. These virtues are: respect for authority, stressing loyalty to the State, obedience to laws, love of fellow men, solidarity, mutual reliance upon each other, respect for man as the highest value, respect for man's inherent rights, cherishing freedom above all, stressing on the part of the Church the mandatory divine command to work, and an ever increasing positive contribution of the Church in furthering these virtues.

The Bench of Bishops has taken the oath of allegiance to the new Constitution also because therein freedom of religion is guaranteed without restriction. Freedom of religion is an indispensable precondition of the activity of the Church. The Church actually does not claim anything else from the State than that this freedom be safeguarded. It leaves the rest to Divine Providence - everything else it might need for its activities. However, the Church must expect and receive from the State the warrant to enable it to struggle for this freedom. Now, since the new Hungarian Constitution actually warrants this, the Bench of Bishops did not act contrary to its conscience in pledging allegiance to this Constitution.

We hope that the fact that we took the oath shall strengthen the confidence of the responsible leaders of the country in the Catholic Church in Hungary. Both of us need this confidence, for the letter and the spirit of the new Constitution must be transplanted into actual life, and also that part warranting freedom of religion must actually be secured for everyday life. This, however, is a practical task which the contracting parties cannot realize without mutual confidence.

Summing up, the Bench of Bishops has taken the oath of loyalty to Hungary and our people in order that freedom of religion, which has been warranted without any restriction in the Constitution, shall be realized in practice and in order to maintain peace within and without.

It took the oath with the knowledge that the oath is not contrary to Catholic doctrine or to our pastoral duty. In taking the oath, the Bench of Bishops has proclaimed in unmistakable words: The Catholic Church

confessing its doctrine, maintaining its discipline, unshaken in its loyalty, prevails. We took the oath not for the sake of material profit, not because we are clinging to power, not for any other reason, but to be able to continue to render our services to our beloved Hungarian people." 154

The taking of the oath, however, did not enable the Bishops to better serve the Hungarian people. If the situation changed thereby, it changed for the worse. The first and most important change was made in the personnel of the dioceses. The bishops had to relieve the vicars general in their dioceses, dismiss the chancellors of their diocesan administration and to appoint in their places members of the Peace Priests' Movement. Thus, through the Movement, only a year old, the State was now able to practically govern the dioceses. The State reached its goal. However, so as to avoid all possibility of deviationism among the new diocesan directors, the Government placed in every episcopal see a Party man to supervise everything (correspondence, recruitment of clerics, theology courses, etc.) and to report to the State Bureau for Ecclesiastical Affairs. 155

The first act of the new "ecclesiastical directors" was to offer to the State, in gratitude for the agreement concluded with the Government, and as a "voluntary donation", all landed property still possessed by the Church. 156 Any

154. Gsovski, op.cit., pp. 143-144.

155. This "Commissioner" of the State Bureau for Ecclesiastical Affairs effectively controlled and continues to control the whole administration of the dioceses.

156. Magyar Kurir (Budapest), August 14, 1951.

priest having a benefice could now hold only 800 square meters of land. ¹⁵⁷ Ecclesiastical organizations had a right only to the same amount as an individual. Thus the clergy lost all economic independence. The land thus acquired by the State was used to establish a Fund, administered by the State Bureau for Ecclesiastical Affairs, which helped to pay a part of the clergy's salaries.

In the other field of Church activity also the effects of this change were very much in evidence. Diocesan bulletins appeared in which it was attempted to prove from Sacred Scripture that the Communist social system was the ideal form of Christianity. ¹⁵⁸ In them the faithful were reminded of their obligation to bring their produce to the collecting centers, to complete as soon as possible their work in the fields, to take part in production competitions, etc. Parish priests were removed from their parishes without any canonical justification, merely to have members of the Peace movement placed in the more important parishes. Canonical penalties were inflicted on priests who refused - remaining faithful to their vocation - to fall into line with State regulations. ¹⁵⁹ Besides, whatever may have been

157. Galter, op.cit., p. 249.

158. "Thank God for the advent of a new era: the era of Socialism. The path of the future is the path of Socialism. At no time in history has Christianity found a current of thought as akin to its own, as basically alike and intimately inter-linked, as Socialism." Cf.: The Relationship...op.cit., p. 19.

159. A Kereszt (Budapest), September 14, 1951.

its intention in professing submission to the Holy See in all questions of faith and morals, the movement in its external conduct so acted as to beget in the minds of the faithful, if not aversion for, then at least mistrust of the Holy See.

b. The establishment of a Government Bureau
for Church Affairs.

The establishment of a Government Bureau for Church Affairs, less than two years after the principle of separation of Church and State was enacted in the new Constitution, represents a decisive step taken by the Communist Government in its campaign to assume full control over church activities. The establishment of the Bureau, according to the official spokesmen of the Government, was to symbolize the separation of Church and State! But the real purpose of it is clearly revealed in the decree which established it. ¹⁶⁰ According to these provisions the jurisdiction of the Bureau extends to "preparing statutes relating to churches and securing the enforcement of these statutes" and "carrying out the measures undertaken by the Cabinet in church affairs and controlling their fulfillment." ¹⁶¹

160. Decree No. 110 of 1951 M.T. Sec.1.Subsec.1, Par. (f) and (i) enforcing Law No. I. of 1951.

161. Gsovski, op.cit., p. 99.

But the sad truth was that the purpose and goal of the new Bureau was to strip ecclesiastical authorities of every vestige of their independence and dignity. The provisions quoted above actually gave the Bureau full power to interfere in church affairs at will, as was amply illustrated by subsequent developments. Officials of the Bureau, men who had been weaned away from religion and who lacked every vestige of familiarity with ecclesiastical affairs, were deputed to all the diocesan chanceries and vested with power to approve and veto any decision reached by the Bishop or his associates. All meetings, appointments of priests to parishes, business affairs, and pastoral letters, were invalid until the representative of the Bureau has given his assent. To each there was attached a group of spies who reported on every real or fancied deviation from the rules.

Istvan Kossa, Secretary General of the Council of the Trade Unions and a leading member of the Communist Party, was appointed first President of the Bureau.¹⁶² There are also subordinate agencies, since the District Local Councils (Soviets) must include a comparatively high-ranking official for handling church-affairs.¹⁶³

To conclude the above and to give the reader an idea of the powers and the working of the Bureau, we reproduce the full text of Law No. 1. on the establishment of the same and also Decree No. 110. of 1951 M.T. referred to in note 160.

162. Magyar Kozlony (Budapest), No. 77. May 1951. p. 435.

163. Decree No. 1016 of 1952 M.T. (June 1, 1952).

"Law No. I. of 1951, on the Establishment of a Government Bureau for Church Affairs.

Sec.1. (1) A Government Bureau for Church Affairs shall be established for the purpose of settling matters between the State and the religious denominations, especially for the purpose of carrying out the agreements and settlements concluded with the various religious denominations and of State support of religious denominations.

(2) The Government Bureau for Church Affairs shall be placed under the supreme supervision of the Cabinet. The Cabinet shall exercise its right of supreme control through one of its members.

Sec.2. (1) The Cabinet shall establish by a Decree ¹⁶⁴ the provisions on the organization, jurisdiction, and activity of the State Office for Church Affairs.

(2) The appropriation for expenditures for personnel and supplies connected with the organization and activity of the Government Bureau for Church Affairs shall be provided under a special title in the budget of the State.

Sec.3. As a result of the establishment of the Government Bureau for Church Affairs, the jurisdiction of the Ministry for Religion and Public Education on Church Affairs shall be discontinued and consequently reference to religion (Church Affairs) shall be omitted in the name of the Ministry.

Sec.4. The Cabinet shall be in charge of enforcing the present law." ¹⁶⁵

Specific powers of the Church Bureau were determined in a Decree, accompanying the above law:

164. Given immediately below.

165. Gsovski, op.cit., p. 131.

Sec.1. (1) The jurisdiction of the Government Bureau for Church Affairs (henceforth referred to as Bureau) established by Law No. I. of 1951, shall extend to the following matters:

- a./ carrying out agreements and settlements concluded with the Churches and religious denominations;
- b./ administering personnel and business affairs connected with State contributions to the Churches and religious denominations;
- c./ remitting contributions for personnel and business affairs for the purpose and maintaining the general high schools of Churches and religious denominations exempted from nationalization;
- d./ granting appropriations for religious instruction in schools;
- e./ administering ecclesiastical funds and other matters related to ecclesiastical property rights;
- f./ preparing statutes relating to Churches and securing the enforcement of these statutes;
- g./ administering matters connected with securing the liberty of conscience and free exercise of religion and securing the undisturbed exercise of religious functions;
- h./ performing all other activities pertaining to the jurisdiction of Church administration of which the Minister of Religion and Public Education was in charge before Law No. I. of 1951 had become effective;
- i./ carrying out measures undertaken by the Cabinet in Church affairs and controlling their administration.

Sec.2. (1) The Bureau shall be headed by a President to be appointed by the Presidium of the People's Republic upon the proposal of the Cabinet.

(2) In fulfilling his duties, the President shall be supported by a deputy President to be appointed by the Cabinet upon the proposal of the Prime Minister.

(3) The President shall appoint the personnel of the Bureau or assign them to their service.

Sec.3. The President of the Bureau shall assign the personnel their work and shall establish the administration of business and schedule of activities of the Bureau according to the provisions of the rules for public administration. In its proceedings, the office shall be in immediate contact with the ministers and other State agencies. ¹⁶⁶

c. Appointment of Prelates subjected to Government Approval.

On July 4, 1951, the Presidential Council of the People's Republic issued a new decree on the formalities to be observed in filling vacant ecclesiastical sees. It stipulated among other things that previous consent of the State was necessary in appointing bishops to vacant sees, and the decree was made retroactive to January 1, 1946, or, in other words, for six and a half years. Another provision made it to remain in full force until a "bilateral agreement" could be reached on filling these church posts. Although the Holy See is not expressly mentioned in the text, it seems obvious that it was intended to make the Holy See conclude an agreement with the Communist Hungarian Government. ¹⁶⁷

166. Ibid., p. 131.

167. In 1945, the Occupying Powers, bowing to Russian insistence, ousted all neutral diplomats, including

Edict No. 20 of 1951 reads as follows:

Sec.1. Archbishops, suffragan archbishops, bishops, suffragan bishops, abbots, and provincials of religious orders within the territory of Hungary may be appointed only with the preliminary approval of the Presidium of the People's Republic.

Sec.2. The provisions of Section 1 shall be applied for all appointments which have been made since January 1, 1946, to the positions of the Catholic Church enumerated above.

Sec.3. The present Edict shall become effective on the day of its publication, and its provisions shall remain in force until an adequate new settlement shall be reached, by way of a bilateral agreement, concerning the filling of the Church positions mentioned above. 168

Monsignor (Archbishop) Angelo Rotta, the Apostolic Nuncio. Nevertheless the Government continued to profess an interest in restoring cordial relations with the Papal State. The Tildy Government of 1945, the Nagy Government of 1946, and even the Dinnyes Government of 1947, repeatedly indicated a concern with the problem. When Cardinal Mindszenty went to Rome in 1946, he was requested to take the necessary steps to see whether a *modus vivendi* could be established. He returned with the assurance that the Vatican for its part was ready to resume relations. But the Allied Control Commission, acting again under Russian pressure, decided that treating officially with the Vatican was not desirable until a Peace Treaty was signed. This was also the view of Rakosi, who on the one hand professed to be highly in favor of diplomatic relations and the other opposed to having any nuncio in particular, since he might turn out to be "another Mindszenty!" (Cf.: Schuster, *op.cit.*, p. 260). When after the Summer of 1948 a wholly critical situation developed, the Holy See officially advised the Hungarian Government that Msgr. Rotta was desirous of visiting Hungary on a mission of inquiry and was prepared to arrive as soon as a Diplomatic Visa was issued to him. His hope was to secure at first hand, information about what was happening so that Rome would be in a better position to form a judgment and determine upon a policy. After procrastinating, the Government replied that the visa would be issued if Msgr. Rotta promised to denounce the Cardinal. This condition was, of course, rejected.

This decree is a milestone in the recent history of the Catholic Church in Hungary. At the time of its issuance two archbishops were in prison; four bishops were under house arrest; two diocesan ordinaries, five auxiliary bishops and the Abbot General of the Benedictines at Pannonhalma were not recognized by the State. There were, at this time, only four bishops free and having State recognition. Furthermore, on July 9th of the same year, all junior seminaries were suppressed. By the autumn of 1952, the major seminaries were closed at Szombathely, Veszprem, Szeksfehervar, Pecs, Kalocsa, Vac and Hejce. Only five major seminaries were functioning: The Central Seminary at Budapest, the seminaries at Esztergom, Szeged, Eger and Gyor (all of which had now become inter-diocesan), and the seminary of the Oriental Catholic rite at Nyiregyhaza (Diocese of Hajdudorog). 169

By the decree the Government intended to place the bishops in a most serious dilemma: they must either accept the conditions laid down by the Government or be completely cut off from the religious life of the country. Actually, this decree finally prompted the bishops to take the controversial oath of loyalty to the Hungarian People's Democracy, as it was shown above.

d. Other restrictions.

There are other restrictions (some still being issued from time to time), further restricting what religious freedoms remained after those of even more profound importance. In 1951, for instance, a special Fund for Church Affairs was established by decree,¹⁷⁰ to consist partly of the equivalent of "lands voluntarily offered by the individual churches to the State."¹⁷¹ The administration of this Fund was assigned to the Bureau of Church Affairs. In effect, therefore, the president of the Bureau has financial control over the clergy and what real property assets are still left to the churches. Moreover, as priests are now paid and even appointed by the Government, this control has become full and complete. On April 27, 1951, the Cabinet empowered the Minister for Religion and Public Education to raise, in agreement with the Minister of Finance, the stipends paid to the lower clergy.¹⁷² The wording of the official press-release on the Cabinet meeting reveals that it is up to the discretion of the Minister of Religion and Public Education (now the President of the Bureau) whether or not he grants pay raise in an individual case.¹⁷³ Moreover, old age contribution is payable from the day when the individual priest

170. Decree No. 170 of 1951 M.T.

171. See page 100.

172. Magyar Nemzet (Budapest), April 28, 1951.

173. Gsovski, op.cit., p. 100.

took his oath of loyalty to the Government. A pamphlet published by the Legation of the Hungarian People's Republic in Washington, D.C. ¹⁷⁴ discloses that "the Government appoints the religious administrative personnel as well as the low clergy." With this measure, the Government gained full control over the clergy.

To conclude the above partial, but representative list of Government regulations on Church matters, we would like to mention one more regulation, the existence of which clearly shows the intent of Communist take-over in things religious. This is the decree on the production and reproduction of art objects. ¹⁷⁵ This decree, issued in 1951, made the commercial production and reproduction, industrially or manually, of any objects of art, and trade involving such objects, subject to special permission of the Minister for the People's Education. Since pictures and statues of religious devotion are also under this provision, ¹⁷⁶ the production and reproduction of such objects of art are likewise subject to a special permit of the Government.

174. "The Accord Between the Hungarian Church and State." - published by the Legation of the Hungarian People's Republic; Washington, D.C., n.d., p. 3.

175. Decree No. 212 of 1951 (XII.15) M.T.

176. Gsovski, op.cit., p. 101.

CHAPTER IX

Cardinal Mindszenty and the Mindszenty Trial.

During the course of the year 1948, Government policy with regard to the Catholic Church was wholly directed towards isolating Cardinal Mindszenty from the clergy and the faithful. Before adopting direct measures against the Primate, the Communists tried every means to discredit him in the eyes of the masses. Moreover, they began limiting the opportunities for contact between the Cardinal and the faithful, not only by making it difficult for him to have access to them directly, but also restricting the relations he might have with his flock through the medium of the clergy.

As early as the beginning of 1948, Matyas Rakosi had told functionaries during a discourse on the Party programme that the problem of relations between Church and State would be solved during that year in one way or another. Of course the real problem to be solved was Cardinal Mindszenty himself.

"The Hungarian democracy, -said the Communist leader- has for three years tried every expedient to incorporate the Catholic Church in its reconstruction schemes but without success...Hungarian democracy must change the policy it has adopted so far. From now on we need to show no tolerance but rather unbending severity in our treatment of spies, traitors, traders in illegal exchange, and Fascists, who hide beneath the robes of priests and cardinals. It is incompatible with the stable organization of our democracy that a Fascist and reactionary gang, such as lead by Mindszenty, should continue to disturb our reconstructive efforts.

