

**Reports as Confessions: Priests as Agents of the State  
Security in Communist Hungary. Case study of István  
Körmendi.**

By

Flóra Kollár

Submitted to  
Central European University  
History Department

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Supervisor: Professor István Rév  
Second Reader: Professor Matthias Riedl

Budapest, Hungary

2012

## **Statement of Copyright**

Copyright in the text of this thesis rests with the Author. Copies by any process, either in full or part may be made only in accordance with the instructions given by the Author and lodged in the Central European Library. Details may be obtained from the librarian. This page must form a part of any such copies made. Further copies made in accordance with such instructions may not be made without the written permission of the Author.

### **Notes on translation**

All of my primary sources are in Hungarian; the documents of the Archive of the State Security, the texts of my interviews and much of the secondary literature I use are also in Hungarian. All the translations were done by me; I only give a few of the original language quotes in the footnotes.

## **Abstract**

Could an informer employed by the State Security deceive his officers for years? Could his personality remain healthy having had to report on his friends? Is someone who was blackmailed into becoming an agent a victim of the system or a collaborator? These are the questions I investigate in my thesis by looking at and analyzing the reports of a priest who informed for years during the 1950s in Hungary. The hundreds of pages of his reports can be found in the Archive of the State Security (ÁBSZTL) in Budapest.

The relationship of the contact officer and the agent can be likened – and perhaps in the mind of a Catholic priest this idea also occurred – to that of the confessant and the priest he confesses to; his reports likened to confessions. Is this a false parallel, or a striking similarity? How could the informer maintain his integrity outwards? I investigate this by comparing the person coming through from his reports to how his still living fellow priests (who served prison sentences) remember him.

Through this case study I show the complex problem of dealing with agents; the role they assume as both victims of the system they lived in, but also as collaborators with it. Moreover, the case brings up the current problem of dealing with the communist past of the Hungarian Catholic Church and investigating the reaction of the Church to the whole issue of agents and the agreements the Church made with the government, whether it had been a struggle for survival or a form of collaboration, or perhaps – as I argue – both.

## Table of Contents

List of Names .....	2
Introduction .....	3
Chapter 1. Historical background.....	12
1.1 Historical background of the Catholic Church of Hungary during communism.....	12
1.2 History of the Regnum .....	17
Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework.....	22
2.1 Confessions.....	22
2.2 Reading of the files .....	26
Chapter 3. Case study of István Körmendi .....	30
3.1 Agent “Kőrösi” .....	30
3.3 Agent “Takács” .....	44
3.3 Körmendi through the eyes of others .....	48
Chapter 4. Case study of other recruiting attempts .....	55
4.1. József Hagyó.....	55
4.2. László Rózsavölgyi .....	62
Conclusion.....	67
Bibliography.....	71

## List of Names

In order to make the reading easier I present here a list of the people who appear in my thesis with a small note on who they are.

### **Körmendi, István (1916-1969)**

A Regnum priest who is in the main focus of my thesis. He was recruited as an agent of the State Security in 1953 and wrote his reports until 1961.

### **“Kőrösi,” “Takács”**

These are the assumed names under which Körmendi wrote his reports to the State Security.

### **Hagyó, József (1932- )**

A still living priest, former member of the Regnum, whom the State Security also tried to recruit as an agent, unsuccessfully. He was a defendant in both the first and the second Regnum trial and spent more than five years in prison. He was one of my interviewees.

### **Rózsavölgyi, László (1919-1987)**

A Regnum priest, whom the ÁVH also possibly tried to recruit unsuccessfully. He was also a defendant in both the first and the second trial and spent several years in prison.

### **Emódi, László (1919-1988)**

### **Keglevich, István (1927-2000)**

### **Tompa, Nándor (1919-1994)**

Other Regnum priests, all three spent several years in prison after the first two trials in 1961 and 1965.

### **Szép, Zoltán (1912-1978)**

### **Csiszér, Ferenc (1921-1982)**

Other Regnum priests.

### **Opálény, Magdolna (1917-?)**

### **Orosz, Ferenc**

Lay members of the Regnum, both defendants of the first trial against the Regnum in 1961.

### **Bölcsvölgyi, Zoltán (?-1996)**

A priest, who was probably recruited as an agent, but in order to warn people told everyone around him about this fact, thus he was put in prison for “betraying state secrets.”

### **“Tárnoki László”**

The code name of an agent writing about the Regnum, his real name is Róbert Vitár.

### **Berényi, István**

### **Brinda, Péter**

### **Gressa, István**

### **Kovács, Ferenc**

### **Pető, Imre**

### **Sándor, Imre**

### **Veres, János**

### **Zsiga, Ferenc**

Contact officers, officers of the ÁVH

## Introduction

“Maybe I shouldn’t mention Heisenberg’s name in this context, but observing obviously changes the observer,”<sup>1</sup> writes Péter Esterházy, a Hungarian novelist. In the days when his new novel about his family, *Harmónia caelestis*, was being published, he learned that his father had been an informer during the communist period. He wrote the work, *Revised edition* afterwards, which deals with this new side of the story, a systematic reading of the reports his father had written, and his own struggle to cope with this fact about his parent. “Observing obviously changes the observer,” is one of the ideas that I deal with in my thesis. I will describe in detail the case of a priest, István Körmendi, who was blackmailed into becoming an agent of the Department of State Security during the 1950s in Hungary. By looking at the reports he had written for more than eight years, the plans and documents regarding him and those around him which were collected by the State Security, I describe and analyze the period in which, we can argue based on his writing, he himself changed in order to accommodate to the double life he was leading.

István Körmendi (1916-1969) was a member of the Regnum Marianum community of priests, whose aim was to educate youths in a Christian spirit, to raise responsible Christian citizens. This community of priests is unique, because it was the only one among Christian movements dealing with youth groups which remained active under the communist regime. There has not been much written on the community; the book of János Dobszay, *Így – vagy sehogy! Fejezetek a Regnum Marianum Történetéből*<sup>2</sup> deals with the general history of the group, with many anecdotes, and memories of members. However, the author had no access to the files of the State Security Archives, which I use. The period of persecution from the 1950s culminated in three trials, which took place in 1961, 1965 and

<sup>1</sup> Péter Esterházy, *Javított kiadás*, [Revised Edition] (Budapest: Magvető, 2002), 53. “Heisenberg nevét nem kéne tán ebben a környezetben megemlíteni, de a megfigyelés láthatóan megváltoztatja a megfigyelőt.”

<sup>2</sup> János Dobszay, *Így – vagy sehogy! Fejezetek a Regnum Marianum Történetéből*, [This way – or no way! Chapters from the history of the Regnum Marianum] (Budapest: Regnum Marianum, 1991)

1971. The second trial has been described in detail by Attila Soós in a conference paper<sup>3</sup> and the third trial by Krisztián Ungváry.<sup>4</sup> The first trial was part of a larger one against the whole Catholic Church, and as part of the larger context it has been looked at. However, the monitoring of the community before 1961 has not been dealt with in detail.

At the beginning of my research I started looking at the documents written and collected by the State Security regarding the Regnum from the beginning of the 1950s. I got caught up in the reports of this one person under the alias of “Kőrösi,” whose texts intrigued me both because of the confessions he writes and also because of the change the texts documented; a change that happens within the writing as the time he had been reporting grows. Moreover, like a detective I was able to find clues to his identity and prove that he was one of the Regnum priests; István Körmendi. I wanted to find out more about this person, to follow the story of a life of which there is little to know, however, in its small frame it is a tragedy perhaps common to that period.

István Körmendi was recruited by the Department of State Security in 1953 as an agent and wrote reports on his fellow priests for more than eight years, until the end of the first trial. In my thesis I analyze the reports written by him, which can be found in the Historical Archive of State Security Organs (ÁBSZTL) in Budapest. These are the typewritten versions of the reports, with added comments from the officers receiving them. The dossiers I looked through also include the plans the State Security Department had concerning the Regnum, how they wished to monitor their activity and later to put an end to it.

<sup>3</sup> Viktor A. Soós, „Békétlenek” és „Ellenállók”: A Regnum Marianum közösség az állambiztonság szemszögéből az 1960-as évek második felében, [“Peace breakers” and “Resisters”: The Regnum Marianum community from the point of view of the State Security in the second half of the 1960s] (Conference paper, 4 October, 2008)

<sup>4</sup> Krisztián Ungváry, “Konceptió per a Kádár-rendszerben: A Hagemann-ügy,” [Show trial in the Kádár-era: The Hagemann Case] in *Beszélő* Vol. 12, issue 12, February 12, 2007 <http://beszelo.c3.hu/cikkek/konceptios-per-a-kadar-rendszerben-a-hagemann-ugy> (last accessed 29 May, 2012)



Based on the reports, my aim is to describe Körmendi's activity as an agent, to present how such work could change him and his life as represented in the texts. Furthermore, I show a change also in the relationship the informer had to his officer(s). A Hungarian historian Miklós György has described his own recruitment, also showing how intimate the relation between agent and contact officer can be.<sup>5</sup> I look at the similarity the reports show to confessions in many ways, for which I use Michel Foucault's theories on confession. Foucault connects confession in jurisdiction to confession in the Church based on historical evolution and on similar aim – of finding the “truth” – people who prescribed them already in the Middle Ages had. He finds similarity in the way, throughout history, confession assumed a key place as evidence in a trial, in the inquisition or in the psychologist's office both in our present day “Western” society and in communist societies.

For my method in analyzing the reports, I use Christiana Vatulescu's ideas, which she describes in *Police Aesthetics*.<sup>6</sup> Her basic idea is to look at the rhetoric of the documents, instead of merely sifting for “nuggets of the truth” within the rhetoric, since this tells us much about what the Secret Police valued as evidence or what they thought of human nature. Moreover, I may add, the rhetoric of the writing also testifies to the attitude of the writer – the agent, thus a change in the rhetoric can be seen as a change in attitude.

In order to avoid the common problem of making the thesis into an “agent-hunt,” I describe through two further cases how the Department of State Security recruited agents, what their methods were, how they used the weaknesses of people for their own purposes. I find this important in order to see that while I deal extensively with the agent, I do keep in mind that the system and those creating it were inherently responsible for the situation in

---

<sup>5</sup> Miklós György, *Kapcsolatom az állambiztonsággal*, [My relation to the State Security] [http://www.boldogsag.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=10398:oenetrjz-es-korkep-10-resz&catid=708:jelenkortoertenet-hamisitasok&Itemid=488](http://www.boldogsag.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=10398:oenetrjz-es-korkep-10-resz&catid=708:jelenkortoertenet-hamisitasok&Itemid=488) (last visited 16 May, 2012)

<sup>6</sup> Cristina Vatulescu, *Police Aesthetics: Literature, Film, and the Secret Police in Soviet Times*, (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2010)

which a person became such an informer. The system of the ÁVH<sup>7</sup> has also been extensively written about by scholars like Gábor Tabajdy and Krisztián Ungváry.<sup>8</sup> However, I do not deny the responsibility of Körmendi himself, nor do I want to belittle the work he did and the destruction his reports on others probably caused, even when he tried to say nothing, since as many people have written, there is no such thing as a neutral report.

The thesis hopes to make a contribution to historiography about agents under communism, firstly because Körmendi himself – as the only Regnum priest to be recruited – has not been dealt with. Moreover, through his case we can view not only the methods of the ÁVH, but furthermore, how the problem of dealing with this kind of double life changed the personality of someone – as far as this can be deduced from the reports he writes.

In Hungary, the Archives were not opened up to the public – as in Germany – and even if one conducts one's research as a scholar, not a citizen, many items are not open for research; papers are censored if they contain intimate personal information on somebody. Moreover, the law states that only public figures might be researched in the archives for public reasons, however, one is deemed a public figure only if one states that about oneself. The secrecy around the topic created an atmosphere where finding an agent each time became a sensation and brought renewed shame to the parties involved. There was no clean slate to start from. Hungary is “a country where after more than one and a half decades there is still no proper legal method of dealing with former informers and with the documents of the former secret services in general.”<sup>9</sup> This resulted in; on the one hand, the description of agent activity becoming what was (is) called an “agent-hunt.” Researches and journalists ruthlessly pursued the truth about people; however, in order to cause sensation parts of the

<sup>7</sup> Államvédelmi Hatóság [Department of State Security], its name was ÁVO (Államvédelmi Osztály: Division of State Security) until 1949.

<sup>8</sup> Gábor Tabajdy, Krisztián Ungváry, *Elhallgatott múlt: A pártállam és a belügy. A politikai rendőrség működése Magyarországon 1956-1990*, [Silenced Past: The Party State and Internal Affairs. The Activity of the Political Police in Hungary from 1956 to 1990] (Budapest: Corvina-1956-os Intézet, 2008)

<sup>9</sup> István Rév, “The Man in the White Raincoat,” in *Past for the Eyes. East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums after 1989*. ed. Oksana Sarkisova, Péter Apor (Budapest: CEU Press, 2008), 9.

story were omitted or distorted. The role of the Department of State Security itself was left out or disregarded, while the despised figure of the agent was put on a pedestal. On the other hand “[t]hose historians who work on morally loaded events of the recent past, in particular on issues related to the life and work of former informers, have often been publicly accused of inappropriate treatment of contentious and sensitive events.”<sup>10</sup>

Another way of dealing with the problem was to blame only the system for the situation, and present the agents as victims of the system. For example the Church has a bad reputation in coming to terms with her past activity under communism. Several times when a figure of the clergy was discovered to have been an informer, the first reaction was denial – outright lying on the part of the Catholic hierarchy, and a defensive attitude to the whole issue. A Church-historian, Ferenc Tomka, a priest himself, published a book in 2005 *Halálra szántak, mégis élünk!*,<sup>11</sup> which deals with the persecution of the Church between 1945 and 1990. He describes procedures of the ÁVH by which they recruited members of the clergy, putting most of the blame on the system and finding excuses for the informers. While there is much truth in the responsibility of the system it is, still, a too one-sided way of presenting the era. Moreover, Tomka also forgot to mention that he himself had written reports. He deals with his own case only in the second edition of the book.

There was, however, a different reaction within the Church. Under the leadership of Asztik Várszegi, the Benedictine abbot, members of the Church tried to research the past with the help of historians. A result of this was the documentary film “Professors of faith and Agents”<sup>12</sup>, in which they search for answers to the question whether the role of the Church was collaboration or survival, by presenting several individual cases within the

<sup>10</sup> István Rév, “The Man in the White Raincoat,” in *Past for the Eyes. East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums after 1989*, ed. Oksana Sarkisova, Péter Apor (Budapest: CEU Press, 2008), 9.

<sup>11</sup> Ferenc Tomka, *Halálra szántak, mégis élünk!* [We live, although they intended us to die] (Budapest, Szent István Társulat, 2005)

<sup>12</sup> *Hitvallók és Ügynökök*, 2009, film of Katalin Petényi and Barna Kabay.

clergy – both from the “professors of faith” and from among the “agents.” They quote the Bible “Truth sets you free”<sup>13</sup> as the thought they wish to adhere to. As far as I know, there was no further result from this sphere.

I believe the truth is between the two extreme attitudes. One must present the system’s vileness, the methods which were immensely effective in recruiting agents. On the other hand, the responsibility of the informers must not be belittled. Not only because they were conscious actors in their own lives, but also because we know that many people did resist and suffered the consequences. Ödön Lénárd was one of these priests and after 1989 until his death in 2003 he researched with enormous energy his own case and later the case of the whole Catholic Church. In the introduction of one of his books he writes about the self-reflection the Church needs.

