

**Tonus Oecumenicus Sancti Martini
in Sacro Monte Pannoniae**

Inter arma non semper silent musae!

(The idea and practice of ecumenism in the life of a
Benedictine monastery during the Cold War between
1946 and 1991)

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Introduction

The Monastery of Saint Martin, Pannonhalma as it is called today, the Archabbey of Pannonhalma is located between Vienna and Budapest. Its position determined its history in many cases. From time to time, and it was the case during the Cold War (1946-1991) as well, it found itself on the line of demarcation of two worlds. As for the theme of “ecumenism”, the period of the Cold War (1946-1991) meant the dictatorship of the Soviet-style communist party-state (1948-1989) for the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe, thus, for the Christians living in Hungary, too. The research focusing on this period is still fragmentary in its findings nowadays.

In 2005, the General Chapter of the Hungarian Benedictine Congregation dealt with the elaboration of the history of the near past and the question of reconciling

with the past.¹ The claim of this decision was meant to be met by the Research Group for Investigating the Past created in 2014,² whose research findings can be relied on today. The present research makes use of these results, and the not really complete research of other religious denominations (i.e., that of the Lutherans and the Calvinists) in addition to that of secular historians.

The Monastery of Saint Martin (of Pannonhalma) was founded by Grand Duke Géza in 996; it was the first monastery of Latin mission in the Northern Transdanubian region of the Christian Kingdom of Hungary in the process of formation. The intention was confirmed in writing by his son, Saint Stephen I in 1001. The monastic community celebrated the millennium of its foundation in 1996. During the past one thousand years, it was many times in extreme peril, it was completely dissolved twice and partially once. The period of reorganisation started in 1802 and that of balanced development lasted until the end of World War

¹: "Pont 1: The General Chapter insists on revealing the history of our Congregation after World War II, facing the past and bringing it to our consciousness." *Általános káptalani iratok*, 2005. október 21., Pannonhalmi Főlevéltár [The Documents of the General Chapter, 21 October 2005. The Archives of Pannonhalma].

A Magyar Bencés Kongregáció Általános Káptalanjának Dokumentumai 2005. október – 2008. október. Pannonhalma, 2008., 16-43.

² The Benedictine Research Group for Investigating the Past has organised three conferences so far and has published three collections of scholarly essays: Dénesi, Tamás and Zoltán Boros, eds., *Bencések Magyarországon a pártállami diktatúra idején* [The Benedictines in Hungary during the Dictatorship of the Party-State], Vols. I-III, Pannonhalma, Pannonhalmi Főapátsági Levéltár, 2017-2018. They are the sources of the quotations in this paper.

The writer of the present essay has been a committed activist of "ecumenism" since his entering the Order in 1964.

II.³ The period of the Cold War (1946-1989) brought serious loss – as for the number of monks in the community, of its institutions and as for its economic affairs – in the life of the Hungarian Benedictine Congregation, which became a distinguished spiritual-intellectual authority by that time. During the age of the Cold War, the remaining Benedictine community in Hungary strove for survival being exposed to an alien ideology and power.⁴

The Life of Saint Martin's Monastery in the Age of the Communist Party-State

In 1950, the communist government and the Conference of Catholic Bishops entered into an agreement as for the *modus vivendi*. As a part of this agreement, four catholic religious communities – the Benedictines, the Franciscans, the Piarists and the School Sisters of Notre Dame, restricted in numbers, each running 2 schools – were allowed to exist. The partial dissolution created a new situation in the Hungarian Benedictine Congregation: the convents of 74 monks altogether in Pannonhalma and Győr – with two secondary schools,

³ Várszegi, Asztrik OSB, "Tapasztalat és életforma..." [Experience and Lifestyle...], in: Varga, 31-57.

⁴ Csóka, J. Lajos OSB, *Geschichte des benediktinischen Mönchtums in Ungarn*, aus dem Ungarischen übersetzt von Mátyás Esterházy, München, 1980.

Takács, Imre, ed., *Mons Sacer 996-1996*, Pannonhalma 1000 éve [The Millennium of Pannonhalma], Vols. I-III., Pannonhalma, 1996.

and the Theological College in Pannonhalma whose number of students was seriously controlled (*numerus clausus*) – were allowed to remain and live, and to carry on their work of education.

The spirituality of the Benedictines has been formed by the Rule of Saint Benedict for 1500 years in Europe and for 1000 years in Hungary. The Rule requires that monks should “set out on [the Lord’s] path with the gospel as [their] guide” and that a monk should “honor all persons”.⁵ Their education and qualification – especially since 1802 (because with few exceptions all monk-priests have been teachers at the same time) – have meant for them that they have incorporated openness to the world and sensibility to Christianity and the universal Church in their lifestyle. The Benedictine bipolar (theological-spiritual and scholastic) training provided foundation for integrating the idea of “ecclesiastical union”, which had some national character in the “Hungarian reform era” (in the first half of the 19th century), at the end of the century, and in the years preceding World War II.

⁵ Kardong, Terrence G., *Benedict’s Rule: A Translation and Commentary*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, 1996. Prologue:21 and Chapter 4:8.

The friendship between Izidor Guzmics, the Benedictine Abbot of Bakonybél⁶ and Ferenc Kazinczy,⁷ a protestant writer united their ideas. They imagined the possible creation of the interdenominational union on a national basis.

At the end of the 19th century, education was the shared field, in which the Benedictines and the Calvinists could work together in the cause of the nation. This positive turn of the mind is suggested by the speeches of Jusztin Bódiss, a Benedictine college professor⁸ and Ferenc Balogh, a Calvinist professor of religion⁹ delivered at the general assembly for teachers of all-Hungary held in Debrecen in 1898.