Our evolution demands that order should reign in this domain too, and if we cannot establish order by means of a reciprocal agreement, ¹⁷⁷ very well then! We shall obey the will of the people, ¹⁷⁸ and establish it by the strong arm of the State! ¹⁷⁹

Earlier in the same year Rakosi during an interview given for the New York Communist Daily Worker had said the following:

"The Roman Catholic Church is the enemy of Hungarian democracy because in connection with the land-reform one million acres were taken away from the bishops and given to the Hungarian peasants. ¹⁸⁰ The Catholic Church

177. The reciprocal agreement of which Rakosi speaks here is best illustrated by the following conversation between Rakosi and Archbishop Czapik during the 1950 negotiations between the Catholic Church and the Government: Czapik: "In four years, you people in the Government have not kept one of your promises. What assurance have we that you will keep the new ones?" Rakosi: "Very well. You don't believe us. What are you going to do about it?" Time (New York), October 9, 1950.
178. How Rakosi felt about the "will" of the people, can be illustrated by another conversation during the same negotiations. This exchange took place between Rakosi and a priest-representative of the Catholic Church, Fr. Horvath, S.J., who opened the conversation by demanding the release of Cardinal Mindszenty. Rakosi: "Please, no arguments. The people decided that." Fr. Horvath: "You know as well as I do who really decided that. It was anything but the people's decision." Rakosi: "It's no use. We can't turn the clocks back." Tobias, op.cit., p. 482.
179. Galter, op.cit., p. 224.
180. The Catholic Magyar Kurir immediately commented on the Deputy-Prime-Minister's statements: "It is untrue to state that a million acres were taken from the bishops and given to "Hungarian peasants." The episcopal property which was expropriated consisted of only 130,000 assessed acres, that is, about 73,000 hectares. Of this, only 90,000 acres (52,000 hectares) were distributed among peasants. When the plan for land-reform appeared for the first time, the Church did not oppose it in the least. Since the land was distributed, the Hungarian

longs to return to the times when its huge estates assumed it a significant role in economic and political life." 181

Another publication of semi-official nature 182 thus summarizes the grievances against the Cardinal:

"...the relationship between the Catholic Church and the democratic Hungarian State took an unfavorable turn already in the fall of 1945. Contrary to the suggestions of the Hungarian Government, the Vatican named Jozsef Mindszenty as Archbishop of Esztergom and Prime-Primate of the country. Jozsef Mindszenty refused to take cognizance of the political and social changes which had occurred, within legal bounds, in Hungary since the Liberation; he refused to recognize the new legal order. Jozsef Mindszenty attempted primarily to restore Catholicism to its erstwhile role in public law, which created a state within the State. In feudal fashion, he called himself the "first banneret" of the country - that is, he assumed an entirely obsolete and invalidated title in public law, and on the basis of this title he arrogated to himself the right to interfere in questions affecting the political and economic life of the nation.

With the restoration of this political catholicism, he intended to pave the way for reinstatement of old conditions of landownership, the restitution of church property, and finally the revival of the defunct reactionary political system. He gave first expression to these purely political ambitions, which had no relevance whatever to religion, on October 18, 1945, in a circular letter issued by the Catholic Episcopate, which he signed in the name of the Catholic Episcopate. 183

Bishops have never claimed that they should be restored, either in their pastoral letter of 1945 or later." Cardinal Mindszenty Speaks, op.cit., pp. 154-155.

181. Ibid., p. 154.

182. The Relationship..., op.cit., p. 3.

183. This first pastoral letter was given in detail and commented on in the early part of this paper on pages 15-16.

In this letter he openly denounced democracy and land reform in such flagrant terms that all democratic parties were compelled to condemn the circular in a joint declaration.¹⁸⁴ This date marks the beginning of the steady deterioration of the relationship between the Church and State in Hungary."

Attempts to discredit the Cardinal and separate him and his policies from the Catholic Hierarchy were numerous and early. A vigorous newspaper campaign was launched trying to show that there were strong differences of opinion between members of the Hierarchy towards Communism. When this campaign had reached its peak around the end of 1947, the Bishops felt compelled to interfere officially, by publishing the following joint letter:

"...the Hungarian Episcopal Body in a plenary session held September 6th, angrily rejects the malicious articles which continually appear in the press, by which it is wished to put the activity of the Cardinal Primate in a bad light before the faithful, and which would have it believed that the Episcopal Body, or a part thereof, or some of its individual members, do not share the Primate's position and they even oppose it. In order to calm and to inform our faithful, we declare that each member of the Episcopal Body not only does not disapprove the many and courageous comportment of the Cardinal Prince Primate in defense of the Church, the freedom of conscience and of the real interests of the fatherland, but, instead, adheres to it unconditionally and approves, supports and serves it with all its might..."¹⁸⁵

This struggle to break the unity of the Hungarian Episcopate reached its real climax in August 1948, when the Government thought it had completely isolated the Cardinal. Day in and

184. "Compelled" is the right word used by this text, as Member Parties of the "Independence Front" acted under orders received by the Russian Occupation Forces.

185. Gussoni-Brunello, op.cit., p. 195.

day out, the Government had been sending delegations to different bishops, partly to protest against the "warlike policy of Mindszenty", and partly to convince them to detach themselves from the Cardinal. ¹⁸⁶

Public opinion in this period was assailed by statements attributed to bishops which they had never made, or which, at best, had been greatly distorted. The bishops had no opportunity to make corrections, nor did the newspapers report their denials.

Cardinal Mindszenty himself had to intervene against this state of affairs. In a letter to the people, dated November 18, 1948, he denounced the open struggle which the regime had unleashed against him. Here is the full text of the letter:

"Beloved in Christ,

For many weeks attempts have been made to state "resolutions" directed against me in all the townships and village communities of Hungary. They condemn the "counter-revolution and anti-democratism promoted and re-kindled" by me on the occasion of the Marian days organized in the various centers of the country in 1947-1948. They deplore the failure to achieve an agreement between Church and State, claiming the "impediment" of my "harmful activities."

The Marian days had the single purpose of deepening the traditional Marian cult and strengthening religious conscience. Insofar as regards the attacks made upon me during these celebrations, the Episcopate has

186. The Vice-President of the Council, Rakosi, deliberately ignoring the Primate, requested a declaration of loyalty and to oblige Catholics to profess obedience to the State and the so-called progressive democracy from Archbishop Szapik of Eger in a letter dated May 7, 1948.

identified itself with me. This solidarity demonstrates to those millions of citizens who constitute public opinion -in face of whose heroic perseverance the persecutors must employ so many methods humiliating to them, and irreconcilable with the freedom of religion guaranteed by law- the failure of the Government propaganda to divide us.

As regards the legal value of the "motions" it must be declared, that notwithstanding the many official promises formulated since the end of the second World War and later, there have not been any local elections held except in the capital. Therefore the "motions" adopted in the counties, in the cities and in the communes, substantially do not have any juridical base. The approval of such "motions," forcibly obtained from individuals by the threat of the loss of their means of existence and their personal freedom, while the entire public opinion of the country is condemned to silence, constitutes a frivolous mockery of public life. The freedom of speech of democracy expresses itself in these motions by the absolute exclusion of any debate, and if, as some significant examples show, there be some who dare to protest, the consequence is the loss of his job or some similar hardship. The suffering of these courageous persons causes me deep sorrow. All those who fought against force, have my deepest compassion. These noble examples of strenght of soul and faithfulness have greatly moved me.

As regards the alleged "offenses" alleged to us, our attackers have once more, as has been the case from the beginning, failed to confute any of our statements. We have repeatedly urged the Government to publish those letters of mine to which it objects and to submit them to the judgement of the country and the world. This has not happened. The Government contents itself with vague and generic accusations.

As regards the lack of an agreement between the Church and the State, or better between the Church and the political parties, it is commonly known that the invitation to negotiate and to participate in the conference called for that purpose arrived after a delay of three months. Naturally, the Church is saddled with the responsibility for the absence of conciliation.

There is something deeply disconcerting in the fact, that insofar as regards the Marian days organized at various communities, complaints were formulated not by the Church, but by those who carried out arbitrary and coercitive acts.

Even the inmates of Kohida were forced to sign a declaration of protest against me. I was once held in that very prison by Hungarian Nazis, together with Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky¹⁸⁷ and twenty-six of my priests. Even those who were arrested by the Nazis would remember all this. But I view with calm this artificially roused tempest. At the post where I stand guard, not on the authority of parties, but by the grace and trust of the Apostolic Holy See, such tempests are not rare in annals and battles of history. Two before me had all their properties confiscated; John Vitez was imprisoned, Martinuzzi was killed by the hired assassins of those in power, Pazmany, the greatest of all, was exiled...But none of my 78 predecessors was attacked as I am, by such flood of strident lies, deliberately fabricated, a hundred times denied, but stubbornly repeated.

I rest solidly on my positions for God, for the Church and for Fatherland, because this is the duty which history imposes on me in the service of my people, the most derelict of all peoples in this world. In the face of the sufferings of my nation, my fate is of no importance.

I do not accuse my accusers. If from time to time I am compelled to clarify the situation, this serves only as an act of justice toward my country because of its lacerating sufferings, its flowing tears, and its invocations of justice."¹⁸⁸

All these attempts had no other aim, except of preparing the final attack against the hierarchy and the clergy. Arrests

187. Bajcsy-Zsilinszky rose from the ranks of the Smallholder deputies to become one of its outstanding leaders in the Parliament during the Nazi era. He prepared a memorandum, signed by all Smallholder deputies, setting forth several measures which the Smallholders felt were necessary to the preservation of the nation during World War II. Among these were: Hungary should quit the war and declare its neutrality; the Government should recall all Hungarian troops from the Russian front; all officers in sympathy with Germany and National Socialism should be removed from the army; the persecution of the Jews should cease immediately; a bill insuring equality before the law for all minorities should be prepared.

188. Gussoni-Brunello, op.cit., pp. 196-198.

of one priest after the other began around September 1. The arrests were made for the most different reasons and, without trial, they were sent to concentration camps.

Deputy-Prime-Minister Rakosi in a speech against the Catholic Church on November 28, 1948, hinted that even more severe measures were in store.

"Now there can no longer be any political tolerance. This tolerant policy, which used kid gloves for dealing with spies, traitors, smugglers, adherents of the royal Hapsburgs and other reactionaries moving about in the gowns of priests or those of a cardinal, is over and done with forever. The law must be applied, not only to small clerical criminals. We cannot allow such organized shock troops of Fascism as clerical reaction to disturb any longer our reconstruction and stabilization." 189

Sensing his fate, the Cardinal's last Advent message contains his last instructions for his priests:

"So far as concerns signatures to declarations against me demanded of the people by the secular authorities, I have tried to ease the conscience of the faithful. This does not apply, of course, to secular priests or any member of a religious order. In future there will hardly be an opportunity for such alleviations. We must stand firm.

Should, by force of circumstances, an interruption occur in our pastoral letters, you have sufficient guidance in the Papal Encyclical Letters and addresses in recent years. You must not fail to make full use of them and read them time and again." 190

On the evening of December 26, 1948, the second feast day of Christmas, Cardinal Mindszenty was arrested by Hungarian se-

189. J. B. Barron and H. M. Waddams, Communism and the Churches (SCM Press: London, 1950), p. 66.

190. Cardinal Mindszenty Speaks, op.cit., p. 214.

curity police. The next morning came the following official announcement:

"Jozsef Mindszenty, Archbishop of Esztergom, was arrested today by order of the Hungarian Ministry of Interior." ¹⁹¹

Half an hour before he was arrested, the Cardinal managed to put down on an old envelop the following statement and to pass it ~~one~~:

"I have partaken in no conspiracy whatsoever. I shall not resign my episcopal see. I shall make no confession. If, however, despite this you should read that I confessed or that I resigned, and even see it authenticated by my signature thereto, regard that as merely the consequence of human frailty; and in advance I declare such acts null and void." ¹⁹²

The Cardinal's trial began on February 3, 1949 and ended in the condemnation of the Prince-Primate to life imprisonment on charges of treason, espionage, plotting against the safety of the State and illicit trading in exchange. The Communist court, presided over by Vilmos Olti, jurist who had served the Nazis well, even as he stood now ready to do the bidding of their Russian successors, handed down the verdict which read in part as follows:

"Jozsef Mindszenty, the first accused, is sentenced herewith...to the cumulative penalty of penal servitude for life, to ten years' loss of office and ten years' suspension of his political rights; further to the confiscation of all his property as supplemen-

191. Ibid.

192. Ibid.

tary punishment." 193

The trial has been very carefully described in minute detail by a number of writers. ¹⁹⁴ It is not within the scope of this paper to go into minor details; we shall limit our discussion to the legality of the proceedings and the objective value of the charges. ¹⁹⁵

Let us see first the English translation of the charges, as printed in the publication: The Trial of Jozsef Mindszenty, published by the Hungarian State Publishing House, Budapest, 1949, pp. 162-163.:

"Jozsef Mindszenty, the first accused, is guilty of:

- a./ the crime of leading an organization aimed at the overthrow of the Republic and the democratic State order, committed once, falling under Law VII: 1946, Article 1, Paragraph 1;

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193. The property of the Cardinal was found to consist almost entirely of a battered second-hand automobile which he purchased shortly after the war ended, with money that had come from the United States. There was also a cow, which animal had been brought as a calf from the farm of his mother in Csehimindszent, together with two small pigs.
194. Cf.: Documents on the Mindszenty Case, the Governments Yellow Book (Atheneum: Budapest, 1949); The Trial of Jozsef Mindszenty, (Hungarian State Publishing House: Budapest, 1949); Stephen K. Swift, The Cardinal's Story (New York; The Macmillan Co., 1949); George N. Schuster, In Silence I Speak (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1956); Bela Fabian, Cardinal Mindszenty: The Story of a Modern Martyr (New York, 1949) and many others.
195. In this we shall follow -partly- the excellent analysis of Gsovski in op.cit., pp. 113-127.

- b./ of the crime of treason, committed once continuously, falling under Law III:1930, Article 58; and guilty of
- c./ the crime of treason defined in Law III: 1930, Article 60, Paragraph 3, and qualified according to Law XVIII:1934, Article 2, Paragraph 1, committed once; and guilty of
- d./ the crime of failing to deposit into a blocked account foreign currency, and failing to declare foreign assets, committed once and continuously, defined in Decree 8400/1946, Article 1, Paragraph 1.
Item (a) further owing to the infringement of the obligation comprised in Paragraph 2, Item (b) and considering Article 17, Paragraph 1, qualified according to Paragraph 2, of the said Article; and guilty of
- e./ the crime of speculation with foreign currency, committed once continuously, defined and punishable in consideration of Law XXVI:1922, Article 1, Paragraph 1, Item 1, and of Law XIV: 1939, Article 1, as set out in P.M. Decree No. 8800/1946, Article 20, Paragraph 2; and guilty of
- f./ the crime of having sent out of the country foreign currency without a permit, committed once, defined under the infringement of the prohibition comprised in P.M. Decree No. 8400: 1946, Article 4, Paragraph 1, and Article 17 of the same Decree Paragraph 1; and guilty of
- g./ the crime of disposing without proper permit of valuables falling under declaration, committed once, and defined under the prohibition laid down in P.M. Decree No. 8400/1946, Article 3, Paragraph 3, and Article 17 of the same Decree Paragraph 1, Item I."

A legal analysis of the trial shows that there was a full confession of the defendants that the charges were true; that there was a very poor evidence offered by the prosecution, and, further, the complete lack of evidence on the part of the defense. Defendants' confessions were used

as the principal evidence for their conviction. All seven defendants of the Mindszenty case were actually convicted on their own confession. The persecution's strongest evidence was the testimony of the various defendants against each other. In the case there was no testimony beside that of the defendants, or if there was, the Government did not find it necessary to publish it in its official publication, the so called "Black Book" on the Mindszenty case.

A shadow of mystery, impenetrable by legal analysis, lies over these self-accusations. It seems strange that all the defendants confessed in full and that none of them tried to defend himself or even find an excuse for the acts with which he was charged. The charges were grave and the foundation of the charges as presented by the prosecution was exceptionally poor. A number of medical considerations which suggest the use of certain drugs to achieve "depersonalization" of the accused, could offer the desired answer to this mystery.¹⁹⁶ Otherwise it is almost impossible to explain the complete breakdown of the Cardinal and his "accomplices" by the time of the trial - and even before, as witnessed in his letter to the Minister of Justice, previous to the trial, beginning on February 3, 1949:

"Dear Sir: I beg the Minister of Justice to consider my announcement or rather request. For some time, publicly and repeatedly, there has been raised against me the complaint that I stand in the way of an agree-

Cf.: Swift, op.cit., pp. 124-129., where the use of Actedron is being suggested as a possible explanation to the above problem.

ment between the State and Church, and that my attitude is hostile to the present order of the State. As for the former, it is a fact that I always emphasized the prerequisites. Now I want to contribute to an improvement to the general situation. Before the trial, which is soon to open, I voluntarily admit that I have committed the acts I am charged with according to the penal code of the State. In the future I shall always judge the external and internal affairs of the State on the basis of the full sovereignty of the Hungarian Republic.

After this admission and declaration, the trial regarding my person does not seem to be absolutely necessary. Therefore, not because of my person, but considering my position, I ask that my case be exempted from the trial on February 3rd. Such a decision, more than anything else, would facilitate a solution, even more than the wisest judgement of the Court.

After thirty-five days of constant meditation, I also declare that apart from other reasons, it may have been due to me, to my attitude as described above, that reconciliation has been delayed; and also that I consider the establishment of true peace between the State and Church necessary, as long as it has not been made. I, too, would take part in the realization of this reconciliation, according to the teachings and laws of the Church, were not complaints against me just in this respect. But in order that I should be no obstacle to reconciliation and that all efforts should be concentrated on avoiding the usual material obstacles, I declare hereby, of my own accord, without any compulsion, that I am ready to withdraw for a time from exercising my office.

