GERGELY ISÓ

The Second Removal of the Lutheran Bishop Lajos Ordass in 1958[1]

The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 ushered in a special, unprecedented period lasting for more than a year and a half in the history of both the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary and the Hungarian People's Republic, albeit for different reasons. For it was during this period – from 31 October 1956 to 24 June 1958 – that Lajos Ordass,[2] perhaps the most significant figure in post-1945 Hungarian church history after Cardinal József Mindszenty,[3] served for a second time as active bishop at the head of the Lutheran Church. His episcopate, though brief, nevertheless had a profound impact on the operations of the new church leadership that emerged, particularly from the 1960s, and which collaborated with the Party-state line.

1 For the Hungarian version of this study, see Isó 2023a, 603–628.

2 Lajos Ordass: born Lajos Wolf in Torzsa (today: Serbia), a German-speaking village in southern Hungary. After his primary and secondary school years, he completed his Lutheran theological studies between 1920 and 1924. In 1924, he was ordained a pastor by Sándor Raffay, bishop of the Bánya Church District. After years as an assistant pastor in Harta, Soltvadkert, and Budapest, he became a military chaplain from 1929, and from 1930, a missionary pastor for the Bánya Church District alongside Bishop Sándor Raffay. From 1931 to 1941, he was the parish pastor in Cegléd, and from 1937 to 1941, the dean. From 1941 until his election as bishop in 1945, he was the pastor of the Kelenföld congregation in Budapest. In 1945, he was elected bishop of the Bánya Lutheran Church District. In 1948, he was arrested and sentenced to imprisonment in a show trial, being released in the spring of 1950. In 1950, the Lutheran Church unlawfully deprived him of his episcopal see, and thus he lived in deprivation and seclusion until his rehabilitation in 1956. On the life of Lajos Ordass and his role in Hungarian Lutheran church history, see Terray 1997 and Fabiny 2008.

3 On Mindszenty, see further Balogh 2022 and Fejérdy–Wirthné Diera 2021.

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REHABILITATION

Lajos Ordass (1901–1978) was elected bishop of the Bánya Lutheran Church District in 1945. In 1948, the government, which was gradually coming under communist control, targeted the churches. Part of its activity aimed at restricting the churches' room for manoeuvre was the almost total nationalisation of the school network, which was then still predominantly in church ownership. The state authorities, which were descending into a Party-state dictatorship, expected the churches to „voluntarily" consent to the surrender of their schools even before the law decreeing nationalisation was passed. During negotiations on this matter with representatives of the state (specifically, the Ministry of Religion and Public Education), Bishop Ordass opposed this form of „agreement" to the very end.[4] This opposition resulted in his arrest in September 1948 and, on 1 October, his sentencing to prison in a show trial. On 1 April 1950, citing this verdict, the Lutheran Church, under state pressure, deprived him of his episcopal office. Ordass was released on 30 May 1950 and thereafter lived in forced retirement for more than six years.[5]

The question justifiably arises as to how, after such a past, it could have happened that, having returned to the episcopal see during the days of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, he was able to remain in this position until June 1958 – in a manner unprecedented even when compared to other denominations. The explanation for this can be found in the circumstances and reasons for his state rehabilitation on 5 October and his ecclesiastical rehabilitation on 8 October 1956. Following Stalin's death on 5 March 1953, the de-Stalinisation process that began in the Soviet Union brought a détente in the foreign and domestic policy of the Soviet bloc, including Hungary.[6]

4 His personal diary entries provide a rather unique, personal insight into his struggle against the nationalisation of the schools; see Ordass 2021. For a historical analysis of the diary, see Isó 2023b.

5 For a more detailed biography of Ordass, see Isó 2021, 441–446.

6 On this, see in detail Kalmár 2014, 81–236. For the English version of this volume, see Kalmár 2023.

It was in this new political climate that the central committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC), a Geneva-based global organisation uniting several hundred of the world's Protestant and Orthodox churches,[7] arrived in Hungary to hold its regular annual assembly at the Grand Hotel Galyatető between 28 July and 4 August 1956. It was clear that the visiting foreign guests – among whom were many of Ordass's friends and his colleagues from the Lutheran World Federation (LWF)[8] – would raise Ordass's case. To pre-empt any potential scandal, the President of the State Office for Church Affairs,[9] János Horváth,[10] visited the bishop on several

7 The inaugural assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) was held in Amsterdam in 1948, but the decision to establish it had already been made in 1938 by the representatives of European Protestant churches meeting in Utrecht. The ecumenical organisation set as its goal – by uniting the world's various Christian denominations – to support missionary activity, to help the needy, and to strive to create unity among the different denominations despite their differences. The complete history of the ecumenical movement is covered in Rouse–Neill 2004; Fey 2004; Briggs, Oduyoye–Tsetsis 2004.

8 The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) was formed in 1947 in the Swedish city of Lund. Its predecessor was the Lutheran World Convention, established in 1923. The aim of the LWF is to unite the world's Lutherans in a missionary service based on a common strategy, to jointly cultivate the Lutheran theological heritage, to give a common response to ecumenical challenges, and above all to help the needy, for which there was a great need after the Second World War. The officials of the LWF are elected at assemblies held every five to seven years. Each assembly is held in a different place, in a different country. At the inaugural assembly in 1947, Bishop Lajos Ordass was elected the second vice-president of the world federation. The organisation's headquarters is in Geneva, in the same building as the World Council of Churches from the outset. See Schjørring, Kumari–Hjelm 1997.

9 The State Office for Church Affairs was established by the Party-state dictatorship in 1951 so that the state could, through this institution, maintain its direction and control not only over the churches but over all religious denominations (for example, the Jewish community). It was directly supervised by the Council of Ministers, except between 31 December 1956 and 2 June 1959 – that is, for most of the period covered by Bishop Ordass's diary entries presented here – when it was incorporated into the Ministry of Culture under the name Ministry of Culture Office for Church Affairs. It was dissolved in 1989, shortly before the change of regime but as part of that process. See Soós 2014.