I believe it is the last moment for Hungarian Catholicism to begin an honest reflection about the past. I have always said that it is natural for an executioner to be an executioner. Thus, in our reflection, we should not be curious about what the system of the ÁVO was like, but what the whole case tells about us; what did we do right, what mistakes we made and based on this what we must correct in ourselves. This writing wants nothing else. (...) The main aim of the book is to start this self scrutiny and spread it in the widest possible circles.<sup>14</sup>

I found a good example of how to do such a study in an essay by Attila Viktor Soós. The study investigates an individual case of a priest who became an agent (and later a bishop). The author painstakingly describes the way he found the agent, the priests own memories (since he was alive during the research), the documents from the archives – which show his activity as an agent. He dedicates a separate chapter to the contact officers, and of course compares the documents and the priests own recollections. The author makes a good point of criticizing the memory of the agent, claiming not that he was lying, but how one distorts the memory of events to fit the life that he had to live. Some of his own evaluation of the agent might seem harsh, but he bases his arguments on a large amount of research.

---

<sup>13</sup> Jn 8, 32

<sup>14</sup> Ödön Lénárd, et al. *Utak és Útvesztők*, [Roads and Labyrinths] (Budapest: Kairosz kiadó, 2006)

“He surely could have found a way so he would not have to write reports. Claiming his writings to be ‘harmless’ is not an acceptable argument, since an agent cannot judge what harms others and what does not. All types of relations to the political police are collaboration.”<sup>15</sup>

I aim to go further in my research, to present in more detail the writings of the reports and how they represent the change that had to happen within the agent. Furthermore, I also pay attention to the relationship of officer and informer – also as far as the documents present these. However, I find it essential to keep in mind; should we look closely at these “agent-stories,” we will discover human weakness where we thought we would find enmity and feel more pity, than resentment towards some of the informers. Timothy Garton Ash’s *The File* is a personal memoir about the author’s experience in East Germany which also compares documents and memory. Garton Ash claims that both are distortions. The author describes his research of the files the Stasi had about him and his visits to the still living officers and informers who reported on him. “What you find is less malice than human weakness, a vast anthology of human weakness. And when you talk to those involved, what you find is less deliberate dishonesty than our almost infinite capacity for self-deception.”<sup>16</sup> Both Soós and Garton Ash talk about the distortion of memory, how one always accommodates what one remembers to what he believes and feels at the moment. Self-deception is essential to survive such situations.

In the first chapter of my thesis I describe the situation of the Catholic Church of Hungary during communism. I follow the process by which the communist government undermined the position of the churches financially, physically, and morally from the end of the 1940s, into the 1950s and show the effect of this process in the Catholic communities.

---

<sup>15</sup> Viktor Attila Soós, “Ügynöktörténet két tükörben,” [Agent story presented in two mirrors] in *Csapdában. Tanulmányok a katolikus egyház történetéből, 1945-1989*, [Ensnared. Essays from the History of the Catholic Church, 1945-1989] ed. Gábor Bánkúti, Tibor Gyarmati, (Budapest: L’Harmattan kiadó, 2010), 187.

<sup>16</sup> Timothy Garton Ash, *The File. A Personal History*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 252.

Within this framework I describe the history of the Regnum Marianum, the community I focus on, from the end of the nineteenth century (the founding of the community) up to today, but detail only the period after 1945, until the 1970s during which time the Regnum was persecuted by the ruling regime in Hungary.

The second chapter will be devoted to the theoretical framework of my discussion; confessions. I base the theory on Michael Foucault's ideas on confession and its link to communist reports. Furthermore, I discuss methodology concerning the reading of secret police files based on Cristina Vatulescu, how to interpret these highly controversial documents, which form the basis of my research.

My case study of István Körmendi follows in the third chapter. Proving the identity of the agent must be my first concern, which is possible to do through his own reports. As his file, which proves the identity of the person behind the names "Kőrösi" and "Takács" has been destroyed or lost this is the only way to prove that István Körmendi, the Regnum priest was an informer under the code name of first "Kőrösi," then "Takács." The two subsequent subchapters trace his activity as an informer, following his reports closely, identifying the changes in his rhetoric and style, his interpretation of his fellow priests and the situation of the Regnum. I also follow, as far as it is traceable, his relation to his officers. In the last part of this chapter, through interviews with still living members of the community, who knew Körmendi I investigate his activity and personality further.

In order to show perspective and contrast, in my last research based chapter, I describe other cases where the State Security tried or at least planned to recruit two other Regnum priests who, according to the documents of the ÁVH, resisted the intended recruiting. This chapter also aims to shed light through these descriptions on the methods of the State Security, which I find essential, as this represents the system in which a priest like István

Körmendi could be recruited as an agent, and one must not forget system's responsibility for the situation.

In my conclusion I deal with some issues which are impossible to evade, if one deals with such a loaded topic. I discuss ideas on why a historian should deal at all with such "dirty past;" and present thoughts why the Church is unable to face its own communist-era cases. Furthermore, I try to interpret some of the reactions of people to the topic of my thesis.

## Chapter 1. Historical background

In order to understand the context of the topic of my thesis, in this chapter I summarize on the one hand the situation of the Catholic Church in communist Hungary after 1945. I shall relate the policies of the communist party of Hungary both before and after their grab of power, as even before 1948 – when they won the elections, there were several decrees that influenced the position of all the Churches in Hungary, among them the largest in numbers, the Catholic Church.

On the other hand I also describe the history of the Regnum Marianum movement, as it is the focus of my research. It is important to see first of all the development of the movement, the aims the members set and the structure it operated in. Furthermore, to understand the background for a member becoming an agent, I will explore how the politics of Hungary from the 1940s influenced activity in the movement – how the limits imposed affected the groups and leaders.

### 1.1 Historical background of the Catholic Church of Hungary during communism

The situation of the Catholic Church was not an easy one under the communist government of Hungary. From 1945 it was among the aims of the communist party to destroy or at least compromise the Churches. The largest of them was the Catholic congregation, and it proved the most difficult to break. However, during the end of the 1940s and in the beginning of the fifties, the government issued decrees that made the life of the Church more and more difficult.

Traditionally the Church had a good and strong relation to the governing power. In Hungary the period between the two World Wars was a time when the Catholic Church could flourish with support of the political power. They had dominance especially in the educational sphere, thus the Church was a power to be reckoned with both politically and financially, as it owned an enormous amount of land property. With the coming of the



communist regime a new situation arose; a situation in which the governing power fought against the denominations and the Church was forced to decide whether to resist or to accept what the regime was willing to give. We must see that it was not only the policies and the persecutions of the communist government which broke the Church, and which I describe below, but some spheres within the clergy thought it more important to preserve the Church and its privileges than to resist, thus collaboration within the clergy was also an important element. People within the Church still argue today that without the agreement of the Vatican and the Hungarian Government in 1964, the Hungarian Church might have been broken off from Rome, which would have created an even worse situation, thus the agreement was necessary. If we look at the neighboring countries of the Soviet Bloc, we see that the Vatican made no such agreement regarding any of them; however the Catholic Church still retains its Roman hierarchy. As most questions, this situation is also not black and white; the Church cannot simply be viewed as a victim of the regime. However, it is necessary to be aware of the policies of the government.

Máté Gárdonyi in his article *Túlélés – együttműködés – ellenállás* [Survival – collaboration - resistance]<sup>17</sup> describes the tactics of the communist governments in the new Soviet bloc after 1945 to subdue the churches in their territory. He claims that this process took place in three spheres: economic, politic and social. I would have to add a fourth aspect which the author leaves out, the moral dimension. By moral dimension, I mean the undermining of respect for the Church, by compromising its members and shaking the trust the clergy, and the lay members had in each other.

By confiscating most of church-owned property during the radical land-reform, the regime took the money by which the Church supported itself, thus, economically the Churches found themselves in a very difficult situation. This foreshadowed the controversial

---

<sup>17</sup> In *Csapdában. Tanulmányok a katolikus egyház történetéből, 1945-1989*, [Ensnared. Essays from the History of the Catholic Church 1945-1989] Gábor Bánkúti, Tibor Gyarmati ed. (Budapest: L'Harmattan kiadó, 2010)

financial support the denominations in Hungary later received from the government. When agreements were made between leaders of the Churches and the government of Hungary, the Churches received annual financial help, which was always proclaimed loudly in propaganda. However, of course the basic financial support was taken from the Churches by the land reform, making this support a meager replacement.

Under the political dimension, Gárdonyi refers to a phenomenon which is unique to the Catholic Church which has long had the most numerous believers in Central Europe, making it the most important target of the process of oppression, especially in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The Catholic Church had strong connections to the Vatican, thus it was the aim of the governments either to break this diplomatic connection or to compromise it: the controversial agreement of 1964 between the Hungarian State and the Vatican made large number among the catholic clergy in Hungary feel betrayed by the Holy See which had been irrespective of their suffering.<sup>18</sup>

The social aspect of compromising churches happened in several steps in Hungary. The secularization of schools maintained by churches in 1948 deprived many monks and nuns of their vocation. This became less of a problem when the religious orders themselves were dissolved in 1951. The government banned most of the religious social organizations and associations – depriving the churches of much of their sphere of influence and relationship with the people. Moreover, they gradually eroded even religious education in schools and also detached theological studies from the universities. In addition, anti-religious propaganda became more and more prominent in the Soviet bloc countries – part of the process of socially undermining the religious denominations.

Furthermore, in 1950, pro-government Church functionaries set up the Catholic Peace movement. The members of this movement became the notorious “peace priests,”

---

<sup>18</sup> Krisztián Ungváry, “The Kádár Regime and the Roman Catholic Hierarchy,” in *The Hungarian Quarterly*, (issue: 187 / 2007), 80-91.

who contributed to the discord within the Church. Adding to this discord was the State Office for Church Affairs (ÁEH, Állami Egyházügyi Hivatal) which was set up in 1951 by the government. This office could veto appointments of Church officials, thus the state had direct influence in the internal affairs of the Church.

Adding to this list of tactics was the physical terror many members of the churches of Hungary were subjected to. Already at the end of the 1940s, many priests were arrested, tortured, sometimes even executed. The crowning of the process was when Prince Primate Cardinal József Mindszenty was arrested in 1949. He would not enter into any compromise with the government, so he had to be disposed of. His was one of the famous show trials of the period.

By the moral undermining of the Catholic Church I partly mean the agreement concluded in 1950 between the Hungarian Government and the Bishops. This one-sided agreement, which strongly compromised the Church, gained it practically nothing, while they promised to propagate the government and its policies to church members. Despite the agreement, the religious orders were dissolved, except the four who were allowed to teach in eight schools that were given back to the Church (out of more than 3000 Catholic schools). The bishops took an oath to the constitution of the Communist State in 1951.

Furthermore, by moral compromise, I mean the infiltration of the Church hierarchy by informers. Many priests and monks were recruited into the secret service and reported on their fellow clergymen. Some for personal gain; like foreign travel, money, or higher positions; some did it out of conviction, and many were blackmailed by fear of pain and arrest or by their own compromising activities. These were applied to other churches of

Hungary as well, and many among the protestant denominations became subservient to the system.<sup>19</sup>

By the time of the 1956 Revolution the Catholic Church had been thoroughly downtrodden, compromised and put under control, thus hardly any priest took active part.<sup>20</sup> Although Mindszenty was freed during the Revolution and gave radio talks, he basically spoke out against the communist government's tactics against the Church, claiming back the properties confiscated in the 1940s. He spoke less about the current problems, hence, besides the symbolic act of being freed by the revolutionaries, his role in the Revolution was also minor. When the Russian army defeated the revolution Mindszenty sought sanctuary at the American embassy and stayed there until 1974.

An instance of resistance within the Catholic clergy happened in 1959. Most of the students of the Budapest Seminary were expelled or left voluntarily, because they would not take part in a "peace meeting," which was the gathering of the "peace priests," and those who supported them, or dared not stand against them. During this period, there were also several trials against priests and monks. Through these trials and because of the agreement and the peace priests' activity the Government was able to break much of the resistance of the Catholic clergy, and through ingenious policies made them serve the state.

The 1960s began with a major trial against priests who still dared to work according to their own principles, mostly ones who worked with youths. They were arrested and sentenced based on the accusations that they had conspired against the state by trying to create a Christian elite with whom they prepared to take over the country. Trials still happened in this decade, however, physical abuse was less frequent. The atmosphere of the

---

<sup>19</sup> For more information of the Calvinist Church see Tamás Majszai, „Harminc éven át állambiztonsági ügynökök álltak a magyar református egyház élén” [For thirty years agents of the State Security stood at the head of the Hungarian Calvinist Church] <http://mozgovilag.com/?p=2438> (last accessed May 23, 2012)

<sup>20</sup> For more details of activity of priests during the revolution see Kálmán Peregrin, “A (budapesti) papság (egyház)politikai koncepciója az 1956-os forradalom idején,” [The (Church)political conception of the (Budapest) priests during the 1956 Revolution] <http://www.vigilia.hu/regihonlap/2010/11/kalman.html> (last visited 2 June, 2012)

Kádár regime (1957-1989) grew less strangling; however, the activity of priests and organizations in the Church were still carefully monitored, and its infiltration with agents continued. Krisztián Ungváry claims that by the change of 1989, at least sixty-four percent of the bishops were in the service of the State Security, furthermore, among the archbishops at least eighty percent were employed in the surveilling work of the Secret Police.<sup>21</sup>

## 1.2 History of the Regnum

The Regnum Marianum movement was founded at the end of the nineteenth century by nine Catholic priests.<sup>22</sup> They started with organizing activities for poor boys in their neighbourhood in Budapest. In 1902 it was officially registered in Rome as a Congregation of Mary. These priests' main goal was the education of youth, to raise them to become healthy and responsible Christian adults. The priests organized the boys into groups from about the age of ten and educated them both religiously and physically. They met every week where they prayed, played games, and learned about both religious and secular topics, went for hikes regularly on the weekends and had week long camps in the summer.

The youths learned about God and Christianity, about history and philosophy, about all kinds of topics that broadened their perspective on life, but they also learned about nature, about making a fire, cooking, or how to find their way in the woods; they learned many outdoor games and sports. They even went canoeing on the Danube and biking in the hills of Hungary. One group was usually under the priests' instruction until the boys finished school, so for about eight years. The priests organized new groups every year again from young boys. Girls were only accepted into the movement beginning in 1951. Later, older boys who had grown up in the Regnum were invited to take part in the education, and become leaders of groups themselves. This "cyclical" practice gained increasing importance

---

<sup>21</sup> Gábor Tabajdy, Krisztián Ungváry, *Elhallgatott múlt: A pártállam és a belügy. A politikai rendőrség működése Magyarországon 1956-1990*, [Silenced Past: The Party State and Internal Affairs. The Activity of the Political Police in Hungary from 1956 to 1990.] (Budapest: Corvina-1956-os Intézet, 2008), 290-292.

<sup>22</sup> Their number grew, but never exceeded around twenty members.

in the preservation of the community in the sixties and seventies, when, due to the persecutions of the communist regime, most of the priests were either in prison or sent to small parishes in the country.

The priests themselves lived together in a house similar to monks,<sup>23</sup> but in a less strict and set way. They all had schools where they taught religion and had several Regnum groups under their instruction with whom they met after school. They had one leader in the house called the “house-superior,” (Házfőnök) whom they voted for every three years, but all major decisions were discussed and voted about by the whole priestly community. Otherwise, since they were regular priests within the Church, they were under the superiority of the bishops of Hungary. However, when they became an official community in 1902, they made an agreement with the Church that no priest would be commanded to become a member of the Regnum community, and a priest could only become a member if the existing members accepted him as such.

The house in which they lived together from 1900 was on Damjanich street 50 (Budapest). This house had its own small chapel and a big courtyard where the children could play together. This was the last house of the Regnum, taken from them in 1950, when the priests were ordered to leave it and were sent to different parishes as curates or parsons. Even today, though they were given the building back, the priests attend and live in their own parishes. While they still have an important role in the life of the Regnum community, lay people have gained most of the educating and group leading positions. This is due both to the lack of priests in the Church, but also to the huge amount of groups<sup>24</sup> within the Regnum, who could not all be led by priests.