If the wisdom of the Bench of Bishops considers it best to make peace, I do not wish to stand in the way at all. Even the Apostolic Holy See, which has the last word in this matter, I would not oppose the materialization of the cause of peace. I make this statement in the knowledge that a true state of peace can be only to the good of both the State and the Church and without it the life of the country is threatened by discord and decay." 197

Another observation concerns the question of the defense. The presiding judge announced at the beginning of the trials that all of the defendants but one had a defense counsel of his own choice.¹⁹⁸ Nevertheless none of these counsels offered evidence of any kind, the counsels directed questions to the witnesses (who usually were his client's fellow defendants). Naturally, after the defendants confessed to the charges, it would be very difficult for the defense counsels to deny the acts. But none of these counsels examined the background of the confessions, nor did they raise any legal issue, although there were plenty of legal questions to be presented to the court.

The first of these questions was the charge of tradition. The prosecution made its charge on the theory that anything against the present order, but specifically aiming at the restoration of the monarchy was a crime. There seems to be here a contrast between the law as it is written¹⁹⁹ and

198. Msgr. Andrew Zakar, Cardinal Mindszenty's secretary, did not employ a lawyer but had one appointed by the court.

199. The charges of sedition were based on the Law on the Protection of the Democratic Political Order and the Republic, which reads in part: "Whoever commits an act which aims the overthrowing the democratic political order or the Democratic Republic established by Law I, of 1946, or initiates, leads or aids substantially and materially a movement or organization having the same aim, shall be punished for a crime." (Law No. VII. of 1946. Section 1, Subsection 1.) This new concept of sedition together with the new concept of criminal law was explained in a message by the Minister of Justice himself. Among other things he said: "Democracy is the foundation of our political system and therefore deserves absolute protection by means of criminal law, while

as was applied by the court. The law itself specifies "overthrow", and the message of the Minister of the Justice emphasizes that the text of the law aims to assure the rights of the citizen to change the form of government "within the limits of the law." 200

The court did not judge the activity in the interest of the restoration of the monarchy as a part of the right mentioned in the ministerial message, but declared by accepting the views of the prosecution: "Hapsburg rule and democracy cannot exist side by side." 201 The prosecutor never tried to prove his view, nor did the defense even attempt to challenge it.

The defense gave the treason charge the same superficial consideration. No comparison was made between the position of the U.S.A. and that of the U.S.S.R. Nobody mentioned that the U.S.A. was a signatory power to the armistice and should be entitled equally with the U.S.S.R., to have an interest in the future development of Hungary.

The "treason" charge extended to such acts as communication with Hungarian priests abroad and especially to the

the Republic, as a constitutional institution, does not deserve protection to such an extent. Consequently any attempt to overthrow or disturb the democratic political order is a crime, while only unlawful activity (i. e. coupled with violence) designed to change the republican form of government is prohibited." Message accompanying the Bill. Cf.: Gsovski, op.cit., pp. 117-118.)

200. The discrepancy can be observed clearly in the above footnote.

201. Gsovski, op.cit., p. 125.

Cardinal's contacts with his fellow Cardinals. The defense again neglected to challenge the qualification of these acts as treason and nobody pointed out that the prosecution proved nothing as to the "spying" activities of Cardinal Mindszenty. The record of the trial published by the Government does not show that the Cardinal ever transmitted any classified secret or anything which could hurt his country.

Similarly, no defense whatsoever was offered against the charge of "currency offenses." None of the counsels suggested and none of the defendants attempted to defend themselves by calling upon the Hungarian National Bank for a statement of the official policy, which could have been that it was permissible to deal with foreign currency sent from abroad to the churches and charitable organizations, on an open market. 202

Two suppositions are possible about the defense: that the counsels were willing accomplices of the prosecution, or that they were intimidated. In either case, there was no defense. Without defense there is no fair trial.

Further considerations are offered by Sir David Maxwell Ffye, Prosecutor at the Nuremberg Trials of the war criminals, who made an extensive study of the Mindszenty trial:

"Was the judge truly independent? Did he have, or did he not have, an indication before the trial took place

202. See P. Beat Ambord, S.J., Der Vatican und die Kirche Hinter dem Eisernen Vorhang, (Eichstatt: Roma Verlag, 1951)., p. 48.

as to what his verdict ought to be?

To me there appears to be only one possible answer. He knew that the Hungarian authorities had prejudged the whole case and that if he gave a verdict of acquittal, as was done by the non-Nazi German Supreme Court after the Reichstag fire trial, it would be regarded as a setback for the regime. Let us ignore for the moment the question whether the judge's verdict was really right or wrong. Can it be said to be in conformity with the principles of justice that the trial should have been conducted by a judge who knew what verdict he was expected by the Government to give?

Let us see what indications there are of pressure having been brought upon the judge who tried Cardinal Mindszenty, such as the Nazis brought on their judges in the Special courts and People's Courts.

In the first place we have the astonishing fact that the Hungarian Government published, before the trial began, a book which has become known as the Yellow Book. It was entitled: Documents on the Mindszenty Case. It is published in English (and for all I know, in other languages as well). It contains photographs of Mindszenty and other persons associated with him, and photographs of many documents which were later to be used in the trial, including what purports to be the Cardinal's written confession.

Nothing could make it clearer, than the Yellow Book itself, that the Hungarian Government had prejudged the result of the trial and would have considered it a disaster if the trial resulted in an acquittal.

The Yellow Book says in its Introduction: The unmasking of Mindszenty and his accomplices, and their arrest, caused the greatest confusion among those whom he served, the western imperialists. Their press, their radio propaganda, and, moreover, statements by certain statesmen and bishops tried, by slander and denial, to whitewash Mindszenty, their accomplice.

The Hungarian Government wishes to publish in this book a few of those many proofs it has at its disposal, the greater part of which are from Mindszenty's secret buried files which will prove tangibly and

irrefutably to any unbiased man that Mindszenty and his company were guilty.

At the end of the Yellow Book appears the following paragraph: The above documents convincingly and undeniably justify the charges against Mindszenty, and the trial that is soon to begin will cast light on every aspect of Mindszenty's list of crimes. But even on the basis of the documents, every objective observer must recognize that there is no question of persecuting the church or the priests, or of infringing the freedom of worship, as some have falsely and tendentiously tried to make out, but of bringing a determined enemy of the Hungarian people to account.

After the publication of the Yellow Book, can it be said that there was no pressure on the judge to swerve from the impartial and unbiased course of justice?

The fact that the result of the trial was regarded as a foregone conclusion is further borne out by the manner in which the official radio broadcast of the trial was conducted. The official commentator introduced his own comments from time to time, for the whole of the Hungarian nation, and indeed the world, to hear, while the fate of the accused was still theoretically undecided.

The traitors are before their judges! he begins, then he goes on: Jozsef Mindszenty, an extreme-right-wing high church dignitary, who became disloyal to the teachings of Christ, who wanted to drag the country into catastrophe by political slogans wrapped up in pious sermons and pastoral letters, who wanted to deprive the Hungarian people of their democratic achievements. The vigilance of our State security organs unmasked this dangerous gang of criminals!

Was it conceivable that against this background the judge should feel able to give a verdict of "Not-Guilty?"

It must not be forgotten that under the Hungarian law governing the setting up and procedure of the People's courts, the presiding judge is removable and has no

security of office, and that his four assessors are direct appointees of the four parties forming the Government coalition. Is not this just how the Nazi People's Courts were constituted? Could such a court be expected to acquit the accused however the trial went?

Look, too, at the reasons given by the judge himself for the verdict. They consist largely of a political speech. The part occupied by the analysis of the evidence and the explanation how the evidence proved the charges is extremely small, at any rate, in the broadcast version and the version printed in the Black Book published after the trial. The conclusion had to resist that there were no really good grounds for conviction, except political pressure and political instructions to the judge. Turning from the judge to the defense counsel, one is amazed at the failure of the latter to stand up courageously for his client's rights." ²⁰³

To conclude the above, we can state that the trial gives the impression, that the question involved was not one of law but of politics. The defendants were either priests or laymen involved in Church affairs. The imprisonment of Cardinal Mindszenty was intended to deprive the Roman Catholic Church in Hungary of her leadership and prepare for her final subjugation to the State.

Before the arrest of Cardinal Mindszenty, the main issue was the nationalization of the denominational schools. The so-called agreement had to be signed, and Cardinal Mindszenty stood strongly against the secularizing forces. His leadership was not only effective but also quite annoying in the eyes of the Government. Masses of people followed him

203. Swift, op.cit., pp. 289-305. (Appendix I, B. Excerpts.)

and observed their religious duties more strictly and devoutly than ever before.

The following characteristic of the situation in the U.S.S.R. - as described by Dr. Vladimir Gsovski, - is also true of Hungary:

"Observance of the ecclesiastic tradition runs counter to the loyalty to the Government, which aims to eradicate religion. Therefore, a religious man is suspected in Soviet Russia of being inimical to the Government, and any accusation of the violation of the "separation of the State and Church" almost automatically involves accusation of counter revolution." 204

Although the accusation in the Mindszenty trial is not counter revolution but sedition and treason, the Soviet principle, that all available and necessary means must be employed against the survival of the Church, remains unchanged. Thus the trial represents the application of the Bolshevik formula to the relations of Church and State.

The official interpretation of the laws, together with the Hungarian courts' organization on a pure party-political line, the weakness of the facts presented by the prosecution, the loose legal construction of the charges, the absence of defense, and the incredible confession in full of all defendants made the Mindszenty Case a political trial par excellence.

The statement of former Secretary of State, Dean Acheson on the Mindszenty trial, seems to be fully justified

204. Cf., Vladimir Gsovski, "The Legal Status of the Church in Soviet Russia," Fordham Law Review, January, 1939.

by the legal analysis:

"In their conduct of the case of Cardinal Mindszenty, the Hungarian authorities do not appear to have omitted any of the usual methods practiced by a police State. Such a proceeding constitutes not the administration of justice, but wanton persecution." 205

CHAPTER X

Agreement between the Roman Catholic Church
and the Hungarian People's Democracy.

Prior to the Communist regime in Hungary the status of religious denominations generally was regulated by laws. Beginning in 1948 various agreements were concluded with the denominations, representing a new means of regulating the status of the denominations.

On May 15, 1948, Gyula Ortutay, Minister of Religion and Public Education, requested in a press conference that representatives of the Roman Catholic, Reformed, Evangelical, and Unitarian Churches open negotiations for the settlement of differences with the Government.²⁰⁶ These negotiations actually took place -as it will be shown- with the representatives of the Catholic Church abstaining. On August 30, 1950, almost two years later, prompted by the events as described above (nationalization of the schools, severing the work of the religious and the imprisonment of Cardinal Mindszenty, just to mention a few), an agreement was concluded with the Roman Catholic Bench of Bishops. In comparison with the other agreements its much more severe provisions and the late date of its conclusion clearly reflect the hard struggle preceding its conclusion and the progress made meantime in

206. Szabad Nep (Budapest), No. 112; May 15, 1948.

the Communist Government's antireligious policy in Hungary.

The first approach was made by Ortutay, who sent a letter to the Roman Catholic Bench of Bishops inviting them to negotiate, on May 9, 1948.²⁰⁷ On May 15, he informed the press of this invitation and the same time disclosed the governmental plan to nationalize the denominational schools.²⁰⁸ On May 19, Cardinal Mindszenty, in answer to Ortutay's letter, agreed in principle to negotiate under the following conditions:

- 1./ that the plan to nationalize the denominational schools be revoked by the Government;
- 2./ that the dissolved Catholic Associations be re-established and their confiscated property restored;
- 3./ that permission be granted to start a Catholic non-party newspaper.²⁰⁹

Without referring to the above points, Ortutay in a letter of June 14, 1948, suggested that Cardinal Mindszenty might treat the school problem as a question of detail on the agenda of the negotiations.²¹⁰ On June 13, Deputy-Premier Rakosi warned the Catholic Church against opposing the Government, and to make an early pact with the Government: "Anyone who opposes the democratic laws of the country, will be

207. Cardinal Mindszenty Speaks, op.cit., p. 152.

208. Szabad Nep(Budapest), No.112., May 16, 1948.

209. Tobias, op.cit., p. 442.

210. Sigismund Mihalovitch, Mindszenty, Ungarn, Europa (Karlsruhe: Badenia Verlag, 1949), p. 207.

smashed by the fist of democracy" ²¹¹ - he said reassuringly, in the true spirit of negotiations. On June 15, Cardinal Mindszenty refused to negotiate in view the prevailing conditions, especially since the Roman Catholic schools were "being closed down by the authorities and occupied by the police even before the question had been brought before the Parliament." ²¹² "After all this -the Cardinal pointed out- it is senseless to continue to talk of further pourparlers, since the question of nationalization would have been one of the most essential items of the negotiations."²¹³ Finally he asked Minister Otutay "in the interest of general rapprochement, to issue a declaration stating that the question of nationalization of denominational schools has been taken off the agenda of the Parliament." ²¹⁴

On the same day, however, the bill on nationalization of denominational schools was submitted to the Parliament.²¹⁵ The next day it was passed by a margin of 293 votes of the Communist-ruled coalition to 63 votes of the Popular Democratic Party, with 71 abstentions. ²¹⁶

211. London Times (London), June 14, 1948

212. Gsovski, op.cit., p. 104.

213. Mihalovitch, op.cit., p. 155. Note 77.

214. Ibid., p. 156.

215. Szabad Nep (Budapest), No.136. June 16, 1948.

216. Keesing's Contemporary Archives (Keesing's Publications Ltd.: London, 1948-1950), p. 9721.

On November 17, 1948, the circulation of Magyar Kurir, the official weekly journal of the Roman Catholic Church in Hungary, was forbidden by the Government.²¹⁷ The last pastoral letter of Cardinal Mindszenty, that of November 18, 1948, was to have been published in the next issue of the paper. In this the Cardinal refuted the communist charges that the Catholic Church was responsible for the lack of an agreement between Church and State:

".....it is well known that.....when the Church was at last invited to negotiate, the main point - the problem of the schools - had already been settled by the State, and the Church had to play the role of scapegoat." 218

On December 16, 1948, the Roman Catholic Bench of Bishops, after a special meeting presided over by Cardinal Mindszenty, announced that they were prepared to settle their differences with the State "in a manner corresponding with the dogma, laws and rights of the Church."²¹⁹

By this time, however, the Cardinal's fate had been decided by his enemies. On December 14, 1948, Istvan Dobi, who became Prime Minister December 10, 1948, declared in his program speech in the National Assembly:

"Mindszenty and his clique, who head the Catholic Church, do not want and do not care for an agreement

217. Mihalovitch, op.cit., p. 181.

218. Gsovski, op.cit., p. 105.

219. Keesing, loc.cit.

with the People's Democracy's State Power. Mindszenty wants to make Hungary a colony of western imperialists. We wish to establish an atmosphere of the kind that both friend and foe will understand: he who opposes the People's Democracy, runs his head against the wall!" 220

On December 26, 1948, Arpad Szakasits, President of the Hungarian People's Republic declared that "the great mass of the people demands the liquidation of the anti-democratic reactionaries of Cardinal Mindszenty's clique." 221

Four days after Cardinal Mindszenty had been arrested, on December 30, 1948, Prime Minister Istvan Dobi invited the members of the Catholic Bench of Bishops for negotiation. 222

On January 2, 1949, the Vatican announced that it had rejected the Hungarian Government's request for an understanding "independent of the personal case of the Prince-Primate of Hungary." 223

220. Nepszava (Budapest), No. 289. December 15, 1948.

221. Gsovski, op.cit., p.105.

222. Nepszava (Budapest), No.302. December 31, 1948.

223. Vatican Radio commented, January 3, 1949, on this Government step: "It is not clear how the desire of reaching agreement with the Holy See can be reconciled with the treatment inflicted on an Archbishop-Primate and Cardinal- a treatment that is an offense against the Holy See. Furthermore it is known that the Holy See wishes to see the rights of the Church and of conscience safeguarded everywhere; it is for that reason that it demands not only freedom of religion, but also freedom of preaching and propaganda and freedom for all Catholic institutions, especially for the Christian education of youth." Cf.: La Documentation Catholique (Paris), January 1949. Col. 142.

Meanwhile, during the period between the arrest and the condemnation of the Cardinal, the Government endeavoured to allay the disquiet caused by the imprisonment of the highest religious authority in the country. At the same time Communist cells were busy in various meetings of workmen and peasants, in schools, factories, and villages, where they succeeded in getting various motions passed calling for an "exemplary punishment", "the immediate departure of Mindszenty" and the "liquidation of the reactionary clergy." 224

Representing these "decisions" as the will of "all Hungarians who desire peace" the Communists forwarded them to the Government. In reply Dobi, the President of the Council, stated that he "would respect the will of the people." 225

Immediately after the arrest of the Cardinal, four bishops 226 were summoned to appear at the Ministry for the Interior in Budapest, and were accused of being directly responsible for the way in which the situation had developed. The Government judged that this threat would be adequate to dissuade the bishops from engaging in active resistance.

