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7 OCTOBER 1961

1961

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(Hungarian Research and Evaluation Note) -- Dr. Joseph Groesz, Archbishop of Kalocsa and Chairman of the Bench of the Catholic Bishops, was buried at Kalocsa on October 6. The same evening Radio Budapest reported briefly on the funeral. The "Homeland Radio" -- broadcasting for Hungarians abroad -- going on the air later the same evening gave a somewhat more detailed account of the ceremony. Dr. Endre Hamvas, Bishop of Csanad, delivered the funeral oration. According to both Radio Budapest and the "Homeland Radio" he stressed that the late Archbishop Groesz was a "devoted worker for peace" and that he furthered with dedication the good relations between the state and the Catholic Church. A delegation of the Hungarian Government led by the head of the State Office for Religious Matters attended the ceremony. The fact that the late Archbishop was sentenced to 15 years in prison on trumped-up charges in June 1951 (hardly a year after he put his signature to an agreement between the state and the Bench of Catholic Bishops), was kept in jail until October 1955, was under house arrest until May 1956, and, though pardoned, was never rehabilitated, was not for obvious reasons mentioned in the funeral address.

Preserving the Status Quo

The death of Archbishop Groesz made it necessary to fill two important positions in the government of the Catholic Church. One was the Archbishopric of Kalocsa, the other was the chairmanship of the Bench of Catholic Bishops.

On October 4 the Chapter of the Kalocsa diocese met and elected Dr. Imre Varkonyi to the office of vicar-capitular. On October 6 the Bench of Catholic Bishops unanimously elected Dr. Endre Hamvas, Bishop of Csanad, to be chairman of the Bench. Thus the two important posts held by Archbishop Groesz have been entrusted to new and different hands.

What is the significance of these appointment? Will it bring any far-reaching changes in the government of the Catholic Church in Hungary, and in Church-State relations? In view of the careers and characters of the two men chosen for the new offices, it would seem that the regime is trying to preserve the existing situation as it took shape under Archbishop Groesz, in other words preserve the "status quo". Such a solution is quite satisfactory for the regime, and for the Church it at least indicates no worsening of the situation.

Dr. Varkonyi

The new vicar capitular of the Diocese of Kalocsa, Dr. Imre Varkonyi, is a former professor of theology; for five years he was rector of the Szeged seminary. Since November 1958

he has been the director of the Hungarian "Actio Catolica". He has often been mentioned among the clergymen in the company of Archbishop Groesz. Hence the conclusion that he was rather close to the late Archbishop. In May 1961 he was entrusted by him with the central direction of the Catholic libraries. Though Dr. Varkonyi could never have been director of "Actio Catolica" had not his person been acceptable to the regime, he is not (and never has been) a "peace priest". (The peace priests, however, have always treated him with sympathy and deference.) A rather colorless personality, Dr. Varkonyi falls into that category of clergymen who, while not unfriendly to the regime, do not go out of their way to lavish praise on it. With the election of a vicar capitular the administration of the Kalocsa diocese will continue to operate. Archbishop Groesz had also an auxiliary bishop, in the person of Dr. Janos Bard, who can continue the duties pertaining to the position of a bishop (e.g. ordaining of priests) which are outside the competence of a vicar capitular. Thus the Archbishopric of Kalocsa can carry out all its functions until a new Archbishop is appointed.

Bishop Hamvas

The office to which Bishop Hamvas has been appointed is of much more consequence. As Chairman of the Bench of Catholic Bishops he will have primarily to keep in close contact with the highest representatives of the regime and try to safeguard at least the present integrity of the Church. Bishop Hamvas, who was 70 in September 1960, has a very distinguished record as a teacher of theology; he is author of the textbook on religious instruction now used in Hungarian schools. He has been bishop of Csanad since 1944. Though he has not suffered imprisonment under the Communist regime he was the target of fierce attacks during the trial of Archbishop Groesz in June 1951 and was accused of having extended assistance to one of the defendants, a monk sentenced to death on trumped-up charges of murder, etc. After the trial he was forced to send a "repentent" letter to Premier Dobi asking for pardon. Ever since, Hamvas has been the Catholic bishop who has gone the furthest in formal contacts with regime personalities and organizations. In spring 1958 he was member of a group of Hungarian clergymen which paid a two-week visit to the Soviet Union. He has been member of the National Council of the People's Front since October 1954 and from time to time has published articles (on "peace work") in the Front's daily "Magyar Nemzet". In May 1957 he became chairman of the Catholic Committee of the National Peace Council. He was on the Hungarian Preparatory Committee for the Vienna Youth Festival of 1959. On his 70th birthday he received the Second Class of the People's Democratic Banner Order. So much cooperation, accompanied by statements supporting the "cause of peace", may well have created the impression that Bishop Hamvas is a "handy" man for the regime. While he has never trespassed the limits of his high ecclesiastical office, it is true that he appears as a conciliatory man, not likely to cause complications on his own initiative in Church-State

relations. Hence an ideal man to maintain the "status quo".

Strictly speaking not Hamvas but the Bishop of Szekesfehervar, Dr. Lajos Shvoy, should have become the new chairman of the Bench of Catholic Bishops. As there are at present no Archbishops in office, Bishop Shvoy ought to have been elected on the basis of seniority. He is, however, now very old (over 80) and in very poor health. But even more important, he is high in the regime's black book for his uncompromising attitude. In all probability it was only his advanced age and bad health which kept him out of the dock in the recent (June 1961) trial of Catholic clergy-and laymen; it also possibly kept him out of jail. To preserve the "status quo" the bishops evidently deemed it necessary to pass over Bishop Shvoy in favor of Bishop Hamvas.

Conclusions

Final comments might be made:

First, the "status quo", while it seems to be acceptable to both sides for the time being, might prove very harmful to the Church in the long run. It can and will certainly be misused by the regime to pursue its own political aims.

Second, while the solution described above is a rather undramatic and routine one, the real trial for relations between Church and state will come as soon as the Holy See tries to fill the vacant Archbishopric of Kalocsa.

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