10 János Horváth (1921–1988): originally a metal turner by trade; member of the illegal communist party from 1939; worked at the Hungarian Communist Party headquarters in early 1945, then moved to the countryside; from April 1945, secretary of the Sopron county party committee, from 1946 of the Veszprém county, and from 1947 of the Baranya county party committee; from 1948, he worked again at the party headquarters, between 1949 and 1950 as head of the Railway Policy Department; from its establishment in 1951, an official of the State Office for Church Affairs ; between 1951 and 1952, deputy president, and between 1952 and 1959, president of the State Office for Church Affairs; from 1959, director of the

occasions before the foreigners' arrival to ascertain his intentions and explore ways of avoiding a scandal. He gathered personal impressions of the bishop. From the perspective of the new political climate's directives, these must have been positive, for by the time the foreigners arrived, the state authorities had already decided to rehabilitate Bishop Ordass, in the hope of being able to reinstall him in his episcopal seat at some point in the future.[11] Thus, when the foreigners did indeed broach the Ordass case, the state could play the part of the lenient negotiating partner. It publicly promised Ordass's rehabilitation and that he would have the opportunity to return to active episcopal ministry at some point in the future. In the meantime, they made it possible for him to work again in the church as a professor of theology at the Evangelical Theological Academy in Budapest.[12] The foreigners left the country believing that they had achieved all this with the state authorities.[13]

We know the content of the negotiations between the State Office for Church Affairs' president and Ordass from the bishop's pro memoriae.[14] These suggest that the state authorities recognised the potential inherent in the bishop's network of foreign contacts and his popularity. They trusted that if they could win Ordass over, they could, through him, infiltrate international ecclesiastical organisations (such as the WCC and LWF) that had hitherto been dominated by the West and the United States, and over which they had previously had no particular insight. They hoped that, through Ordass, they could exert an influence on the future policy and

Textile Parts Manufacturing Company. See Viktor Attila Soós, 'Horváth János', https://neb.hu/asset/phpHcYc7Z.pdf (Accessed December 21, 2024)

11 Ordass 1987, 508–514.

12 See EOL DOLL Box 9, Item 9, in the appendix to László Scholz's speech at the deans' meeting of 7 September.

13 The foreigners consistently communicated the negotiations as having occurred on their initiative, and at which they succeeded in bringing the State Office for Church Affairs to an agreement. Cf. *Time magazine*, 22 October 1956, http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,824507,00.html (Accessed December 20, 2024) and WCC Archives, 42.0062 General Secretariat, General Correspondence, 1947–1957, file 5, Ordass: letter from Franklin C. Fry to János Horváth, 11 September 1956, and 'The Rehabilitation of Bishop Lajos Ordass'.

14 MNL OL P 2173, Box 16, File group 2.1.2, Folders 1–2.

operation of these organisations that would be in line with the interests of the Soviet bloc.[15]

The fact that the state (5 October 1956) and ecclesiastical (8 October 1956) rehabilitations were not immediately followed by Ordass's reactivation in the episcopal see is also connected to the foregoing. According to Ordass's pro memoria, János Horváth once remarked: „If you work as a professor of theology, we too can get to know Your Grace the Bishop better."[16] In this new situation, the Party-state needed time to ascertain whether Ordass could be persuaded to cooperate in the long term. As a professor of theology, Ordass would have performed an ecclesiastical service active enough for them to become acquainted with new sides of his character, yet the position was sufficiently lacking in weight and danger that, if Ordass did not prove suitable, he could serve out his remaining years until retirement in this role. It is therefore conceivable that if the authorities had had the chance to get to know Ordass in his theological professorship, due to commence on 24 October, he might never have been able to return to the head of the church as bishop. The calculations of the State Office for Church Affairs were, however, overthrew by the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 that broke out on 23 October. As a result, the bishops who had collaborated with the

15 The LWF's Minneapolis assembly of August 1957 will be mentioned again later. Even at this point, before his rehabilitation, it was planned to send Ordass there as an active bishop in the hope that he would secure an important position. As we shall see later, this hope was not unfounded. Cf. Ordass 1987, 551; Isó 2015c; Böröcz, 263–321; Pap 1992, 320–324. This strategic goal of the communist Party-state with regard to the Lutheran Church would run through the entire Kádár era. The career trajectory of Zoltán Káldy, who took the episcopal see after Ordass's second removal, clearly points to this, as he was eventually elected president of the world organisation in 1986 at the LWF's eighth assembly, held in Hungary. For more details, see Kertész 2014.

16 Ordass 1987, 551.

previous regime, László Dezséry[17] and Lajos Vető[18], resigned from their offices. Lajos Ordass, at the request of the state authorities (János Horváth and Ernő Mihályfi[19]) took over the governance of the Southern Lutheran Church District[20] from Dezséry on 31 October 1956, and thus began the second active period of his episcopate.[21]

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17 László Dezséry (1914–1977): Lutheran pastor, journalist, politician; ordained in 1938 by Sándor Raffay, bishop of the Bánya Church District; between 1938 and 1941, assistant pastor of the Pest Lutheran congregation; from 1939, acting, and between 1941 and 1949, regular university chaplain in Budapest; after Bishop Ordass's imprisonment in 1948, his article 'Open Letter on the Matter of the Lutheran Church' was published, in which he urged for an agreement with the communist-controlled state and the „democratisation" of the church; between 1949 and 1950, under state pressure, pastor in Óbuda; from 1950, bishop of the Bánya Lutheran Church District, and from 1952, bishop of the Southern Lutheran Church District until his resignation at the end of October 1956; from 1957, an employee of Hungarian Radio; on 24 June 1958, he returned to the episcopal see for a few hours, thereby assisting in Bishop Ordass's second removal; he joined the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP); between 1958 and 1962, a member of parliament; between 1962 and 1966, general secretary of the National Peace Council.