“Yes! The Hungarian firmament is arced over by the great rainbow of culture, one end of which starts from the height of Pannonhalma and the other one touches the ground in this region of the Great Hungarian Plain; these two ends meet here (i.e., in Debrecen) today. All of us are the children of the same native land. I welcome the colleagues of Hungarian culture coming from Pannonhalma, let us continue the development of the regenerating age of the millennium, our common future

⁶ Izidor Guzmics OSB (1786-1839) monk-priest, professor of theology in Budapest and Pannonhalma, member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the Abbot of Bakonybél (1832-1839).

⁷ Ferenc Kazinczy (1759-1831) Hungarian writer and poet, the leader of neology, member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

⁸ Jusztin Bódiss OSB (1863-1921) monk-priest, teacher in Győr, Pannonhalma and Komárom.

⁹ Ferenc Balogh (1836-1913) professor of theology and church history at the Evangelical Reformed College in Debrecen.

with sanctified and noble will.”¹⁰ This is the background that can interpret a sentence by Ottokár Prohászka,¹¹ Bishop of Székesfehérvár: “I wish a rainbow-bridge of love arched between Pannonhalma and Debrecen, on which the angels of understanding went to and fro, and this bridge were a new Hungarian meridian.”¹²

Archabbot Krizosztom Kelemen (1884-1950)¹³ followed this tradition promoting the aspiration to union in Hungary while frequently corresponding with Calvinist bishops, namely with László Ravasz¹⁴ and Imre Révész.¹⁵ In the forties of the 20th century, the “union” of the religious denominations turned out to be a topic again in Hungary. The Jesuits had a disillusioning effect on those, who cherished the rapprochement among the religious denominations, or perchance the hope of union. Archabbot Krizosztom Kelemen aroused great interest with his writing entitled “Towards the Spiritual Union of the Hungarians” published in the columns of *Pester Lloyd* at Christmas in 1942. Both the denominational and the civil press reflected on the comments related to this article. The expression of the Archabbot’s views caused some embarrassment within the Catholic Church.

¹⁰ Speech in reply by Ferenc Balogh, professor of theology, in: Barcza, József, ed., *Szivárványhíd Pannonhalma és Debrecen között* [A Bridge of Rainbow between Pannonhalma and Debrecen], Debrecen, 1991, 17.

¹¹ Prohászka, Ottokár (1858-1927) catholic priest, writer, philosopher, politician, theologian, university professor, member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, bishop of Székesfehérvár.

¹² Prohászka, Ottokár, in: Barcza, 5.

¹³ Kelemen, Krizosztom OSB (1884-1950) monk-priest, teacher, Archabbot of Pannonhalma (1939-1950).

¹⁴ Ravasz, László (1882-1975) Calvinist pastor, bishop of the Danubian Church District (1921-1948).

¹⁵ Révész, Imre (1889-1967) Calvinist pastor, university professor, bishop of the Transtibiscan Church District (1938-1949).

According to Jusztinián Cardinal Serédi prince-primate¹⁶ Rome also took notice of the Archabbot's thoughts. He was concerned for the purity of the catholic faith in the process of the denominational rapprochement. The denominational dialogue unavoidably had political overtones in the years of World War II. As once in the reform era, the urge to promote the union was meant to support the national unity, now the denominational rapprochement emphasised the anti-communist coalition. The sense of fear from the common enemy and the true exploration of the possibilities are simultaneously present in these acts.

The union of the Christian churches in Hungary was thought to be treated not on the level of dogmatics, but on the level of national unity. After such a tradition and antecedents of ideas, the theology of ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council was accepted willingly by many.

The “chronology of ecumenism” in Pannonhalma during the Cold War in 1945-1950

The situation following the agreement between the Hungarian Benedictine Congregation – the Hungarian

14. Serédi, Jusztinián OSB (1884-1945) Benedictine monk, canonist, Archbishop of Esztergom, cardinal, prince-primate, leader of the Catholic Church in Hungary (1927-1945).

Catholic Bishops' Conference and the communist rule (1950) has been touched upon above.

1950-1956: Benedictines and pastors of different denominations – sometimes together – were prisoners of war, were imprisoned, or were subjected to show trials. It was a period of terror and uncertainty.¹⁷

1956-1961: revolution in Budapest, after its suppression reprisal also in Pannonhalma, the imprisonment of the headmaster.¹⁸ Many escaped to the West. The communist blackmailing was kept on: enlisting the members of the community and their fellow-workers in their environment as agents; home-raids.

1961-1989: Kádár's consolidation – a period of slow but steady relaxation: the possibility of establishing connections, travels abroad, visits by foreigners. In spite of these, the control is still powerful, enlisting agents, manipulated election of the archabbot (1973).¹⁹ The events, personal meetings, ecumenical connections in

¹⁷ Balogh, Margit, "Egyházak a szovjet rendszerben (1945–1989)" [Churches in the Soviet System (1945–1989)]. In: Tarsoly, István Kollega, ed. in chief, *Magyarország a XX. században* [Hungary in the 20th century]. Vol., II. Szekszárd, 1997.

¹⁸ Szalai, Béla, "A pufajkások házkutatása, (Söveges) Dávid atya elhurcolása" [A home-raid by the quilted-jacketed, the removal of Father Davis (Söveges) by force], in: Szalai, 421-428.

¹⁹ Várszegi, Asztrik, OSB, "Die Wahl des Erzabtes bei den ungarischen Benediktinern im 20. Jahrhundert", in: *Erbe und Auftrag*, Benediktinische Zeitschrift, 94(2018)2: 167-178.

Petes, Róbert, "Legányitól Szennayig: Egy főapátválsztás margójára" [From Legányi to Szennay: on the margin of the election of an archabbot], in: Dénesi, Vol. II., 27-47.

Hungary and abroad enumerated in this paper took place within the framework of the dictatorship of the party-state all through, in a hostile and strictly controlled setting.

The official ecumenism imposed upon the denominations by the party-state was also strictly controlled and supervised. The ecumenical and the similar peace conferences in Hungary and abroad, as well. None of these influenced Pannonhalma, if only one thinks of the fact that the archabbot had to be present at some of these occasions, or that foreign guests visiting Hungary were also taken to Pannonhalma. The ecumenism directed “from above” collapsed simultaneously with the decomposition of the party-state. In Pannonhalma, ecumenism has been based on a process organised “from below” related to informal and personal connections in many cases.