---

<sup>23</sup> It is important to point out that they were not a religious order like monks and nuns. This had increasing importance when the Communist regime dissolved the religious orders in 1951, as Regnum Marianum did not fall under this category.

<sup>24</sup> Today, the community numbers around 2000-3000 members, however it is difficult to count, as groups which “grow up” still consider themselves as part of the Regnum, without the leaders who organized them for 8-10 years.

When the boy scouts movement was introduced in Hungary, Regnum became one of its propagators, and took part in the movement as the Third Regnum Marianum scout group from 1913. Though they were very similar in the physical activities, Regnum was unique in the great emphasis it put on spiritual activities and religious education. It was both a scout group and a Congregation of Mary. Although the Regnum later distanced itself from the scouts, this close connection to the Scout movement might have added to their persecutions by the communist government, since the scouts became quite political before the Second World War, and were quickly dissolved after 1948 by the regime.

The Regnum community could operate without hindrance until the end of the Second World War. Under the new communist regime, however, their activity was made difficult when the regime confiscated the house where the priests lived and ordered them to serve in far away parishes. Their church was also taken away in 1951 and blown up in order to build a statue in its place at the edge of Városliget and to create space for the huge organized marches which took place usually on the anniversary of the “Great October Socialist Revolution,” November 7 and the Celebration of Work on May 1. The priests were put under pressure not only by the state but also by their bishop to “voluntarily” dissolve the Community, which they refused to do. “If such a great man as the bishop doesn’t have the courage to do such an act [ordering the dissolving of the Community], how dare we simple little priests?”<sup>25</sup> they replied to the bishops suggestion.

The gatherings and other activities such as excursions, attending mass together, organizing intellectual competitions did not stop; young people took part in these events secretly. An example of how secret these were is my own mother’s case. She became the member of a youth group when she was twelve years old (1969). However, she did not know it was a Regnum group, since they were not told this. In this way, the children could

---

<sup>25</sup> János Dobszay, *Így – vagy Sehogy! Fejezetek a Regnum Marianum történetéből*, [This way – or no way! Chapters from the history of the Regnum Marianum] (Budapest: Regnum Marianum, 1991), 80.

not accidentally talk about Regnum and draw the attention of State Security to themselves, their parents and their group leaders. She found out she had been in a Regnum group only in 1971, when her leader, Veronika Hegyi, was arrested. Hegyi was tried and sentenced for six months prison in the third Regnum trial.<sup>26</sup>

Through informers and agents the government gathered information about the people, especially priests, who directed the organization, in order to incriminate them and stop their work, as the regime felt them to be a threat with their alternative education of young people. Also many priests of the Catholic Church itself turned against the “Regnum priests” mostly out of fear that they themselves might be prosecuted because of the illegal activities of the Regnum.

Many reports of the informers describe the Regnum priests with admiration, and see their danger in the example they are for young priests, who see in them the incarnation of what priesthood should be. They describe the Regnum priests as people who are fanatic about their vocation as educators of youth, and thus cannot be tempted with high positions within the church. They live simply, and, moreover, they are mostly better educated than the average priest and are well read not only in theology but also in Marxist theory. This latter advantage enabled them to argue convincingly, a quality which fascinated the young people.<sup>27</sup>

The persecutions and surveillances culminated in 1960, when four of the Regnum priests were arrested on November 22, and several other members’ apartments were searched. László Emődi, who was – not nominally, but in practice – the leader of the community was one of the arrested. The other three were Nándor Tompa, Istán Kegleich and László Rózsavölgyi, all of them members of the older generation of priests. Later on,

<sup>26</sup> János Dobszay, *Így – vagy Sehogy! Fejezetek a Regnum Marianum történetéből*, [This way – or no way! Chapters from the history of the Regnum Marianum] (Budapest: Regnum Marianum, 1991), 189.

<sup>27</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 92-93. Report of “Kőrösi” January 30, 1960.



more people were added to those in prison. As part of a larger trial against the Catholic Church in July, 1961, they were sentenced to several years in prison.

In 1965 and 1971 two more trials were conducted against the Regnum Marianum community, during which mostly priests and some lay men were sentenced to prison for corrupting the young generation and organizing activities against the communist government. Even during these harassments the community continued to work underground though the lay leaders of the group received greater responsibility as most of the priests were serving prison sentences or were in country parishes. Many people remember the seventies and eighties as a flourishing period for the Regnum.<sup>28</sup> After 1989 the community flourished and grew and it still operates today.

---

<sup>28</sup> János Dobszay, *Mozaikok a Regnum Életéből a hetvenes évektől napjainkig*, [Mosaics from the Life of the Regnum from the seventies to our time] (Budapest: Corvinus Kiadó, 1994)

## Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter is devoted to two topics essential to my work. The first gives the framework in which I interpret the reports of informers: confessions. I discuss the relation between confessions in different settings, linking them all in their aim to find some kind of truth. The second part of the chapter is concerned with the problem of reading files of the secret police, and the obvious problems this genre poses and how one can try to deal with them.

### 2.1 Confessions

“Next to the testimony of witnesses and the learned methods of observation and demonstration, the confession became one of the West’s most highly valued techniques for producing truth. We have since become a singularly confessing society.”<sup>29</sup> Although Foucault speaks in this text, *The History of Sexuality*, about confession as part of Western society, its role in psychology and modern science, this statement also holds true for the communist societies of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in the twentieth century. With the establishment of the Secret Police of the different countries, extracting confessions from possible enemies, possible deviants and possible informers became one of its most important tasks. Even if an array of (false) witnesses could thoroughly condemn a defendant in a trial, a self-condemning confession was considered the most highly valued proof of an individual’s guilt. Thus the officers of the secret police went very far to obtain such written testimonies. As Foucault writes, “torture has accompanied [confession] like a shadow, and supported it when it could go no further.”<sup>30</sup>

The written reports of recruited agents assumed a double role. On the one hand, they were writing against other people as witnesses, describing connections, relations, activities,

---

<sup>29</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 59.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p 59.

and often personal descriptions of how the agent viewed the person who he or she observed; these written reports could also contain conversations, and what people said that could be used against them. On the other hand, most agents had to write self-confessions too. In these, they described their own activity, their relations, and thoughts.

The tradition of describing one's thoughts in confession reaches far back into the history of confessions, as does the aim of the confession to produce truth. There is a striking similarity between confession in the Catholic Church as prescribed in the Middle Ages and the confessions given to communist police and also – as Foucault points out<sup>31</sup> – in the confessions of patients to a psychologist. Confession produces truth and freedom; however, this truth is not something that only corresponds to facts, acts, and deeds, but also to thoughts and words. One can sin with one's thoughts, both in Christianity and in communism. In the Catholic mass, part of the prayer one says during the penitential rite is "I have sinned in my thoughts and in my words," not only in deeds. Under many forms of communism, a word said in the wrong place at the wrong time, an idea that might be in one's thoughts was already seen as a plot against the state. One is reminded of George Orwell's "Thought Police" in *1984*, whose job is to constantly survey the population and punish all who commit *thoughtcrime*, potential challengers of the authority of the state. This crime does not relate to what one does, but what one could do. Cristina Vatulescu, author of *Police Aesthetics*, a research into Soviet and Romanian Secret Police archives, quotes Lenin when writing about the differences between police activity before and under communism; "people are in prison in order to prevent plots,"<sup>32</sup> not for an already committed crime.

The similarity between Catholic confession and confession in the legal system is based on their historical evolution by Foucault. The 1215 Lateran Council prescribed the

---

<sup>31</sup> Michel Foucault, *Christianity and Confession*, in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (New York : Picador, 2005)

<sup>32</sup> Cristina Vatulescu, *Police Aesthetics: Literature, Film, and the Secret Police in Soviet Times*, (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 45.

need for confession at least once a year, but already in the eleventh century confession also became part of legal practice – a secularization of confession, as Foucault describes it. According to his theory, confession was and is seen as “one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth.”<sup>33</sup> Within the communist system of the Soviet Union, which became the model for the Eastern Block in Europe, confession also assumed an important role. In the terror that ensued during the period of Stalin’s show trials, the defendant’s written and signed confession was the most damning evidence as it showed the person’s self-condemnation. That these confessions were written under torture, the threat of torture, or blackmail did not matter, they were testimonies to the “truth.” Furthermore, as Simon Sebag Montefiore describes in detail in his book *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*,<sup>34</sup> confessions were used by those close to Stalin to forestall arrests. Montefiore writes about several occasions on which, when one of Stalin’s magnates learned about his disfavor with the leader, he wrote a self-criticizing confession in which he admitted to his own incompetence and mistakes, begging for forgiveness. In some of these instances the culprit was only reprimanded or demoted instead of being handed over to the officers of the *Lubyanka*. Furthermore, there were public critique and self-critique sessions during party meetings, where people were expected to criticize each other and also confess their own faults.

Dealing with the files of the Secret Police of any former socialist country involves the reading of confessions: Not only confessions of potential victims, people arrested and tried for crimes they usually had not committed, but also confessions of the informers on whose reports the arrests of others were based. What is important to consider in analyzing these confessions is the audience for whom they were written – “the confessor.”

<sup>33</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 58.

<sup>34</sup> Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, (New York: Knopf, 2004)

Foucault also deals with the role of the confessor, as confession represents “a ritual that unfolds within a power relationship”: “one does not confess without the presence (or virtual presence) of a partner who is not simply the interlocutor but the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile.”<sup>35</sup> As he describes, the relationship between the confessant and the confessor is not on equal terms. The confessor holds power and also responsibility. He has the role of interpreting what is being said, which Foucault also describes in *Christianity and Confession*. He is somebody with expert knowledge, who explains to the person confessing the truth about himself, interpreting what he confesses. In the act of writing a report to the State Security, the presence of the officer who will read it must constantly be taken into account, for he takes on the role of the confessor. The officer not only reads the report, but also writes comments and an evaluation of whether the report was useful and truthful, what the agent should pay attention to, and what are his tasks in the future. Similarly, in a religious confession, the priest would advise the penitent, evaluate his sins, and accordingly set the penance to be done. This unequal power relationship can even result in the development of an intimate connection between a contact officer and an informer, as the officer becomes the sole confidante concerning the secret life of the agent, and this is another aspect that I will investigate. Timothy Garton Ash’s *The File* mentions this aspect among many other related issues when he likens the Stasi of East Germany to the British secret service.

Both describe to me, in almost identical terms, the unique quality of the personal tie between agent and case officer. ‘It’s a wonderful relationship,’ says the senior retired gentleman from MI6. ‘You can talk about anything, your job, your personal problems, your wife, and be quite sure that it will be kept secret.’ I glimpse the paradox at the heart of all spying: the key to betrayal is trust.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 59-60.

<sup>36</sup> Timothy Garton Ash, *The File. A Personal History*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 235.

While there are many similarities between confession to the Secret Police and confession in Christianity, and I use this theory in my thesis, I do have to point out a basic difference, besides the idea that one hopes that a priest has a very different attitude and aim when listening to a confession than an officer of the Secret Police. Christian confession ends with the forgiving of all sins – it offers an absolutely clean start to the penitent. Confession to the Secret Police offers no such absolution; the tension of the double life of an agent is never lifted.

## 2.2 Reading of the files

As Foucault writes, the aim of confession is to find “truth”: truth of the sins committed, truth of the crime committed in a law suit, and truth of the sins committed against the communist regime. However, how should one interpret the “truth” thus produced? What should the reader believe? As Timothy Garton Ash writes, “people often protest that their files are wholly unreliable, full of distortions and fabrications.”<sup>37</sup> Based on his own memories compared with his files, he is conscious of the distortions these reports create. So how should one read a secret police file?

One of the most important contributions of Cristina Vatulescu’s book *Police Aesthetics* is a method she describes and uses. Vatulescu’s background in literature provides the basis of her methodology. She applies close reading, but as in literature, the reader must “beware of the texts.” She, like others before, makes the distinction between the rhetoric of the writing and reality, or “Truth,” which people are usually looking for when digging in the archives. The tendency is to try and sift through the rhetoric in order to find truth about the past, to search for nuggets which describe reality behind the rhetoric of the Secret Police. However, she claims she will focus also on rhetoric, as it represents the values, apprehensions, and fantasies of the secret police; files can be misleading or outright lie

---

<sup>37</sup> Timothy Garton Ash, *The File. A Personal History*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 23.

about a person's life, but they nevertheless reveal what the Secret Police valued as evidence, or how they understood human nature.

I found this a useful method and would add that a change in the rhetoric of the files, or a change in the style of an author of a document is also revealing. It might show a change in attitude toward the task of writing or a shift in the writer's relationship to the secret police. As Vatulescu points out, similar to literature analysis, it is important to keep in mind who the author and the intended audience is, as this information sheds light on many aspects of the writing. Did an agent try to write in order to please the officer he was writing? Did the author of the autobiography try to inflate his achievement or his party work?

The classic form of the beginning of an interrogation is the autobiography writes Vatulescu, which a suspect was instructed to write. This usually reads like a CV, with curt lines and simple sentences, and perhaps some emphasis on the person's activity in the party as one tried to show his/her loyalty. The classic form of ending an interrogation was a confession. This piece of writing had to adapt to the rules of the Police composition. It is usually a much more detailed piece in which one establishes himself as the enemy the police wants him to be. It is much more personal and often it contains apologies concerning the "crimes" the suspect committed. The change in the two types of genres also indicates the change that had to happen in between the writing of the two documents. The suspect must have come closer in his self-perception to the picture the police wanted to establish, which, at times was a painful process.

Vatulescu makes a helpful distinction between files, calling pre-arrest files "surveillance files," and post-arrest ones "investigation files." In the post-Stalinist times, the amount of surveillance files grew dramatically, especially with the new technology, which made listening in on telephones and bugging apartments possible. On the other hand, as opposed to Stalinist times, not all surveillances ended with an arrest. Many times the files

were closed with the death of the person involved. There was also a difference in the kind of biography the police files created in post-Stalinist times. There was greater intent in actually monitoring the object of the file, to depict his life, movements, and relations, than in the earlier crime-searching process of Stalinist surveillance.

The informer I am concerned with is an author of such surveillance files. He is one of the people whom Vatulescu calls “depth informers”: those who have knowledge about the person(s) under surveillance, or an intimate relation with them, and thus can report usefully.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, based on my research, it seems he is the only real depth informer involved in the case as a member of the priest community under surveillance; the other agents are outsiders or former members of youth groups led by the priests. His reports are important to the State Security in the monitoring of the Regnum Marianum, and the change within the rhetoric of his writings might indicate a change in his attitude toward the Secret Police, which I analyze in my thesis.

Foucault describes confession within the Church and in our conception of psychology as a “ritual in which the expression alone, independently of its external consequences, produces intrinsic modifications in the person who articulates it: it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation.”<sup>39</sup> But what about confessions in which people admit sins or crimes that they are fully conscious of not having committed? Moreover, what about the reports given about others, condemning one’s friends and fellows? What effect do these writings have on the author?

In my thesis I apply the method of close reading to the reports written by István Körmendi about the priests of the Regnum Marianum community. Besides the content of his writing, I focus on his style, on the rhetoric he uses both in his reports about others and in his confessions about himself, and analyze what this tells us about his attitude toward being

<sup>38</sup> Cristina Vatulescu, *Police Aesthetics: Literature, Film, and the Secret Police in Soviet Times*, (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 37.

<sup>39</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 60.



an informer, his relationship to his contact officer, and the complex personal dynamic between being a priest and an agent of the State Security.

## Chapter 3. Case study of István Körmendi

This chapter is devoted to the case of István Körmendi. He was one of the regnum priests; based on my research, the only one among them who was recruited by the State Security organs as an agent. Through the analysis of his reports I aim to first of all establish his identity, both as the agent under the alias “Körösi,” and as the agent under the alias “Takács,” whose reports took up where those of “Körösi” left off. Meanwhile I also show how these reports can be likened to confessions. My last aim is to show as far as it is possible from his reports a change that happened in his personality and his relationship to his contact officers.