Negotiations between the episcopate and the Government

224. Galter, op.cit., p. 227.

225. Ibid.

226. Msgr. Jozsef Grosz, Archbishop of Kalocsa, Msgr. Nicholas Dudas, Bishop of Hajdudorog (Oriental Catholic Rite), Msgr. Jozsef Petery, Bishop of Vac, and Msgr. Julius Shvoy, Bishop of Szekesfehervar. Later a trustworthy person testified that they were also told that it would be better for them to resign as they have been compromised by a statement of the Cardinal and by the discovery in his palace of documents implicating them in illegal financial operations. La Documentation Catholique (Paris), January 1949. Col. 125.

recommenced on January 4, 1949, but no progress could be made and they ceased on January 12th. Only one meeting had been held. ²²⁷

The negotiations were not resumed officially for more than a year. The Communists did not rest meanwhile. The Government set out organizing a "fifth column" within the Catholic Church in Hungary. Scarcely a month after the condemnation of the Cardinal a Peace Congress was held in Budapest, to which a number of priests were invited. ²²⁸ The Communists had the effrontery to call these priest-delegates "representatives of the Church." ²²⁹

The bishops were approached individually a number of times during 1949 and the early part of 1950. At these meetings they were blamed for the failure to reach an agreement between Church and State, - more so especially after April 14, when the Catholic Church in Poland reached a modus vivendi with the Polish Government; the precarious situation of the clergy was referred to; the Protestants were held up as an example for the way in which they had submitted to the wishes of the Government. Almost every day the clergy were pressed to make declarations of loyalty and to pledge themselves to support the Communist "peace" ideal. Priests found themselves faced with one case of conscience after the other. In a

227. Keesing, loc.cit., p. 7921.

228. Galter, op.cit., p. 229.

229. Of the clergy in favor of close cooperation with the Communists the ex-parish priest, Istvan Balogh, was specially active. He had already been suspended by his bishop, Msgr. Hamvas of Gsanad.

word everything possible was done to keep both bishops and clergy in a state of tension, living as they were in an atmosphere of ridicule, intimidation, terror and duplicity.

Finally the agreement was prompted by two issues: the question over the religious and that of the so-called Peace-priests. As we have already seen, the Bench of Bishops on February 27, 1950, and the Superiors of the religious orders on April 17, 1950, protested to the Government against the illegal steps taken by authorities against the members of religious orders.²³⁰ These protests, of course, were made in vain.

Another consideration to be faced by the Bishops was the question of the Peace-priests and the possibility of the forming of a "Hungarian National-Catholic Church" by the same organization. The Government actually informed the hierarchy, after the official inauguration of the movement, that if the episcopal delegation failed to come to terms with the Government, it was ready to open negotiations with the priests who joined the movement.²³¹

Under this threat and with the hope that they might yet save some of the religious, the Bench of Bishops and its acting head, Archbishop Jozsef Grosz, requested the Government to negotiate over the issue of the religious orders.

230. Katolikus Szemle (Rome), 1950. No.3., p. 130.

231. Galter, op.cit., p. 237.

These negotiations started on June 28, 1950. The Archbishop informed the Minister of Religion and Public Education in a letter on August 28, 1950, that the Episcopate had authorized him to sign an agreement with the Government. The letter closed:

"The Bench of the Bishops did this in the hope that the difficulties which have arisen in the relations between State and Church may be settled in a spirit of mutual understanding and that this understanding will be shown in the handling of the question of members of religious orders in a more humane manner. At the same time the Bench of Bishops wishes to stress the fact that by concluding this agreement it intended by no means to affect the rights of the Holy See with regard to the determination of the relations between Church and State."²³²

Archbishop Grosz signed this agreement on August 30, 1950. It appeared the next day on the first page of the Budapest daily, Magyar Nemzet.²³³ The text is as follows:

The Government of the Hungarian People's Republic and the Hungarian Catholic Bench of Bishops, moved by the desire to ensure peaceful cooperation between the State and the Catholic Church and thus to promote unity, the constructive work of the Hungarian people, and the peaceful development of our country, concluded after negotiation the following agreement.

I.

1./ The Bench of Bishops recognizes and, in accordance with its civic duties, supports the political order and the Constitution of the Hungarian People's Republic. The Bench of Bishops declares that it will proceed under ecclesiastical laws against ecclesiastical persons who may act against the legal order of the Hungarian People's Republic or against the con-

232. Gsovski, op.cit., p. 107.

233. Tobias, op.cit., pp. 484-485.

structive work of its Government.

2./ The Bench of Bishops emphatically condemns all subversive activity, regardless of their source, directed against the political and social order of the Hungarian People's Republic. It declares that it shall not permit the religious feelings of the Catholic believers to be misused for political purposes against the State.

3./ The Bench of Bishops calls upon the Catholic believers as citizens and patriots to assume their share with all their strength in the great work which is being done by the whole Hungarian people under the leadership of the Government of the People's Republic by carrying through the Five-Year-Plan, for the purpose of increasing the standard of living and making social justice effective. The Bench of Bishops particularly calls upon the clergy not to resist the movement of agricultural productive co-operatives, because, these being voluntary associations, ²³⁴ it is founded on the moral principle of human solidarity.

4./ The Bench of Bishops supports the movement for peace. It approves the efforts of the Hungarian people and the Government of the Hungarian People's Republic to protect peace, condemns every kind of war-mongering, and the use of the atomic weapon, and consequently it holds guilty of a crime against humanity any government which will be the first to use the atomic bomb.

II.

1./ The Government of the Hungarian People's Republic guarantees complete religious freedom of Catholic believers according to the Constitution of the

234. These "voluntary associations" and other aspects of Hungarian agriculture are being aptly discussed in volume Hungary of the "East-Central Europe Under the Communists" series by the Mid-European Studies Center - already referred to several times in this paper. While the book is not concerned with Church-State relationship in Hungary, it is a fairly good presentation of present day conditions in Hungary. The problems of agriculture are being discussed on pages 229-258.

People's Republic ²³⁵ and similarly guarantees freedom of activity to the Catholic Church.

2./ The Government of the Hungarian People's Republic agrees to restore eight secondary Catholic denominational schools (six schools for boys and two for girls) ²³⁶ and agrees that the religious teaching orders for men and women may work in the Catholic denominational schools in numbers required for teaching.

3./ The Government of the Hungarian People's Republic, in the spirit of agreements already concluded with other denominations, is willing to take care of the financial needs of the Catholic Church by assigning an appropriate sum for Catholic ecclesiastical purposes, during the period of eighteen years, that is until the Catholic Church is able to meet its financial needs from its own resources, and according to a scale proportionately decreasing every three or five years respectively.

The Government of the Hungarian People's Republic particularly emphasizes that within the above limits of material support an adequate minimum subsistence should be secured for the clergy performing pastoral work.

A committee shall be established for the actual carrying out of the present agreement consisting of an equal number of representatives of the Government of the Hungarian People's Republic and of the

235. For a better understanding of this guarantee, let us recall Art. 55 of the 1949 Constitution: "The Hungarian People's Republic in conformity with the interests of the workers guarantees freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of assembly." In Art. 54 of the new Constitution, the Hungarian People's Republic recognized freedom of religious practice but professed the principle of complete separation between Church and State. This did not mean that the Church became independent of the State, but merely that the State no longer gave a solemn guarantee to protect the right of the Church. In Art. 55, by invoking the interests of the workers or a similar motive, the State could act more freely with regard to the Church and could tamper with Church government without having to fear a storm of protest.

236. See note 139.

Bench of Bishops.

Budapest, August 30, 1950.

In Behalf of the Cabinet Council
of the Hungarian People's Republic:

/s/ Jozsef Darvas

Minister of Religion and Public
Education

In Behalf of the Hungarian Catholic
Bench of Bishops:

/s/ Jozsef Grosz

Archbishop of Kalocsa

A closer look at the agreement will show that it differs substantially in several points from the agreements previously concluded by the Government with the various Protestant Churches. Whereas in these agreements the rights of the Churches "belonging to the free sphere of church activities" were mentioned in detail, the agreement with the representatives of the Roman Catholic Church merely states in general terms that "the Government guarantees full religious freedom to the Catholic believers and freedom of activity for the Catholic Church."

In the agreements concluded with the Protestant Churches the Government had fixed in detail the extent of the sup-

port promised to the churches on the basis of the support previously enjoyed by them and regulated by the law; the agreement with the Catholic Church -as we have seen above- contains only a phrase promising support "in the spirit of the other agreements" and avoids promising support equal to that granted to the Protestant Churches. Moreover, the promise of securing an adequate minimum subsistence for clergymen performing pastoral work implies a discretionary right of the Government to fix the amount of the support arbitrarily.

In return, the representatives of the Roman Catholic Church in Hungary, again unlike the Protestant Churches, had to pledge explicitly to support the political order and the Constitution of the People's Republic and to take appropriate steps against clergymen opposing the Government and its work; to condemn all activities against the State; to urge Catholic believers to take part in carrying out the Five-Year-Plan; to call upon the clergy not to oppose agricultural cooperatives (Kolkhozes); to support the Peace Movement, and to condemn warmongers and the use of atomic weapons.

A week later, on September 7, 1950, the Presidium of the Hungarian People's Republic issued an edict by which the religious orders in Hungary were dissolved. On September 10, the Bishops, in a pastoral letter signed by Archbishop Grosz, emphatically protested against the total

dissolution of the religious orders. ²³⁷

The apparent lull in the attacks on the Bishops after the signing of the agreement did not last long, for the Communist Government planned to inveigle the Bishops into the political arena. Late in 1950, the Government insisted that they sign the Appeal of the World Peace Committee (the Stockholm Manifesto). In reply the Bishops, under the leadership of Archbishop Grosz, issued a circular letter (December 11, 1950), in which they spoke of peace in the Gospel sense of the word. ²³⁸ This displeased the Communists and they renewed their attacks. On a similar occasion (the Peace Congress, held in Berlin in February 1951) another circular letter was issued by the Bishops, ²³⁹ while again refusing to sign the Communist inspired "Manifesto." Suddenly there were cries that the "agreement" had been violated. This date marks the beginning of a new phase in the struggle against the Church in Hungary. ²⁴⁰ The Communists had to

237. Katolikus Szemle (Rome), 1950. No. 3., p.131.

238. Galter, op.cit., p. 242.

239. April 3, 1951. For text see La Documentation Catholique (Paris), 1951. Col. 918.

240. "Szabad Nep" on April 13, 1951, reported that Archbishop Grosz had refused to receive the members of the "Peace Committee" of his city and that the same attitude was adopted by Bishops Hamvas and Petery. "This means, -Szabad Nep pointed out- that they do not support the Peace Movement and that therefore they brutally violate the agreement concluded with the Hungarian Government.those who stand apart, are enemies of peace." Cf.: Galter, op.cit., p. 242. Note 94.

realize that there still existed among the Catholic clergy a strong opposition which was impending every effort to lead the Church into the desired way. This obstacle had to be removed at all costs. So the Communists decided on new measures and chose new victims. On May 15, 1951, the police arrested the President of the Bench of Bishops, Archbishop Grosz of Kalocsa, his secretary, and some others on the pretext of illegal traffic in currency exchange, of hiding arms, of organizing escapes, of assassination and incitement to assassination. The Archbishop was also accused of having sent on July 15, 1950, a written declaration to the legation of an "imperialist" State at Budapest and to have been in close contact with other "imperialist" diplomatic representatives and with the Vatican. ²⁴¹

A new trial was begun. Our previous observations concerning the Mindszenty trial are also valid here, so no new analysis of the trial will be given. It ended on June 28, 1951, the Archbishop receiving a sentence of 15 years of imprisonment. ²⁴² The justification for this sentence was

241. Galter, op.cit., p. 244.

242. Even before Archbishop Grosz was condemned (just like in the case of Cardinal Mindszenty) Radio Budapest announced on June 18, 1951, the following charge against him: "Grosz aimed at overthrowing the Hungarian People's Government; his intention was to act himself as the head of the State until the restoration of the Hapsburgs." (Grosz thus stated in his "last plea": "Due to my education and circumstances I was of royalist convictions and I profess myself a royalist even now." Cf.: Schuste, op.cit., p. 168.)

given in these words: organization of means to overthrow the democratic regime, traffic in currency exchange, organization of escapes from the country. In fact to the glory of the accused, his only real fault was the refusal to speak as the Communist regime would have him to speak. ²⁴³

The remaining bishops made vain attempts to intervene on behalf of the Archbishop. ²⁴⁴ Indeed, the attitude of the Government grew stiffer every day. On June 23, 1951, Bishops Hamvas of Csanad, Petery of Vac, Shvoy of Szekesfehervar and Badalik of Veszprem (whom the Communists tried to involve in the trial of Archbishop Grosz), were put under police supervision and kept prisoners in their own residences. On the following day the press published over the signature of two Bishops, Msgr. Hamvas and Msgr. Bard, declarations condemning the "conspiracy" of Archbishop Grosz and affirming their own loyalty.

With the bishops deprived of their freedom, the Government decided to pave the way to have priests of the Peace Movement put in charge of the direction of the dioceses. On June 30, 1951, Msgr. Hamvas, Bishop of Csanad and Apostolic Administrator of the Archdiocese of Esztergom, ²⁴⁵

"In collusion with his accomplices he had organized terrorists. L'Osservatore Romano (Vatican City), June 22, 1951.

243. See the official publication: The Trial of Jozsef Grosz and his Accoplices (State Publications: Budapest, 1951.)

244. A Kereszt (Budapest), June 21, 1951.

245. Esztergom, the Primatial See, was -naturally- never

(while still under house arrest) was invited by the Government authorities "to present" a list of names from which a Vicar General for Esztergom and one for Szeged might be chosen.²⁴⁶ Refusal would have meant more severe restrictions of his liberty and the impossibility of directing the two bishoprics dependent on him. Under these circumstances he preferred to make the Government-imposed nominations, and appointed Miklos Beresztoczy, head of the Peace Movement, as Vicar General of Esztergom²⁴⁷ and Antal Szeczy, an important member of the same movement, as Vicar General of Szeged.

The Government tried to impose similar changes on the Bishop of Vac, Msgr. Jozsef Petery. When he refused, his Vicar General was forced to replace his own pro-vicar and chancellor by prominent members of the Peace Movement. Likewise Msgr. Lajos Shvoy, Bishop of Szekesfehervar, had to replace his chancellor. And a few days later Msgr. Bertalan Badalik, Bishop of Veszprem, was obliged to appoint a new Vicar General.

Having mentioned the movement of the Peace-Priests so

filled after the imprisonment of Cardinal Mindszenty, who is considered by ecclesiastical law impeded from the discharge of his duties.

246. Galter, op.cit., p. 246.

247. The preceding year the Holy See named the Bishop of Csanad Apostolic Administrator of Esztergom, to prevent the Government candidate, Beresztoczy, from becoming Vicar Capitular. By its forcible action in June 1951 the Government attained its end.

often, here we attempt to give a more orderly discussion of this sorrowful phaenomenon of Hungarian Catholicism of the post War era. God being the only judge of human weakness, we prefer to refrain from condemning men, who under circumstances requiring less heroism - a gift only of the few - could have fared better in the interests of Church and their fellow men.

The Peace-Priests Movement.

When the Bureau of Church Affairs was set up by the Government during May, 1951, ²⁴⁸ one of its major functions had become the organization of the "Peace-Priests." These are clergymen who have agreed to cooperate with the Government in all possible ways. They distinguish between the Sovereign Pontiff, whom they recognize as the head of the Catholic Church, and the Vatican, which has become for them also "a political agency serving the Anglo-American imperialist powers." ²⁴⁹ In Communist propaganda they are described as valiant and wise representatives of the lower clergy, "who were without a voice in the conduct of Church affairs until the Party introduced democracy." ²⁵⁰

The Party had slowly, cautiously felt about for clergymen likely to be favorable to its cause, and had as a matter of fact, held out no end of inducements. At all events, the first recruits for the "Peace Priests" were a most unimpressive group. They consisted of clerics who, for one reason or another, had been at odds with their superiors,

248. See pp. 102-106. of this paper.

249. Schuster, op.cit., p. 151.

250. Ibid.

or against whom allegations of different kinds could be made. But after the arrest of the Cardinal there was a different story to tell. It was now possible for the Communists to recruit two priests of not inconsiderable stature.

One of them was Monsignor Miklos Beresztoczy, who had been the personal secretary of Cardinal Seregy, immediate predecessor of Cardinal Mindszenty as Archbishop of Esztergom. He was arrested early in 1949, held in custody for a time, and then released. Due perhaps to the treatment which was meted out to him, or it may be for other reasons, he was, when freed from captivity, a willing tool of the Communists.

In all probability, however, the real leader of the "Peace-Priests" is a former Cistercian monk of rather signal gifts, Father Richard Horvath, who in the days prior to the Communist seizure of power had been a frequent contributor to leading Catholic periodicals and was known likewise as a pulpit-orator of magnetism and effectiveness.

On August 1, 1950, the movement -active even before that date- was officially organized at the "National Conference of the Catholic Priests" held in Budapest under Party auspices.