The existence of the Benedictine monastic life in Pannonhalma was shrewdly used by the ecclesiastical policy branded by János Kádár on such occasions when the state wanted to demonstrate the freedom of religion for foreign countries.

Frederick Donald Coggan, the Archbishop of Canterbury travelled to Hungary and Berlin between 24 May and 11 June 1979. As early as 25 May, Archabbot András Szennay was a party to the official reception of Archbishop Cogan in Budapest. He and his suite visited

Pannonhalma on 1 June. The exact and detailed account of the event is registered in the Prior's Diary. Accompanied by his wife, a canon, his secretary, a representative of the British Embassy, the secretary's wife and an interpreter, Archbishop Coggan arrived in Pannonhalma at 12 o'clock. At the main entrance of the monastery, Archabbot Szennay and a group of the monks were waiting for him, they greeted each other. The official greeting took place in the Archabbot's reception hall, and the guests were helped to refreshments and coffee. Many Benedictines were present here as well. At 12.30 they left for the secondary school, where the Archbishop and his retinue were greeted by a pupil in English on behalf of the school. The Archbishop greeted the pupils in a few words, then a song was performed vocally. The community lunch was served in the monastery's Baroque refectory, where the Archabbot suspended the enclosure for this occasion and the ladies had their meal there as well. After lunch, the guests were guided through the monastery's sights, the library, the quadrangle and the basilica, where an ecumenic worship of the Divine Word was held. The guests were taken from Pannonhalma to Tihany to have a rest. I do not know whether they were informed that the beautiful church and monastery on the peninsula of Tihany had also been a Benedictine place of mission, but the same party-state confiscated and dissolved them in 1950. On leave-taking, the Anglican Archbishop, The Most Reverend Donald

Coggan declared that his visit to Pannonhalma was the culmination of his stay in Hungary. The Benedictines were honoured by the visit of the Anglican Archbishop, they were also satisfied, but as far as I know, it was not continued.²⁰ The greetings were phrased in the tone of mutual respect and honour. Archabbot András Szennay made a note of this event in his memoir entitled “Mosaics of Memories”:²¹ “We were warned in advance that we had to prepare a visit of high level, and I think that this visit was a success.”

Since 1991: the reorganisation of the Hungarian Benedictine Congregation in regained freedom, carrying on with the mission of ecumenism.

The reception of the teachings of Vatican II in Saint Martin’s Monastery

The Catholic Church in Hungary obtained only a few and filtered pieces of information about the events and theological ideas of the Council. However, Pannonhalma proved to be an exception in a certain sense.²²

²⁰ *Perjeli napló*, 1979. június 1. Pannonhalmi Levéltár [Prior’s Diary, 1 June 1979. Archives of Pannonhalma], 427.

²¹ Szennay, András OSB, “Emlékmozaikok” [Mosaics of Memories], Manuscript, Pannonhalma, 1995-2010, 43.

²² Petes, Róbert, “Szerzetesi megújulás Pannonhalmán a II. Vatikáni Zsinat fényében: az 1969-1971-es rendi nagykáptalan” [Monastic renewal in Pannonhalma in the light of Vatican II: the General Chapter of the order in 1969-1971], in: Dénesi, Vol. III., 7-29.

The two dominant communities living here, the Benedictines and the approximately one hundred representatives of other religious orders (Jesuits, Cistercians, Premonstratensians, Franciscans, Capuchins, Salesians, Verbites, etc.) forced to live together in the State Social Home of the time formed a unique island with their intellectual freedom and command of languages. No other situation of this kind is really known in the countries under the rule of the people's democracy.²³

Besides the daily routine of monastic life (consisting of common prayer, community meetings, work in the school), the Benedictine community searched for points of direction through its steadfast intellectual life (reading, conversations, discussions, translating available articles in foreign languages) so that they could keep their identity both in the hostile environment surrounding them and in the church changing all over the world and in the life of the intellect. Within a freedom under control, the intellectually responsive members of the Benedictine community gave a positive answer to the challenges coming both from inside and outside in the circumstances imposed upon them by the dictatorship.²⁴

²³ Szabó, Csaba, "A pannonhalmi Szociális Otthon és lakói" [The Social Home in Pannonhalma and its inmates], in: Dénesi, Vol. I., 247.

²⁴ Várszegi, Asztrik OSB, *Legányi Norbert (1906-1987) főapát (1958-1968)*, Manuscript.

Training and educating the young Benedictines of Pannonhalma

The theological training of the Benedictine students was conducted in the Theological College of Saint Gerard of Pannonhalma until 2000. Szilveszter Sóllymos OSB²⁵ served in Pannonhalma (1959-1967), then in Budapest (1967-1969), and as a college professor and superior of studies again (1984–1989). He created the Guzmics-circle, which was a forum besides the college as its extension for individual and shared training in intellectual matters.²⁶ At the same time, it provided conciliar and ecumenical training for the junior monks. We organised discussions with invited speakers: a good number of Hungarian protestant pastors and Benedictines from abroad.

As earlier, our schools readily admitted pupils coming from other denominations in this period as well. We admitted into our two schools, which survived in 1950, the sons of those pastors of other religious denominations, who asked that from us.

²⁵ Sóllymos, Szilveszter OSB (1920-2006) college professor, superior, imprisoned between 1951 and 1956.

²⁶ Várszegi, Asztrik OSB, *Legányi Norbert (1906-1987) főapát (1958-1968)*, Manuscript.