### 3.1 Agent “Körösi”

The functioning of the orchestra, while it existed was part of the life of Regnum and it was a good aid in distracting the boys from socialist building, and turning them against democracy.

[...]

Organizing plays and thus involving parents was or seemed an appropriate tool in bringing the parents under the influence of the Regnum too. Not only did we turn the boys against democracy, but we also had a similar effect on their parents. This was part of our work against democracy which went on in the Regnum and for which we are responsible.

Looking back today at these plays, puppet-shows – the plot of which were not in aid of the building of democracy – I see that this work of ours was damaging. It damaged what the working people had built and I was part of this destructive work. I condemn this work of mine. In the country of the working people I deserve punishment for such a deed.<sup>40</sup>

This quote is part of the first report of an agent under the alias of “Körösi” from February 9, 1953. His reports begin in 1953, with varying frequency, sometimes monthly, sometimes more often, and he writes them until 1960,<sup>41</sup> with about a two and a half year break after 1956. The reports document a changing representation of his personality. The system makes him become someone different than he was before – as far as this can be asserted from the analysis of the reports. He must lead a double life; reporting on people he

<sup>40</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 24. Report of “Körösi” February 9, 1953.

<sup>41</sup> May 12, 1960 is the last one in these dossiers.

considered his friends. His writing changes from lying in order to defend those he is informing on to almost total submission to the officers' instructions. The officers he reports to become his confessors; he constantly feels the need to claim his sinfulness, to confess his crimes against the system; moreover, he can only gain reassurance from them, when he has fears of being revealed.

The subject of "Körösi's" reports is the Regnum Marianum Movement. The surveillance of Regnum became systematic in 1952, when János Veres, a junior lieutenant of the State Security proposed the opening of a group file for the movement, because, contrary to expectations, the Regnum Marianum priest community continued to operate even after the initial 1950 dispersing. The police knew this based on the reports of three informers already writing on the subject.<sup>42</sup>

"Körösi," who was a later addition to the agents reporting on Regnum, wrote his first reports on February 9, 1953. His reports are interesting from several aspects. First of all, he writes as somebody who is part of the community, not merely as an outsider. He writes about when he "moved into the Regnum" in 1947,<sup>43</sup> and as I quoted, writes in first person plural about "our" activity. Moreover, it is interesting that he condemns the work they are doing, i.e. destructive work against socialism, he writes as if he were confessing his (and others') sins. In many paragraphs he adds sentences or words that express regret or merely statements about the guiltiness of the work they did, and also, the deserved punishments that they must accept. "This illegal work is against the law and might be dangerous for both the parents and the boys. The parade<sup>44</sup> itself, but all work that was done by the Regnum after the dissolving of the house was too bold and was a reckless challenge to the organs defending

<sup>42</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 2. Proposal for opening of group file, February 15, 1952.

<sup>43</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 24. Report of "Körösi" February 9, 1953.

<sup>44</sup> At least once a year the Regnum organized a parade where every member met usually on a large meadow somewhere, and had games and celebrations. They organized one even in the spring of 1952 (the event "Körösi" describes), which they tried to keep a secret as much as possible – they were quite successful in diverting the State Security organs with a false place and time.

the laws of the state.”<sup>45</sup> In a different report, where he describes the meeting of the priests when they received the order to leave the house, he claims that they decided to continue the work, even though they must abandon the place that was their center and home. “With this decision we stepped from the path of the law and all responsibility is on us, because we did all that came afterwards deliberately; [...] against the law. We and I fully deserve to be crushed by the state authority.”<sup>46</sup>

On the other hand, “Kőrösi” lies in his reports about the work of the Regnum priests. He claims that after this 1952 parade, they decided that all collective work must stop, and “the Regnum would cease to exist. There would be no regular meetings with the boys, and even the friendships between the priests would be slowly loosened.”<sup>47</sup> Yet during 1952-53 the priests met at least once a month to discuss what they were doing with their groups. They also had meetings with the growing number of lay leaders; they tried to keep up the work they had been doing before, but due to the lack of the house the activities changed. However, this was also the period when the movement started to grow. Before, it had been focused around one place, now, with the priests dispersing to different parishes, the territory they had influence over grew.<sup>48</sup>

“Kőrösi” writes that “The Regnum as an organization has thus ceased to exist, true, only half a year after the dissolving; this half year was illegal work, and it is only thanks to the patience of the state, that the strictness of the law was not used against us.”<sup>49</sup> He makes similar declarations about the connections between the priests, how these also practically disappeared, they no longer maintained such tight friendships. Moreover, when in November 1953, he was asked to write about each Regnum priest individually, he writes

<sup>45</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 26. Report of “Kőrösi” February 9, 1953.

<sup>46</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 29. Report of “Kőrösi” February 9, 1953.

<sup>47</sup> ÁBSZTL 03.1.5-O-11516/1, 26. Report of “Kőrösi” February 9, 1953.

<sup>48</sup> This time period is briefly described in János Dobszay, *Így – vagy Sehogy! Fejezetek a Regnum Marianum történetéből*, [This way – or no way! Chapters from the history of the Regnum Marianum] (Budapest: Regnum Marianum, 1991), 86-88.

<sup>49</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 27. Report of “Kőrösi” February 9, 1953.

about most of them that “he [the priest he is describing] does nothing that has to do with youth education.”<sup>50</sup> Even earlier he tries to claim ignorance, by writing about himself that he does not keep his own group together. He continued, “I don’t know enough about the activity of the others, because I only took part in two of the irregularly held meetings since then [September 1952], and even then, there was nothing said about their work. I’ve heard that László Rózsavölgyi, Zoltán Szép and Nándor Tompa have connections to the youths, but merely individually. This information might be wrong.”<sup>51</sup> In this way he practically tries to defend the priests. In the November 1953, report, the officer in charge of “Kőrösi” commands<sup>52</sup> the informer to refresh his friendship with the Regnum priests and bring reports about their present-day activities.<sup>53</sup>

On February 21, 1955 the content and style of the reports change, he no longer denies the work they are doing. The agent called “Kőrösi” writes a long confession both about his own activity and about his misinforming of the Department of State Security. He again describes how he joined the Regnum in 1947 as a religious instructor. He gives the names of all the priests working at that time in the movement, who, besides working in schools, led youth groups. “The goal of the activity was to educate the members of the groups against the existing system’s ideology in an anti-Marxist way, and thus make them stand up against the state and its aims. [...] I joined the work and led the group given to me in this spirit.”<sup>54</sup>

In this report he admits that even after the spring parade in 1952, the priests did not stop their work, though it did become more cautious. They also began to educate older boys so they would have help leading the younger groups. These older boys were occasionally

<sup>50</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 31. Report of “Kőrösi” November 24, 1953.

<sup>51</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 27. Report of “Kőrösi” February 9, 1953.

<sup>52</sup> The reports have a usual schema: the agent writes the report, then there is comments from the officer, under these there can be orders, tasks, measures to be taken by the state security service.

<sup>53</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 31. Report of “Kőrösi” November 24, 1953.

<sup>54</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 42. Report of “Kőrösi” February 21, 1955.

called together and trained for the work. He describes two meetings of the priests, always naming the people taking part in the meeting. He writes about a September 1953, meeting: “Attending were: László Emódi, Zoltán Szép, [...], István Körmendi, and myself.” Similarly in October: “Taking part were: László Emódi, Nándor Tompa, László Rózsavölgyi, István Körmendi and myself.”<sup>55</sup> These members named are all priests, which points to “Kőrösi” also being a priest. Testifying to this also is the fact that he taught religion and had his own groups to lead.

In this confessing report of February 1955 “Kőrösi” again condemns the work of the Regnum as dangerous and against the state, emphasizing how in the education of the older boys the priests focused on parts of theology that are criticized by Marxist ideology and gave anti-Marxist answers to the boys which they could use later in their own groups. His own self-reflection is also present regarding the weekly meetings he has with his own group: “In these discussions I show the topics in an anti-Marxist light and give sharp criticism of the system.”<sup>56</sup>

In this text, when describing the priests one by one, he gives details about their activities and their groups. In a last paragraph he makes a confession which is unique, because it can be understood two ways. “All this, that I have written, I knew; I took part in the illegal work, and although I was in contact with state security organs, I did not communicate this and I abused their trust in me.”<sup>57</sup> It can be understood either as a confession of his sin about not giving all this information to the Department of State Security before or as a confession of not warning the priests about his connection to the state department, depending on who we understand the “they” and “their” to be.

<sup>55</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 43. Report of “Kőrösi” February 21, 1955.

<sup>56</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 47. Report of “Kőrösi” February 21, 1955.

<sup>57</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 48-49. Report of “Kőrösi” February 21, 1955. “Mindezeket, amiket leírtam, tudtam, résztvettem [sic] az illegális munkában és bár az államvédelmi szervekkel kapcsolatban voltam, ezt nem közöltem és az irántam táplált bizalommal visszaéltem.”

This report is also different; because its receiving officer was no longer Péter Brinda, lieutenant of State Defense, part of the I/2-b subdivision, which was in charge of “clerical reaction prevention.” The officer receiving this report is István Gressa, also lieutenant of State Defense, part of the IV/5 subdivision in charge of “Catholic Church prevention.” “Kőrösi’s” reports are received by this subdivision until after the 1956 revolution, though the officers themselves vary.

His next report from March 2, 1955, describing a meeting of the Regnum priests was written to Lieutenant Imre Sándor, and the officer’s comment at the end of the report sheds some light on the reason why “Kőrösi’s” writing may have changed. “We have dealt with uncovering the enemy activity of the Regnum priests for some time now. Our agent has only given useable reports since his realignment on February 15, 1955. He had misinformed us about their activity till now.”<sup>58</sup> This “realignment” (*átszervezés*) of “Kőrösi” might mean merely the fact that he has a new officer, or that the issue is now dealt with in a different subdivision. I have not been able to find out more concerning what else it could mean: (blackmail, threatening).

However, it is possible to prove who the real person is under the name of “Kőrösi,” and this fact sheds light on the contrary reports he gives and on his lies and his guilty confessions which can be understood in different ways. Though the archive does not have, or did not find the “number 6-file”<sup>59</sup> in which the Department of State Security and the Internal Ministry documented the agents they had recruited, it is possible to prove “Kőrösi’s” identity from his reports and other documents in the dossier.

First of all, as I have shown, he himself claims that he joined the Regnum, moved into the house and that he taught religion, took part in the meetings the priests had among themselves, and had his own group of boys which he led. All these facts point to him being

<sup>58</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 50. Report of “Kőrösi” March 2, 1955.

<sup>59</sup> “6-os karton” in Hungarian, which contains both the real name and the code name of an agent and the time and type of his recruitment.

one of the Regnum priests. Moreover, after the 1955 report, he more or less gives monthly, sometime even more frequently reports, most of them about the meetings of the priests. Secondly, there is a document which proves that the ÁVH had at least the intention of recruiting one of the priests as an informer. This is the only page which was censored in this dossier; it is an operative plan by Péter Brinda from November 17, 1952. He writes that a group-dossier had been opened under the name of “Regnum” in order to monitor the group’s activity. “In order to check up on the members of the Regnum Marianum priestly community, and, furthermore, to find out about and document their destructive work, I propose the following operative measures to be put into action.”<sup>60</sup> The first element of this plan refers to the recruitment of István Körmendi, a “former” member of the Regnum, presently a curate. According to this plan, the ÁVH had found out something about Körmendi which could be used as blackmail, but the nature of this personal information is crossed out in the copy I had access to.

We have collected every available material about him [István Körmendi] and prepared a recruiting proposition. We will recruit István Körmendi based on the compromising data. In this way we will have the possibility of monitoring the activity of the Regnum and gain more extensive knowledge regarding their destructive work. Moreover, this gives us opportunity to check on other agents working on the topic.<sup>61</sup>

Since contemporary Hungarian law does not give access to data that is about sexual or other such personal information, Körmendi might have had a lover, which was very compromising in the case of a priest or was perhaps homosexual, and the state security organs found out about it. Whatever the nature of this compromising data, it was used in order to blackmail Körmendi into informing on his fellow priests and friends in the Regnum.

“Körösi” starts giving reports at the beginning of 1953, which theoretically would allow him to be Körmendi, whose recruitment must have occurred at the end of 1952 based

<sup>60</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 53. Operative plan by Péter Brinda November 17, 1952.

<sup>61</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 54. Operative plan by Péter Brinda November 17, 1952.



on the operative plan. Moreover, as I have shown, “Kőrösi” reports as an inner member of the Regnum community. He reports discussions that occurred between him and László Emődi, who became the organizer and leader of the work of the Regnum during the fifties. Emődi would probably only have important discussions with someone he trusted.

There are more concrete proofs of his identity, however. “Kőrösi” writes that in 1954, he could not take part in the work that aimed at training older boys to become leaders of groups due to his other engagements. “Dr. János Galambos the parson of the Rokolya street became sick and I had to attend to the parish by myself.”<sup>62</sup> This means that he was the curate of the Rokolya street parish. In his next report on March 2, 1955, he again talks of the training of boys and that they must go to the different priests who teach them different topics. In the reports “Kőrösi” describes István Körmendi as teaching dogmatism to them and writes that Emődi said the boys should get notification to “be at the parish in District XIII on Rokolya street at Körmendi’s at 3 PM on March 6, 1955.”<sup>63</sup> In 1954 “Kőrösi” describes the individual work of the priests and about Körmendi he writes: “István Körmendi is a helper (curate) at the outer Angyalföld parish.”<sup>64</sup> This “outer Angyalföld” parish can be found on Rokolya street, and it is still called that today. Moreover, from 1952 until 1959 the parson of the parish was János Galambos,<sup>65</sup> supporting evidence that Körmendi was indeed Kőrösi, who was asked to attend the parish alone when Galambos fell ill.

Another proof that the two people are one and the same is the address where “Kőrösi’s” and Körmendi’s apartment is. The agent writes that his group gets together each

<sup>62</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 45. Report of “Kőrösi” February 21, 1955.

<sup>63</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 50. Report of “Kőrösi” March 2, 1955.

<sup>64</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 39. Report of “Kőrösi” January 30, 1954.

<sup>65</sup> [http://lexikon.katolikus.hu/Külső-Angyalföldi Szűz Mária Keresztények Segítségé plébánia.html](http://lexikon.katolikus.hu/Külső-Angyalföldi_Szűz_Mária_Keresztények_Segítségé_plébánia.html) (last visited April 29, 2011)

Monday “at my apartment /: Bp. VI. Eötvös-u. 36. III. 18.:/.”<sup>66</sup> Later, when describing the priests individually, he says that “István Körmendi lives in VI. Eötvös u. 36.”<sup>67</sup>

The identity is further proved by the fact that “Kőrösi” writes reports about meetings which concern the training of older boys. This activity of the Regnum was headed by László Emődi and in one report the agent claims that Emődi’s most important helper is Körmendi.<sup>68</sup> He describes such meetings with the names of all those participating; giving the names of the boys, then adding: “besides them only Emődi and Körmendi were present.”<sup>69</sup> It is interesting that in the February 21, 1955, report quoted on page 34, “Kőrösi” describes the meetings of the priests twice by adding himself as a participant right after the name of István Körmendi. This could be seen as a way in which he wanted to disguise his identity. Or, perhaps as a way to distance the two people within him; the priest who is reported on, and the agent who informs. In later reports he merely gives names without adding himself and Körmendi is always among the people named.

