



with its international "secretariat", is an anachronism, and, potentially at least, always insidious. The last two years have seen a considerable increase in atheist propaganda, and the drive for socialist rituals to replace baptisms and the other Christian sacraments has been given a fresh impetus.

Recently, however, this slow erosion of the Church's authority was dramatically accelerated. Seminarians in Budapest and Győr were expelled and their teachers suspended for failing to attend lectures given on the "peace movement" by Kossuth, Horvath, Nagy and other propaganda clerics. This was followed by a number of arrests, with homosexuality and the corruption of the young figuring high on the list of official charges. On February 7, eight priests and two lay persons were taken into custody and charged with conspiracy against the state. Because they were named as ringleaders, it could already be surmised that the arrests would not stop at that. For the first time since 1956 it was officially stated that the detentions had been made by the "Organs of the Ministry of the Interior", admitting that the AVH was, in fact, back in operation.

With the eight priests were charged a Hungarian countess and a former officer of the Hungarian Hungaril Panzer Grenadiers, a Hungarian-speaking voluntary unit of the SS, formed during the final stages of the Second World War. The intention was clearly to bring the Church into disrepute by putting the servants of God in the dock in the company of an aristocrat and a Nazi. The priests involved were also accused of immorally admitting young acolytes, the implication being that it is not only unwise for parents to send children to Church, but that it is also dangerous.

The current wave of detentions, police questionings and house-searches which are reported to be running into their thousands, must be seen against a background of these preliminaries. Apart from vicarages, the houses, flats or rooms of members of the dissolved religious orders have also been searched. From the evidence the police are trying to produce it would appear that the government is anxious to show that under the umbrella of an outwardly cooperative episcopate, a second Church is active underground.

There is nothing in Hungarian Communist law to make it possible for the government to prosecute the clergy or non-clerical persons for religious activity. In Church law once a canonical vow has been taken, the dissolution of religious orders by temporal authority does not abrogate monks or nuns from their responsibilities. The orders are directly under the control of their Generals in Rome and, apart from reporting irregularities (if any) to their superiors, even the local Bishops have no power to interfere with the lives of these communities. That the orders have preserved a sense of spiritual cohesion since their members were forcibly ejected from their religious houses would seem to be both natural and probable.

The government hopes to be able to prove that the "underground" Church is underground also in the sense that it is seditious. In that case it could hope to kill two birds with one stone: first,

it could discourage the "underground" and, secondly, it could split the hierarchy from the lower clergy by demanding from the Bishops that they should condemn their brothers for praying (to put it quite simply) not only in Church, but also, as it were, in the catacombs. This would cause the Bishops automatically to drift into a position close to that of the "peace priests", and the regime's long-term program, that of alienating the Vatican from the Hungarian hierarchy, would be carried a step forward.

Archbishop Gross's perhaps slightly belated, but vigorous, stand has made the government's work very difficult. His plea to be sent back to prison unless the campaign against the Church is stopped, makes it possible for him to play a strong hand. For Kadar it would be both embarrassing and unpropitious to arrest a man who had been put in jail at the same time as "officially false charges" and by the same people under whom he himself had suffered torture and imprisonment.

It has been suggested that the present campaign in Hungary (and Poland) indicates regained confidence on the part of Communist leaders, shaken by the aftermath of the Hungarian revolution. There may be some truth in this, but in Hungary at least it would seem more likely that the regime is genuinely worried about its unpopularity. One way of curing it would be to make fresh inroads into popular thinking and weaken the Church wherever she is vulnerable. By threatening the clergy with mass arrests, the regime may hope to bring new concessions out of the Church, especially in the field of education. It may also hope to show that at a time of agricultural collectivization or softening in the ideological field will be tolerated, least of all in those areas where the farmers and the clergy are bound together by historic and trusted ties. But Kadar is unlikely to feel strong enough openly to throw down the gauntlet to the Episcopate if the Archbishop persists in his present attitude.

If there is an "underground" Church in Hungary, it is underground only in exactly the same sense in which the real message of Christianity is subversive in all dictatorships.

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