18 Lajos Vető (1904–1989): Lutheran pastor; ordained in 1928 by Sándor Raffay, bishop of the Bánya Church District; between 1928 and 1929, assistant pastor in Medgyesegyháza; between 1929 and 1931, a scholarship holder in Germany and Estonia; received his doctorate in 1935; between 1931 and 1937, deputy pastor in Szolnok; between 1937 and 1948, pastor of the Diósgyőr-Vasgyár congregation; from 1948, bishop of the Tisza Lutheran Church District, and from 1952 until his resignation on 1 November 1956, bishop of the Northern Lutheran Church District; between 1956 and 1957, professor of theology; from the end of 1957, under state pressure, he again became bishop of the Northern Lutheran Church District until his retirement in 1967; between 1953 and 1971, a member of parliament. Cf. Nagy 1989; *Evangélikus Élet*, 18 November 1979, 1; 8 October 1989, 3; 17 October 2004, 10.

19 Ernő Mihályfi (1898–1972): journalist, politician; from 1942, a member of the Independent Smallholders' Party; from 1947 until his death, a member of parliament; in 1947, Minister of Information, concurrently with temporary appointment as Minister of Foreign Affairs; from 1947 to 1948, head of the office of the President of the Republic; from 1948 to 1949, deputy speaker of the national assembly; from 1949 until his death, a member of the Presidential Council; between 1957 and 1958, Deputy Minister of Culture; from 1952, by state will, general superintendent of the Lutheran Church; he resigned from this office verbally in 1956, during the Hungarian Revolution of 1956; from 1957 until his death, under state pressure, he was again general superintendent.

20 In 1952, the Lutheran Synod reorganised the church district system. The Southern Lutheran Church District thus became the legal successor to the Bánya Lutheran Church District, at the head of which Lajos Ordass had been elected in 1945. EOL Synodal Papers, Box 16, Papers and minutes of the 1948–53 Synod, 1948–1953.

21 For the precise circumstances of Bishop Ordass's return, see my earlier study: Isó 2016.

NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND THE STATE

We have seen that during the days of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, Ordass was essentially able to resume his episcopal ministry with the approval of the state authorities; moreover, for a long time, it seemed that he did not particularly wish to interfere in the internal affairs of the Lutheran Church.

In this period, which was more or less intact in terms of the church's internal autonomy, the Ordass-led church leadership had the unique opportunity to begin the reconstruction of a church that had been morally degraded and its room for manoeuvre restricted during the preceding Rákosi dictatorship, while upholding ecclesiastical principles. In addition to internal renewal,[22] Ordass's second episcopate was, in line with the state's earlier calculations, successful in terms of foreign policy, even within the narrow confines available. Besides the fact that the foreign trust in Ordass contributed to large-scale aid shipments arriving in Hungary from the LWF and the WCC, the Lutheran Church also once again became an important factor in the lifeblood of international church life.[23] The highlight of this was clearly the third assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, held in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA, in August 1957,[24] in which a delegation of the Hungarian Lutheran Church, led by Bishop Ordass, also participated, and at which Lajos Ordass was once again elected a vice-president of the organisation.

The Minneapolis assembly was also a symbolic end to the period in which the communist authorities had given the Lutheran Church a quasi-free hand in shaping its internal affairs. In the autumn of 1957, the state – through the Office for Church Affairs – again presented the Ordass-led

22 The three cornerstones of the Ordass-led church leadership's policy aimed at internal renewal were: 1. a complete renewal of office-holders down to the diocesan (deanery) level, i.e., the legitimisation of the middle and upper leadership of the church; 2. rehabilitation, making amends to church personnel who had been persecuted, removed from their posts, etc. in recent years, and rectifying illegalities; and finally 3. the swift restarting of church life (religious education, the church press, church bodies). For details, see Isó 2017a.

23 For details, see Isó 2017a.

24 For details of the Minneapolis trip, see Isó 2014; Isó 2015a; Isó 2015b.

church leadership with demands to which the bishop and the leadership he personified had to once again say a firm „no".

Even in the first half of 1957, there had been alarming signs indicating that the dictatorship would again apply a hard-line policy towards the Lutheran Church.[25] The authorities arrested numerous pastors for shorter or longer periods,[26] the state promise regarding free religious education made at the end of 1956 was withdrawn, pressure was exerted on the church to participate in the work of the National Peace Council,[27] They also expressed their expectation that the Lutheran press should regularly emphasise the church's declaration of loyalty to the government. Furthermore, the state prevented the election of a new Southern District superintendent to replace József Darvas,[28] and a new general superintendent to replace Ernő

25 On this, see in detail Isó 2017a, 28–30.

26 These arrests were primarily not related to their pastoral positions, but were carried out as part of the reprisals for the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, against those suspected of „counter-revolutionary" behaviour.

27 After the Second World War, with the intensification of the Cold War, the importance of various peace movements grew throughout the world. The Soviet bloc saw a political opportunity in this movement's demand for the maintenance of peace and tried to appropriate it and use it for its own anti-American propaganda. It was with this aim that the so-called World Peace Council was formed in November 1950 at the Second World Peace Congress held in Warsaw, an organisation financed by the Soviets and serving Soviet political interests, disguised as internationally open. Its members were mainly left-wing, communist-sympathising people, not only from the Soviet bloc but also from Western states. In the countries under Soviet control, including Hungary, the „peace struggle," the heroic socialist fight for peace, became an important element of propaganda. The Hungarian peace movement was directed by the National Peace Council, formed in 1950. Under the slogan of peace, demonstrations were regularly organised against military actions contrary to Soviet interests, such as the intervention of the United States in the Korean War (1950–1953). The peace movement within the Soviet bloc was also an excellent tool for forcing the Christian churches to serve the socialist state. The atheist, anti-church, and anti-religion socialist dictatorship could refer to the movement for peace as the lowest common multiple with the churches. The peace movement soon became another forum for keeping the Christian churches in check. Since the service of peace also fits closely with Christian values, Bishop Lajos Ordass found no principled objection on theological grounds when the Office for Church Affairs requested that the Lutheran Church form the Lutheran Church Committee of the National Peace Council. See Ordass 2021, 207.

