

NO.409 "B-4" FACESHEET AND RATING

LL p.1

June 26th, 1957
Innsbruck

1. I-9
2. [REDACTED]
3. Innsbruck
4. 29
5. M
6. Hungarian
7. Roman Catholic
8. Roman Catholic
9. Single
10. -----
11. R.C. Priest, Prof. in Theological Seminary
12. -----
13. -----
14. Peasant
15. No
16. No
17. -----
18. -----
19. R.C. Theology at Esztergom
20. Other urban
21. Other urban
22. Esztergom
23. -----
24. November 1956
25. Innsbruck
26. No
27. -----
28. No
29. -----
31. "6"
32. "8"
33. "6"
34. Respondent is extremely modest. He maintains that he was all the time very much absorbed in his theological and musical studies and teaching and therefore does not know much about other things. He was also somewhat reluctant to disclose internal affairs of the church and personal matters about the church leadership. However, during our conversation, he gradually relaxed and gave a fine description of the situation at Esztergom.

Respondent was professor of liturgy and church music and choral at the theological seminary at Esztergom.

(Tell me please about the admission and number of students in the Esztergom seminary! Was there any change during the recent years in comparison to the pre-war or during the war years? Answer:)

Several seminaries were dissolved or rather united with others. So, in Esztergom now there ~~were~~ are not only theological students from the Diocese of Esztergom, but also from the Diocese of Veszprém. The number of students is about the same as it was after the war in 1945, 1946, or 1947. There is less than during the war years, but of course at that time the Esztergom Diocese was much larger. In the admission committee I do not know of any outside influence. Whether to admit or refuse an applicant was left in the church's hands, with one exception, namely, it was strictly forbidden to admit any former member of a religious order. The religious orders, which were dissolved in 1950, had of course many students who could not study further towards the priesthood. These were absolutely refused by the régime the permission to enter a diocesan seminary and become a secular priest. Besides this, I know only of one case, when somebody admitted to the Esztergom seminary was later removed by the State Church Bureau. This person was a vice-director

of a school. He spent a few months in our seminary when the Rector was called by the State Church Bureau from Budapest and ordered to dismiss this person without delay. Later, when the pressures were relaxed during the last year, he returned to the seminary again.

(What was the set-up in Esztergom and also in the direction of the seminary there, in what way did the régime exert its influence on the affairs of the most important diocese of Hungary? Answer:)

After the arrest of the Cardinal Mindszenty and the arrest of the subsequently elected vicars Mgr. Meszlényi and Mgr. Gigler, the régime forced finally the canons to accept Beresztóczy as the new vicar. The Holy See thereupon appointed Bishop Hamvas of ~~Csanád~~ Csanád to be also the Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese Esztergom. Bishop Hamvas spent about half of his time in Esztergom, and half of his time in his own diocese at Szeged. Beresztóczy was a very well educated man and personally agreeable, only he was cajoled by the régime into submission and did not have the backbone to resist. The other person, whom the régime placed in a key-position, was Vitányi, a young "peace priest" from the Diocese of Vác. This man became the Chancellor of the Archiepiscopal Office. It was typical of the policy of the régime towards the church that the xxxxxxxxxxxx

~~key~~ key-offices were entrusted to priests from other dioceses which before was entirely unknown and contrary to the church practice. So the Rector of the seminary in Estragom was Dr József Hajós, a canon from Székesfehérvár. Like Beresztóczy, he was a highly educated, old priest, who personally was a perfect gentleman, but a great coward, who would do everything what was said to him. These three persons were representatives of the illegal church hierarchy who were appointed exclusively by the State Authorities. Interesting was that they, although they behaved perfectly politely and gentleman-like towards the others and towards each other, in private they could not even stand each other. And often I heard e.g. remarks from Beresztóczy, by which he ridiculed the Rector of the seminary, Dr Hajos. (How did the priests and the theologians behave towards these "peace priests". Answer:)

Outwardly everybody behaved politely, but in fact the priests and the theologians had the greatest contempt for these "peace priests". Especially the young priests were very courageous and often had to be punished by the authorities, because they criticized the "peace priests" behaviour. In the countryside, e.g. in the so-called "Corona" meetings of a Deanery, I was several times present when a young priest would demand the old Dean to put down his protest against the government's policy in the official diary, and the old

priests often were flabbergasted and showed their fear because ~~because~~ of the outspoken and courageous behaviour of the young priests. This was the same at Esztergom itself. The students of the seminary resisted to all kinds of indoctrination and intimidation and gave a hard time to the Rector, Dr Hajós, when he came and gave them a speech about ideology, the peace campaign and other subjects which he was told by the Communists to do; the students used all their wits and arguments to bring him into embarrassment and ridiculed his speeches so that finally he had to give up. It was even worse with the young "peace priest", Vitányi, of the chancellery. When he held speeches to the theology students, he usually could not finish it up, because of the clever attacks from the part of the students, who made all his ~~argixt~~ arguments ~~just~~ seem just silly and childish.