Students of theology coming from Christian denominations together in the Hungarian People's Army (1966-1989)

Between 1966 and 1989, the theological students of the Benedictines – among those of different (Catholic, Calvinist, Lutheran, Baptist, Adventist) denominations – were conscripted for military service. The intention of the power in connection with the military service of the young students of theology was to impair their faith and to make them leave their chosen profession.²⁷ In the barracks of the Hungarian People's Army (in Lenti, Nagyatád, Baja), the time spent together has yielded multiple fruit. They were watched by the state security organization, specially detailed records were kept about them, and during their military service they were under close supervision. "The State Office for Church Affairs was informed in disposition reports. Ecumenism was improved by shared reading of the Bible, common prayer, mutual fraternal help, appreciating each other, making friends, and maintaining relations."²⁸ The members of this generation are partly still active today and their relationships are also vigorous.

²⁷ Várszegi, Asztrik OSB, *A hely szerelmese*, Elmer István beszélgetése Várszegi Asztrik püspök pannonhalmi főapáttal [Who loves his place, István Elmer in conversation with Asztrik Várszegi, bishop and Archabbot of Pannonhalma], Budapest, Szent István Társulat, 2010. 131-149.

²⁸ Petes, Róbert, "Bencések a Magyar Néphadseregben" [Benedictines in the Hungarian People's Army], in: Dénesi, Vol. I., 235-245.

The relationship of Lutheran pastors with Pannonhalma

Owing to the acquaintance of the monastery's monks and the Lutheran pastors living in their neighbourhood, a special, intimate and fraternal relationship came into being among them, which had the effect of evangelising radiation in the surroundings. Margit Pröhle,²⁹ the wife of a Lutheran pastor, Zoltán Laborczi (1919-2004), devotes a separate chapter to our topic in her privately published family-history: "We and the Benedictines."³⁰ They visited each other, they attended mutually their services, they had theological discussions. "The Benedictines claimed thorough knowledge, and they shared it with my husband."³¹ They regularly invited Benedictine monks to preach and give talks in their congregation. Our themes were: Martin Luther as seen by a Roman Catholic, Learning from each other's services, Faith and grace, etc., which attracted the congregation's attention. Father Szilveszter Sólymos was the superior of the theological students, and he took them to meet the Lutheran pastor, his family and work. At the end of the meeting the students of theology asked for the blessing of the Lutheran pastor. The author of this paper witnessed this. The Benedictines also invited the Lutheran family to

²⁹ Pröhle, Margit (1921 - 2014) wife of the Lutheran pastor, Zoltán Laborcz, she has 5 children.

³⁰ Laborczi, Zoltánné, *Akinek szívügye volt az evangélizáció: Megemlékezés férjemről*, Laborczi Zoltán evangélikus lelkészről (1919-2004), [Laborczi Zoltánné, For whom evangelisation was a labour of love: Remembering my husband, Zoltán Laborczi, Lutheran pastor], Private publication, "Mi és a bencések" [We and the Benedictines], 2007, 56-61.

³¹ Laborczi, 57.

attend the conventual mass. The eucharist was not celebrated in the usual way, because the sacrament was administered in both kinds. Following an opinion poll, Zoltán Laborczi invited his fellow-pastors to Pannonhalma, and held their “irregular” meeting in the monastery. Because of its importance, I have to quote correctly the phrasing of Margit Pröhle, the wife of the pastor: “They could experience in Pannonhalma that we were not representatives of another denomination, but brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.”³²

Archabbot András Szennay as an Honorary Doctor of the Lutheran Theological Faculty

András Szennay (1920-2012) professor of theology, archabbot (1973-1991), edited the Catholic periodical, *Theology* for twenty-four years. He worked with ecumenical affinity in the spirit of Vatican II. As a sign of recognition, the Lutheran University conferred an honorary degree on him in 1987; he was the only Hungarian theologian among many excellent foreign scholars of the same degree. He had a working relationship with many of the Faculty’s members, and made friends with others.³³

³² Laborczi, 59.

³³ Szennay, 1995-2010. Manuscript.

Károly Hafenschner³⁴ (1926-2018) Lutheran professor of theology and Gellért Békés OSB³⁵ (1915-1999) professor emeritus of the Pontifical Atheneum of Saint Anselm in Rome made friends of a fraternal relationship, which testified ecumenism both in the field of literature and in personal spheres in Hungary.

The relationship between Taizé and Pannonhalma

László Cziráki³⁶ (1915-1981) was the first Hungarian Benedictine monk to visit Taizé in 1965, he established a personal relationship with the Prior, Roger Schütz. Their correspondence is a rich and fraternal evidence of the honest wish for unity.³⁷

It was in 1963 that Brother Rudolf Stöck from Taizé first visited Pannonhalma, then he came many times. Brother Rudolf represented the Taizé-connection for the junior Benedictines, i.e., the fraternity and friendship of those among the protestants in Hungary, who also related themselves to the protestant ecumenical and monastic

³⁴ Hafenschner, Károly (1926-2018) Lutheran pastor, professor of theology in Budapest.

³⁵ Békés, Gellért OSB (1915-1999) Benedictine monk, professor of the Pontifical Atheneum of Saint Anselm and the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, man of letters, poet, editor in chief of *Katolikus Szemle* [Catholic Review] in Rome between 1959-1999.

³⁶ Cziráki, László OSB (1915-1981) Benedictine monk, teacher.

³⁷ Cziráki, László OSB, "Látogatás a taizéi közösségbe" [Visiting the community of Taizé], in: *Vigilia*, 31(1966)4:239-241.

Gereben, Ferenc, "Lélekben mindig előttem vagytok..." Etüdök Cziráki László OSB centenáriuma [You are spiritually in front of me... Etudes for the centenary of László Cziráki OSB], in: Dénesi, Tamás, ed., *Collectanea Sancti Martini*, Vol. III., A Pannonhalmi Főapátság Gyűjteményeinek értesítője [The Bulletin of the Collections in the Archabbey of Pannonhalma], Pannonhalma, 2013, 209-244.

community. In the reconstruction of the historic experience, we can rely on the oral accounts of living witnesses, “samizdat” translations of the period, and the reports of agents. Starting in the 1970s, owing to the possibilities of travelling abroad, the young Benedictines visited their friends of ecumenism – partly known from the reports of the state security system – in Niederaltaich, Taizé, Chevetogne and London.