28 József Darvas (1912–1973): populist writer, left-wing politician; from 1945 until his death, a member of parliament; a secret member of the Hungarian Communist Party; from 1945, vice-president of the National Peasant Party; between 1950 and 1956, Minister of Culture on several occasions; from 1956, a member of the HSWP; from 1957, director of the Hunnia Film

Mihályfi.[29] The most serious measure was the issuing of the Law-Decree No. 22 of 1957, which retroactively stipulated that senior church positions could only be filled with prior state approval. Although this measure was primarily created because of the Roman Catholic Church, it also ran counter to the operating principles of the Lutheran Church. Nevertheless, the tone of the various pressures was not yet demanding; rather, they employed persuasion, and alongside this, they allowed the internal church elections and rehabilitations to take place without any state interference.

Due to the increasingly strong state pressure and the proliferation of alarming signs, Bishop Ordass resolved at the end of October 1957 to summarise in a letter all the issues in which the church, in his view, was at a disadvantage, and those in which the state was making demands on the church leadership that Ordass could not fulfil.[30]

The dissatisfaction was mutual: back in August 1957, János Horváth, the president of the State Office for Church Affairs, had asked one of the collaborating pastors, Károly Grünvalszky,[31] to draw up a plan on how

Studio; from 1959, president of the Hungarian Writers' Union; from 1950, superintendent of the Bánya Lutheran Church District, and from 1952 until his retirement in 1972, of the Southern Lutheran Church District. Cf. Ordass 2021, 366.

29 Ernő Mihályfi resigned from his position verbally during the freedom fight, but not in writing, while Darvas promised that he would resign, but this ultimately did not happen. To remove them, the consent of the Presidential Council would have been necessary according to Law-Decree No. 22 of 1957 (of which Mihályfi was also a member), but the council postponed the decision. The reason for this could not be known at the time, so although it was an ominous sign, it could not yet be regarded as a „declaration of war" against the church. Cf. Ordass 2021, 138; Isó 2017a, 28.

30 For the letter, see MNL OL XIX-A-21-a, Box 7, E-257-14/1957.: Letter of D. Lajos Ordass on the affairs of the Lutheran Church, 25 Oct. 1957.

31 Károly Grünvalszky (1912–1996): Lutheran pastor; ordained in 1935 by Sándor Raffay, bishop of the Bánya Church District; between 1935 and 1937, assistant pastor in Mezőberény and Budapest; between 1937 and 1938, a scholarship holder in Germany; in 1939, assistant pastor of the Bánya Lutheran Church District; between 1939 and 1941, pastor in Budapest-Zugló; between 1941 and 1946, religion teacher at the Fasor Lutheran Gymnasium in Budapest; between 1946 and 1948, missionary pastor of the Budapest Diocese; from 1948 until his retirement in 1979, pastor in Budapest-Józsefváros; in addition, from 1952, with state support, deputy general secretary, and from 1954, general secretary of the church; he resigned from his post as general secretary in October 1956, but returned at the end of 1957 under state pressure, resigning permanently in 1959. He is presumed to have made reports to the state security services under the codename „Karcsi". Cf. Vető 1996 and *Evangélikus Élet*, 4 July 1954, 4; 7 June 1959, 3; 16 June 1996, 4.

changes could be made in the Lutheran Church so that it would operate more in accordance with the state's will.[32] The state authorities were displeased that during the church elections, the „progressive" elements had been almost completely eliminated from various positions. The submission contained specific proposals as to what personnel changes would be necessary for the „progressive" – that is, the faction willing to collaborate with the authorities – to receive adequate representation, and for the „ecclesiastical reaction" – that is, persons deemed unsuitable for cooperation with the Party-state – to be forced out of the leadership.[33]

The negotiations took place in November 1957, on the 11th, 12th, 15th, 25th, and 26th.[34] The church was represented by Ordass himself and a few of his close associates, but the state insisted that representatives of the so-called „ecclesiastical left," the pastors collaborating with the state, also be present at the talks. At the negotiations, the State Office for Church Affairs' President János Horváth sought to play the leftist pastors off against Ordass's group, a role they willingly accepted.

Although there were many contentious issues, on the first three days of negotiations, some relative progress was still made towards an agreement.[35] On 25 November, however, the personnel issues came to the fore, which ultimately led to the breakdown of the talks. It was here that

32 The very title of the submission was telling: A Plan for the Restoration of the Legal Order of the Lutheran Church in Hungary. See MNL OL XIX-A-21-a, Box 7, E-257-16/1957.

33 For my detailed analysis of the submission, see Isó 2017b, 17–21.

34 On 11 November, Ordass and Horváth agreed on the agenda for the negotiations; on the 12th and 15th, they discussed the first agenda item (The relationship between the state and the church and its political aspects), and on the 15th, they began the second item (Review of personnel issues). It was this agenda item that led to the breakdown of the negotiations. For a detailed analysis of what was said on each day of the negotiations, see Isó 2017c, 11–25.

