

RADIO FREE EUROPE

Research

TARGET AREA

• HUNGARY

18 September 1964

THE HUNGARIAN-VATICAN ACCORD

The difficult negotiations conducted between representatives of the Holy See and the Hungarian Government since the spring of 1963, both in Budapest and in Rome, have yielded the first tangible results. The partial agreement, representing a compromise of limited scope, signed in the Hungarian Foreign Office by Megr. Agostino Casaroli, deputy secretary of the Holy Congregation for extraordinary Church affairs, and Jozsef Prantner, President of the Hungarian State Church Office, marks the successful conclusion of the first round of the talks. It thereby leaves the door open for the settlement of other, more difficult issues.

The agreement, the full text of which is not yet known, is obviously the product of hard bargaining. This is clear from the official announcement made by Radio Budapest on September 15, which says that the document contains "some practical agreements, safeguards and/or obligations concerning some of the questions under discussion," but, at the same time, it "embodies the standpoints, claims and reservations" expounded by the two parties concerning individual questions. The hope that other problems might also be solved in the future through further talks was expressed both in the official announcement of Radio Budapest and in Prantner's comment on the agreement. The President of the Hungarian State Church Office attributed, of course, the agreement to the "more realistic" appreciation of the progress achieved by the Hungarian People's Republic and the increased reputation of the Socialist countries. This, according to Prantner, had impressed the Vatican

and had prompted its readiness to settle relations with the Hungarian State. Such a "realistic policy" might lead to the settlement of other pending issues, he stated.

The points on which agreement has been reached were disclosed by Frantner in an interview granted to MFI on September 15. He said that the agreement refers to 1) the appointment of bishops, 2) the citizen's allegiance oath to be taken by priests, and 3) the position of the Papal Hungarian Institute in Rome. This, considerable though it is, represents only a small segment of the many problems which have been under discussion between the Holy See and the Hungarian Government since spring 1963. The many unresolved problems include, for example, the freedom of the Bishops to run their dioceses and entertain regular contacts with the Holy See, more liberal conditions for the teaching of religion and the training of young priests; these do not appear to be covered at all by the present agreement. The most outstanding and dramatic problem which has yet to be settled and which has so obviously been sidestepped is that of Cardinal Mindszenty. The whole complex of problems which revolve around the Cardinal and the Archbishoprics of Esztergom, the most important in Hungary, still remain unresolved. The same -- on a less dramatic level -- applies also to the Bishoprics of Vác and Veszprém, which are still run by an auxiliary Bishop and an Apostolic Administrator, respectively.

The decisions involving appointments made under the agreement -- the nomination of an Archbishop and of five Bishops -- show the compromise nature of the agreement particularly clearly. The Hungarian Government has dropped its earlier claim to have prominent peace priests elevated to the dignity of Bishop. It has gone further; it has accepted as one of the new bishops Jozsef Winkler, a person whom the Holy See appointed "unilaterally" in 1959 and of whom the regime did not approve. On the other hand the Holy See agreed to promote to the rank of Archbishop a man -- Endre Bányas -- who may appear to many as a little too pliable toward the Hungarian regime. Of the four new Bishops, two have been the virtual heads of their dioceses for some time and have played a considerable role also in public life, while the other two are meritorious clergymen of high scholarly or pastoral standards, but without any real prominence in public life. They are definitely not peace-priests. On the contrary, the appointment of some of the new Bishops might

will diminish the influence of some notorious peace-priests in the bishoprics to which they have been appointed. It will also mean an infusion of fresh blood into the highest Church hierarchy.

A definite succession by the Vatican seems to be indicated by the clause pertaining to the position of the Hungarian Institute in Rome. Up to now there have been no details about this particular clause, but it is very likely that the Institute, now in possession of exile priests, will pass into the hands of the Hungarian Government. Just what is involved in the new agreements on the question of the civic oath of allegiance to be taken by priests, is not known at the time of this writing.

Biographical Data on Appointees

Dr. Andra Havvas, former Bishop of Csanád, has been appointed Archbishop of Kalocsa. The 74-year-old Havvas, president of the Bench of Hungarian Catholic Bishops since October 1961, succeeded the late Jozsef Gross, Archbishop of Kalocsa. Since December 1961, Havvas has occupied the office of President of the "Opus Facta," the organization of the bishops for "peace propaganda." In October 1964 he was elected to the National Council of the People's Front, a post to which he was re-elected in October 1967. In March 1964 he also became member of the Presidency of the People's Front's National Council. Since January 1963 he has also been a member of the Presidency of the National Peace Council. He has visited the Soviet Union twice: in April 1958 on the invitation of the Soviet Governmental Council for religious affairs and in July 1962, when he was a member of the Hungarian delegation to the Moscow conference "of disarmament and peace." Havvas headed the Hungarian delegations to the sessions of the Ecumenical Council. He is a scholar of high standing, and author of the current textbook on religion used in Hungarian schools.