"Our movement -said Father Horvath- stems from priests that are of the people, that march abreast of the people, and are devoted to the people...and we believe

that this movement, striving to serve our church and our country, will reach its goal." 251

According to a Government Publication 252

"The Catholic Priests' participation in the Conference recognized and affirmed that there is and can be no contradiction whatsoever between religious conviction and the upbuilding of socialism, respect for labor, realization of our Five-Year-Plan; the new, free and happy life created by the Hungarian people. Accordingly, if the Catholic Church really wants to discharge its spiritual calling, it must come to an agreement with the State of the working people." 253

The Conference agreed and declared that priests loyal to the People's Democracy, "who do not hatch criminal plots on the heinous chance of a third world war," should fight for peace with all their might. The speakers underscored the serious damages sustained by the Catholic Church "through the policy pursued by its reactionary leaders."

"The Conference demonstrated clearly that those high priests who hope for an atomic war, hate the People's Democracy, persecute the priests who have signed the Stockholm peace appeal, are isolated not only from the people but also from priests loyal to the people.

Participants in the Conference expressed their unalterable devotion, in church matters, to the Holy See, but at the same time they stressed the intention to take part loyally in the building of the country. They urged the Catholic Episcopate to reach an agreement with the State within the shortest possible time." 254

251. The Relationship...op.cit., p.6.

252. The above (and previously) quoted publication of the Hungarian Legation in Washington, D.C.

253. Ibid.

254. Ibid., p. 7.

Jozsef Darvas, Minister of Religion and Public Education, was at hand throughout the Conference, declaring in his closing speech, in the name of the Government, that the Hungarian People's Democracy "never demanded and will never demand from any priest or believer of the Catholic Church to be untrue to his church and his religious activities." He assured the movement of the Government's support and declared that he would fully protect all those priests who because of their "democratic attitude" might suffer persecution at the hands of their superiors.

"I know - Darvas said- that the road of this salutary and honest movement will not be altogether smooth. There are, and will be, those who will do their utmost to malign its adherents. Among these are people who oppose agreement between the Church and State, and who even at the cost of a third war would like to restore the old system of oppression against the people. But I am equally sure that the participants in the movement cannot be intimidated because they know theirs is the path of the righteous.

In behalf of our working people, in the name of the Government of our People's Republic, I pledge this movement our backing, and if need be, our wholehearted assistance and defense. If necessary, we shall not fail to inform anyone that in our People's Democracy it cannot be detrimental to any person -including the Catholic priests- to be devoted partisans of democracy, progress and peace." 255

Father Horvath, the clerical leader of the Conference, voiced that the attitude of the Church towards the People's Republic must change. He assured the participants and himself concerning the legitimacy and righteousness of their

255. Ibid., p.40.

cause:

"this movement is our own, a spontaneous and autonomous movement of priests that stem from the people. We have gathered here compelled by no one; thwarted, dissuaded and intimidated by many; encouraged, invited and wanted but by few....We must differentiate between faith and ethics as against politics - between the prestige of the Vatican as teacher and the Vatican's politics, some of its organs, agents, radio and press...Unfortunately, Rome still appears very often to be deriving its information almost exclusively from the irresponsible chatter of emigre priests and from the biased propaganda of political reactionaries. It is deplorable that the Vatican Radio and the Ossrvatore Romano serve up a great deal of false news, a lot of chit-chat and gossip fit for women at a coffe-klatch, especially as regards the people's democracies.

If we should observe that even in official circles -thus in the Vatican itself- there is a disposition to accept the capitalist-imperialist system as the whole source of redemption; that is not binding upon us; it is not the Christian concept and is devoid of even a spark of infallibility. If we were to follow it, we should be headed for disaster. We should then be turning our faces away from the future. Our place is beside the people.

For the sake of peace, Catholics, believers and priests alike, Christians and Communists together, all men of good will and good intention, can unite. And this fight of ours will have God's blessings too." 256

At the end of the Conference the following resolution was adopted by the participants:

"The Roman Catholic priests and monks, affiliated with all the Dioceses of Hungary, and participants in this Conference, hereby declare that they are all faithful to the Holy Roman Catholic Mother Church and

256. These are excerpts from Fr. Horvath's speech, published in the above publication: The Relationship....op.cit., pp. 17-28.

to the head thereof, as well as loyal citizens of the Hungarian People's Democratic State. They deem it to be their duty, as priests and citizens, to perform their pastoral calling, to promote the campaign launched to insure enduring peace. Be it therefore resolved:

1./ That they seek, with mutual respect for the laws of Church and State, the urgent and full achievement of an agreement between Church and State. They welcome the negotiations now underway between the Episcopate and the representatives of the People's Government, and they intend to facilitate them to the best of their ability.

2./ In order to restore confidence between the clergy and the working masses, they pledge their devotion to the People's Democratic State: to the Hungarian People's Republic. They regard this to be their patriotic duty, the more so as the People's Democracy has made it its own prime objective to liberate the Hungarian people socially, to elevate them to human dignity, and to proclaim -as does the clergy too, in keeping with its Christian Creed- that "man is the supreme asset." They further declare that they will do their utmost toward the realization of the economic Five-Years' Plan so that they too may contribute to the raising of the material and spiritual standards of the Hungarian people. They will combat every internal and external reactionary attempt, first of all -of course- the reactionary tendencies that may arise within their own ranks, which would retard or sabotage the fulfillment of the Five-Years' Plan and the building of Socialism. They will not condone attempts by reaction to exploit the Holy Roman Catholic Mother Church for its own ends. They will not yearn for the revival of the social injustices of the past. They desire to march forward in unison with the people in patriotism, in affection and in labor.

3./ They support, without reservation, the Hungarian People's struggle for peace, of which they wish to partake their own stint actively, bearing in mind this sentence of Our Lord Jesus' Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." Guided by this and for that reason, they unanimously endorse the Stockholm peace appeal and call upon those fellow-priests who have not yet signed this appeal, to regard the affixing of their signatures as an urgent Catholic duty.

4./ Inasmuch as the defense of enduring peace is essential to Church and State alike, they condemn war-mongering of imperialists and the military intervention of militarist imperialists, designed to suppress the battles for liberation of colonial and semi-colonial peoples. In the name of Christian humanism, they protest against the advocacy and use of the atom bomb. They brand those who, in connection with the Korean war, demand the employment of the atom bomb. They protest against the bombing of the Korean civilian population, of defenseless cities and villages.

5./ For the sake of reconciliation between Church and State, for the cooperation of the clergy and the working masses, they regard it desirable that the State should extend the fullest support within its power to the clergy and to monastic orders, loyal to the people, in the performance of their labors to further the reconstruction of the country and the cause of lasting peace." ²⁵⁷

We have seen earlier how the activities of the Peace-Priests' Movement influenced the Catholic Hierarchy of Hungary to enter an agreement with the State and to take the oath of loyalty on the Hungarian Constitution. It was hoped that by doing so, the influence of the "Peace-Priests" would be lessened and at least a rudimentary form of freedom of the Episcopate could be assured. We have seen, however, how these expectations fell short of reality and how the "Peace-Priests" eventually took their place in Hungarian Catholic affairs.

It has to be said that most of these so-called Peace-Priests entered the movement through compulsion. The Communists thoroughly catalogued their every weakness so as to compromise them at the propitious moment. This group justi-

fied itself by claiming to prefer a year's confinement in a disciplinary monastery when the Church in Hungary would be freed again, than a year in an AVO prison.²⁵⁸ That more priests joined this camp under pressure than for reasons of cowardice and ambition is generally born out of the fact that prior to the bishops' conference in July 1951, which was compelled to approve the peace-movement,²⁵⁹ the membership of the "Peace-Priests' Movement" did not reach 5% of the total of Hungarian priests. A distinction should also be made between those priests who were the prominent leaders, who helped to restrict the proper exercise of the bishops' power, who became communist tools against their more courageous fellow priests, or who were the beneficiaries of sizeable remuneration in return for which service was rendered; and the passivists, who rarely turned up at peace meetings,

258. Cf. Delaney, op.cit., p. 65.

259. An episcopal conference was called for July 3, 1951 at Budapest. The members of the Episcopate still at liberty met under the presidency of Msgr. Czapik, Archbishop of Eger. At this meeting were also present the new Vicars General, who outnumbered the diocesan bishops. A declaration previously approved by the Government, was published. According to the text given by the Hungarian Telegraphic Agency, the bishops protested their loyalty to the People's Republic, condemned every act of violence against the regime, undertook to observe "with ever growing care" the agreement signed with the State, and above all approved of the Peace (Priests') Movement. The Government demanded furthermore that in order to help production and increase working hours, feasts of patrons, pilgrimages and days of adoration, which fell on week-days, be transferred to the following Sundays. Cf.: The Tablet (London), July 14, 1951.

who faithfully read out from the pulpit regime circulars, and who in due course secured their tenure and safety. The Hierarchy was aware of this distinction and after the 1956 uprising, Church authorities deposed only the leaders and most active members of the peace movement. It does great credit to the Hungarian clergy that there was only one priest, who opposed the Church decision and turned to the regime for help, thus bringing on himself papal excommunication. 260

It cannot be said that the collaborators -few as they were- would ultimately have curbed the respect for the Church. The idea of religious and national resistance was embodied in Cardinal Mindszenty who became a symbol. Everyone recognized that a Church-State agreement had been achieved only through the arrest of a second prelate, Archbishop Grosz, and through the exploitation of Archbishop Czapik's physical condition and finally by the use of sheer force. A great number of priests had been interned and imprisoned - in the rough ratio of fifty Catholic priests to each non-Catholic clergyman. 261

260. Fr. Horvath, the Cistercian monk, whose fate will be mentioned in the next chapter.

261. More than 130 priests have been imprisoned permanently; 300 secular priests and 3,500 religious have spent more or less long terms in concentration camps and 8 priests are known to have been deported to the USSR. (Cf.: Galter, op.cit., p. 251.)

CHAPTER XII

Recent events and the present religious
situation.

After the new Constitution of Imre Nagy (July 1953)²⁶² the persecution of the Church seemed to ease off a little. There was a noticeable revival in the practice of religion. But this must be regarded as merely part of the Communists' tactics during the re-shaping of the policies of the Hungarian Communist Party. There were some difficulties within the State to be overcome, and the world outside had to be shown the possibility of peaceful "co-existence" between the Church and the Communist State.²⁶³ This "favorable situa-

262. Shortly after the death of Stalin, Rakosi was summoned to appear in Moscow, where he was forced to listen to a scathing denunciation of his stewardship during the past years. He was told that his attempt to build up a gigantic heavy industry in Hungary under the Five Year Plan of 1950, expanded further in 1951, was unsound, extravagant adventurism. His farm policy, determined in the needs of industrialization, also had been disastrous. It drove hundreds of thousands of peasants from the countryside, swelling the ranks of industrial workers, who could only produce at a loss, while leaving the land without people to work it. The country lacked food and the mood of the people was bitter. If the situation was not remedied, the government would eventually be "booted out." Rakosi was to abandon his premiership and hand it to Nagy, whose mission was to placate the peasantry by stopping the collectivization drive and to emphasize production of consumer goods at the expense of heavy industry. Police terror was also relaxed. (See on this: Imre Nagy, op.cit., pp. 67-74.)

263. The Government continued to give its support to the Movement of Priests for Peace and to direct the activity of the Church by means of the Bureau for Ecclesiastical Affairs.

tion" however, was of short duration. And in any case, as L'Osservatore Romano of February 28, 1954, pointed out, it must never be forgotten that "liberty of worship" is very far from the idea of complete religious liberty. ²⁶⁴

In June 1955, the Holy Office condemned two periodicals: the "Bulletin Catholique Hongrois" ²⁶⁵ and "A Kereszt", organ of the Movement of Priests for Peace. The Government replied by tightening its control on the clergy. Priests who as a result of the Decree of the Holy Office, refused to take part in meetings of the "patriotic clergy", were threatened immediately with sanctions equivalent to suspension; in some cases they were driven from their dioceses and forbidden to exercise their ministry anywhere in the State.

On June 16, 1955, the Hungarian Government issued the following communique:

"At the request of Cardinal Mindszenty himself and of the whole of the Hungarian Episcopate, taking into account his great age ²⁶⁶ and the state of his health, the Minister of Justice has decided to suspend the application of the penalty to which the Prelate was condemned. As his place of residence, the Cardinal has been assigned the ecclesiastical building proposed by the Episcopate." ²⁶⁷

264. Galter, op.cit., p. 252.

265. The Bulletin Catholique Hongrois has been published for several years, and it is circulated in foreign countries in several languages. (Bolletino Cattolico Ungherese, Romish-Katolische Rundschau aus Ungarn, etc.)

266. The Cardinal, though ill, was only 62 years of age.

267. L'Osservatore Romano (Vatican City), September 18, 1955.

A similar example of Communist "clemency" was the liberation of Msgr. Grosz, Archbishop of Kalocsa on May 11, 1956. Received on May 13 by the President of the Council, Andras Hegedus, the Archbishop was authorized to take over again the administration of his diocese and his place as the head of the Episcopal Conference. ²⁶⁸ L'Osservatore Romano commenting ²⁶⁹ on this measure of "clemency" and the statement made on this occasion by Msgr. Grosz, concluded in these terms:

"The statements that "Szabad Nep" attribute to Msgr. Grosz, must be considered in the light of the real conditions of Catholicism in Hungary. When meticulous legislation attacks the internal jurisdiction of the Church and legalizes the intervention of the State in ecclesiastical and religious life, it is permitted to doubt the authenticity and spontaneity of the words spoken by Msgr. Grosz...the liberty accorded to the Archbishop of Kalocsa after five years of unjust imprisonment cannot be considered, when there is question of true liberty, as an adequate gesture of conciliation towards the Church. Oppression still exists; God grant that it may not become worse under the false appearances of "a more moderate policy." ²⁷⁰

During the world-celebrated Hungarian revolution of 1956, on October 30, regular army formations and a group of insurgents liberated Cardinal Mindszenty from Felsopeteny prison, to which he had been transferred some days previously from his forced "residence." His return to Budapest will long be remembered as the most triumphal reception ever accorded to a Hungarian national hero. ²⁷¹

268. Szabad Nep (Budapest), May 13, 1956.
 269. L'Osservatore Romano (Vatican City), May 20, 1956.
 270. Galter, op.cit., pp. 252-253. Note 116.
 271. Cf.: United Nations: General Assembly - Official Records: Eleventh Session; Supplement No. 13(A/3592): Report of the Special Committee on the Problem of Hungary(New York)1957. p.8. (No.71).

A communique of the Council of Ministers of the Nagy Government, dated November 1, 1956, stated that the Primate could again exercise his ecclesiastical functions and his civil rights, because his condemnation has been "devoid of all justification."²⁷² Cardinal Mindszenty personally told one witness early in November of 1956, that he had no intention of claiming the return of the great Church estates, but was proposing to ask for the reopening of Catholic schools.²⁷³ The Bibo plan,²⁷⁴ under which the new political life of Hungary might have been organized was it not for the forced intervention of Soviet troops, would have given, as it seems, full freedom of religion for all denominations.

"Among the basic freedoms, full freedom of religion shall be emphasized particularly. The State shall

272. Galter, op.cit., p. 460.

273. United Nations Report, op.cit., p. 19. (No.140).

274. Minister of State, Istvan Bibo of the Imre Nagy Government had prepared a draft endorsed by the most important representative organ of the Revolution, the Central Workers' Council of Greater Budapest. The restoration, as it seems, would have been accomplished along Socialist principles: a National Communism, according to Yugoslav ideas would have been set up in Hungary. "We must not forget that the aversion of an orthodox capitalist, reactionary, anti-Communist restoration is the concern not only of the Soviet Union and the Communists, but also of the youth, workers and soldiers who carried out the Revolution and shed their blood for its victory." Cf.: Facts About Hungary, op.cit., p. 102.

in no way interfere with the life of the Churches. The status of the Churches shall be regulated according to the principle of complete separation of Church and State. The State shall respect the Churches' social work, including educational activities, and shall, under agreement, subsidize them." 275

It is scarcely necessary to recall here the sad turn of events in Hungary shortly after the insurrection had restored the democratic liberties of the people. When with the help of Soviet tanks the fierce and repressive rule of Janos Kadar had been consolidated, the persecution in Hungary -religious and otherwise- increased in violence. In January 1957 several priests were arrested and brought before the courts, accused of "counterrevolutionary" activity. Religious instruction in the schools, re-established during the short lived period of the Nagy Government, 276 has come under bitter attack from the President of the Council, Kadar. He has not been ashamed to state publicly: "We will not allow the reactionary elements to continue to exercise their influence over women and to torture our children by teaching them the knowledge of God." 277

New attacks have been directed against members of the Hierarchy - especially against Cardinal Mindszenty, both by various members of the Government and the press.

275. Ibid., p. 105.

276. Galter, op.cit., p. 460.

277. Ibid.

The Cardinal, after his liberation, had been living in the vicinity of the United States Legation in Budapest. Since November 5, 1956, when Russian tanks advanced into the city, he has found refuge in the Legation and he has been there ever since.