For the sake of improving the connection with Taizé, Archabbot András Szennay invited Brother Roger to Pannonhalma in the 80s.³⁸ The visit of Roger Schütz, Prior of Taizé fell through because of the fierce opposition of the State Office for Church Affairs. In spite of this failure, the relationship between Taizé and Pannonhalma has remained alive.

Archabbot Norbert Legányi (1958-1968)

Pope Paul VI and the Council fathers signed the decree on ecumenism – *Unitatis redintegratio* – in Rome on 21 November 1964. One of the Council Fathers signing the decree was Archabbot Norbert Legányi.³⁹ He made acquaintance with the Lutheran professor of theology,

³⁸ Szennay, 1995-2010. Manuscript. Under-secretary Imre Miklós “actually asked in rage by right of what, on what basis I had invited, why I invited Brother Roger to Pannonhalma... The main point was: it was out of question that he could have come to Pannonhalma. In a short time, however, I learnt that he was allowed to go to Budapest, and could meet Cardinal Lékai...”

³⁹ Legányi, Norbert OSB (1906-1987) Benedictine monk, teacher, archabbot (1957-1968). He retired from his service due to the pressure exerted on him by the state.

Vilmos Vajta⁴⁰ in Rome. The ideas of Vatican II and his monks' commitment to ecumenism urged him to work for the unity of the Church in Hungary.

The following distressing event could be called the greatest “adventure of ecumenism” of the Benedictines of Pannonhalma in the period of the party-state.

The Hungarian Benedictines met Father Bonifacius – whose secular name is Dr. Peter Manternach⁴¹ – of Swiss origin but a Benedictine monk of Chevetogne in Belgium through a Lutheran professor, Dr. Ernő Ottlyk.⁴² Father Bonifacius met Ernő Ottlyk, professor of theology at an ecumenical conference abroad in the sixties. Professor Ottlyk was then the general secretary of the Ecumenical Council of the Lutheran Church. Father Bonifacius was interested in the Christianity living behind the iron curtain: Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant Churches alike. He acted according to his private initiative with the support of his abbot and community. He had the command of many languages including Russian. He went to Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia three times. He said in his own words that he was honest

⁴⁰ Vajta, Vilmos (1918-1998) pastor of the Hungarians abroad, head of the division of theology at the Lutheran World Federation in Geneva; in 1963 the director and professor at the Ecumenical Research Institute of the LWF in Strasbourg.

⁴¹ Dr. Peter Manternach (1932-) Benedictine monk in Chvetogne since 1954, ordained on 3 June 1963. He left the Benedictine community around 1970.

⁴² Dr. Ernő Ottlyk (1918-1995) pastor, theologian, bishop (1967-1982); from September 1958, agent with the code-name of (László) Szamosi, his working file of number M-32 404 contains 6 folders of about 1800 pages, his reports cover almost all the aspects of the whole of the Lutheran Church.

and unsuspecting,⁴³ and that was how he made many mistakes, brought troubles to his friends. He was considered to be an enemy, a spy, a suspicious character by the authorities, he and those whom he met were trailed. He visited Pannonhalma, met the Archabbot, and also met other church-figures in Hungary. “After having accumulated considerable information, I went to see Cardinal Secretary of State Casaroli⁴⁴ in Rome, and I spoke to him about my experiences concerning the Christians in the socialist states.”⁴⁵

Professor Ottlyk, Father Bonifacius and Szilveszter Sólomos first met in Budapest. During this meeting, Szilveszter Sólomos invited Professor Ottlyk and Father Bonifacius to Pannonhalma. After this, Professor Ottlyk visited Pannonhalma for the first time on 20-21 October 1965.

The intensive discussions for a day and a half made it unambiguous for Professor Ottlyk that the Benedictines had a real plan in the spirit of Vatican II. They wanted to establish a Secretariat of Ecumenism within the Catholic Church – with reference to the protestants – in Budapest, and they had already found an appropriate candidate for the leadership, Imre Timkó,⁴⁶ a professor of the Greek

⁴³ “The Romanian secret police (Securitate) documents on me are in my hands, and out of that I conclude, what was projected on me by the power because of its fear.” Dr. Peter Manternach’s oral information to Asztrik Várszegi on 11 January 2007.

⁴⁴ Agostino Casaroli (1914-1998), the Secretary of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs that time. Later Cardinal Secretary of State, the father of the Vatican’s “Ostpolitik”.

⁴⁵ Dr. Peter Manternach’s oral information to Asztrik Várszegi on 11 January 2007.

⁴⁶ Timkó, Imre (1920-1988) professor of theology, later Greek Catholic bishop. He was a Benedictine pupil, then a Benedictine novice, thus he was known to the Benedictines.

Catholic Church. The plan was to be presented by Archabbot Norbert Legányi to the Conference of the Catholic Bishops. The task of the secretariat would have been to represent and spread Rome's efforts for the unity, in addition to keeping contact with the council of ecumenism and those who were not catholic. The secretariat's nonofficial task would have been to screen cover the activities of those catholic priests and members of religious orders who supported the operation of the secretariat.

One of Archabbot Legányi's proposition was that the week of prayer starting on 18 January 1966 should be observed by every catholic parish in temporal and thematic coordination with the protestants. Pannonhalma had a great tradition in the field of working for the unity, and they were ready to play a leading role in this movement as well, said the Archabbot. They had an opportunity to spread the idea and spirituality of ecumenism during the spiritual exercises for priests held in the monastery in the summers. These occasions were attended by 250-300 priests. It had already occurred as well that a protestant pastor was also invited, although the invited pastor had to give up his lecture due to the pressure exerted upon him by the state.

According to Szilveszter Sólymos, it was also possible that a small group of about 6-9 protestant pastors could

come to Pannonhalma to share their ideas with the Benedictines.