35 For example, the principled positions on the role of the church in the socialist state (the first agenda item of the negotiations) were successfully reconciled in a way that was acceptable to both sides. The State Office for Church Affairs demanded that the Lutheran Church clearly declare its support for the government. Ordass's side replied that the church accepts that it should operate in socialism by God's will, that it can also support the cause of peace, and that if the state requires it, they are willing to express this more frequently in the press. Cf. MNL OL P 2173, Box 16: Pro memoriae. The negotiations of the representatives of our Lutheran Church with the representatives of the state authorities, 6–12, and MNL OL XIX-A-21-a, Box 7, E-257-15/1957.: Minutes of the meeting concerning the Lutheran Church on 12 Nov. 1957, and briefing on what was said at the State Office for Church Affairs' Lutheran pastoral meeting of 24 Jan. 1958, 15–47.

it became clear to the church delegation that the state had not come with negotiating material, but with an ultimatum. The necessary personnel changes formulated in the Grünvalszky submission were unacceptable to Ordass and his colleagues. The break itself was caused by the state's adamant demand that Károly Grünvalszky return to the position of general secretary, from which he had resigned in October 1956 due to the outbreak of Hungarian Revolution of 1956, and that Lajos Vető be reinstalled in the episcopal see of the Northern Lutheran Church District, thereby replacing Zoltán Túróczy.[36] As the church negotiators were unwilling to yield on this issue, János Horváth lost his patience. He declared that there was a high degree of unfounded mistrust towards the state on the part of the church's negotiating committee, and therefore he was unilaterally closing the negotiations. He then declared in an ultimatum that from that point on, they would consider Ernő Mihályfi to be the general superintendent and József Darvas the superintendent of the Southern District; they would forbid the Lutheran Church from accepting Western aid; and they would review all of the church's press publications. He forbade church personnel from travelling to the West and Western church personnel from entering Hungary. He appointed a ministerial commissioner to the head of the Lutheran Church – as had been done in the Roman Catholic and Reformed churches a year earlier – in the person of Károly Grnák, a department head at the State Office for Church Affairs,[37] whose task was to monitor foreign correspondence and the church's official ecclesiastical administrative measures. Horváth also stated that the church committee alone was respon-

36 Zoltán Túróczy (1893–1971): Lutheran pastor; ordained in 1915 by Gusztáv Scholtz, bishop of the Bánya Church District; from 1915 to 1917, assistant pastor in Komárom and Ózd; from 1917 to 1923, pastor in Arnót; from 1923 to 1927, pastor in Ózd; from 1927 to 1939, pastor in Győr; from 1939 to 1948, bishop of the Tisza Lutheran Church District; in 1945, he was sentenced to ten years in prison by the people's court on the (false) charge of war agitation; following a retrial, the president of the republic terminated the proceedings by way of pardon in 1948; from 1948 to 1952, bishop of the Transdanubian Lutheran Church District; in 1948, as the clerical president of the synod, he signed the agreement between the church and the state on behalf of the church; from 1952 to 1957, retired; from February 1957 until his removal in December, bishop of the Northern Lutheran Church District. See Fabiny 2002.

37 Viktor Attila Soós: *Károly Grnák (1928–?)*, https://neb.hu/asset/phpKjKm24.pdf (Accessed December 21, 2024).

sible for the current situation, and that their above measures did not violate religious freedom.[38] In his diary, Ordass tersely summarised the events: „What had been brewing for days has now come to pass. The struggle between our Lutheran Church and the state authorities has broken out."[39]

What expectations and assumptions did the respective parties bring to the negotiations? What did they anticipate in terms of results? To what extent were these expectations met?

Although no sound recording of the negotiations has survived, or at least none is known, the State Office for Church Affairs minutes of the talks,[40], as well as Ordass's pro memoriae[41] and diary entries[42] attest that the discussions were not devoid of emotion; indeed, the parties often contributed to the issues under discussion with very vehement remarks.[43]

It also seems clear that both sides genuinely desired a peaceful agreement. The state authorities could have introduced the sanctions they eventually did right from the start. But instead, over five days of negotiations, they sought to compel the church delegation to accept the will of the state.[44] A significant part of the emotion, in fact, stemmed from this: the state authorities often used the method of veiled or quite open threats, along with a very contrived, emotional, and sentimental style of

38 MNL OL XIX-A-21-a, Box 7, E-257-15/1957: Minutes of the meeting on 12 November 1957 concerning the Lutheran Church, and report on the statements made at the State Office for Church Affairs' Lutheran pastors' conference of 24 January 1958, 87–88..

39 Ordass 2021, 343.

40 MNL OLXIX-A-21-a, Box 7, E-257-15/1957: Minutes of the meeting on 12 November 1957 concerning the Lutheran Church, and report on the statements made at the State Office for Church Affairs' Lutheran pastors' conference of 24 January 1958.

41 MNL OL P 2173, Box 16: Pro memoriae: Negotiations of representatives of our Lutheran Church with representatives of state authorities.

42 Ordass 2021, 335–338; 341–344.

43 For example: „The negotiation became very tense, mainly due to the speeches by Károly Grünvalszy and Dr Miklós Pálfy, which were tantamount to treason against the church. These men hired by the state sought to destroy the church to the full satisfaction of their employers, and were more Catholic than the Pope. Because of their intolerable behaviour, I was forced to make the following statement: 'We have been waiting for a long time to be able to sit down with the representatives of the state authorities to discuss the relationship between the state and the church, but now we must realise that it is the ecclesiastical opposition that has put us in the dock.'„ See Ordass 2021, 338.

44 ÁBTL 3.1.5 O-13599 /1. "Lutheran Church reaction" , fol. 9: Report by 'István Papp', 5 Nov. 1957.

argumentation (e.g., the state supports the church in so many ways, they are only expecting reciprocation, etc.).