The official paper of the Communist Party, "Nepszabadsag"; in the first days of February 1957 accused Cardinal Mindszenty of being behind the action taken by the Bishops of Vac and Szekesfehervar against "democratic and progressive priests" in preventing them from "taking part in religious functions." The paper contested the bishops' right "to discredit and set aside faithful sons of the Country and the Church, among them deputies and most important directors of the National Committee of Catholic Priests for Peace." 278

The truth is that the Hungarian bishops had merely put into effect the letter and the spirit of the decree of the Sacred Congregation of the Council, 279 which

278. Ibid., p. 461. The attack of the Communist paper gave the American Legation in Budapest the opportunity to clarify its position. It declared that "while the personal safety and well-being of the Cardinal were being looked after in the best possible way within the Legation, at the same time nothing was left undone and nothing is being undone on the part of the diplomatic representation of the United States to ensure that the Cardinal does not in any way make use of the Legation to carry on political activities, or activities connected with politics." Ibid. Note 2.

279. Acta Apostolicae Sedis (Vatican City) XXXIX, 38-39.

threatened with grave penalties about a dozen Hungarian priests, who already for some time had been suspended a divinis ²⁸⁰ because they had accepted, without any authority, ecclesiastical offices from the Communists. Should they not submit to certain prescriptions of the Congregation (renunciation of the offices arbitrarily assigned to them and now held without authority) -said the Decree- they would incur excommunication reserved in a special way. The Cistercian Father Horvath, in virtue of this Decree incurred excommunication immediately for his evident reluctance to comply with the prescriptions of the competent ecclesiastical authority.

A special report of the United Nations ²⁸¹ found that

"since the Soviet occupation of Hungary of November 4th (1956), hundreds of priests have been thrown into prison on accusations of "counter-revolutionary activity".....

Strong pressure is being brought on the Catholic Church to support the so-called "Priests for Peace" movement. The basic purpose of this movement is to reconcile faithful Catholics to the Communist system. But so far the regime has found only a handful of intimidated compromising priests who are willing to work with it. The so-called Department of Church Affairs is again in operation. This department has an office in every diocese and even

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280. From the exercise of their priestly functions, such as the administration of the Sacraments.
281. Hungary Under Soviet Rule. A Survey of Developments Since the Report of the U.N. Special Committee. Prepared by The American Friends of the Captive Nations and the Assembly of the Captive European Nations. New York, n.d., p. 24.

the most inconsequential matters must be channeled through the State organ. On March 23rd (1957) the Presidium of the Council of Ministers issued a decree, retroactive to October 1, 1956, making the consent of the State essential for every ecclesiastical appointment, transfer or suspension. In practice this means that the Government's approval must be obtained for the filling of even the lowliest ecclesiastical office and that appointments or changes made during the brief period of freedom are automatically invalidated."

The Papacy -though in vain- has intervened several times during these incidents so full of sorrow for Hungary. The voice of Pope Pius XII has been raised in three Encyclicals ²⁸² and in an Appeal to the World - something entirely new in the history of the Church and in pontifical procedure.

On October 28, 1956, asking for public prayers to obtain peace based on justice for the Hungarian people torn by bloody war, the Pope wrote in "Luctuosissimi Eventus":

Let it be clear to everybody that when order has been destroyed among nations, it cannot be restored by force of arms, the bearer of death, or by oppressing the citizens by violence which cannot stifle their innermost feelings, or by deceptive theories which corrupt the heart and violate the rights of the Church and of all civic and Christian conscience. The longing for true liberty can never be smothered by force." ²⁸³

282. "Luctuosissimi Eventus", October 28, 1956; "Laetamur Admodum", November 1, 1956; "Datis Nuperrime", November 5, 1956.

283. Cf.: Galter, op.cit., p. 462.

On November 5, 1956, even more strong words were being used to condemn the bloodshed in Hungary:

"Conscious of our duty we cannot but deplore and condemn these tragic events which have aroused the indignation and deep sorrow not only of Catholics everywhere, but of all free peoples...For the words of the Lord to Cain: "The voice of thy brother's blood cries to me from the earth" is still true today; the blood of the people of Hungary cries out to the Lord. And if the Just Judge does not punish man for his sin till after death, His vengeance sometimes falls even in this life - as history teaches - on rulers and on nations for the injustices they have inflicted on others." ²⁸⁴

And in his World-Wide Appeal on November 10, 1956, the Pope, having recalled "the outrage culminating in the ruin of the beloved people in Hungary, whose crime was to have sought respect for the fundamental rights of human beings", he proclaimed:

"The import of the sorrowful events in Hungary weighs on the hearts of men more than all other anxieties. The universal and spontaneous emotion of the world, which the attention given to other grave events has not been able to diminish, ²⁸⁵ shows how necessary and urgent it is to give back liberty to those who have been deprived of it.

Can the world allow itself to be indifferent to the lot of our brothers and abandon them to the fate of a degrading slavery? Surely Christian conscience cannot escape the moral obligation of trying by every possible means to restore their dignity and give them back liberty." ²⁸⁶

284. Galter, op.cit., pp. 462-463.

285. The Pope refers to the Suez crisis, contemporaneous with the Hungarian revolution.

286. Galter, loc.cit.

PART II.

OTHER RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS IN HUNGARY AND THEIR

RELATIONSHIP TO THE COMMUNIST REGIME.

This paper concerns itself with Church and State relationship in Hungary. It should not be, therefore, limited to discussing the fight and fate of the Catholic Church alone, although, as it was shown, the Catholic Church constitutes the absolute majority among the religious denominations of the country. On the following pages we shall discuss the history of the Protestant Churches and the Jewish denomination in Hungary during the last decade. Our discussion will be, by necessity, rather brief. A more full presentation is being written, no doubt, by more competent observers of Hungarian Protestantism and Jewry.

CHAPTER I

The Reformed Church in Hungary after 1945.

The Reformed Church (Calvinists) had an approximate membership of 2,400,000 at the outbreak of the war and was particularly strong in the Eastern part of the country, the city of Debrecen being in a sense its citadel. Calvinism was in a very special way identified with Hungarian patriotism. During the times of the Reformation it has swept the country, being accepted as a form of Christian faith untainted by Hapsburg control; and even though the Counter-Reformation later on reestablished the Catholic faith as that of the great majority, Calvinistic Protestantism retained its appeal as the medium through which the Magyar could most effectively express his opposition to the German Austrian and the Catholic Hapsburg. The Kossuth uprising in 1848 was, -partly- its creation.

Face to face with Communism, the Reformed Church had to reckon with several sources of vulnerability. It had very little landed property, and though its aim was self-support, it was compelled by reason of poverty of the people, to accept subventions from the State. As a result, Rakosi had only threaten that these subventions would cease in order to confront leaders of the Reformed

Church with a situation of the utmost gravity.

Great stress was also laid by them on religious education. In 1937 there were 1,171 Calvinist elementary schools, 22 secondary schools, 5 teacher training colleges and 3 seminaries. The Church was strongly opposed to the secularization of education and sought through every available means to increase the size of its own school system.

A third weakness resulted from the fact that the Protestant clergy were usually married men with families. A Protestant pastor, responsible for the welfare of a wife and often of numerous children, could not ignore the fate which would be meted out to them if he remained steadfast in his opposition to the new masters of the country.

A great asset on the part of the Reformed Church was the leadership of Bishop Laszlo Ravasz, a man of great stature and integrity. Valiant in his opposition to Nazism, he emerged as the brilliant and devoted protagonist of Christianity. But when he opposed the secularization of Church schools with frankness and vigor, the heavy fist of the Government came down. Bishop Ravasz was compelled to resign as President of the General Synod, and to step down from his hierarchical office. Matyas Rakosi personally threatened Ravasz that the salaries of the Reformed teachers would be cut off and the educational work of the Church stopped if he did not resign.²⁸⁷ Finally he re-

287. Markham, op.cit., p. 87.

tired on April 28, 1948, and was succeeded by "Pastor" Karoly Kiss, who up until that time had been merely a minor official in the Ministry of Culture. ²⁸⁸ The foremost personage among the collaborating Protestant clergy is, however, Albert Bereczky, a clergyman of genuine intellectual distinction. He had long been active in a parish serving the working population and was well acquainted with the burdens and privations of the proletariat. It would be impossible to doubt his sincere interest in social reform, or his commitment to the "theology of crisis" which under the sponsorship of the renowned Swiss theologian, Professor Karl Barth, had affected Calvinist thought and teaching in many parts of the world. Barth, as the war in Europe moved on, professed not to see any disturbing thing in Communism or Stalinism, at least far less than in Nazism and Hitlerism. His reasoning seems, in essence, to have been this: "Hitler, who talked a great deal about God, was likely to lead people astray theologically, whereas Stalin, who openly avowed his atheism, ceased to be a moral problem with which a professor of Christian doctrine needed to be concerned. For the issue was clear. No member of the community of the Church would doubt that the voice of Stalin was all else than the voice of God. It may also be that Barth thought he saw in the westward sweep of Communism a Protestant opportunity to make headway against the Church of Rome. For if Protestantism humbly accepted the blows which were sure to

288. Schuster, op.cit., p. 37.

be rained on them, in a spirit of submission to the divine will, they might demonstrate in their lives the true intent of the Gospel, while Catholics, unable to extricate themselves from concern for purely temporal things, were being forced to the wall because of an excess of what Barth has been wont to call anxiety." ²⁸⁹

It is not surprising that Barth accepted an invitation to go to Hungary during 1948. He professed to believe that while it might be difficult to live in a State which did not respect the moral law, one would nevertheless at the same time be challenged to foster one's inner peace and security.

"The Hungarian Protestants -said Barth- are not pre-occupied with all the undecided questions of East versus West, nor with the memory of Russian horrors, nor with the question of the justice or injustice of their present Government; they are concentrating on their positive task as a Church. They are trying to formulate the Word of God in fresh terms. And they are endeavoring to carry that message to the members of the Reformed Church themselves, first and foremost, as the first step towards all future work and towards determinating their future attitude." ²⁹⁰

After Barth returned home, Bereczky was named to the top post of Hungarian Calvinism. He was soon to endorse the Communist position so uncompromisingly that some of his fellow churchmen were beset with grave doubt concerning his wisdom and loyalty.

289. Ibid., pp. 164-165.

290. Tobias, op.cit., pp. 135-136.

The position of the Reformed Church in Hungary was thus defined by Bereczky:

"Our Church, by the judgment and the grace of God lives on that spot of the world where, between two struggling giants, there is not the slightest doubt as to which is the sphere of power in which we live. We belong to the Hungarian Reformed Church which, in her earthly life and service, shares the destiny of the Hungarian people. Our task is to be Christ's Church in this part of the world, to stand here in the tension of prophetic service. No selfish longing for salvation may justify our escaping from here to a God, whom we try to expropriate for our use, or to a disobedient people. We must stay on the critical spot where the Church of the apostles and prophets discharges her double task: to proclaim God's Gospel and law and to intercede, in repentance, in the sight of our forgiving and gracious God, for our people. 291

Our Church would cease to be a Church should she flee from this point of tension. She must recognize her situation, here and now, in order to be able to discharge her God-given functions. Our Church is not between East and West: our Church is in the East. She must serve here, and she must accept from God's gracious hands all struggles, travails and positive achievements of the great transition in which we live, as opportunities to serve... 292

But although Bereczky continued along his fateful path - with or without Barthian blessings - the measures adopted by the Government to control the Reformed Church were the same as those resorted to in dealings with Catholics.

291. Protestant Christians had been involved in Nazi crimes, in the persecution of the Jews, in "proud anti-Romanism" in politically motivated educational activities. The idea of "repentance" can be clearly distinguished in many of the "proclamations of guilt" issued by Protestant churchmen after the war.

292. Tobias, op.cit., pp. 136-137.

The Bureau of Church Affairs exercised unremitting control over Reformed church-affairs. Unworthy but wholly subservient pastors were appointed to high ecclesiastical positions. The religious press was throttled. Church organizations were forbidden and all concern for human welfare, for the sick and the poor in particular, was reserved to the State.

Officially, the relationship between the State and the Reformed Church, was determined by an agreement, the earliest and lengthiest of all similar agreements, which was to serve as a sample for intended "reconciliation" between State and the Catholic Church as early as 1948. This agreement with the Reformed Church is very significant, because it shows the "religious" ideas of the 1948 Hungarian Government and enables us -comparing it with the agreement entered into with the Catholic Church in 1951- to see the results of ideological and political developments between those years. Although somewhat lengthy, we give here the full text of this agreement.

"The committees appointed by the Government of the Hungarian Republic and by the Synodical Council of the Hungarian Reformed Church to settle the relationship between the State and the Church in a peaceful and proper manner as desired by both parties, have concluded the following agreement:

- 1./ In order to arrive at a new regulation of the status of the Church in the Hungarian Republic, the Hungarian Republic and the Hungarian Reformed Church appoint a permanent joint committee for drafting new laws concerning religious matters among

which first of all a bill concerning religion of children should be prepared. The legislative body of the Church will amend its ecclesiastical laws in accordance with the new national legislation on religion.

2./ The Government of the Hungarian Republic declares on this occasion too, that it shall recognize and guarantee, with all possible and necessary means, the full enjoyment of religious freedom. The Hungarian Reformed Church again recognizes the fact on this occasion that the legislature and the Government of the Hungarian Republic have ensured and protected the enjoyment of religious freedom up to the present time, and have even extended it considerably by enacting Law No. XXXIII of 1947, and by granting subventions for personal and administrative expenses, and have made it possible to maintain church activities at the same level as before.

3./ The Government of the Hungarian Republic, in accordance with the laws in force deems that in the following activities belong to the free sphere of church activities: the performance of worship in churches, suitable public buildings, private homes and open places; the teaching of the Bible in churches, schools, private homes and congregational houses; missionary work through denominational newspapers and other publications; disseminating the Bible and Holy Scriptures; holding congregational and national ecclesiastical conferences and meetings for evangelization, the compulsory teaching of religion in the schools, and the performance of charitable work. For this purpose the Hungarian Government permits the church to use, where needed, without charge (by agreement to be concluded with the school authorities and carrying with it the obligation of compensation for any damages which might occur) the classrooms or other suitable rooms of the public schools for worship, Sunday schools, Bible lectures, choir and other religious and ecclesiastical meetings and conventions at any time except during the regular periods of teaching, until the congregations have secured other buildings for their purposes.

The Government of the Hungarian Republic recognizes that the autonomous activities of the church fall likewise within the sphere of free ecclesiastical life, provided that they are within the limits and in a manner set up by ecclesiastical laws approved by the head of the State.

4./ The Government of the Hungarian Republic recognizes, respects and shall make others respect those

duties of the Church which concern inspiring its members to perform good deeds and especially to take care of the poor, the abandoned, the aged and orphans, which duties are imposed upon her according to the command of Christ and the Church. For this purpose the State will protect the right of the Church to maintain and expand charitable institutions and to collect charitable donations within the limits of existing laws.

5./ The Government of the Hungarian Republic recognizes the manifest endeavor of the Reformed Church to realize the principle: "A free Church in a free State."

The Government of the Hungarian Republic declares its willingness to grant subventions temporarily to the Reformed Church as stated below, until its financial condition improves.

6./ a. The Hungarian Republic secures the subvention of the personnel in the amount equal to the salaries of public servants from June 30, 1948 to December 31, 1948, and thereafter for the following five years. The amount of subsidy for personnel shall be reduced 25% beginning with January 1, 1954, and the Government shall continue to furnish the remaining 75% until December 31, 1958. During the period from January 1, 1959, to December 31, 1963, 50% of the present Government subsidy shall be paid, while during the period from January 1, 1964 to December 31, 1968, 25% shall be paid. All Government subsidies shall cease on December 31, 1968.

b. The Government shall provide for extraordinary expenses, consisting 10% of the annual Government subsidies of personnel expenses.

c. The Government of the Hungarian Republic continues to pay a subsidy for the construction, reconstruction, and equipment of buildings of the Hungarian Reformed Church in the amount equivalent to the yearly rate of the subsidy paid for the same purpose during the time from August 1, 1946 until July 1, 1948, provided that this subsidy will be used exclusively for the construction, reconstruction, maintenance and equipment of ecclesiastical buildings, i.e. churches, congregational houses and manses. This subsidy shall be reduced every five years in a manner similar to the reduction of the subsidy for personnel and the subsidy shall cease on December 31, 1968.

d. Any other subsidies paid until now shall be paid in the amount reduced according to the above scale.

e. The Government shall pay the pensions of the Reformed ministers and the widows and children of members of the National Pension Fund in accordance with the rules governing the pensions of public servants; furthermore, the Government shall assume the payment of pensions of those who will retire before December 31, 1953.

7./ The Hungarian Reformed Church, in accordance with the clear commandment of the Holy Scripture, shall incorporate prayers for the Hungarian Republic, for the head of the State, for the Government and for the well being and peace of the Hungarian people in its "Order of Worship" and shall conduct worship conforming with the Gospel and the confession of the faith of the Church on national holydays. It declares that the new hymn book to be published in the near future contains hymns suitable for such occasions.