On December 9, 1959, “Kőrösi” describes an incident that scares him. He is afraid that people suspect him of being an agent. This report is interesting from several aspects. An older boy, who used to be his student introduces a girl to him and asks “Kőrösi” to become her confessor, (this is concrete evidence that “Kőrösi” must be a priest). This boy – Ferenc Orosz<sup>70</sup> – asks him about what the State Security knows. “They always find out about everything either in advance or afterwards. Uncle Pista, don’t you think that we haven’t been found out only because, though they know about us, they don’t want to make a case about us until we become too impertinent?”<sup>71</sup> Ferenc Orosz is described as calling “Kőrösi”

<sup>66</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 47. Report of “Kőrösi” February 21, 1955.

<sup>67</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 77. Report of “Kőrösi” June 21, 1958.

<sup>68</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 46. Report of “Kőrösi” February 21, 1955.

<sup>69</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 65. Report of “Kőrösi” May 27, 1955.

<sup>70</sup> He also lead groups in the Regnum and was one of the defendants of the first trial (1961) against the Regnum. He was sentenced to 1 year and 6 months in prison. (János Doboszay, *Így – vagy sehogy!* p 140: the book contains the sentences of all three trials against the Regnum)

<sup>71</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 87. Report of “Kőrösi” December 9, 1959.

uncle Pista,<sup>72</sup> which is important, since Pista is a nickname for István, the first name of Körmendi.

From the comment of the officer we find out that “Kőrösi” was quite agitated about the issue, asking whether it might have been the Regnum priests who sent Orosz to him because they suspected him of being an informer. He also wonders if it was not the Internal Ministry itself that wanted to provoke him with this incident.<sup>73</sup> He had been reporting for seven years by that time. While simultaneously having had to participate actively in the Regnum, teach young boys, take part in meetings of priests, discuss with them all sorts of topics about the present situation, he was regularly reporting on all of it to the State Security. This double life must have made “Kőrösi” not only suspicious but, but also increasingly isolated and confused. He turns to his officer for comfort, who tries to reassure him with the comment found at the end of the report. He is the only person who knows about this double life, who might understand his fear. The officer writes, “I reassured ‘Kőrösi’ nobody knows about our correspondence and Orosz probably says such things because he is afraid of these huge assemblies.”<sup>74</sup>

In the following section, I will point out two more reports from which it is obvious that the agent “Kőrösi” is one and the same as the Regnum priest István Körmendi. A report from March 8, 1960, documents how the informer talked with Regnum priests about the deplorable situation of the Catholic Church,<sup>75</sup> and proposed to write a plan in order to renew it. He describes how his words were received with great enthusiasm and Emődi suggested that the two of them prepare the plan together beforehand and then take the problem before a larger audience. Notably, he describes all the priests’ reactions except for Körmendi’s.

<sup>72</sup> Pista bácsi in Hungarian, which is an endearing way of calling older people.

<sup>73</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 87. Report of “Kőrösi” December 9, 1959.

<sup>74</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 87. Report of “Kőrösi” December 9, 1959.

<sup>75</sup> He talks about the outdated system of the Church hierarchy, the bad attitude of the bishops to just wait until some miracle happens and changes the situation. He mentions the inhuman situation of the curates within this system, and the idleness which is common in the whole Church; priests do not care, that the number of the believers diminishes constantly, but merely consider their positions as a way to earn money. ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/2, 18.

Later in the report “Kőrösi” writes: “The more than three hour long discussion ended with the decision that Emődi and Körmendi begin the preparation.”<sup>76</sup> It was the agent who was suggested by Emődi to be the one working on the plan, thus this quote, once again, points to Körmendi being “Kőrösi.” Moreover, Körmendi did not comment on the topic, which is logical if he brought it up.

The second report written on February 27, 1960, makes “Kőrösi’s” and Körmendi’s shared identity even more obvious. The priests are preparing an “Intellectual Olympics,” in which boys and girls had to answer questions written by them on many different topics. According to the report they decided that Körmendi would receive the answers in a sealed envelope and he would be the one to evaluate the papers and give the scores to Emődi. In the comment, the officer writes: “The evaluation of the Intellectual Olympics is done by ‘Kőrösi,’ thus we will have the opportunity of gaining the groups exact membership number and their names.”<sup>77</sup> Without doubt the agent “Kőrösi” is equated with Körmendi.

It shows his subjugation to the system that since he is ordered by the officer to give the questions, answers and names of all the youths participating in the Olympics to the State Security Department, these documents can be found right after the report. He follows orders punctually thus giving up not only the priests, but the young boys and girls who took part as members of the Regnum groups.

An article by Viktor Soós, in which he describes the second trial of the Regnum, quotes a document that also hints at Körmendi’s role as an informer. It is a proposition to allow former Regnum priests to work again, since “in the last few years they showed loyal behavior.”<sup>78</sup> Among the three named is István Körmendi.

<sup>76</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 98. Report of “Kőrösi” March 8, 1960.

<sup>77</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 102. Report of “Kőrösi” February 27, 1960.

<sup>78</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.9-V-152268/1. Emődi László and co. p. 8-12. Proposition, Budapest, December 1, 1964. An earlier version of the same document: ÁBTL 3.1.9. V-152268/4. Emődi László and co. p. 329-333. Proposition, Budapest, October 24, 1964. I quote it from: Viktor A. Soós. „Békétlenek” és „Ellenállók”: A Regnum Marianum közösség az állambiztonság szemszögéből az 1960-as évek második felében. [“Peace

István Körmendi was born on February 20, 1916, in Baja. According to the first report evaluating the Regnum, he worked as a military hospital priest in the Horthy army.<sup>79</sup> He graduated from the University of Theology and in 1947 he joined the Regnum Priests and moved into the Damjanich street house. After 1951, when the house was taken away he was first sent to a chapel in Buda,<sup>80</sup> but by 1953 he was at the outer Angyalföld parish. In 1958 he reports that he works at the parish in Újlak<sup>81</sup> and in 1959 he is a curate at the Servita square.<sup>82</sup>

During the training of the older boys he taught dogmatism and pedagogy. Of himself, he reports that “István Körmendi lectures on history of pedagogy, using every opportunity to emphasize the mistakes in present day education, to ridicule it and to make the boys stand against Marxist thinking and those who believe in it.”<sup>83</sup> Emődi remembers him as one of the best lecturers they had. He also mentions that there was a time period when Körmendi had to go into hiding, but he neither supplies a concrete date for it, nor comments further on the subject.<sup>84</sup> This is interesting, because it corresponds to a report of a different agent who informed on the Regnum. This man, an agent called “Tárnoki”<sup>85</sup>, describes the priests individually and of Körmendi he says:

He is the one about whom I know the least. Around 1945-1955 [sic] he disappeared for a longer period. They said he went into hiding under a false name. What the reason was, nobody knew. Then one day he reappeared as if nothing had happened. He is the most worldly among the priests, several times he told ambiguous jokes, with which he shocked his fellow priests. He is also a well prepared priest; I think he is sick a lot.<sup>86</sup>

---

breakers” and “Resisters”: The Regnum Marianum community from the point of view of the State Security in the second half of the 1960s] (Conference paper, October 4, 2008)

<sup>79</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 4. Proposition by János Veres Februar 15, 1952.

<sup>80</sup> This is both in the reports and also in Emődi’s memoirs: *A Regnum Marianum Története*, [History of the Regnum Marianum] ed. Dyekiss, Virág, Rochlitz, T., Fodor, B. (Budapest: Regnum Marianum, 2003), 53.

<sup>81</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 77. Report of “Körösi” June 21, 1958.

<sup>82</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 80. Report of “Körösi” May 16, 1959.

<sup>83</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 45. Report of “Körösi” February 21, 1955.

<sup>84</sup> László Emődi, *A Regnum Marianum Története*, [History of the Regnum Marianum] ed. Dyekiss Virág, Rochlitz Tibor, Fodor Bertalan. (Budapest: Regnum Marianum, 2003), 147.

<sup>85</sup> His real name is Róbert Vitár, he was a member of the Regnum as a teenager.

<http://www.magyarhirek.hu/index.php?mod=article&cat=bunugy&article=1966> (last visited 2 June, 2012)

<sup>86</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 129. Report of “Tárnoki” April 29, 1960.

The agent probably meant 1954-55 as a time when he disappeared, since from 1947 until 1950 he was in the house of the Regnum. This not only corresponds to what Emődi writes, but also to the fact that he had to be ordered by his officer in the Department of State Security to refresh his relations with the Regnum priests. That he disappeared from the life of Regnum around 1954-55 would also correspond to the time after he began reporting, so the fact that he tried to distance himself from the Regnum might have been a way to prevent himself from reporting anything important. Thus he could claim ignorance about the activities of his fellow priests.

This disappearance of his comes up in one of his own reports in 1956. He writes that Emődi was of the opinion “that I disappeared partially because I had escaped from the ÁVÓ’s clutches and did not want to call attention to myself and partially since they can’t interrogate me about what I don’t know /Regnum/.”<sup>87</sup> Körmendi claims that Emődi approved of his disappearance.

Another interesting aspect about this report is that in the “command,” the officer instructs him; “In order to reassure his mother, he should arrange a meeting with her in the way we discussed.”<sup>88</sup> This means Körmendi had told his officer about personal problems, in this case the anxiety of his mother. Furthermore, the officer decides to take care of this problem through the report and orders the agent to meet his mother. Such exchange shows an intimate relation between the two people, much more than a mere “work connection.”

As time passes, “Körösi” starts to have his own ideas about how he could gain more information, which is a long way from the beginning of his reports when he lied in order to defend his peers. On May 18, 1959, “Körösi” reports that Emődi had asked him to give a lecture to his group on dogmatics, which he gladly accepted. This time, it is the agent and not the officer who writes a strategic comment:

<sup>87</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 159. Report of “Körösi” January 31, 1956.

<sup>88</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 75. Report of “Körösi” January 31, 1956.

Emődi's invitation makes it possible that if I present good lectures to his group he will tell the other Regnum priests and they will also invite me to their groups as lecturer. The lectures could be organized in such a way, so there wouldn't be only one occasion, but the boys might ask for a lecture series. Thus it would shed light on the place of the meetings, on the people attending and on the type and method of work in each group. This job could be a tool in mapping and keeping watch over the activity of the Regnum priests. I made a promise to Emődi, and I will try to work out the lectures in a way so we can gain from them all we can in order to see more clearly.<sup>89</sup>

Not only does he have his own ideas by 1959, but he is also praised for it by his officer. In addition to the positive comments from Lieutenant Kovács in his evaluation of the report, Ferenc Zsiga, a captain, thought it worth his while to scrawl a handwritten sentence on the paper; "Interesting report, the plan of the agent is good for gaining further information."<sup>90</sup>

Another change in "Kőrösi's" reports is the way in which he begins to write about the priests he works with. A general positive evaluation of the Regnum priests is still there: their simple way of life and lack of desire for advancement in positions; they are learned men and their enthusiasm for their activity with the youth of Budapest is also described, which other priests are jealous of. However, when he describes Emődi as an individual, he paints a not too flattering picture, calling him foolhardy and somebody who puts himself forward too much.<sup>91</sup>

Even more degrading are the sentences he writes about László Rózsavölgyi in March 3, 1960, report, when he is asked to give an individual characterization. "He looks young, like a child, due to his almost girl-like appearance, he is usually a favorite with women,"<sup>92</sup> writes "Kőrösi," though he knows that a sentence like this could be highly compromising in the case of a priest. He writes this even though he admits in this report that he knows nothing regarding such liaisons. It is possible to contrast this to a report from 1953, in which he also had the task of describing Rózsavölgyi. This contains no special information, merely

<sup>89</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 172. Report of "Kőrösi" May 18, 1959.

<sup>90</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 172. Report of "Kőrösi" May 18, 1959.

<sup>91</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 89. Report of "Kőrösi" December 8, 1959.

<sup>92</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 172. Report of "Kőrösi" March 3, 1960.

the usual facts, that Rózsavölgyi had also taken part in the illegal activity and worked in the Regnum. It also has condemning facts from the point of view of the Department of State Security, since “Kőrösi” writes that Rózsavölgyi is “politically against the system, he condemns collaboration and acceptance”<sup>93</sup>. However, this is far from the malicious comment in the report of 1960.

### 3.2 Agent “Takács”

In May 1960, the reports of the agent “Kőrösi” end. His last one is from the beginning of May. However, a new agent’s reports appear around the same time. He writes under the name “Takács,” and his contact officer is also Ferenc Kovács, who was the officer of “Kőrösi” from 1958<sup>94</sup> until the spring of 1960. There is also a report from the agent to Kovács dating from 1955.<sup>95</sup>

The first report from “Takács” dates to May 12, 1960, and provides a summary of the Regnum.<sup>96</sup> From then on he writes, as “Kőrösi” did, mostly about the meetings of the Regnum priests every fortnight. Again, it is possible to prove that “Takács” is Körmendi and for some reason he received a new name. His identity will be demonstrated in the following section.

First of all, “Takács,” like “Kőrösi,” takes part in the meetings of the priests, which indicates that he is a priest as well. In later reports it becomes more obvious that Körmendi is Takács. On May 23, 1960, “Takács” writes, “István Körmendi sought out László Emődi, with whom he spoke in the passenger hall of Kelenföld station.” In the report “Takács” describes that Emődi told Körmendi about his suspicion that one of the leaders is an informer. “He tried to reassure Körmendi, that it is an uncomfortable feeling that there is an

<sup>93</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1-a, 435. Report of “Kőrösi” January 31, 1953.

<sup>94</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 75. Report of “Kőrösi” June 18, 1958.

<sup>95</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 156. Report of “Kőrösi” February 22, 1955.

<sup>96</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 131. Report of “Takács” May 12, 1960.



agent among the leaders, however, there is nothing they can do.”<sup>97</sup> From the comment of the officer it becomes obvious that the agent writing the report is Körmendi as he summarizes these events by writing that Emődi told “Takács” about his suspicion.

It is interesting how in the reports themselves the agent sometimes disguises his identity, at others not. There are reports when he describes a discussion and writes: “On July 30, 1960, László Emődi talked to István Körmendi in my presence.”<sup>98</sup> In other places he merely writes that somebody told “me” or somebody talked to Körmendi, making his identity obvious.

Why his name was changed, while his role and functions were not, I have not been able to ascertain. However, his life became more difficult beginning from 22 November, 1960. A plan of the Internal Ministry from August 17 is included in the dossier. In this the Ministry plans on stopping the “destructive activity of the Regnum Marianum” through a series of steps. The strategy involved the arrest of four priests: László Emődi, István Keglevich, László Rózsavölgyi and Nándor Tompa, which did occur on November 22. “After their interrogation – based on their confessions – we will take into custody a further four-five priests.”<sup>99</sup> The role of “Takács” would be to monitor the activity and reaction of the members who were still free. He must find out how they evaluate the situation, how they prepare to synchronize their confessions if they think they will be arrested and if and how they talk about hiding and destroying documents that the service did not find. “Such discussions of the illegal priestly community would be recorded with the use of “Takács” through applying the III/e regulation,”<sup>100</sup> which means that the agent would be wired and they would record the discussions. However, “during the second step of breaking the

<sup>97</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 149. Report of “Takács” May 23, 1960.

<sup>98</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 211. Report of “Kőrösi” August 5, 1960.

<sup>99</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 212. Monitoring Plan August 17, 1960.

<sup>100</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 212. Monitoring Plan August 17, 1960.

adverse activity, our agent under the alias “Takács” will also be taken into custody.”<sup>101</sup> At the end of October, the State Security Service had a plan about the realization of the arrests.<sup>102</sup> This included orders about which brigade would watch and arrest which priest and where; they write which other priests will be exposed to house-search, and Körmendi is one of the people mentioned.