The motivations of the church delegation are relatively easy to grasp. From Ordass's letter to János Horváth preceding the negotiations, it is clear that for the bishop, the relationship with the state and the resolution of conflicts was a matter of honour. This does not mean that he had excessively high hopes of success – though of course, neither did he rule out the possibility of success – but he believed that as the responsible leader of his church, it was his duty, arising from his vocation, to do everything possible so that the church could carry out its mission received from Christ in peace and freedom. He practised the Christian attitude that everything humanly possible must be done for the goal, but success itself must be placed in God's hands.[45] This mentality is also reflected in the statements of the church delegation led by Ordass during the negotiations. Consequently – no matter how much the contrary was hammered home by Horváth's side, and after the failure of the talks, by the church press – the church delegation was a far more flexible and compromise-ready negotiating partner than the state, not least because of its vulnerable position. They were ready for compromise in the sense that, without crossing a certain line of principle – which in this case was the freedom of the church – they were willing to consider, weigh, and apply other points of view.[46]. It is another matter that, on the state's part, a readiness for compromise would have meant the church accepting and adopting the state's demands wholesale, and submitting to them.[47] This, however, is the rhetoric of power and command.

45 Similar sighs regarding the evolving relationship with the state can be found several times in his diary: „I trust in God." See Ordass 2021, 330.

46 The state authorities, for example, expressed their wish for the church to convene a synod at which a third church district would also be created (since 1952, two church districts, the Southern and the Northern, had operated in the Lutheran Church, replacing the historical church districts: the Bányai, the Tiszai, the Dunántúli, and the Dunáninneni). Ordass – although he did not agree with it – was not averse to such a question being brought before the synod. See MNL OL XIX-A-21-a, Box 7, E-257-15/1957: Minutes of the meeting of 12 November 1957 concerning the Lutheran Church, and report on the statements made at the State Office for Church Affairs' Lutheran pastors' conference of 24 January 1958, 26.

47 The State Office for Church Affairs also argued during the negotiations, among other things, that they had reduced their demands to a minimum, that there was nothing to negotiate on this, and that Ordass's side could either accept them or not. See Ordass 2021, 338.

To map the state's motivations, we must highlight two important documents as a starting point: one is János Horváth's speech at the State Office for Church Affairs conference[48] in Budapest at the beginning of September 1957, in which it was stated that their short-term goal was, on the one hand, to separate the reactionary figures from Lajos Ordass's side, and on the other, to use his international authority for the benefit of the state.[49] The other document is a report dated 27 December 1957 by an agent with the codename „Karcsi," at the end of which the case officer notes that the state security service also pushed for the changes in the Lutheran Church, because this way a few agents could be reinstated in important key positions, from where they could then influence church policy. Moreover, the case officer notes, this was successful, because two agents obtained significant posts.[50]

The state therefore certainly had this dual objective: to use the person and authority of Ordass as a tool as much as possible, on the one hand for the purpose of building relations with the West, and on the other, to demonstrate that if Ordass, who had been through Rákosi's prisons, could be a church leader in a socialist country, then there must surely be religious and other freedoms there.

The agent's report, in turn, provides an answer to the state's demands for personnel changes: they wanted to install agents, church personnel willing to collaborate with the Party-state, into responsible church positions.

Who could have been the two network personnel to whom the case officer referred?

First, who could be the agent with the codename „Karcsi," who wrote the report on the changes in the Lutheran Church? The content of the report is that „Karcsi" reports on the negotiations between the church and the state, the resulting situation and changes, and evaluates them from the perspective of the ecclesiastical left. What can help us in identification is

48 Between 2 and 7 September 1957, the international church affairs offices conference was held in Budapest, with the participation of the church affairs offices of the Soviet Union, Romania, Czechoslovakia, the GDR, and Hungary (for more details, see Böröcz 2012, 450–457).

49 Böröcz 2012, 453–454.

50 ÁBTL 3.1.5 O-13599/2: "Lutheran Church reaction", ff. 20–21; Report by "Karcsi," 27 December 1957.

a short scene. „Then a few days later, conversing with Károly Grünvalszky [i.e., retired bishop József Szabó was conversing with him – G.I.], who expressed his hope that unity and peace would come to the church, he said that it depends on how you do things, to which Grünvalszky remarked, we are doing them, to which he said nothing."[51] The report then levels sharp criticism against József Szabó for not being willing to side clearly with the ecclesiastical left. From the above, the logical conclusion is that the agent codenamed „Karcsi" is none other than Károly Grünvalszky, as he reports on a private conversation in which he criticises the other participant negatively. Although it cannot be ruled out that „Karcsi" heard about the conversation from a third person (perhaps even from Grünvalszky), this is less probable than the former assumption. This assumption would also explain why Károly Grünvalszky suddenly came to the forefront of the state's interest, essentially from nowhere – since he had completely disappeared from church public life after his resignation in October 1956 – and why they wanted to reinstate him in the position of general secretary at all costs.

We can at best only surmise the identity of the other agent mentioned by the case officer. We know that the other significant church position, the filling of which Horváth's circle had a firm and unalterable idea, was the episcopal see of the Northern District. We also know that Bishop Lajos Vető reported to the state security services under the codename „Veres"[52] and it also emerges from the sources that Vető – by his own admission – would have preferred to remain in a theological professorship, but the

51 ÁBTL 3.1.5 O-13599/2: "Lutheran Church reaction", ff. 20–21; Report by "Karcsi," 27 December 1957.

52 This becomes clear from the report of 3 August 1957 by the agent codenamed 'Veres'. In it, the agent reports – in a vehement emotional outburst – that Bishop Lajos Vető, despite prior promises, had not received a visa to the United States, where he had wanted to attend the central committee meeting of the World Council of Churches as a member of the committee. He was also promised that he would subsequently be invited to the Minneapolis world assembly, but this did not materialise either. In the agent's report, he is unmasked by his own case officer, László Baji, who writes the following in a note attached to the report: „In the report, it must be taken into account that Bishop Lajos Vető (emphasis my own, G.I.) also gives expression to his indignation and bitterness, thus his statement is not entirely objective" (see ÁBTL 3.1.5 O-13599/2. "Lutheran Church reaction", fols. 14–15: Report by 'Veres', 3 Aug. 1957). See also Majsai 2006.

state insisted on his „rehabilitation." From this follows the well-founded assumption that the other agent whom the state installed at the head of the church may have been Bishop Lajos Vető.