(Was there no informant or spy planted among the seminarians? Answer:)

No, there was not. At the beginning they have tried and we have had suspicion several times, especially in one case. But those people left the seminary usually after a very short time. It would be almost an impossible thing for a spy to live in a seminary and not to be discovered. The seminary has a very intensive life, a regular discipline, which would be difficult for an outside person to accept and conform to it for a

longer period of time.

(What was the State Church Bureau and what part did it take in the direction of church affairs in Esztergom?

Answer:)

The State Church Bureau was a part of the AVH. It had its separate offices in Budapest, but it worked the same way as the AVH. It had the records, the so-called "kader-cards" of every priest in the country, with the most detailed information of their activities, their likes, their dislikes, of their association with different people, as it was reported to the office by its delegates from each diocese. The priests were regularly called in to this office, were questioned and held there for days, just like other people at the ~~regular~~ regular AVH headquarters. During the Revolution this Centre Office in Budapest was ceased and the documentary material, all these "kader-cards" were removed to Castle Hill, but later in the great confusion, they were not sent abroad or destroyed, but again fell into the hands of the AVH. Only documents pertaining to Cardinal Mindszenty's famous trial were rescued and sent to the Cardinal to the American Embassy. As I mentioned ~~before~~ before, the State Church Office had its delegates in every diocese. In Esztergom the delegate was a man who participated in his youth in many ecclesiastical ~~xxx~~ activities and organisations as ~~xxx~~ e.g. he was

in the catholic Legényegylet, an organisation for young workers, and also in the church choir. Later he became atheist and developed a great hatred and contempt towards every priest and towards the whole church. He ~~behaved~~ behaved in Esztergom very rudely, he did not even conceal his contempt for the ecclesiastical persons. He treated the church dignitaries and priests just like the regular AVH officers treated the so-called class enemies, who were put at their mercy.

Just as an example I can tell you the case of a young parish priest, who was denounced by somebody to have wed in the church the local party secretary and to give the sacrament of baptism to the children of the local council chairman. This priest was called to Esztergom and put in ~~the~~ confinement in the palace opposite the room of the State Church Bureau's delegate and besides this he was demoted from his parish to be a chaplain again.

(How did the bishops, in this case Bishop Hamvas, take the control of these men? Did he seem to be under heavy pressure? Answer:)

Yes, I had the feeling all the time that Bishop Hamvas was very nervous and under heavy pressure. I was once witness to an interesting conversation. I went to see the bishop and overheard through the door, which was not properly closed, how the bishop protested against the order transmitted to him by Vitányi, the director

of the chancellery to include certain passages in his Pastoral Letter. Bishop Hamvas seemed to be very upset about it and categorically said several times that he would never include such passages in his Pastoral Letter and nobody can order him to do so. However, when the Pastoral Letter appeared and was read in the churches these passages were in it. In such cases, however, you never knew, whether the bishop finally agreed to it or they had printed the passages anyway, without his agreement.

(Could you talk with your bishop privately without any control ? Answer:)

In the darkest times, in the early fifties, the priests could not talk with their bishop without having somebody there from the "peace priests" or the AVH. Later this has been relaxed and we could talk with our bishops privately. However, we had always the feeling that the bishop himself is under control and pressure and cannot say everything he would like to say to his priests. How brutal was the control in those earlier years, an example will show: In Esztergom all the mail, even the private mail, which came to the Episcopal Palace was opened by the AVH. When several times we protested against this, at least the private mail was left alone, but up to the last day all the official mail, of course, arriving to the office went first through the hands of the AVH men, that is the

appointee of the State Church Bureau.

(Was there arrests and terror against the priests in recent times? Answer:)

There were still ~~many~~ plenty of arrests, especially against young out-spoken priests, but the punishments took usually a milder form. It mostly consisted of demotion. Priests who were not ~~agreedable~~ agreeable to the régime were demoted from their offices or larger parishes and sent as chaplains to small village's ~~communities~~ communities with, of course, much less salary, while the "peace priests" were put not only in the key-offices of the dioceses to be e.g. vicars of the dioceses and the directors of the chancellery of the bishop, but also they received the largest and materially most lucrative parishes.

(What was the attitude of the priests and of the seminarists in regard to the policy of ~~Archbishop~~ Archbishop Czapik and such leading ~~in~~ church members as e.g. Bishop ~~fr~~ Imre Szabó, Vicar of Budapest? Answer:)

The clergy, especially the young priests, condemned very definitely the co-existential policy of Archbishop Czapik, especially his role as peace~~priest~~ priest even outside the country, when e.g. he went to Finland. In the case of Bishop Szabó everybody was surprised at his behaviour, because he was always an excellent priest, a wonderful parish priest, and his priests and believers liked him very much; only he

did not seem to have enough backbone and courage to resist the Communist pressure. He seemed to be a nervous wreck during the last years. It is interesting that Cardinal Mindszenty, when he was freed, called only Bishop Pétery of Vác, Bishop Szabó Shvoj of Székesfehérvár, and Archbishop Grösz of Kalocsa to himself, and did not ask for Bishop Szabó, the Vicar of Budapest, neither for any other bishop besides the three mentioned before. This might indicate how Cardinal Mindszenty thought about the rest of the Episcopate, who were more or less compromising during the last years with the régime, following thereby more or less Archbishop's Czapik's policy.