Before the realization of this plan there is an interesting report by “Takács” in which he documents a debate of the Regnum priests.<sup>103</sup> In this debate, the agent takes upon himself the role of peacemaker and succeeds in calming the others. In his report he depicts himself as the saver of the unity of the community. “Emődi’s sharp and indignant tone of argument caused such tension that threatened the community with dissolution. It was Körmendi who interposed again. [...] Körmendi’s opinion was accepted and even Emődi calmed down gradually.”<sup>104</sup>

Interestingly, on one hand this could be viewed as a positive gesture from the side of the Regnum, since they are in need of coherence. However he is also praised by his officer, who writes “Takács moderated the debate rightly. His intervention was necessary; otherwise the illegal community would have continued to operate in fragments without central control, which would have hindered the documentation of the case in its present state.”<sup>105</sup>

After the arrests of the four priests, the position of Körmendi became more difficult. Many people questioned why he himself was not among those taken, when he took part in the activity quite actively. Moreover, he was ordered to report constantly about the opinion of those left free, and the relatives of the arrested. One of his tasks was to be the confident of the mother of Rózsavölgyi and find out who else visited her. It is no surprise that he

<sup>101</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 213, Monitoring Plan. August 17, 1960.

<sup>102</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 230-132. Plan of arrest October, 1960.

<sup>103</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 247. Report of “Takács” November 2, 1960.

<sup>104</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 247. Report of “Takács” November 2, 1960.

<sup>105</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 248. Report of “Takács” November 2, 1960.

became even more suspicious and anxious about being found out, as we can see from some of his reports.

He describes a discussion with Magdolna Opálény,<sup>106</sup> a member of the Regnum Community, who tried to get a package of food and clothes into prison to one of the priests. A lawyer helped her write the petition, and for some reason “Takács” became scared that this lawyer had connections to the Internal Ministry and thus might know about him too. The officer writes;

Relating to the report, I discussed with the agent that what Opálény and the other people who are outside [not in prison] said are merely figments of their imagination and they have no serious basis. I said this in order to calm the agent, since he was worried that maybe his own person is also known among those outside.<sup>107</sup>

Once again, we see a situation, where the officer takes upon him the task of calming the agent, of soothing his fears.

On February 21, 1961, there is another proposition by the Internal Ministry for the breaking up of the activity of the Regnum priests. In this they decide to include five more priests in the procedure. These priests, however, could remain free, because there was no need for more arrests. Among the five is Körmendi, about whom they write, “He took active part in the organizing of the illegal work. During our investigation of the case he worked as an informer thus in order to make further use of him it is necessary to prosecute him without an arrest.”<sup>108</sup> Not only is this proof of Körmendi’s work as an agent, but it also shows the meticulous way the ÁVH planned their steps, to prevent the other members of the community of finding out his informing work but at the same time to be able to make further use of him.

However, in order to make it less suspicious they decided to include two younger priests in the prosecution. “Our aim is to have them receive identical sentences during the

<sup>106</sup> In the first trial, she became a defendant and was sentenced to sixteenth months of prison.

<sup>107</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1-a, 288-289. Report of “Takács” January 19, 1961.

<sup>108</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1-a, 301-304. Proposition, February 21, 1961.

trial as our agent ‘Takács’ and so succeed in extracting him from the case. [...] The mild or acquitting verdict of these three people legalizes our agent and he can continue his informing activity for us.”<sup>109</sup> Until the trial in July, the agent wrote reports almost weekly about the opinion of those still free. He wrote about their fears and anxieties, their account of their interrogations or their silence after it. He described the relatives’ visits to him, reported on their feelings. He was the eldest of the Regnum priests who was left free, thus many people sought him out, asking for advice.

Körmendi was thirty-six years old when he was recruited as an agent, and through his reports it is possible to trace a change in his style and attitude, which suggests also a change in his view of himself and his personality. He became suspicious and probably constantly guilty about the double life he had to lead. The system’s vileness is inherent in the fact that an informer must condemn the people around him and use them to gain information to satisfy the officers. Körmendi also felt the constant need to confess his own crimes; and even though he supposedly believed the opposite – that he was doing the right thing in educating youth – he had to write about it as a crime. Though in the beginning he tried to outwit the system, he could not escape. After years of such controversy it must have been difficult to see anything clearly. As another agent, “Tárnoki,” reports, Körmendi was prone to sickness, which also might have to do with the life he led. He died on September 9, 1969,<sup>110</sup> at the age of fifty-three.

### 3.3 Körmendi through the eyes of others

Two priests are still alive who had known István Körmendi during the fifties and beginning of the sixties, and I had the opportunity to talk with them both. One of them – he asked me to omit his name, so I will call him B, had not known that Körmendi was an agent,

<sup>109</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1-a, 301-304. Proposition, February 21, 1961.

<sup>110</sup> László Emödi, *A Regnum Marianum Története*, [History of the Regnum Marianum] ed. Dyekiss Virág, Rochlitz Tibor, Fodor Bertalan. (Budapest: Regnum Marianum, 2003), 145.

although the first time I interviewed him<sup>111</sup>, he mentioned that he did know it. After having read much of the dossiers on the regnum, in which I found out more about Körmendi, I interviewed B again<sup>112</sup> and asked him to tell me about István Körmendi, how he knew that Körmendi was an agent. I found out that it was only after 1989 that B suspected his fellow priest. He deduced it from some of the reports that he received when their case (he was a defendant in a trial against priests) was reopened in order to rehabilitate them. Based on the agent's descriptions of the conversations they had had, he guessed that it was Körmendi writing the report. However, as my interviewee explained to me, if Körmendi had written those reports during the period between the arrests in November, 1960 and the trial, then they might have been part of the interrogations, many people said things in the interrogations and that does not make them an agent. During this second interview, I heard similar stories, in which B tried to defend Körmendi, or put him in a better light as this line of thought about the interrogations also shows. When I asked B what Körmendi was like, he answered, "he was a strong, tough man. ... A determined, hard man and honorable. I know nothing bad about him."<sup>113</sup> This makes sense if we see that he still was unsure whether Körmendi had been an agent, and he wanted to believe that he had not been one.

During the time of the first trial B had not known Körmendi was an agent, he could only tell me that after the first trial in 1961, Körmendi stopped working altogether in the Regnum. Moreover, he broke all connections to the priests and worked only in the parish assigned to him in the Béke square. One time, when a priest visited him and mentioned 'Regnum', Körmendi angrily sent him away immediately, according to B. It seems that after the first trial he went back to the only tactic against being an agent, to try and know nothing noteworthy to report.

---

<sup>111</sup> Interview on 24 January, 2011.

<sup>112</sup> Interview on 7 May, 2012.

<sup>113</sup> Interview on 7 May, 2012.

B also told me a story he had heard about two Regnum priests during the interrogations before the first trial. Rózsavölgyi and Körmendi were confronted with each other. Afterwards, the officer who led Rózsavölgyi back to his cell told Körmendi: “Do you know what Rózsavölgyi told me? He said ‘don’t arrest him [Körmendi], because he has a bad heart’ Why do you love each other so much?”<sup>114</sup> What I can deduce from this is that the sickness of Körmendi that is alluded to several times in the reports of “Kőrösi” and others’ was probably a sickness of the heart. I also thought, based on this, that similar to B, the other Regnum priests themselves also did not know about Körmendi being an agent. A different report might testify to this.

In November, 1960 another priest, Zoltán Bölcsvölgyi was arrested and they tried to build up a case against him, in which he was accused of homosexuality.<sup>115</sup> It could not have been successful, as the police decided to accuse him of betraying state secrets – meaning that he had told other people that he was an agent. This was at least true; of this crime he was guilty.

Based on our investigation it has been shown that Bölcsvölgyi had told Ferenc Csiszér, a member of the so called ‘RM’ movement, an organization against the state about his recruitment by the Internal Ministry’s organs and his meeting place with the organs. He also told Csiszér that he has to give information about several priests – among them former Regnum priests. Through Csiszér the other Regnum priests also found out about the above.<sup>116</sup>

In a report from 1959, ‘Kőrösi’ mentions Bölcsvölgyi, writing that “Bölcsvölgyi has asked that people spread it among the community of the priests that they have to be careful with him, and that he has to be avoided,”<sup>117</sup> obviously claiming that he is in the service of the ÁVH, and although he could not say no to the recruitment, he tried to warn those around him about his connections. This seemed to be a general way to try to outwit the Department of State Security; not to have anything to report, not to know about the people you were

<sup>114</sup> Interview on January 24, 2011.

<sup>115</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1-a, 311. Informing report, March 24, 1961.

<sup>116</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1-a, 311. Informing report, March 24, 1961.

<sup>117</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 86. Report of “Kőrösi” December 1, 1959.

supposed to inform on. In the comment of the priest we can read that the Regnum is relieved that the informing priest was not from among them, which means they did not suspect Körmendi.

B also told me that after the first trial the fathers realized how naïve they had been. They asked him to write a presentation about saying the truth, “because saying the truth does not mean spilling discreet information” – in order to somehow come to terms with what to say, or whether it was allowed to lie during an interrogation, which most of them had to endure. He wrote a paper in Latin, collecting what philosophers and thinkers had said on the issue. Every priest knew Latin, however, if it was found, it would not be understood by the ÁVH. “It was found, and later I was confronted with the translation. Somebody translated it who understood Latin, but had left out the most incriminating sentence”<sup>118</sup> – that during these difficult and frightening times, they must not speak. Thus, it became a general paper on the moral question of telling the truth and could not be used against him. B believes that it was translated by Körmendi, since the translator spoke Latin, but had positive inclination towards him.

During our discussion, it was clear that B did not know that Körmendi had been an agent for years. Moreover, to me it seemed that he wanted to defend him somehow, to put him in a positive light, to show him as a person of integrity, or to find an acceptable explanation for the reports that the other priest had written – meaning that he wanted to believe that what he had read had been written by Körmendi as part of an interrogation, not a report. I told him that Körmendi had been writing reports for years before that, and showed him the document of the operative plan in which the ÁVH states their intention of recruitment in 1952.

---

<sup>118</sup> Interview from 7 May, 2012.

Looking at the reports from the beginning B started to talk about the events described by Körmendi and not about the issue of recruitment itself. Then, he asked me what I really wanted. Did I want to seek out agents? We started discussing the “agent question,” how it was important to see that the true culprits were the officers of the ÁVH and those even higher in the ranks of the party; that the Hungarians have not come to terms with their communist past while, for example, in Germany, everybody had been forced to leave their job who had been a communist.

I agree with him, the officers are the ones who created a system in which a priest like Körmendi could be put into a position in which his life was destroyed. He had to lose his self-respect, his honesty, and his friends while living this double life. On the other hand his own crimes cannot be denied, he cannot be viewed merely as a victim of the system. He himself had committed something that the ÁVH could blackmail him with, moreover, many others were capable of resisting recruitment, while he was not. I also have to add that not only the Hungarian nation, but within it, the Hungarian Church has also not come to terms with its past during communism.

The interview showed me the deep instinct within even such a priest like B, who could never be made to report on others – he himself told me, that you must live in a way so that they do not have anything to use against you – the deep instinct of defense, which has had a great role in the cover-up the Church has been doing since 1989. As I have experienced, people still fear that such information which I present here could be used against them, against the Church or just used in a dishonorable way. That B did not want his name to appear shows this inherent fear which the system injected into people, who thus, still today have to deal with it.

I do not want to go into moral questions regarding this hotly debated issue; my aim was to present this case, both as a way to show the methods of the ÁVH, but also to show its



effect on a priest. How, based on the analysis of his reports we can trace the change in the life and personality of Körmendi, who was both a victim, but also a collaborator with the system.

I also interviewed József Hagyó, a former Regnum priest, about whom I write more in the fourth chapter. He described to me an interrogation during the period before the first trial, in which the ÁVH had tried to recruit him.

This was an interesting episode seeing how they still wanted to get a couple more people to inform. We knew that among us there were a few, who had been afraid, or because of something else... [Among the priests? – I had asked] Yes, yes. But we were so honest with each other that he had announced during one of our priestly meetings, that he had been asked, and he is afraid and doesn't dare say no, but from now on, let's not tell him anything confidential, and if during a meeting there is such a topic, he will leave, so he might have nothing to report.”<sup>119</sup>

When I asked him more about this, he said “He probably didn't cause harm to anybody, but just admitted that the ÁVH had tried to recruit him, and he had said yes. He couldn't bear the procedure, the tension. But as a friend, he remained close to us, and we tried to shield him in some sense, so he wouldn't know data about us.” However, this way, he couldn't really help that much with the work of the Regnum. Hagyó did not remember clearly when this happened, but that it was before the trials. He also told me, when I asked about Körmendi, that he had been the one just described. “But he had been such a good friend of Emódi for example; that we couldn't... nobody had the heart to exclude him, only this caution was our solution.”<sup>120</sup> This means that the priests, at least those who were active during that period, did know that Körmendi had been recruited. However, they had not minded, but accepted Körmendi's weakness, and merely tried to reduce the things he could know. The priests did not know that he had written reports about all their meetings, their groups and themselves and probably, by 1960 they believed Körmendi was no longer an agent.

<sup>119</sup> Interview with József Hagyó on May 16, 2012.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

I did not tell Hagyó about the content of the reports I had read. He believed that Körmendi had not harmed anybody, and it seems from this interview that in the beginning, Körmendi had tried to make a clean breast of it. However, he had not succeeded in keeping the balance: in satisfying his officers but shielding or at least not harming his fellow priests. As Péter Esterházy writes several times in his novel, “you can only betray everything.”<sup>121</sup>

Without wanting to belittle Körmendi’s own responsibility in the life he led, I find it important to present, through two cases, the methods the Department of State Security used to recruit priests. I do this in order to escape one of the typical ways of writing about agents, a way that is typical, at least, in Hungary. I do not want to make Körmendi’s case an “agent-hunt.” It must be kept in perspective of the system into which he was recruited, thus the responsibility of the officers must also be clear, which I will further investigate in the next chapter.

---

<sup>121</sup> Péter Esterházy, *Javított kiadás*, [Revised Edition] (Budapest: Magvető, 2002) “Elárulni csak mindent lehet.”

## Chapter 4. Case study of other recruiting attempts

In this chapter I will describe two cases of unsuccessful recruiting of priests, which are documented by the Interior Ministry within the operative dossiers of the Regnum. One of them happened between the arrests of four regnum priests; László Emődi, László Rózsavölgyi, István Keglevich and Nándor Tompa on 22 November, 1960 and the first trial in July, 1961. Besides these four priests, many others were called in for interrogations, during which they had to testify against each other, admit their guilt in conspiring against the state and confess that their activity's main aim was to raise an elite which would be able to lead the country in case there was a change in the regime. The other case of a plan for recruiting was prepared and discussed in reports during a longer period between 1959 and 1960.

The two cases I present are important in order to see the mechanism of how the ÁVH worked, how meticulously they planned such a recruiting. These plans present the difficult position a priest, or anybody could be put in, if the State Security decided to recruit him or her. The system's methods, most importantly its ability to use the weaknesses of people for their purposes can be seen in these small case studies.

### 4.1. József Hagyó

During the interrogations the accused were asked about their fellow priests, they were ordered to describe the activity of the other members, the groups they led and personal traits which were important for the officers of the State Security. Using these and their own information from their observations, their impressions from the interrogations and the reports of their agents, they decided to try to recruit other priests within the community. József Hagyó became one of their intended based on the very precise report by Ferenc Kovács police lieutenant on 15 March, 1961.

“In order to observe and monitor the activities of the free members and clerical groups of the illegal Regnum Marianum, we suggest József Hagyó, Roman Catholic priest to be recruited for agent work.”<sup>122</sup> The officer is very systematic in the reasons for this suggestion, he lists the traits of Hagyó based on which he is deemed suitable for this activity. First and foremost, he is trusted by the other members, both clerical and the laity. Furthermore, he is young which, according to the State Security makes him open to their “appropriate training and leading.”<sup>123</sup>

József Hagyó was twenty-eight years old during these interrogations. He had been ordained as a priest in 1955, and became an active member of the Regnum Marianum Community immediately afterwards. He led several groups, went on hikes with the youths and even after being sent to Esztergom took active part in the life and organization of the Regnum. He was one of the main writers of the questions for the “Intellectual Olympics,” which they tried to organize every year – the one in 1960 was the last one.