8./ The Hungarian Reformed Church takes notice of the decision of the Government of the Hungarian Republic that all schools other than the public schools together with the boarding houses connected with them shall be socialized by legislative action. The enforcement of the nationalization of Calvinist schools shall be guided by the following agreement:

a. The Government shall take over into the civil service as of July 1, 1948, the entire former teaching and other personnel of the nationalized schools and the boarding houses organically connected with them, according to the length of service of each person.

b. The buildings of the nationalized schools, the boarding houses organically connected with them, and the lands used by the employees shall pass into Government ownership with all their encumbrances incurred before May 15, 1948, and proved beyond doubt either by recording in the Land Register or otherwise. Controversies arising in this respect shall be decided by the Minister of Religion and Public Education after hearing the committee to be established according to Section 1.

c. The Government agrees that those members of the teaching personnel who have acted as cantors, may perform their duties under the same conditions as they did before, for two years following the conclusion of this agreement. The land which is the benefice of the cantor for this work shall remain in church ownership.

d. Nationalization shall not apply to institutions which are exclusively ecclesiastical in nature and are not institutions of public education, i.e. theolo-

gical academies, ministers' training institutes, deacons' and deaconesses' training schools, and training schools for missionaries or other church workers.

The present legal relationship between the theological faculty of Debrecen and the Ministry of Religion and Public Education shall remain unchanged.

e. The Government of the Hungarian Republic, partly in appreciation of the merits of the Reformed Church in the field of Hungarian public education, partly as a means of ensuring preparatory training for the new generation of ministers, agrees that the Reformed colleges of strongest historical tradition, mentioned below, shall remain ecclesiastical schools, not to exceed their present size, viz., the secondary school, girls' preparatory school, and the teachers' training school belonging to the Reformed College at Sarospatak.

The secondary school, girls' preparatory school, belonging to the Reformed college at Debrecen, as well as the girls' secondary school, girls' preparatory school, and the teachers' training school of the Doczy girls' training institute.

The secondary school (gymnasium) belonging to the Reformed college of Papa;

The Reformed secondary school of Budapest's IXth district, Lonyai Street, and its organic part, the Baar Madas Reformed secondary school for girls.

The permanent committee to be established under Section 1 shall be competent to give suggestions to the Government concerning the occasional expansion of the existing framework.

The maintenance of the said institutions shall be supplied by the Government of the Hungarian Republic for the duration of the Government subsidy in the same manner as the subvention of personnel provided above; after the expiration of the period of Government subvention their maintenance shall be assumed exclusively by the Church.

f. The Government of the Hungarian Republic recognizes and secures right of the Reformed Church, that mandatory religious instruction must also henceforth be held at schools of a public character in complete freedom. The question of religious instruction is to be settled anew in one way or another by the new law concerning religious matters, with special consideration to the followers of the free churches and to those who are not affiliated with any religion.

g. The Government shall take over, grant the proper status in the civil service, and appoint the teachers of the schools to be closed, teachers' schools for men and women, etc., in the same way as that provided for the other teachers, taken over into the civil service.

h. In case the Law School at Kecksemet should be closed, the State shall arrange for appointments of the professors corresponding to their present positions.

i. The Government of the Hungarian Republic shall take measures if requested by parents, that in those schools where the mother tongue of the students is not Hungarian (Romanian, Serbian, Ruthenian, Slovak, German) the language of instruction shall be the mother tongue of the students.

At the same time the Government of the Hungarian Republic shall make efforts to have similar provisions enacted on a reciprocal basis in neighboring states for students whose mother tongue is Hungarian.

9./ The Church shall change its statutes pertaining to public education in accordance to the new laws enacted by the Government.

10./ The discussion and drafting of proposals relating to the settlement of all open questions shall be within the jurisdiction of the joint committee established under Section 1." 293

Karl Barth once professed to believe that a Christian faced with the problem of living in a State which did not respect the moral law, should above all "not lose his sense of humor." 294 Hungarian Calvinists, however, had little to cheer about. Despite of the above agreement the grossest kind of interference in the work of the pastorate was continuously resorted to, so that in the end -as already mentioned above- notorious and criminal Communists were installed in

293. Gsovski, op.cit., pp. 134-138.

294. Schuster, op.cit., p. 194.

ecclesiastical offices, while worthy churchmen were dismissed, deported, and imprisoned.

"The Protestant Church -says a report on Hungary- is under heavy attack, similar to that experienced by the Catholic Church. The more bitter attacks in this field have been directed against Bishop Ravasz, who is under house arrest at Leanyfalu. Many protestant ministers are in prison. Some Reformed ministers were sentenced to death for participation in the revolution." 295

Only eight schools -as we have seen- survived the drive for the nationalization of education. Relief and welfare organizations were forbidden, and the press was reduced to impotence by censorship and suppression. Towards the close of 1951, two theological seminaries were closed. 296

295. Hungary Under Soviet Rule...op.cit., pp. 24-25.

296. Schuster, op.cit., p. 195.

CHAPTER II

The Lutheran Church in Hungary after 1945.

The Hungarian Lutheran Church, a most laudable segment of Hungarian Christians, depleted by the deportation of German "ethnic" groups after the war, ²⁹⁷ was powerless

297. The Catholic Church in Hungary will always be proud of the courageous stand of her bishops in behalf of the German speaking minority after the War of 1939-1945. Their letter to the Prime Minister on August 8, 1947, is given here in full: "Mr. Prime Minister: The Bishops of Hungary are greatly alarmed by the news that the expulsion of the German minority is to be continued. In 1944 we did our utmost to prevent the Government then in power from carrying out the inhuman deportation of the Jews. Conscious of the mission entrusted to us by God, we consider it now our duty to protest against the expulsion of the German speaking minority. The more so since they are of our faith. We have already lodged a protest with your predecessor in office. For we would have no right to be indignant about the cruel expulsion of the Hungarians in Czechoslovakia if we approved the same methods being employed in our own country where the Germans have been settled for more than two hundred years. We protest against measures of this kind, where the whole German minority was to be made collectively responsible for the treacherous actions as the Volksbund and the SS. We protested against the practice that punished with the traitors not only the innocent and politically indifferant people, but also those who had avowedly professed their loyalty to the Hungarian homeland by supporting the "Loyalty Movement," even when they did not wish to forego their mother-tongue. We have mentioned already the contribution of German settlers towards the prosperity of our country. The nation is indebted to the for many outstanding Hungarians of German descent. Why should we make these fellow-countrymen our irreconcilable adversaries? Priests in Germany testify that a great number of the children of those expelled Swabians no longer understand the German language. They need Hungarian speaking priests in order to make their confessions. If we expell the

after the trial and sentencing to prison for two years of

living Germans, why not the dead ones as well? Let expel the statue of the great physician Semmelweiss, the works of Steindl, Ybl, Hausman, Strobl...the books of Ferenc Herceg. Why not obliterate the names of German scholars and scientists from the year books of our academies? Among them we find many Magyarized names, those of Hungary's most loyal sons.

The Hungarian State is anxious to repair the harm done to the Jews, to repatriate them and restore them their former rights. We agree fully to these measures. But why should we expel innocent German Christians from this country, deprive them of their property and destroy them morally and physically, thus making ourselves responsible before history for a crying injustice?

We expel from our midst a hard-working, diligent and frugal type of man. We deprive these people of their lawful property. We destroy them morally by regarding them as undesirable aliens, although they feel they belong to us. What will the Swabian prisoners of war, who fought shoulder to shoulder with the Magyars of this country, say on their return? It is sad, indeed, that the centenary of the great revolution of 1948 finds the country in a state of such gloom and confusion.

We are told we must make room for those Magyars who were driven out from Upper-Hungary. We have been told that these Magyars would be settled in those districts which the Slovaks had to leave. Can we truly speak of equal rights if only a few thousand Slovaks choose to go to Czechoslovakia, while all Magyars are forcibly driven out from Slovakia? Those poor Magyars arrive in Hungary, expecting to find here houses and land of the Slovaks waiting for them. Instead they must witness the expulsion of the Germans from their villages and are offered their houses and land. Astounded and shocked they ask: "Are we supposed to intrude upon the property of our Hungarian-speaking Christian fellow-countymen?" And the tears of the expelled Magyars mingle with those of the expelled Germans.

Mr. Prime Minister, the ends do not justify the means. Eternal principles are being sacrificed for the sake of cheap expediencies. A dreadful short-sightedness deprives us of the shield of law and justice, which we ourselves shall greatly need sooner or later. We believe that the facts speak for themselves and will suffice of themselves to put an end of the expulsion of the German-speaking minorities." Cardinal Mindszenty Speaks, op.cit., pp. 139-142.

its ablest leader, the outspoken and indomitable Bishop Lajos Ordass.

On December 16, 1948, an agreement between the Government and the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church in Hungary was concluded after Bishop Ordass and Baron Albert Radvanszky, Supervisor General of the Evangelical Church, had been arrested.²⁹⁸ Both were sentenced under the pretense of black marketing on October 1, 1948.²⁹⁹

In general, the agreement conforms with those previously concluded between the State and the Reformed³⁰⁰ and Unitarian Churches.³⁰¹ Concerning certain Evangelical schools Paragraph (d) of Section 6 provides that legal relationship existing up to that time between the theological faculty of Sopron and the Ministry of Religion and Public Education shall continue. Paragraph (e) of the same section provides that the Government agrees that two secondary schools, one for boys and one for girls, in Budapest, remain dominational, provided that they do not exceed their present size. According to Paragraph (f) of the Section, the Hungarian Government recognizes and secures to the

298. Markham, op.cit., p. 88.

299. Nepszava (Budapest), No. 227. October 2, 1948.

300. Full text in Lutheran World Federation Newsbulletin; Vol. IV. No. 2. Also (excerpts) in Tobias, op.cit., p. 474.

301. See about the Unitarians below.

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Evangelical Church as a matter of right that compulsory religious instruction in Government schools shall be held in full freedom.³⁰²

The Unitarian Church, with only a small number of adherents in Hungary proper,³⁰³ followed the Reformed Church in signing a similar agreement with the Government on the same day,³⁰⁴ without attempting resistance.

In order to do justice to Hungarian Protestants, we will here publish results of an investigation of Communist takeover and occupation of Hungary conducted by the House of the Representatives of the United States Eighty-Third Congress.³⁰⁵ Here authorities on the subject will elaborate on subjects barely mentioned above.

"During the two years (1947-1949) which I spent in Hungary,³⁰⁶ I witnessed the takeover by the Hungarian

302. Gsovski, op.cit., p. 139.

303. Only 8,465 Unitarians were listed for 1948 by "Magyar Statisztikai Zsebkönyv" of 1948; or 0.1% of the population. In comparison a considerably larger part of Hungarians living in Transylvania (now Romania) are Unitarians.

304. October 7, 1948.

305. Investigation of Communist Takeover and Occupation of Hungary; Fifth Interim Report of Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Hungary of the Select Committee on Communist Aggression. House of Representatives; 83rd Congress 2nd Session; H.R. 346. and HR. 438. (United States Government Printing Office: Washington, 1954).

306. Alvin M. Bentley, Member of the Congress; Cf.: Investigation; op.cit., pp. 70-72.

Communist Government of the three leading Protestant faiths; Reformed (Calvinist), Lutheran and Unitarian. The following memorandum tells in brief of my observations on this theme during this period.

The Hungarian Government early took advantage of the fact that there had been much war damage to church buildings and property and that the churches by themselves were unable financially to effect the needed repairs. In return for its assistance, the Hungarian Government demanded a "true democratic spirit" on the part of the churches.

The part played by the Unitarian church may be disposed of quickly. After the departure of its leader, Bishop Szentivanyi for the United States early in 1947, this church found itself too weak to resist the demands of the Government. The agreement which it signed on October 7, 1948, was similar in context to that signed by the Reformed church leaders, which will be discussed later.

Following the elections of August 1947, both the Reformed and Lutheran churches addressed strong protests to Prime Minister Dinnyes against the widespread disfranchisement which had taken place among the church members, both religious and lay figures. The Lutheran Church even appealed to the Prime Minister to secure the four freedoms of the Atlantic Charter to all Hungarian citizens. These protests were never publicly acknowledged or answered by the Hungarian Government.

During October 1947, the Reformed Church also protested the new Government decree relating to censorship of the press, especially as it referred to religious publication, and objected to non-church authorities censoring printed material designed for religious instruction. This protest also went unanswered. It was approximately this time that the Hungarian Government began tentative negotiations for agreements with the Protestant Churches.

These discussions continued in secret throughout the winter of 1947-1948 with leading figures of both parties (the Lutheran and Calvinist Churches) considerably divided as to the proper attitude toward the Hungarian Government. Some persons spoke out for the freedom of the churches and rejected all charges of reactionary tendencies; others expressed a willingness to conform and cooperate with the so called People's Democracy. It was at this time that Presbyterian

delegates from the United States, including Dr. Vissert Hooft, visited in Budapest.

On March 20, 1948, the Lutheran Church issued a statement to the effect that "its religious tasks had not been hampered up to the present." It acknowledged that relations between the churches and the Government had become strained and urgently demanded that negotiations be undertaken openly to achieve an agreement and peaceful cooperation. The Communist press generally applauded this statement while warning against "the disturbing elements in all churches, who supported reaction rather than democracy." Opinions were general on both sides as to the necessity for reaching an agreement.

However, Lutheran Bishop Ordass laid down certain conditions, which would have to be met, before an agreement could be reached. These included, freedom of religion, freedom of worship, free religious education by the church, and a guarantee that the church would not be obstructed in carrying out social-welfare work. Bishop Ordass was sharply attacked for this statement (curiously enough by the Socialist press) for even daring to presume that the Hungarian Government did not safeguard freedom of the religious schools and freedom of worship.

It was at this time that two disturbing elements came to light: Resignations of leading church-personnel were announced, and other prominent churchmen began to indulge in self-criticism, especially with regard to the attitude of the churches in the past. ³⁰⁷

Negotiations between the Lutheran Church and the Hungarian Government commenced in April 1948. Talks also got underway with the Reformed Church. However, strong hints were given by the Government, that Reformed Bishop Ravasz and Lutheran Bishop Kapi should first resign, even though the reasons given were innocuous. Ravasz resigned on April 29, 1948, and a Socialist, (curiously enough again) stated that "The key position held by him can now be allotted to a man, who is

307. "With anguish of heart...as the debacle ending the war was approaching...churchmen were awaiting the Divine judgement so well deserved by so much sinful omission; and how many had taken it for granted that all possibilities of our future activities would be lost to us owing to our unworthiness." Bishop Berecky's radio speech on January 1, 1949. Cf.: Tobiat, op.cit., p. 167.

also a good democrat in conformity with the true spirit of the Reformed Church. 308

Communist leaders spoke with growing confidence of the nearness of a rapprochement between the churches and the Government. Meanwhile, on April 30, the Reformed Church issued a statement, expressing its willingness to negotiate for an agreement and making known its approval of the Government's land reform and reconstruction program. 309

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308. In the following years, though no opposition comparable with that put up by the Catholic Bench of Bishops was offered, many more Hungarian Protestant leaders had to be removed - usually without violence, though dozens suffered the fate of deportation. Almost the last two to go were the Lutheran Bishops, Zoltan Turoczky and Jozsef Sabo, who were "persecuted by order of the Government" in the spring of 1952. Cf.: Gordon Sheperd, Russia's Danubian Empire (London: Wm. Heinemann Ltd., 1954). p. 128.
309. Here are some quotes of this declaration: "The Synod considers the breaking up of the big landed estates and their distribution among the peasants, similarly the nationalization of the greater industrial undertakings in harmony with the spirit of the Scriptures, insofar as the measures have been taken in the interest of a better and juster social order. Our Church will always be ready to serve in a society which has been built with the cooperation of workers, peasants, and educated classes. It regards such a society suited for a better assertion of the spirit of the Gospels, though necessarily not even such a society can be free of the temptations of human sinfulness." - "The old forms and ways of life, both of the community and of the individuals, have disappeared, and we don't feel at all sorry about it. They have disappeared out of the will of God. We confess that the forms of life in present day Hungary are not alien to our innermost hearts, and we discover the frameworks of a juster and happier life in them, as ordered by God Himself." "The 1946 Act of the Hungarian Parliament, which has assured the fullest measure of religious liberty among other human liberties, has made a reassuring impression not only on the Hungarian churches only, but all over in world Christianity as well." - "The Synod recognizes the Constitution, legislation, and various institutions of the Hungarian Republic, declaring at the same time, that it considers the republican constitution as particularly suited for the raising of free

On May 8th, the newly formed Hungarian Workers' Party (resulting from a merger of the Communists and Social Democrats) issued its draft program. This program included a demand that Government-printed textbooks must be used in all schools and, that all denominational schools must be nationalized. It also demanded that the churches sever all connections with the former large landholders and also with the capitalist system "in order to cooperate peacefully with the State." Energetic measures were threatened against those elements of "reaction" who remained in the churches. By this time both Reformed Bishop Ravasz and Lutheran Bishop Kapi had been ousted from their positions.