Havvas celebrated his Golden Mass in 1963 and has been a Bishop for 30 years. It remains to be seen whether his appointment to the Kalocsa Archbishopric will curb the influence of the notorious peace priest Dr. Imre Varkonyi, who has been the capital vicar of the Archbishopric since the death of Jozsef Gross in October 1961. In February 1963, Varkonyi was also elected to Parliament and has been liable to fall under excommunication

for that reason. Havas' appointment to the Ealsosa Archbishopric seems to be a compromise solution.

Dr. Mi Bressanóczy has been a Capitular-Vicar of the Eger Archbishopric since the death of Gyula Campia in April 1956. In August 1959 he became Apostolic Administrator. His appointment as titular Bishop confirms his administration of the Archbishopric, a responsibility which he has held for some years now. The 52-year-old Bressanóczy has the reputation of being one of the most vigorous and capable of Hungarian prelates. He attended both sessions of the Ecumenical Council. The fact that also he visited the Soviet Union in 1958 and North Vietnam in September 1961, as well as his membership of the National Council of the People's Front since March 1954, did, however, give rise to some doubts as to his relation to the regime. On balance, however, his overall record shows that he has always known how to move cleverly between the limits of his Church offices and contemporary imperatives. His appointment to one of the largest Church dioceses in Hungary may well represent a definite plus for the cause of Catholicism in Hungary.

Dr. József Szarháti, about fifty years of age, has also functioned as Capitular Vicar (since 1960) of the Pécs Bishopric. Now he has been confirmed in the post as titular Bishop and Apostolic Administrator. For years he has held the chair of professor at the Catholic Theological Academy in Budapest. He is the type of prelate who seems to have done nothing to displease the regime, or to cast a shadow on his priestly office.

Jozsef Winkler, about 45, was appointed auxiliary Bishop of Szombathely by the Vatican in 1959, without the prior approval of the Hungarian Government. In this case, in regime eyes, "illegal manner," Sallert Sallón was appointed auxiliary Bishop of Néc, also in 1959. His name is not mentioned in the new accord. Up to now Winkler had been prevented from exercising his office because of the illegality of his appointment and has simply held a minor post in the hierarchy of the Szombathely Bishopric. The agreement has now "legalized" his position. In fact the Holy See has now asked for the "previous consent" of the Hungarian Government, and this has been granted. Under the Canon Law, however, Winkler has been a Bishop since his appointment by the Holy See. His case is a clear example of a compromise; in the case of

Bellen the Vatican has not pressed the point so obviously.

Dr. János Ijjas, about 50, has been appointed titular Bishop of the Csanaké Bishopric, thereby taking over the governing duties formerly held by Andre Hesztes. Ijjas is a relatively obscure priest who has been a parson in various localities of the Ealocsa Archdiocese.

Dr. József Békó, about 60, the new auxiliary Bishop of Győr, is an outstanding scholar of Canon Law. A former secretary of the late Primate Cardinal Serédi, Archbishop of Esztergom, he has been a professor of the Catholic Theological Academy in Budapest in recent years. He attended the session of the Ecumenical Council in 1963.

The Bishop of Győr, Kálmán Papp, is not only 78 years old, but his health is extremely poor. The actual running of the Bishopric has fallen into the hands of the Capitular Vicar, Mészáros Sándor, one of the most notorious pease priests.

X X X

The timing of the announcement of the accord must be booked as a masterly political stroke of the Kadar regime. Available evidence points to the fact that the Hungarian regime deliberately held back on the agreement until the convention of the third Ecumenical Council -- in order to draw maximum attention to its "reasonable" attitude à-la-Vogliatti.

Problems remain. The embarrassing presence of Cardinal Mindszenty has been more than gingerly skirted by both sides. The question of religious instruction in schools, the activity of priests in towns and villages -- crucial points for the Church -- are not touched upon, to name only a few of the outstanding questions between the Vatican and the Kadar regime. But the initial evaluation of the accord must remain on the positive side of the balance sheet; the Hungarian Bench of Bishops is being reconstituted.

(This paper was first published on 15 September 1964.)

(EE/Hungarian Unit)