During his stay in Rome, Archabbot Legányi invited Vilmos Vajta to Pannonhalma to give a lecture. If Vajta came to Hungary, Professor Ottlyk was also asked to deliver a talk. About 50-60 monks and some diocesan priests would attend their lectures. Pannonhalma undertakes the task of supporting the efforts for the unity and considers itself a basis for ecumenism. In this respect, the Benedictine Order was encouraged by the Pope.

This was the course of planning, and in a short time everyone experienced the harsh and disillusioning reality in their own positions.

Professor Ernő Ottlyk under the code-name of “László Szamosi” reported on Father Bonifacius and his visit to Hungary to his contact officer of state security, he also reported on his own visits and experiences in Pannonhalma, on the Benedictines’ plans and steps for ecumenism. Professor Ottlyk described his experiences with great care including the minutest details. He prepared comprehensive reports on the Benedictines’ ideas concerning ecumenism. According to these, his relationship with the Benedictines rather served the interests of the state intelligence work instead of the

cause of ecumenism. His reports went into details about Father Bonifacius, the international connections known by him, as well as about the aspects of the foreign relationships of the Hungarian Benedictines among monasteries abroad. His visit to Pannonhalma – as is reflected in his report – not only met the fraternal invitation but also fulfilled the requirements of the instructions prescribed for him by his state employers. The state security had already observed the Benedictines' efforts for the sake of ecumenism and through involving and employing Ottlyk they wanted to learn more about it, and they managed to do so. His pieces of information covered not only the plans and connections of ecumenism; his reports faithfully described the anti-state and anti-regime attitude of the Benedictines whom he knew.⁴⁷

The activity for the state security and the reports of Professor Ernő Ottlyk – later Lutheran bishop and agent with the code-name of László Szamosi – has been elaborated and published.⁴⁸

From those written above, one can understand that the Benedictines' plans for ecumenism became detected step by step, and they fell through being directed by the state security and its agents.

⁴⁷ "Generally speaking, all the conversations display the anti-socialist overtones. The Benedictine theologians deride our system or attack it. The atmosphere and the mood are reactionary, this is the way to talk with them about every topic." Mirák, 634.

⁴⁸ Ittész, Ádám, "Ottlyk Ernő állambiztonsági tevékenysége" [Ernő Ottlyk's activity for the state security], in: Mirák, 436-519.

Professor Ottlyk's second report⁴⁹ deals with the relationship between the Benedictines of Pannonhalma and the Orthodox Church. In Hungary, there is a small community of the Russian Orthodox Church, which was related to the Patriarchate of Moscow after World War II. Owing to the number of newly converted intellectuals, the group increased in the sixties, and they had more opportunities in the Moscow-Budapest scope for action. In these years, Richárd Korzenszky,⁵⁰ a young Benedictine monk was a student of the humanities at the University of Budapest. He was urged by his Russian major, command of the language and his love of monasticism to turn his interest to Russian monasticism on the one hand, and to translate Orthodox texts and then those of ecumenism into Hungarian, on the other hand. As a fellow monk of Szilveszter Sóllymos, he functions as the liaison among Ottlyk, Father Bonifacius and Szilveszter Sóllymos. Ottlyk's second report partly covers this network – he makes an attempt to provide an exact account for his employers, but he also develops the ecumenism of the Benedictines with his creative imagination.

⁴⁹ «»Szamosi« thinks that the aim of the Belgian Benedictine, Father Bonifacius is to release the deadlock of the jerky Hungarian connections of ecumenism.” In: Ittész, 501.

⁵⁰ Richárd Korzenszky OSB (1941-) teacher, Prior Emeritus of Tihany.

“I translated ‘Dynamique du provisoire’ by Roger Schütz from French into Hungarian, and as I remember, Bonifacius took it with him in 1966, and had it published in Munich in János Molnár’ press without identifying the translator and with the title: ‘Az egység sodrában’ [In the flow of unity].” (Richárd Korzenszky’s personal communication through e-mail, 7 February 2007)

The second report concludes with a special comment, which could be referred to as a meditation, and which insinuates that the efforts of the Benedictines serving unity actually conceal an intention of counter-revolution and the restoration of Roman Catholicism. The full text of the “comment” runs as follows:

“The relationships reveal that the second and third generations of the Russian emigration is organised internationally. Boniface, Timkó, Korzenszky hold together, they visit each other. Korzenszky’s recent paper has been an introduction to Gogol, and many other signs show that the old ‘Holy Russia’, the operation of the counter-revolution hidden behind the religious ideology looks forward to the day when the Russian could be converted. In the Middle Ages, ‘Bonifatius’ went to convert the Slavs for Rome with the help of the Teutonic Order. ‘Bonifatius’ (my private remark: Bonifatius = Peter Manternach) is practically a watchword and an objective to reach. The monastery in Chevetogne works in the terms of this end. Szilveszter Sólymos wrote about Abbé Couturier in the terms of this end; the Abbé supported the Russian emigrants. The unity of Christianity also appears in the context of preparing the ground for Rome.”⁵¹

⁵¹ M- 32.404/5 “Szamosi László” ügynök [agent]. In: Ittész, 502.

The state security and the religious denominations

Having referred to the reports for the state security in the previous chapter, it can be proved that Pannonhalma dealt with the idea of Christian unity in a committed way, and the Benedictines wanted to involve Father Bonifacius, then Vilmos Vajta into this activity, and the Lutheran professor, Ernő Ottlyk could have helped in this. The expected help failed to come about, and the plan also came to naught. However, the efforts and work of ecumenism were not dispirited by this failure, either.

