

September 1957

Königstein

1. KLL-3
2. not given
3. Königstein
4. 29
5. Male
6. Hungarian
7. Roman Catholic
8. Roman Catholic
9. single
10. ---
11. Priest, Chaplain, Teacher of Religion
12. ---
13. ---
14. Peasant
15. ---
16. 1944/45 Germany
17. ---
18. ---
19. Theological Seminary
20. Rural
21. Rural
22. Vas
23. ---
24. January 8th, 1957
25. Denmark
26. ---
27. ---
28. ---
29. ---
31. 8
32. 9
33. 8
34. 8

Respondent was reluctant to give his name and to name the places where he was working in Hungary. Interviewer noticed several times certain caution, and at times evasion in the answers given by the respondent. However, there is no reason to doubt the sincerity and truth of the material which respondent was willing to disclose.

I was ordained in 1951 at Szombathely.

(For a description of conditions in the Szombathely Seminary and at the Office of the Bishop of Szombathely, see Interview KLL-1, 301).

I was working as chaplain in several communities of Zala County, but my last post, before the Revolution, was in the County of Vas. For two years, that is the first and the last year of my four years priestly career in Hungary, I was teaching religion to the school-children. In the intervening two years I did not have permission to do this.

Each time, when I was transferred, I received my new assignment on the regular way in the usual form, signed by the bishop. Any such order, of course, had to be counter-signed by the official of the State Office for Church Affairs, but I could not tell just how much my transfers were the work of this State authority or whether it was left to my bishop's discretion.

I was exceptionally lucky as teacher of religion. Although there were some chicaneries put in my way too at the registration for religious instruction, still, in my communities, almost all parents registered their children for religious instruction. I had almost 100% of the children coming to my classes. In other places the number was usually between 60 to 80%. Those, who were not registered, were strictly forbidden to attend my classes, but besides this, I never had the slightest trouble

about my classes during my career as instructor of religion. I was controlled all the time; at each class a teacher was sitting in the last bench listening to me, but never saying a word.

There was a law, that children with the permission of their parents could be prepared for First Communion and also for Confirmation. On these preparations even those, who did not go to religious instruction in the school, could take part. For these preparatory instructions, two hours weekly for two months were prescribed, which could be held in the church.

In one of the villages, deep in the heart of Zala, where the Catholic religion is still very much alive, the Party secretary, together with the chairman of the local Council, declared that if nobody wanted to care for their children, at least the priest could do it; from him the children would not learn anything bad. After this, nobody would have dared to speak against me. My room became a veritable children's camp, 20 to 22 children surrounded me every day.

Church going was free. There was a sermon held each Sunday in connection with the Holy Mass. We held also outdoor processions. On these holidays, which had been abolished by the State, we held Masses in the morning and in the evening for the people and the school-children.

Naturally, you could feel the controls and terror imposed by the Communist State even in the most remote places. We had to take

care of our words said from the pulpit, because we never could be sure that an informer would not denounce us. Many priests have been dragged away by the AVH after their sermon.

The State authorities labour very hard to infuse life into their still-born peace-priest movement in order to weaken and finally to divide and break-up the Catholic Church. However, in our diocese, all their efforts in this direction ended in fiasco. Just to give you an example: at their first great peace-priest Conference in 1950, which was held in Szombathely, and on which all priests should have been participating, besides the invited guests, only three or four priests showed up and even these did not behave entirely in the way the Communists wanted them to behave.

The Circular Letters from the Episcopal Chancellery, were either read from the pulpit by the priests or simply thrown away into the paper basket according to the priests' conscience and their position in the locality. In either case, the community knew well that the Circular was written by the State authorities and not by their bishop.

Police terror was by far not the only means in the hands of the authorities to influence the priests' attitude. In fact, open terror was less and less exercised in the last years against the Church. The State rather resorted to the means of raising or lowering somebody's position, authority and working field and with it also somebody's living standard. In this way

it could reward the people who would be inclined to play ball by promoting them to better positions and giving them higher salaries, while they could punish the recalcitrant priests by demotions, transfers to God forsaken little parishes and by stopping their pay. For example, I did not receive any pay for one and a half years. One could never be sure about the next month's salary. Those priests, who became personae non gratae, more often did not get their salary than they did. I know of such priests, who did not have even a loaf of bread for their Christmas holidays.

The usual salary of a chaplain was 500 forints for a month. The Rector of the Parish received between 620 to 720 forints. After the Land Reform of 1945, still much land was left in the Church's hand, i.e. most of the land which belonged to the individual parishes. In 1950, the greatest part of this land was also nationalized and only 800 81 (1/2 cadaster yoke) could be kept by each Parish. The same amount of land, 800 81, was left for each the cantor and the sexton.

During the Revolution, I was starting the organization of the Revolutionary Council in our village and became one of its leaders. When afterwards my position became untenable, I left the country on January 6th.