The state's objective with the negotiations and the demand for personnel changes was, therefore, on the one hand, to retain the well-regarded name of Lajos Ordass for themselves through a showpiece procedure of reconciliation (this did not succeed), and on the other, to ensnare the church with their own people.

THE SECOND REMOVAL

In the following months, the state completely isolated Bishop Ordass. Given that the state itself had rehabilitated him in 1956, it made every effort to avoid having to remove him by force a second time. Their strategy was rather to persuade him to resign voluntarily. They blackmailed him by withdrawing the state salary supplement (in Hungarian the so-called *kongrua*) from the pastors in the bishop's church district, thereby plunging the Lutheran clergy into an existential crisis.[53] However, the plan backfired: numerous pastors from the other church district sent aid to their colleagues from their own salaries, and several of the wealthier congregations undertook to make up for the state support themselves. Thus, the support of the faithful significantly reduced the financial hardship and blunted the edge of the blackmail.[54] Alongside this, through continuous pressure, they sought to incite the pastors of Ordass's dioceses, and lay and clerical church members in general, to make statements against Ordass, which were of course always given press coverage.[55]

53 MNL OL XIX-A-21-a, Box 11, E-9-3/1958, Request for state aid, 18 January 1958.
54 Böröcz 2012, 521–531.
55 See Ordass 1987, 803; and the following issues of *Evangélikus Élet*: 5, 12, 26 January; 2, 16, 23 February; 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 March; 6, 27 April; 4, 11, 18, 25 May; 1, 8, 15, 22, 29 June; 6 July 1958.

In response, Ordass initiated disciplinary proceedings against himself before the church's special disciplinary court.[56] He received no official reply to his petition; the competent bodies acted as if nothing had happened.

Unofficially, the bishop learned from Károly Grünvalszky at the meeting of the Pest diocese on 7 March that a disciplinary case was not the solution to the church's problems. It was then that it became clear to the bishop that his petition would not be answered.[57]

Ordass's opponents therefore considered not only his potential removal by the state to be undesirable, but any form of forced removal of Ordass whatsoever. There are several reasons why they ultimately chose state intervention instead of a disciplinary procedure. Firstly, it was by no means certain that a disciplinary procedure would have resulted in a verdict favourable to the state before the disciplinary court. As the court votes by secret ballot, it is difficult to check who cast their vote for what.[58] Secondly, if Ordass had been removed by disciplinary means, it would have borne an eerie resemblance to his being deprived of his episcopal office, also by disciplinary means, in 1950. They would probably have found it harder to bear the odium of this than what they ultimately did.

In the entry of 20 April 1958 in his pro memoria, Lajos Ordass formulated what was almost a prophecy concerning his own expected removal.[59] In

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56 „With the consideration of giving the pastors of the church district (and perhaps the congregations too) as much protection as I could from unnecessary harassment, I requested the initiation of disciplinary proceedings against me by the church's special disciplinary court." See MNL OL P 2173, Box 16: Pro memorias. Negotiations of the representatives of our Lutheran Church with state authorities, 39.

57 Cf. EOL DOLL Box 2, Item 6 and MNL OL P 2173, Box 16: Pro Memoriae. The negotiations of the representatives of our Lutheran Church with the representatives of the state authorities, 41–43.

58 ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-13599/1. "Lutheran Church reaction", fol. 33: Report by 'István Papp', 4 Mar. 1958.

59 „I must make a small summary of the matter of my removal from my post. Originally, it seemed that the state did not wish to send me away (on the model of Túróczy) and they repeatedly acknowledged that the church's disciplinary court was also unwilling – despite my request – to initiate the investigation. The intended path was to turn the pastors of the district, and if possible, the congregations, against me, so that what János Horváth reported to foreign countries back in January would become a reality: Ordass would be forced to resign by his own pastors. It seems that this path proved difficult to follow. Now, several signs point to the fact that in the end, the state will intervene in the matter after all. [...] The only question now is this: Will they simply send me away, or – as certain signs might also

it, he too drew the conclusion that the state had not originally intended to remove him in the same way as Túróczy, nor to depose him from his episcopal seat through a disciplinary procedure, because it would have been more convenient for them if he had resigned voluntarily. Now that, according to the bishop, it had become clear to the state authorities that this would not happen, Ordass predicted that – based on recent statements by state officials concerning the imminent conclusion of his case – he would indeed be removed from church life by state intervention.

Ordass's diagnosis was exceedingly accurate. Indeed, the state had not expected such a degree of stalemate to develop; they would not have thought that Ordass would refuse to break despite the sanctions introduced against him. They hoped to the very end that Ordass would either capitulate and fall into line with the „progressives," or that they could force him to resign voluntarily. In the event, neither happened. Thus – however much it did not want to – the state was forced to remove the bishop from his post. Ordass, as we have seen, was aware that the state was very reluctant to take this course, and he consciously played on this.[60] From a certain point of view, it was Ordass who controlled the events throughout. By being unwilling to abandon his principles, he remained in a negotiating position throughout, and with his deliberate behaviour, he forced the state to resolve the situation in a way that was least in its interest. In a moral sense, therefore, Ordass was victorious: he was not fighting for his episcopal position, but for his church and for the principles he held for the sake of the church. He held fast to these principles to the very end, not yielding one iota. Thus, the

suggest – will they initiate a conspiracy trial? In that case, my accomplices in the conspiracy would obviously be those who have been subject to attacks recently." See MNL OL P 2173, Box 16: Pro Memoriae. The negotiations of the representatives of our Lutheran Church with the representatives of the state authorities, 52–53.