The topic of the state security and the religious denominations have been researched for approximately three decades, it is discussed in an ever-increasing secondary literature. The work of investigation is manifolded, its intensity is different depending on the religious denominations, but it has remained a timely problem up to now. In this short paper it is worth mentioning: there are not any movements or events in the history of the religious denominations or that of our society, which would not have a written document in the collection of the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security.⁵² Each and every piece of information is important related to the knowledge and manipulation of

⁵² The Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security, the legal successor of the Historical Office, was created by Act III of 2003. The Archives preserves and processes the documents related to the operation of the Hungarian state organisations conducting the activities of state security between 21 December 1944 and 14 February 1990.

the Church, and ecumenism is one of the topics of highlighted importance: the unity of Christianity threatens the regime in existence. For this reason, it was to be controlled and interfered with. At the same time, their representatives of “ecumenism” travelling abroad were appropriate tools of collaboration to make the establishment of a human-faced socialism be acceptable by the Churches and politics in the West. However, it is a fact that the regime had collapsed before it could have been proven.

The officer of state security evaluating the Benedictines’ efforts for unity summarises as follows: “The movement for ‘union’ has not been able to develop in Hungary for years. In spite of this, the young Benedictines living in Pest and some protestant pastors eagerly promote the development of the movement.”⁵³

A female pastor from the Netherlands

A Dutch pastor, Katharina van Drimmelen introduced herself officially as the leader of the “Reformed Presbyterian Office for Ecumenism” in Vienna. She mentioned the World Council of Churches, Dutch and American protestant foundations, which supported her, but she did not detail them. As far as I know, she visited Budapest in 1970 for the first time. In 1972, in the

⁵³ Bozsik, László police major’s summary of 17 January 1968 about the Benedictines’ efforts for ecumenism, Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security, 3 1 2, M-35 901.

Augustinian cloister of Klosterneuburg near Vienna, Katharina van Drimmelen,⁵⁴ the Dutch protestant pastor was given the advice by Norbert Höslinger⁵⁵ Augustinian professor that – if she was about to leave for Hungary in order to complete her work of ecumenism – she should visit the Benedictines in Pannonhalma, because their disposition was in harmony with ecumenism. Pastor Van Drimmelen first visited Father Elemér Sulyok,⁵⁶ then contacted the author of this paper in Budapest. This was the way she got into contact with the Benedictines of Pannonhalma. This friendly relationship was kept up with her till she died.

The mission of Katharina van Drimmelen was to visit the isolated Calvinist pastors, bishops and professors in the socialist countries, to establish connections with them following the legal pathways, to develop these relationships, to inform the contact persons, and to arrange support and foreign invitations for them. Her engaging personality, her command of many languages (Dutch, German, English and French) made her qualified for such a task. Occasions of worship, conferences, friendly talks of ecumenism, meeting the youth and pastors were on her agenda when visiting Christian communities in Hungary or in other countries. She

⁵⁴ Katharina van Drimmelen (1917-2004) pastor, director of a boarding school, head of a project of ecumenism in Vienna.

⁵⁵ Norbert Wolfgang Höslinger, CanReg., (1930-2011) Augustinian friar, professor of theology, director of the Bible Society in Austria.

⁵⁶ Sulyok, Elemér OSB (1941-2015) Benedictine monk, teacher, theologian, college director in Pannonhalma.

heartily met the wives of pastors, the situation of women and the question of peace above all were among her priorities. She met young people with pleasure. She introduced her flat in Vienna (Wien III., Hintzerstraße 9) as a small “Centre for Ecumenism”. In this spacious bourgeois flat, besides a modest private home, there were a number of smaller guestrooms available to house groups or individual visitors, their board and lodging was cleverly organised and provided by herself, and even her guests were involved in the housework. Depending on her financial resources, now and again she had to change her flat.

She visited the young Benedictine students in the Central Seminary in Budapest. Once she joined us in our Divine Office in the morning before leaving for Debrecen, and when parting, she said: “Dear Brothers, God is marvellous, and his sense of humour is excellent. This is what we pray in Psalm 2: ‘The One whose throne is in heaven sits laughing, Yahweh derides them.’ I am a Dutch protestant pastor, I join the service of Benedictine monks, I accumulate power in prayer, from here I leave for Debrecen, the ‘Calvinist Rome’, as you call this place in Hungary, I shall meet the bishop there to win him over to the cause of ecumenism.” During her visits in Hungary or her journeys taking her further afar, Pannonhalma proved to be a sure stronghold and home for her. When she retired from her office, she came to Pannonhalma

many times and visited her Hungarian friends from here. She spent the Paschal Triduum in Pannonhalma. She worked for years in Switzerland, in the centre of the World Council of Churches in Geneva, and she several times referred to this in her words. She cultivated a friendship with Lukas Vischer,⁵⁷ and this friendship proved to be fruitful in Budapest as well. Lukas Vischer's sister, Anneliese Vischer was the wife of Dr. György Bodoky head physician, and she lived here with her family. This relationship provided a dual profit for Van Drimmelen's mission. The Bodoky family was highly renowned in Hungarian Calvinist spheres, it helped her through Dr. Bodoky's support to find her way to the Calvinist bishops and other ecclesiastical authorities. At the same time, the visited "official authorities" were aware of the fact that the Bodoky family by no means belonged to the official Calvinist group acknowledged by the party-state, they were rather critically approached. They assumed that pastor Van Drimmelen knew this opinion, she was received in this sense, and they were suspicious towards her. The pastor got into contact with the Calvinist and Lutheran bishops and officials of the officially recognised churches of the time: István Szamosközi, Zoltán Káldy, Károly Tóth, Tibor Bartha, and the Greek Catholic Imre Timkó and Archabbot András Szennay.

⁵⁷ Lukas Vischer (1926-2008) one of the most influential Calvinist theologians of the twentieth century.

The pastor's and the Bodoky family's friendly relationship with the Benedictines of Pannonhalma prepared the way for Lukas Vischer and his family to visit our monastery. Professor Vischer had already made friends with Father Gellért Békés in Rome, and the friendship between the Bodoky family and Pannonhalma, in addition to his friendship with Gellért Békés promoted his visit to Pannonhalma in the 90s.⁵⁸

Pastor Van Drimmelen's activity and movement – starting from Vienna, involving Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria and once the Soviet Union – was spotted and observed by the organisations of the state security. One can find notes and reports on her in Budapest and Bucharest. Her hosts received her, listened to her, talked to her – and reported on her, and what is more, they made use of her relationships and hospitality. Once, on applying for a passport, the author of this paper was accused of making friends with “American spies”.