Emődi describes him during one of his interrogations in very positive terms, meanwhile also making him guilty of the activity which was considered criminal by the State Security. “As a young member of the Regnum, Hagyó was active, he scrupulously attended our communities illegal meetings, he was very enthusiastic about working for his youth groups and had a role in the work of our movement against the people’s democratic order.”<sup>124</sup>

A very similar description is given by Nándor Tompa, who added that he also organized activities for girls, and the compulsory sentence appears at the end of the confession: “He [Hagyó] too took part in our enemy work against the people’s

<sup>122</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1-a, 328. Proposition by Ferenc Kovács, March 15, 1961.

<sup>123</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1-a, 329. Proposition by Ferenc Kovács, March 15, 1961.

<sup>124</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1-a, 364. Transcript of the interrogation of László Emődi, January 7, 1961.

democracy.”<sup>125</sup> Another text appears in the confession of László Rózsavölgyi, which details the work Hagyó did in the community.<sup>126</sup>

The State Security had further material in their hands. They had the interrogation of Hagyó himself, in which he claims according to the documents that their “camps and hikes served the purpose of winning the children to the cause of the community and to draw them away from the KISZ [Communist Youth Association] and pioneer movements.”<sup>127</sup> What I want to show through these quotes is that the State Security had enough material to incriminate Hagyó, were they to find it necessary.

The summarizing report by Kovács Ferenc on 15 March, 1961, describes Hagyó as fast in forming opinions, but altogether insecure. As somebody who is not absolutely fanatic, who is modest and easily inspires trust in other people,<sup>128</sup> a necessary trait in an informer. Not only are his inner characteristics described, but since they wish to recruit him, this eight page long proposition contains also his biography with details about his family, his education, and his work in the Regnum.<sup>129</sup> From this they conclude that “with his enemy activity he substantially contributed to educating the youths recruited into their illegal groups in an anti-Marxist and idealist spirit, he integrated the resolution of the priestly community to abstract young people from the influence of democratic youth organizations.”<sup>130</sup>

I must add that this summarizes the basic problem the State Security and the communist regime had with the Regnum Marianum. Although they were charged later with conspiring against the state, their main danger was the influence they had over a large number of young people; influence, which was in a very different spirit from that which the

<sup>125</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1-a, 362. Transcript of the interrogation of Nándor Tompa, January 11, 1961.

<sup>126</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11519/1-a, 332. Quotes from the interrogation of László Rózsavölgyi December 15, 1960 in the proposition by Ferenc Kovács, March 15, 1961.

<sup>127</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1-a, 331. Quotes from the interrogation of József Hagyó March 7, 1961 in the proposition by Ferenc Kovács, March 15, 1961.

<sup>128</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1-a, 329. Proposition by Ferenc Kovács, March 15, 1961.

<sup>129</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1-a, 329-330. Proposition by Ferenc Kovács, March 15, 1961.

<sup>130</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1-a, 330. Proposition by Ferenc Kovács, March 15, 1961.

regime wished to have over youths. The regime was afraid of a generation which was raised to be self-confident in their intellectual capabilities, which was able to question the ideas, principles and acts of the regime.

It shows the precision of the system how they meticulously planned the recruitment of József Hagyó. They collect in points why the discussion with the potential agent ensures his “recruitability.” Among these are two points which try to pinpoint the weakness of the man. This was an important trump card in the hands of the State Security, when they wanted to blackmail or bully somebody into informing. Point three states that “he is frightened of legal impeachment, and is conscious of the fact that based on his activity he could be sentenced to prison.”<sup>131</sup> This statement already points ahead to their tactic in threatening him with prison. Point four states their observation that he worries about the future of his parents and siblings, which might be jeopardized in the case of his arrest. This is another tactic of the State Security, to blackmail somebody through the people he cares for.

After giving all the reasons why Hagyó is a good candidate for becoming an informer the report systematically describes the way in which the priest should be recruited through a discussion with him. They claim that if they conduct the conversation well Hagyó will be obliged to consent to working with them. I will quote some of the methods, to show how ingeniously they aimed to pull the right strings in order to achieve their goal, sometimes playing on the fear of the victim, or trying to inspire his trust by putting themselves in a fatherly position and him a the role of the prodigal son, whom they are willing to welcome back, if only he complies to their wish; if only he shows his good behavior by writing reports.

They will tell him – says the proposition – that his case is not yet finished and they will conduct a further interrogation. “His fate will be determined based on his future

---

<sup>131</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1-a, 333. Proposition by Ferenc Kovács, March 15, 1961.

behavior and on his honesty during the interrogation.” They will ask him to evaluate the illegal activity of the community and himself, and hoping he will confess his crimes, they will reveal the crime of his fellow priests, “who, purposefully counting on the fall of the people’s democratic system, were organizing an ideological diversion against the state.” However, they consider him merely mistaken, since he is young and lacks experience, but they “expect him to prove that he is not an enemy of our people’s democratic system.” After this subtle proposition, they expect he himself will offer to collaborate. If he does, they expect him to say in what form he imagines this work, and “after recalling his crimes again, we will accept his proposition.”<sup>132</sup>

If their plan goes as intended they will explain all further details to him, how to write a report, the importance of secrecy, the use of code names and how to keep in touch. If recruited, Ferenc Kovács would be his contact officer and they could monitor him through their agent “Takács.” Should the recruitment fail, he will be arrested and put to trial based on his activity, the documents and his own confession.

We can see the systematic planning behind the whole plan. They allow for all possibilities, they aim to use every available tool to achieve their aim. The most important such tool is their ability to play on the weaknesses and fear of the people in their hands. In this case it was mostly fear, however, in many other cases it was a weakness for power, luxury or privileges.

On the 11 April another interrogation took place, which dealt extensively with Hagyó’s work in the Regnum, making him incriminate himself further.<sup>133</sup> From 14 April there is another document where Ferenc Kovács described the recruitment plan as follows:

In order to legalize József Hagyó – in case of his recruitment – he will also be taken to court; however, during his recruitment we will inform him that the court will only receive documents which moderate his enemy activity and thus he will be acquitted or will receive a suspended verdict.

<sup>132</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1-a, 334. Proposition by Ferenc Kovács, March 15, 1961.

<sup>133</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1-a, 354-360. Transcript of interrogation of József Hagyó, April 11, 1961.

[...]

Should the recruitment of József Hagyó fail, we will impart all our incriminating material on him to the court in order to make sure he is sentenced to prison.<sup>134</sup>

Among the documents there are handwritten texts by Hagyó dating from 25 April. One of them is a declaration of secrecy, stating that he will not speak of anything that was mentioned during his interrogation to anybody, not even to his closest friends, and understandably, there is an added comment: “not even in confession.”<sup>135</sup> The second is, again, a description of his activity in the Regnum, in which he confesses to his responsibility in working against the regime. The third document is the most shocking. In this he is asked to describe morally unacceptable behavior of priests. He lists four priests of whom he believes that they had relationships with women, claiming that he received this information from others, or the priest had said or wrote about it himself, thus everybody knew about it. None of them are members of the Regnum Marianum. Making him write such a document could be seen by the police as the beginning of a relationship between him and the ÁVH, where he is on the State Security’s side against those members of the clergy whom they claim are against the regime, or even against the Church, which their morally corrupt behavior shows.

Based on the documents, it seems the ÁVH tried to recruit Hagyó, which was obviously unsuccessful, as Hagyó was arrested right before the trial in June and condemned to two years of prison. I had the opportunity to speak with him, as he is still alive.<sup>136</sup> He is eighty years old and although moving around has become difficult for him, he still works every day in a ceramic workshop with disabled people. He told me much about the activity of the Regnum during the fifties and funny anecdotes from the priests’ lives in prison. He was open and friendly and had aura of contentment and happiness around him.

<sup>134</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1-a, 368-369. Report by Ferenc Kovács 14 April, 1961.

<sup>135</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1-a, 337. Handwritten document by József Hagyó 25 April, 1961.

<sup>136</sup> Interview with József Hagyó on May 16, 2012.



Hagyó explained to me the naivety with which they had gone to the interrogations before the first trial. “Most of us did not realize the danger in what we were saying.” They felt they had nothing to hide, since what they had done was their duty. However, they had not been careful with the names of others, and only saw later – when it was too late, that these sentences caused many other people problems like being expelled from the university or from work. “The others were right, who saw immediately how dangerous it was, because we put others in difficult positions.”

Without my asking, he told me about a special interrogation in which their aim had been to recruit him.

They had always called me into the Fő street, but my interrogating officer said that this time we would go someplace else.” ... “They brought me to a building on the Rózsadomb, where they had some rooms. They took me inside and gradually a couple of other officers arrived, and after a couple of sentences I realized which one was the bully, which the flatterer, and the others. They messed up one thing,”... “they kept saying another priests name instead of mine. I did not correct them, but realized that he too was probably going through the same procedure as I.<sup>137</sup>

I asked Hagyó what kinds of things his interrogators had said to him, whether they explicitly asked him to write reports.

It depended on who talked. One of them threatened me ‘If you won’t [inform], you will rot in here’... ‘We can save you; we only require small services’ and such. I said no, no, no, and another one said that they could find me a really good position in the diocese. They threw in all they had, and in the end when we parted, they said, ‘you’ll see’ and the interrogations continued.<sup>138</sup>

This testimony shows that the ÁVH did go through with the plan, but was unsuccessful in the case of József Hagyó, who could be neither threatened nor bribed, furthermore, had nothing to be blackmailed with. He spent twenty months behind bars, and was released in 1963 with amnesty. Then, during the second trial in 1965, he was again sentenced, and spent more than three and a half years in prison. After being released he

---

<sup>137</sup> Interview May 16, 2012.

<sup>138</sup> Interview May 16, 2012.

found jobs as a physical worker, claiming in an interview<sup>139</sup> that this way he could not be observed so easily, moreover, he did not want to have any relationship with the ÁEH, which organized, with the authority of the state, the life of the Catholic Church. He declined their offer to find him a job. He later became a member of a Christian order which lived together with disabled people and lived a contemplative life, besides doing physical work.<sup>140</sup>

#### 4.2. László Rózsavölgyi

There was definitely an intention to recruit László Rózsavölgyi (1919-1987) as an agent. How far they went in carrying out the plan is not clear, but some documents suggest that it was not put into action. However, again we find a detailed systematic plan how the recruitment should be carried out, thus we can view some of the methods which the ÁVH used when wanting to recruit an informer, which is important to see when discussing agents.

Among the documents of the operative dossier we can find a proposal from István Gressa, captain of the ÁVH, dating from April 13, 1959, in which he suggested the recruitment of Rózsavölgyi.<sup>141</sup> He described Rózsavölgyi's family, his education, details of his work, similarly as in all the cases where a personal file was put together. They had information about the activity of the priest during the 1956 Revolution. This document says that he took part in the fighting indirectly, by organizing his group of boys' fighting. Based on what I know of the Regnum priests activity during the Revolution, this statement was probably not true, but merely that members, or just one member of his group took part in the Revolution, and the ÁVH knew of this connection. A different document says that he can

<sup>139</sup> <http://www.tebennedbiztunk.hu/?m=451> (last visited 5 May, 2012)

<sup>140</sup> Károly Hetényi Varga, *Papi sorsok a horogkereszt és a vörös csillag árnyékában I*, [Lives of Priests in the shadow of the swastika and the red star] (Budapest, Új Ember- Márton Áron kiadó, 2004), 125-129.

<sup>141</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1-a, 419. Proposition of István Gressa 13 April, 1959.

only be suspected of telling the youths under his influence to fight, since one of them was injured.<sup>142</sup>

Two documents are added for information dating from February 1957. One suggests that Rózsavölgyi be taken into custody based on his activity during 1956, his speaking out against the Peace Priest Movement during a meeting of priests in September, and taking part in the “assembly of revolutionary priests” on October 31.<sup>143</sup> The second suggests that he be put under arrest based on the same activities.<sup>144</sup> Both documents are signed by the same István Gressa, then only a lieutenant. This arrest did take place on March 6, 1957; he was interrogated and let out on March 29.<sup>145</sup> According to Károly Hetényi Varga, as a way of discrediting him he was accused of embezzlement, which, however, they could not prove, thus “father Rózsavölgyi could leave prison with his head held high.”<sup>146</sup>

According to the proposal of István Gressa in 1959,

during his interrogation, he honestly confessed his earlier activity. Based on this confession the II/3<sup>147</sup> subdivision recruited him for agent work. ... Péter Brinda was in charge of his recruitment. About a week after his recruitment we released him from prison, the connection was kept by Péter Brinda – based on our knowledge – they only met about four times, why Péter Brinda broke the connection, we do not know. Furthermore, all the documents regarding his recruitment disappeared in the II/3 subdivision. We think it probable that Péter Brinda dealt with Rózsavölgyi’s case similarly to his other criminal activity.<sup>148</sup>

We can only guess at the truth. Perhaps Rózsavölgyi signed papers in prison during his interrogation, which testified to his recruitment. However, even the document of the ÁVH states that the connection was broken almost immediately afterwards. I found no mention of this recruitment anywhere else, except some documents included in this dossier

<sup>142</sup> ÁBSZTL-3.1.5-O-11516/1-a, 426. Proposition of taking into custody László Rózsavölgyi by István Gressa 21 February, 1957.

<sup>143</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1-a, 426. Proposition of István Gressa 21 February, 1957.

<sup>144</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1-a, 425. Decision of arrest by István Gressa 23, February, 1957.

<sup>145</sup> János Dobszay, *Így – vagy Sehogy! Fejezetek a Regnum Marianum történetéből* [This way – or no way! Chapters from the history of the Regnum Marianum] (Budapest: Regnum Marianum, 1991), 90.

<sup>146</sup> Károly Hetényi Varga, *Papi sorsok a horogkereszt és vörös csillag árnyékában*. [Lives of Priests in the Shadow of the Swastika and the Red Star] (Budapest, Új Ember- Márton Áron kiadó, 2004), 282-285.

<sup>147</sup> This subdivision was in charge of preventing “Inner reaction”

<sup>148</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1-a, 420. Proposition of István Gressa 13 April, 1959.

which discuss the plan for his recruitment. An October 12, 1959 report mentions the same fact, adding similarly that the connection had been broken and he does not work as an agent.<sup>149</sup>

Péter Brinda was asked to send a report about the case on 21 August, 1959. In this report, Brinda defends himself, and claims that he dealt with Rózsavölgyi well, and they had several meetings, however, he only brought useless reports about the atmosphere of the period. Moreover, Brinda's subdivision did not have work for the priest. The officer makes excuses, that although he tried to find the agent another area to work in, due to several officers' discharging, he was unsuccessful. Brinda offers his help in the re-recruitment, as he knew Rózsavölgyi. He even has ideas on what to say, how to explain to the priest the breaking of the connection. Several times he recalls the names of other officers, who could also supply information about the case. He, who was also discharged, writes as someone who would like to find his way back into the service.<sup>150</sup>

In the April 1959, report Gressa asks for permission to contact Rózsavölgyi and re-recruit him into the service. He describes his plan for the way in which this should take place. He suggests that the recruitment should happen during an observation. They should observe Rózsavölgyi from the morning, and only contact him when he is going back to his apartment. Then, "at a convenient place we shall address him, tell him, who we are, remind him of the deal we made in March 1957."<sup>151</sup> They would take him to a villa in their possession where the interrogation would be repeated by István Gressa, as he was there also during the 1957 recruitment. They would make him sign a document about keeping the interrogation a secret and ask him further questions both about the ending of his work as an agent in '57 and already about the Regnum Marianum community.