On May 15, 1948, Gyula Ortutay, Hungarian Minister for Cults and Education, openly stated that the denominational schools were to be nationalized. He promised the maintenance of compulsory religious education, and said that all teachers would be taken into Government employment. He demanded, however, that the churches take up an open stand "for the People's Democracy." The negotiations between the Protestant churches and the Government were now drowing to a close, but the Government spokesmen still protested against certain church negotiators, notably Albert Rodvonszky of the Lutheran Church.

By June 1, negotiations had been concluded with the Reformed Church, since Albert Bereczky replaced Bishop Ravasz, and evidently proved himself more amenable to Government demands. Another new figure, Undersecretary of Defense, Roland Kiss, also emerged as a prominent lay leader of his church. Bereczky and Kiss were most active in concluding negotiations between their church and the Government. The election of Bishop Bereczky, incidentally, was strongly supported by the famous theologian, Prof. Karl Barth, of Basle University in Switzerland.

Further "purges" in the Lutheran Church hierarchy took place in June, but the chief obstacle to a conclusion of negotiations seemed to be Bishop Laszlo Ordass. Ordass himself became the subject of severe attacks by the Government press. The changes in the Lutheran leadership were commented on by one paper, which said: "Such changes are needed in order to reach an agreement with the State. To date the same persons have directed

society of free men." - "The Declaration of the Council of the Synod of the Hungarian Reformed Church Concerning Church and State Relationship and Other Connected Issues." In Tobias, op.cit., pp. 465-468.

the Lutheran Church, who held these key positions during the Horthyists and fascism." Bishop Ordass was finally ousted on June 15, - two days before Parliament passed legislation on the nationalization of schools. Five Reformed church schools and four Lutheran schools in Budapest alone were taken over by the Government.

Government attacks on the Lutheran leadership grew more and more bitter. Erno Mihalyfi said on August 19: "the leaders do not stand unreservedly for democracy. The Government cannot tolerate any longer that such persons should be the leaders of the Lutheran Church." Mihalyfi then went on to describe in detail the "fascist and reactionary" backgrounds of several of the leaders and added bluntly: "All without exception must retire." He also attacked Bishop Ordass for opposing "the propagation of social justice." These attacks were echoed by a conference of so-called Lutheran Church leaders, which demanded fundamental changes in the lay leadership of the church.

On September 9, 1948, the Hungarian Economic Police announced the arrest of Bishop Ordass, Radvanszky, and Sandor Varga, former secretary general of the Lutheran Church, on charges of violating foreign exchange regulations. Specifically, they were charged with having embezzled currency collected abroad for the relief work of the Hungarian Lutheran Church. A protest against the arrest of Ordass from the Bishop of Cicester was strongly rebuffed by Prime Minister Dinnyes.

The trial of these church leaders commenced on September 28th and continued til October 1st. Bishop Ordass bravely pleaded not guilty, and told the court: "In these five weeks I have often asked myself and my God whether I am guilty. I had time enough for meditation. And now standing here before my judges, I must say that I have never enjoyed such peace of mind, as during these weeks." The workers' court nevertheless sentenced him to two years of imprisonment, while Varga received a three years' sentence. Both were also heavily fined. Rodvanszky was not tried at this time, since he "fell sick" while in prison and had to be removed to a hospital.

After the "agreements" the takeover of the Protestant Churches was complete. The new leaders of the Reformed and Lutheran communities followed the Government leadership in bitterly denouncing Cardinal Mindszenty during the time of his arrest, imprisonment and

trial. All of them began to "represent" their church abroad in so-called peace conferences. All of them sang the praises of the achievements of the Hungarian Government, which had found its true and faithful servants at last within the two great Protestant Churches."

The agreements, as it would be expected, meant nothing in improving Church and State relationship, nor did all servility on the part of the puppet Protestant leaders produce even a beggar's coin in shape of Government concessions.

In July 1952, the Hungarian Lutheran Dioceses were summarily reduced from four to two, and the Church districts cut from twenty-one to sixteen, thus enabling "unreliable" clergy to be removed.³¹⁰ Commenting on the changes, the Lutheran organ said humbly at the time: "Our Synod in all this had done nothing but obey the divine command."³¹¹

A similar squeeze was also applied to the Hungarian Calvinists in 1952, when, in direct abrogation of the agreement of October 1948, the Calvinist secondary schools of Papa, Budapest, Sarospatak and Debrecen, were handed over to the State. Said Janos Horvath, President of the Hungarian State Office for Church Affairs, in a speech to Reformed Church leaders: "The Church does her best, when in her own way she explains to Church members, that the individual's

310. Shepherd, op.cit., p. 129.

311. Evangelikus Elet (Budapest), July 20, 1952.

best contribution for the cause of peace is to do his work as conscientiously as possible." ³¹² There has been little else the Protestants can do in these days within the temporal borders of Hungary.

312. Tobias, op.cit., p. 552.

CHAPTER III

The Orthodox Church in Hungary after 1945.

The Communists' approach to the Greek Orthodox communities was radically different, not in violence and tempo, but in direction: whereas the Catholics and to a lesser extent the Protestants had been met head-on, in frontal attack, the Greek Orthodox movement was, so to speak, stormed from the rear, and treated as an ally rather than as a foe. In its political exploitation of the Orthodox faith, as in many other features of its East-European and Balkan policy, the Kremlin was treading the paths which had been blazed generations before by the Tzars. No modern leader of the Russian Empire has ever been blind to the political potentialities of the Balkan-Orthodox movements, as counter-weights to the influence of Rome and the Occident in general.

The independent (autokephalos) Orthodox Church was established in Hungary in 1770, and in 1791 freedom of religion was enacted for the Church.³¹³ In 1864 an Orthodox National Congress was convoked, which divided the Orthodox Church in Hungary into a Serbian and a Romanian province. The resolutions of the Congress were given the effect of law³¹⁴ and an independent Romanian Orthodox

313. Law of 1791; No. XXVII.; confirmed by Sections 6-8 of laws No. XX and XXI of 1948.

314. Law No. IX. of 1868.

Metropolitanate was created in Hungary. This Metropolitanate was detached to Romania by the Treaty of Trianon after World War I, and only the bishopric in Buda remained for the Serbian Orthodox province in Hungary.

Besides the above provinces, there were - and also are - communities belonging to the so-called Hungarian Greek Orthodox Church. The congregations of this denomination had, however, no joint ecclesiastical authority.³¹⁵ The legal provision on the Greek Orthodox Churches merely was:

"The followers of the Greek Orthodox Religion of other than the Serbian and Romanian mother tongue, may also henceforth maintain all the rights which they have exercised in the past, related to settling the matters of their church communities and schools independently, using their liturgical language freely, and the managing the property and the funds of their church communities."³¹⁶

As late as 1941, the congregations of the Hungarian Greek Orthodox Church were partly placed under the jurisdiction of a special ecclesiastical administrator, appointed by the Regent.³¹⁷ In 1950, these congregations were placed

315. Cf.: Mihaly Mora, The Greek Orthodox Church Laws (Budapest: 1938), p. 15. (In Hungarian)

316. Gsovski, op.cit., p. 98.

317. Cf.: Lajos Kubinszky, Outline of the Law of Administration of Matters of Religion and Public Education (Budapest: University Press, 1947). p. 250.

under the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Patriarch of Moscow by a notice of the Minister of Religion and Public Education:

"The Greek Orthodox Patriarch accepted the Hungarian Greek Orthodox Communities, which lacked a supreme ecclesiastical authority, under his provisional jurisdiction and delegated the Greek-Orthodox Dean, Janos Kopolovics, as an administrator, in order to settle their questions or to resolve their problems.

The Cabinet took cognizance of the appointment of Janos Kopolovics as an administrator and approved his assumption of activities." ³¹⁸

Thus the Hungarian Orthodox community, "adopted" by the Russian mother-church, adopted, in its turn, the political line of that Church and became a subservient tool in the hands of the Government. The line to be followed was pointed out as early as in August 1942:

"The Holy Sobor urges all churchmen to abandon all attempts to use the Church for temporal political schemes, for the Church belongs to God and must serve Him only...Churchmen must not see in the Soviet authority the anti-Christ; on the contrary, the Sobor calls attention to the fact, that the Soviet authority is the only one throughout the world, which will realize, by Government methods, the ideals of the kingdom of God. Therefore, every faithful churchman must not only be an honorable citizen, but also fight with all his might, together with the Soviet authorities, for the realization of the Kingdom of God upon earth." ³¹⁹

Russian Orthodox Metroplitan Nicolai, visiting Hungary in January 1954, declared that the Church could not consider

318. No.1, 161-1 K-4 of 1950 Eln. No. 6. - Notice of the Minister of Religion and Public Education on the Provisional Supreme Authority of the Hungarian Greek Orthodox Communities. Gsovski, op.cit., p. 131.

319. Tobias, op.cit., p. 157.

"an armed defense of Christianity." He added that it is
"not our attachment to any earthly system, but our loyal-
ty to Christ", which should determine the Church's action
in the cause of peace. 320

320. Ibid., p. 165.

CHAPTER IV

The Jewish Denomination in Hungary since 1945.

Although Jews were mentioned in Hungarian statutes as far back as 1092, their oppressed status -similar to their contemporary situation in other countries- was not significantly improved until the Imperial Rescript of Emperor Joseph II. 321

The Diet of 1840 improved the status of the Jews further, enacting as follows:

"1./ Jews born in this country or in the parts thereof, as well as those who have obtained legal permission to reside here, may reside freely everywhere in the country and in parts thereof, with the sole exception of the Mining Cities mentioned in Law XXXVIII of 1791, and such places from which they are presently excluded by old legal custom regarding mines and mining institutions.

2./ According to existing conditions, Jews may also establish factories and may pursue trade and handicraft, either alone or with the help of apprentices of the same religion; they may train their sons for these trades and henceforth they may practice the sciences and honest trades which they have previously been practicing.

They shall be compelled to use permanent first and last names, and to enter their births in the registers kept by their own rabbis." 322

One of the last acts of the Revolutionary National Assembly of 1848-1849 was the law adopted on July 28, 1849, on the "Emancipation of Members of the Jewish Faith." Due to

321. March 31, 1783.

322. Gsovski, op.cit., pp. 109-110.

the collapse of the Revolution, this law did not become effective.

The Parliament of 1867 proclaimed the "Emancipation of the Jews Concerning Civil and Constitutional Rights":

"...the Jewish residents of the country shall be entitled to exercise civil and political rights equal to those of the Christians." 323

In 1895, status equal to the Christian churches was enacted for the Jewish denomination, proclaiming:

"The Jewish religion shall be a legally recognized religion." 324

After the outbreak of World War II, and following a number of discriminatory statutes, the Parliament under the influence of the Nazis repealed the progressive legislation adopted in 1895. The Jewish religion became an "admitted" instead of a "recognized" religion. 325 Thus it lost its status of equality with other leading denominations in Hungary. The law abolished appropriations for the support of Jewish schools and institutions and provided that such institutions would henceforth be supported exclusively by funds raised by the Jewish community in Hungary. The conversion of a Hungarian citizen to the Jewish religion was deemed void, unless it involved persons belonging to the Jewish race. Earlier, the Jewish religion had been deprived of its represen-

323. Law XVII. of 1867.
324. Law XLII. of 1895.
325. Law VIII. of 1942.

tation in the Upper House. ³²⁶

By the Armistice Agreement concluded in Moscow on January 20, 1945, Hungary accepted the obligation

"...to release all persons held in confinement in connection with their sympathies with the United Nations' cause, or for racial or religious reasons, regardless of their citizenship or nationality, and repeal all discriminatory legislation and disabilities therefrom." ³²⁷

As a result of this obligation, the Provisional Hungarian Government decreed the repeal of all anti-Jewish legislation. ³²⁸ Jewish survivors, ³²⁹the majority of whom lived

326. Law XXVII. of 1940. The anti-Semitic tone of Hungarian legislation began under German influences during the premiership of General Gyula Gombos (1932-1935). Gombos was responsible for a law which inaugurated a "numerus clausus" of 20% (reduced later to 6%) for Jewish employment in business and the professions.

327. Gsovski, op.cit., p. 111.

328. Decree No. 200 of 1945. M.E.

329. The 1947 Annual Report of World Jewish Congress estimated the total number of Hungarian Jews killed during the war at 564,000. However, the majority of victims came from territories regained in 1938, 1939 and 1940 and also as a result of the military campaigns, and therefore do not relate to the present territory. Various estimates seem to agree on 220,000 as the approximate number of losses suffered by the Jewish population of the Trianon territory. Of this number, about 68,000 were killed in Hungary, while 152,000 met their death in German concentration camps. (For the extermination of Hungarian Jewry by the Nazis and for the various rescue actions see Eugene Levai, Black Book of the Martyrdom of Hungarian Jewry (Zurich and Vienna, 1948). pp. 77-457. Levai also collected and published in four volumes material concerning the fate of Hungarian Jewry. These volumes were published in Hungarian (Budapest, 1946).

in Budapest, attempted, at first with some success, to restore their pre-war organizations. Religious congregations were formed anew, and even the Budapest Rabbinical Seminary reopened its doors, serving mostly those students whose studies had been interrupted by the Nazi persecutions. A National Board of Social Reconstruction was also founded, the members of which included citizens prominent in all walks of life and, even representatives of the Christian Churches. ³³⁰ It boldly attacked all recrudescences of anti-Semitism and even espoused the cause of the German ethnic group then being expelled from Hungary. Soon, however, the Communists succeeded in placing one of their men, Louis Stoeckler, in an office of crucial importance in the Jewish community. Stoeckler, in his utterances, sought to persuade his audiences that neither the Christian Churches nor the Western Powers had been responsible for the liberation of those Jews who survived, but that instead they owed everything to the "glorious Red Army", which now deserved all their support.

Stoeckler and other "official" representatives of the Jewry in Hungary supported the memorandum addressed to the Peace Conference by the Hungarian Government, in which it was stated that although restitution had not as yet been made to the victims of Nazi persecution of their lawful property, the reason was solely to be found in economic condi-

33.° Schuster, op.cit., p. 157.

tions caused by inflation, war damage, and the burden of reparations. It gave assurances that the problem would be solved as speedily as possible.

On the home front it was said, that if the influence of the Communist Party in Hungary were destroyed, Jews would lose the support of the only power which had been consistently pro-Semitic. Propaganda, reporting fable after fable which had no basis in fact, described the Soviet Union as a veritable paradise, in which everything possible was being done to assure the happiness and prosperity of the Jew.

By May, 1948, the Communists were ready to seize control of a still unyielding Jewish community. Stoeckler was put in charge of the "Temporal National Committee" to represent the autonomous Orthodox Jews in Hungary, until the representation could be newly organized upon by-laws adapted to the changed conditions. 331

On December 7, 1948, an agreement was concluded between the "Government of the Hungarian Republic, the National Bureau of the Hungarian Jews, and the Orthodox Central Bureau, as the legal representatives of the Jewish congregations." 332 This agreement is an almost verbatim repetition of those concluded with the Reformed and Unitarian Churches, containing the same guarantees and privileges. It also meant that "the general schools of the Jewish denomination were natio-

331. Decree B. No. 34,000 of 1948. V.K.M.

332. Magyar Kozlony(Official Gazette, Budapest), No. 271., December 10, 1948.

lized in the same manner as were those of other denominations." 333 The guarantees and privileges meant - for many - deportations to Russia for slave labor purposes. The anti-Zionist campaign, inaugurated after the first election had been held in Israel, also reached new heights of intensity. The Jewish community was soon a thing of the past, although rabbis were still permitted to officiate. All Jewish congregations were unified under a single authority. 334

On January 17, 1953, it was officially reported that Louis Stoeckler was arrested, the communique adding laconically that he was a former "industrialist." But the damage had been already done. By the close of 1950, hardly a Jew in Budapest could have existed, if it had not been possible for him to sell some item of personal property. A campaign against the "nationalists" and "cosmopolites", who favored the establishment of Israel, added to the misery and confusion. One of the charges levied against several defendants in the trial of Laszlo Rajk was, that they had favored "reactionary, chauvinistic Zionism." These strangely submissive "criminals" confessed, that persons who favored Israel were traitorous advocates of American imperialism and treacherous indulgers in espionage. 335

The deterioration of the Hungarian economy and the in-

333. Schuster, op.cit., p. 160.

334. January 12, 1950.

335. George N. Schuster, Religion Behind the Iron Curtain (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1954), p. 264.

creasing bleakness of the cultural scene led to bitter popular outbursts of feeling, for which the surviving Jews were convenient scapegoats. Despite of this, many Hungarian Jews played a prominent part in the Revolution of 1956. The leaders of the Jewish community at the time, openly supported the uprising, and they condemned the conduct of those Jews, who had taken any part during the years of terror in the persecution of the people. In February 1957, four Jewish university professors were arrested, because they refused to cooperate in the editorship of the so-called Government "White Book", in which the regime alleges that there were anti-Semitic pogroms during the revolution. ³³⁶

It is characteristic to the situation, that 75,000 of the 125,000 Jews probably still in Hungary applied for emigration visas since the Revolution of 1956. ³³⁷

336. Hungary Under Soviet Rule....op.cit., p. 25.

337. Schuster, Religion....op.cit., p. 265.

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