The framework of this paper does not allow us this time either to investigate this issue in depth, thus a colleague of ours helped me to have a glance at the documents of state security both in Romania and in Hungary.⁵⁹ It would probably be worth researching in depth the

⁵⁸ In his serious illness, Karekin I, the Armenian Catholicos, said to the author of this paper in Etchmiadzin in May 1995 as follows: “If Lukas comes to Pannonhalma, I also have to be there, it is a simple reason for me to attend the Day of Christian Unity on 14 September 1996.” This declaration reveals Lukas Vischer's fraternal and friendly character for us.

⁵⁹ I express my gratitude to István Bandi for helping me in researching the collections of the Romanian Arhivele Consiliului Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității and the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security.

personality of the protestant pastor, Katharina van Drimmelen, and her mission of ecumenism in Central Eastern Europe.

Aktion Sühnezeichen (ASZ) – The movement of reconciliation

The Aktion Sühnezeichen (ASZ) – the movement of reconciliation – was initiated by Lothar Kreyssig at the Council of the Lutheran Church in Germany in 1958: “We, Germans started World War II, and we caused enormous suffering to mankind, more than anybody else. [...]” The activity of the ASZ was defined by the intention of reconciliation. This idea had different effects in the German Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic, including the societies and churches in Poland Czechoslovakia and Hungary. The movement – coming from Christian sources – aimed at reconciliation and atonement.

According to Kreyssig’s idea, this would have been a voluntary service of peace for a year in those countries, in which the Third Empire caused the most harm. This form of work was not applicable in East Germany, thus ASZ split into two.

The ASZ operating in the German Democratic Republic was tightly related to the Lutheran Church in East

Germany to the end; the ASZ was financially supported by the Lutheran Church. The young people taking part in the movement came from a Christian milieu, and it was their Christian spirituality that played the most significant role in their daily routine as the most important form of work.

The activity of the ASZ in Hungary – in the strictest sense of the word – was realised through personal relationships, and the informal nature of these relationships proved to be the most important element in forming communities and their identity.

While the church-leaders were left out from the ASZ's Calvinist network, the catholic connection was established by Asztrik Várszegi, a Benedictine monk and priest in 1976, who regularly went to the German Democratic Republic, mainly to Erfurt. “Once upon a visit of this kind, I was introduced to the Aktion Sühnezeichen, which was the movement of the Lutheran Church. On the one hand the idea, on the other hand the relationships and the language-practice urged me to make this movement known among the pupils of both schools of ours”⁶⁰ – writes he in one of his letters.

For the first time in 1976, four pupils of the Benedictines participated in the summer camp of the ASZ, and the connection became regular after that. With the knowledge and support of their teachers, pupils of both

⁶⁰ An interview through correspondence between Edit Király and Asztrik Várszegi in 2007. Király, 123.

Benedictine Secondary Schools of Pannonhalma and Győr went to the German Democratic Republic. The leaders of the ASZ and their fellow-workers yearly visited Győr and Pannonhalma to improve the relationships and to distribute the places of summer camps. In the 1980s, the ASZ programmes were visited and attended by many teachers, e.g., Father Valter Pásztori OSB, an elderly and Father Marcell Mártonffy OSB, a young priest and teacher. In these years, based on mutual interests, they also sent young people to Győr, and they helped in the works of reconstruction of the school. These two Benedictine church-schools formed the kernel of the ASZ's Hungarian relations.

Further personal relationships of the Benedictines with pastors

The Benedictines had lively and fruitful, fraternal relationships with excellent and faithful Calvinist pastors both in Pannonhalma and Budapest. I have to mention by name **Endre Gyökössi, a Calvinist pastor,**⁶¹ who spoke about the latest interpretations of the Bible, the renewal of the liturgy in the Calvinist Church, and the idea of the unity. The preaching of **József Farkas**⁶² was always readily attended by the Benedictine students. **Mihály Tapolyai,**⁶³ a physician, took the young Benedictines

⁶¹ Gyökössi, Endre (1913-1997) Calvinist pastor, psychiatrist, writer.

⁶² Farkas, József (1914-1994) Calvinist pastor, excellent preacher.

⁶³ Tapolyai, Mihály (1921 - 2010) Calvinist pastor, professor.

with himself to take part in his mission among the Romany minority on the Great Hungarian Plain.

In spite of the betrayals, disorganisation and peril, with the support of Archabbot Norbert Legányi, the middle and young generations of the Benedictines of Pannonhalma preserved their desire for the efforts of unity. The “connections of ecumenism” did not take place on the level of theoretical, theological meetings, but they were the first steps taken towards mutual respect and acknowledgement. The fraternal relationships established in hard times serve as foundation even today, in times of newly achieved freedom.

In September 1996, Pope John Paul II visited Hungary and celebrated the millennium of the foundation of Pannonhalma with us. Keeping in mind the recent past as well, he encouraged the Benedictine community in his speech delivered during the Vespers on 6 September 1996 as follows:

“Let us give thanks to God together for his wonderful deeds throughout the past millennium. And you, the Benedictine community of Pannonhalma, remain – as a city built on a hill-top – a source of light for this region and for the whole nation. Remain faithful to this vocation of yours, as you were throughout the past centuries.”

Through your everyday service promote the unity of Christians having a dialogue with everybody. The movement of ecumenism can obtain great benefit from your commitment to dialogue, to listening to others and to rapprochement. Keep your abbey open as a home before the concerns of your brothers.”⁶⁴

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⁶⁴ http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/homilies/1996/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19940906_arciabbazia-pannonhalma.html

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