<sup>149</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1-a, 404. Report of Ferenc Kovács 12 October, 1959.

<sup>150</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1-a, 408. Report of Péter Brinda 21 August, 1959.

<sup>151</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1-a, 421. Proposition of István Gressa 13 April, 1959.

It seems the whole plan was dropped until October of the same year, when there is another proposal to recruit Rózsavölgyi. It has become more important, because the ÁVH wants information on a catholic priest, József Tóth, whom Rózsavölgyi knows. Again, they include a plan in which they describe how they wish to talk to him during the interrogation, by which they would recruit him. They will tell Rózsavölgyi that the organs had waited for the priest to contact them, after he had moved from the country back to Pest but he had not done so. However, now the ÁVH finds it important to make the connection themselves. First they will ask him to report on an indifferent topic. Through this they will be able to monitor whether he is honest and “our agent “Körmendi” [sic] will report to us if Rózsavölgyi becomes a traitor among the Regnum priests.” After they had established his reliability they will gradually tell him to work on political cases such as the Regnum priests and the mentioned priest Tóth. “Neither during the first meeting, nor on those after will we mention that his documents concerning the 1957 recruitment have been destroyed.”<sup>152</sup>

A letter from a police captain without a date can be found among the documents which sheds light both on the type of research they did on priests and on why they decided against recruitment in Rózsavölgyi's case. However, it also proposes further action in order to compromise the priest, so he would be easier to recruit.

Comrade Komornik!

The division of Budapest has processed material on Rózsavölgyi László, a Regnum priest, with the aim of recruitment. The material assessed by the comrades, besides the old ones, does not include documents related to either politics nor on sexual issues which would be enough to allow us to deal with Rózsavölgyi.

My opinion is that even if we had such material, we would still have to think it over whether we want to recruit Rózsavölgyi, since we know that he is presently one of the most active people in the enemy activity within the Regnum, Schwarz-Eggenhoffert and Mihály Endrey<sup>153</sup> circle.

I suggest that at the moment we desist from employing Rózsavölgyi and until we decide to begin his recruitment, we should try to clear up Rózsavölgyi's relations

<sup>152</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1-a, 402. Suggestion of recruitment by Imre Pető 13 October, 1959.

<sup>153</sup> They were bishops.

to women. Moreover, let's try to morally compromise him through one of our female agents.

István Berényi police captain<sup>154</sup>

I do not know whether this letter was written between the two proposals of April and October. Thus I cannot be sure whether they tried to recruit him – or re-recruit him. However, based on the fact that on November 22, 1960, he was among the four arrested priests, moreover, he was sentenced in the first trial to more than three years of prison, I would guess that the ÁVH decided against recruitment or that they failed in their attempt.

From the described procedure, it can be deduced that one of their main methods when recruiting priest was to find out compromising details about their life – or to create such details. Those, who had something to hide, were easier to recruit. In the case of Körmendi, he obviously had such an issue, some secret with which he could be blackmailed. It was easy for the ÁVH to get a grasp on him, and once they had him, he was unable to keep a balance between working for the Department, and not betraying his friends.

---

<sup>154</sup> ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1-a, 398. Letter of István Berényi.

## Conclusion

“The historian has a distinctive role and a special responsibility. It cannot be denied that the informer is the collaborator of the historian.”<sup>155</sup>

István Rév discusses the role of the historian when writing about agents (and writing history in general). He looks into the right of the historian to moralize, as he is never in position of all the facts and thus, a reconstruction of the past is impossible. However, that is not the task of the historian. “Rather, the historian, following accurate and professional research, should demonstrate the inherently uncertain character of any representation of the past.”<sup>156</sup> This means that he is not in the position of the judge, “still, accurately researched and sincerely stated uncertainties might provide protection from the dangers of unreflexive conviction of historical certainty, the mother of narrow-minded preconceptions and intolerance.”<sup>157</sup>

Looking at István Körmendi – those parts of his life which were open to research – one must realize the many facts which remain uncertain or hidden regarding him. One can say that he was put into a position by the system he lived in, from which it was difficult to escape. By seeing the methods of the ÁVH we can guess at the pressure he was put under, however, we must also not forget that he possibly had something he was ashamed of, which he could be blackmailed with. Having agreed to inform on his fellow priests, he slowly went down a path, which might have begun with the belief that he would not hurt anybody, while still protect himself, but ended in the condemning of others and the writing of malicious sentences regarding those who trusted him.

Why is it important to discuss such a tragic life-story, or part of a life? People have told me that it is better to leave these things alone and not dig in the “dirty past.” Since this

<sup>155</sup> István Rév. “The Man in the White Raincoat” in *Past for the Eyes. East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums after 1989*, Oksana Sarkisova, Péter Apor ed. (Budapest: CEU Press, 2008), 11.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

question is real in current debates and I deal with such a controversial topic, I must discuss this issue here. I believe, first of all that this too is part of the past; the past of Hungary, the past of the Church. In order to be able to go on, to begin anew, these elements of the past; collaboration with a despotic system; reporting on others must be faced and put side by side with the resistance and suffering of people, as both existed. Moreover, it is essential, to look in detail into the cases, since we must distinguish between those who collaborated for money and power, those who were blackmailed into it, or those who did it out of conviction. They must be dealt with differently; however, if we do not look at the cases closely, then these people will appear under the same simple term of “agent,” although there is a huge difference between them.

There was a famous case in Hungary; the case of György Benyik, which Tamás Majsai wrote about in 2007.<sup>158</sup> The theologian priest became an agent in 1978 out of ambition, for money and in order to be able to build his career more easily. To make the story more controversial, in an interview in 2000, he had declared that the authorities had tried to recruit him, but he had declined, which made his trip to Rome more difficult. Actually, the authorities had given him as much support as they were capable of, since he was such a good agent. This case shows the controversy of dealing with such subjects – and the difference between Benyik and Körmendi is, I believe, substantial, however, in order to see this, we must research the cases thoroughly.

Dealing with a priest who became an agent also brought up the question, why the Hungarian Catholic Church never faced her own past under communism. During our discussions Professor István Rév argued that it might be the inherent tradition of the Church; that confession happens between the penitent and the priest, and it is enough to tell the sins of the past within confession, to deal with it in secret and the Church sees no need

---

<sup>158</sup> Tamás Majsai, „Ismereteimet soha senkinek nem fedhetem fel”[“I must never uncover what I know to anybody”] in *Beszélő* <http://beszelo.c3.hu/cikkek/%E2%80%99Eismereteimet-soha-senkinek-nem-fedhetem-fel%E2%80%9D> (last accessed May 23, 2012)



to do so in public, because of the inherent tradition of secrecy. I do not agree, first of all, because this incapability of facing the communist past is common to the whole of Hungary, and within that the Church; the Church is not unique in this question.

Secondly, I do not agree, because the facing of the past has not happened even within the Church, which should happen, if the Church followed such a tradition. We see cases, when priests occupying high positions remain in office even though they were revealed as former agents,<sup>159</sup> or just never admitted the fact that during the communist regime, they did not stand by their fellow priests who were put in prison. Such leaders have not asked the forgiveness of their fellow priests. One would think that based on the teachings of the Catholic Church absolute forgiveness exists if one admits one's sins and thus it is possible to restart with a clean slate, so it is even more difficult to understand the attitude of the Church. Esterházy has a paragraph in his novel *Javított kiadás* (Revised Edition) about this problem, which corresponds to my ideas on the topic.

The leadership of the Hungarian Catholic Church has recently declined to be researched, meaning that it would be made public, who among them had been agents. This could be understood, for example based on their autonomy, or that they do not have to account to the parliament, but to Rome – and of course God. But why do they not practice self-scrutiny? Would you not think that for those who believe in eternal life it is easier to face their own weaknesses, since not all their stakes are here on Earth? Those who have (joke:) the heavenly harmony? Is it not this strength which comes from faith what a catholic, as a catholic could offer his homeland? Faith does not protect one from weakness and fallibility, but concerning forgiveness a catholic (might) have a broader culture which would make confession easier. Why does the Church leadership not tell its own Kádár-era story? We see that the society does not, and the Church (one subgroup of society) also does not. Somebody says the bishop collaborated with the regime many times in order to protect his priests. Yes, this happened. And why cannot they give account of this now? How a vile era forced vileness. This and this happened; I thought this, and these were my arguments. These are my truths and these are my mistakes. I confess to the almighty God...<sup>160</sup>

People who are now 75-80 years old were shocked by my research topic. Their reaction was why I want to “dig in garbage,” these things are better left alone. Their attitude

<sup>159</sup> Case of László Paskai and other priests written about by Krisztián Ungváry. He also claims that the priests are the only ones who could call attention to the officers who recruited them and are still active. Krisztián Ungváry, “Mozgástér és kényszerpályák. Ecsetvonások egy egyházfő életrajzához,” [Latitude and forced fates. Brushstrokes to the life of a Church leader] in *Élet és Irodalom*. [Life and Literature] 2006(L)/5. (II. 3.), 10-11.

<sup>160</sup> Péter Esterházy, *Javított kiadás*, [Revised Edition] (Budapest, Magvető: 2002), 232.

showed a fear of writing down information which might be used by others. Another reaction was merely, that these things are better left alone, and hopefully they will be forgotten. Pondering on these sentences I realized the fear still inherent in these people. They are of the generation, who lived through the most difficult times of the communist era, who experienced a constant tension and fear, which I am unable to imagine. Thus their reaction is understandable – as a consequence of their lives, and I accept this. However, as I have argued, I disagree with the attitude which would suppress this kind of information, as I believe that looking at such cases is essential if we wish to come to terms with, and face our past.

I have not dealt in detail with the question of whether being a priest makes serving the system different than in the case of a lay person. It would be interesting to try and compare reports of priests and reports of others. However, what makes this issue difficult, is that as we see, within the clergy, as within society, there were very different reasons for which somebody became an informer, thus one would think that the reports differ more based on their reason for recruitment, than based on whether the agent was a priest or not, but this is open to further research.

## Bibliography

ÁBSZTL 3.1.5-O-11516/1, 1-a, 2, 2-a

All my primary sources come from the Archive of the State Security Department. The dossiers are the four operative dossiers about the Regnum.

Dobszay, János. *Így – vagy Sehogy! Fejezetek a Regnum Marianum történetéből*. [This way – or no way! Chapters from the history of the Regnum Marianum] Budapest: Regnum Marianum, 1991.

Dobszay, János. *Mozaikok a Regnum Életéből a hetvenes évektől napjainkig*. [Mosaics from the Life of the Regnum from the seventies to our time] Budapest: Corvinus Kiadó, 1994.

Emődi, László. *A Regnum Marianum Története*. [History of the Regnum Marianum] ed. Dyekiss, Virág, Rochlitz, T., Fodor, B. Budapest: Regnum Marianum, 2003.

Esterházy, Péter. *Javított kiadás*. [Revised Edition] Budapest: Magvető, 2002.

Foucault, Michel. *Christianity and Confession*. in *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*. New York: Picador, 2005.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction*. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.

Gárdonyi, Máté. “Túlélés – együttműködés – ellenállás” [Survival – collaboration – resistance] in *Csapdában. Tanulmányok a katolikus egyház történetéből, 1945-1989*. [Ensnared. Essays from the History of the Catholic Church, 1945-1989] ed. Bánkúti, Gábor, Tibor Gyarmati, 31-42. Budapest: L'Harmattan kiadó, 2010.

Garton Ash, Timothy. *The File. A Personal History*. New York: Vintage Books, 1998.

György, Miklós. *Kapcsolatom az állambiztonsággal*. [My relation to the State Security] Hetényi Varga, Károly. *Papi sorsok a horogkereszt és a vörös csillag árnyékában*. [Lives of priests in the shadow of the swastika and the red star] Budapest, Új Ember- Márton Áron kiadó, 2004.

[http://www.boldogsag.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=10398:oenolet-rajz-es-korkep-10-resz&catid=708:jelenkortoertenet-hamisitasok&Itemid=488](http://www.boldogsag.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=10398:oenolet-rajz-es-korkep-10-resz&catid=708:jelenkortoertenet-hamisitasok&Itemid=488) (last visited 16 May, 2012)

Lénárd, Ödön. *Utak és Útvesztők*. [Roads and Labyrinths] Budapest: Kairosz kiadó, 2006.

Majsai, Tamás. “Harminc éven át állambiztonsági ügynökök álltak a magyar református egyház élén” [For thirty years agents of the State Security stood at the head of the Hungarian Calvinist Church] <http://mozgovilag.com/?p=2438> (last visited 23 May, 2012)

Majsai, Tamás. “Ismereteimet soha senkinek nem fedhetem fel” [“I must never uncover what I know to anybody”] in *Beszélő* <http://beszelo.c3.hu/cikkek/%E2%80%9EIsmereteimet-soha-senkinek-nem-fedhetem-fel%E2%80%9D> (last visited 23 May, 2012)

Montefiore, Simon Sebag. *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*. New York: Knopf, 2004.

Peregrin, Kálmán. “A (budapesti) papság (egyház) politikai koncepciója az 1956-os forradalom idején.” [The (Church)political conception of the (Budapest) priests during the 1956 Revolution] <http://www.vigilia.hu/regihonlap/2010/11/kalman.html> (last visited 2 June, 2012)

Rév, István. “The Man in the White Raincoat” in *Past for the Eyes. East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums after 1989*. ed. Sarkisova, Oksana, Péter Apor, 3-56. Budapest: CEU Press, 2008.

Soós, Viktor A. “Ügynöktörténet két tükörben” [Agent story presented in two mirrors] in *Csapdában. Tanulmányok a katolikus egyház történetéből, 1945-1989*. [Ensnared. Essays from the History of the Catholic Church, 1945-1989.] ed. Bánkúti, Gábor, Tibor Gyarmati, 157-188. Budapest: L'Harmattan kiadó, 2010.

Soós, Viktor A. „Békétlenek” és „Ellenállók”: A *Regnum Marianum* közösség az állambiztonság szempontjából az 1960-as évek második felében. [“Peace breakers” and “Resisters”: The *Regnum Marianum* community from the point of view of the State Security in the second half of the 1960s] Conference paper, October 4, 2008.

Tabajdy, Gábor, Krisztián Ungváry. *Elhallgatott múlt: A pártállam és a belügy. A politikai rendőrség működése Magyarországon 1956-1990*. [Silenced Past: The Party State and Internal Affairs. The Activity of the Political Police in Hungary from 1956 to 1990.] Budapest: Corvina-1956-os Intézet, 2008.

Ungváry, Krisztián. “Koncepció per a Kádár-rendszerben: A Hagemann-ügy” [Show trial in the Kádár-era: The Hagemann Case] in *Beszélő* Vol 12, issue 12, February 12, 2007. <http://beszelo.c3.hu/cikkek/koncepcios-per-a-kadar-rendszerben-a-hagemann-ugy> (last visited 16 May, 2012)

Ungváry, Krisztián. “The Kádár Regime and the Roman Catholic Hierarchy” *The Hungarian Quarterly*, issue: 187 / 2007, 80-91.

Ungváry, Krisztián: „Mozgástér és kényszerpályák. Ecsetvonások egy egyházfő életrajzához.” [Latitude and Forced Fates. Brushstrokes to the Life of a Church Leader] in *Élet és Irodalom*. [Life and Literature] 2006(L)/5. (II. 3.)

Vatulescu, Cristina. *Police Aesthetics: Literature, Film, and the Secret Police in Soviet Times*. Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2010.

<http://lexikon.katolikus.hu/Külső-Angyal földi Szűz Mária Keresztények Segítségé plébánia.html> (last visited 29 April, 2011)

<http://www.tebennedbiztunk.hu/?m=451> Interview with József Hagyó by Ágnes Fekete (last visited 5 May, 2012)