60 As early as February 1958, the state security service established that „Bishop Lajos Ordass would like a measure to be taken by the state that does not accept his episcopacy. The background to this is that Ordass would appear abroad as someone who firmly stood by his position, but was removed by the communist government. This provides him with the opportunity to be treated as a martyr, and for him to be regarded in principle as the bishop of the Lutheran Church." The above assessment by case officer László Baji shows that the state was fully aware of the expected consequences of Ordass's repeated removal, which is why he also adds that the removal must be rethought, because if he is removed, it would „mean the assertion of Ordass's will against the state" (see ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-13599/1. "Lutheran Church reaction", fol. 25: Report by 'István Papp', 10 Feb. 1958).

other side, the state and the church leadership that served it, was forced to adapt its behaviour and reaction to Ordass. In a grotesque way, therefore, the authorities adapted to the situation created by the bishop, and not the other way around. It is thanks to this that the state had to abandon, in several stages,[61] the image it had originally wanted to project: that of a Hungary where peace and religious freedom prevailed.

When Ordass wrote the situation assessment in his pro memoria on 20 April, the state's scenario for the bishop's final removal from church life was already prepared. The draft was compiled by Károly Grnák, the ministerial commissioner appointed to head the Lutheran Church in November and senior official at the State Office for Church Affairs, and was dated 14 April 1958.[62]

In his first point, Grnák proposes that „the council of the Southern Church District [i.e., the presbytery, G.I.] must be convened in such a way that the Church District Superintendent József Darvas writes a letter to Ordass, in which he requests the convening of the council of the Southern District."[63] Grnák even drafted the letter. „If Ordass does not reply to this by the designated deadline, or replies in the negative, then according to church laws the district superintendent can convene the council on his own. Or the majority of the members of the 23-member district council can convene the council of the Southern District."[64] This point of the scenario was executed with clockwork precision. On 6 May 1958, Ordass received the letter from Superintendent József Darvas, [65] requesting that he convene the meeting of the district presbytery. Ordass replied,[66] stating that he was unable to do so because of the freedom-restricting sanctions imposed on the district. Subsequently, nine members of the church district council

61 In the first step, when the sanctions were introduced in the church, and in the second step, when Ordass was removed.

62 MNL OL XIX-A-21-a, Box 11, E-9-18/1958, Survey of Youth Work in the Area of the Lutheran Church, 14 April 1958. The first part of the document deals with youth work in the Lutheran Church and the state concept to be developed in relation to it, which is why the document was given this title in the archival inventory.

63 MNL OL XIX-A-21-a, Box 11, E-9-18/1958, Survey of Youth Work in the Area of the Lutheran Church, 14 April 1958.

64 MNL OL XIX-A-21-a, Box 11, E-9-18/1958, Survey of Youth Work in the Area of the Lutheran Church, 14 April 1958.

65 EOL DOLL Box 2, Item 9.

66 EOL DOLL Box 2, Item 9.

(presbytery) (fewer than half of the body) petitioned the church district presidency to convene the council meeting. In response, Superintendent József Darvas on 17 May convened the presbytery meeting for 27 May, as prescribed in the Grnák scenario.[67]

According to sub-point a.) of the scenario's second point, the church's general prosecutor and the department of ecclesiastical law at the Evangelical Theological Academy were to provide an expert opinion. In this, they would explain that the episcopal see of the Southern Church District became vacant on 30 October 1956, with the resignation of László Dezséry. The office remained unfilled because church law prescribes that it can only be filled by election, and Lajos Ordass was not elected bishop of the Southern District by anyone; his 1945 election was solely for the Bánya Church District, which had since been abolished.[68] In addition, Lajos Ordass does not have the necessary conditions for his pastoral ministry, because he has not taken the oath to the People's Republic and its constitution. Furthermore, Ordass does not have the necessary consent from the Presidential Council for his episcopal ministry (based on Law-Decree No. 22 of 1957). For this very reason, the episcopal seat of the Southern District is vacant; Ordass has nowhere to resign from, because in reality he is not even a bishop. In his draft, Grnák set a deadline of 18 April for the preparation of the above expert opinion. This point of the scenario was also precisely executed: the expert opinion was published in the 11 May issue of the church weekly, *Evangélikus Élet*.

In sub-point b.) of the second point, the scenario deems it necessary for the faculty of the theological academy to issue a statement on the Ordass case before the presbytery of the Southern District convenes. They were to declare that there is religious freedom in the country, and that Lajos Ordass alone, who in any case is not a legitimate bishop, is responsible for the present situation. I have not found any documentary evidence for the execution of this clause of the draft, so it probably did not take place. The reason for this may be that it would only have prolonged the matter, and the state officials were in a great hurry.

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67 EOL III/2. Southern Lutheran Church District from 1952, Southern District Council Meetings 1958, 27 May 1958.

68 On the reorganisation of the church districts, see above.

Sub-point c.) was only partially realised, perhaps also due to haste. According to this, those dioceses where the dean was „progressive" or at least influenceable – and also the Pest county diocese, which had to be punished for its hitherto recalcitrant behaviour – should also have adopted declarations against Ordass with the above content. Of these, only the declaration of the Pest county diocese and that of the Bács-Kiskun diocese were realised, and even those were ambivalent. Neither declares Ordass to be an illegitimate bishop; they merely emphasise the importance of settling the relationship with the state. *Evangélikus Élet* published both.[69]

The concept of sub-point d.) was fully implemented: „Press support must be given to the settlement of the Ordass case."[70] Every document related to the settlement of the case was, as we have seen, diligently published by *Evangélikus Élet*.

Undoubtedly – although no direct data on this has survived – sub-point e.) was also methodically executed. According to this, great emphasis was to be placed on the task euphemistically termed „persuasion" among the members of the Southern Church District presbytery. Grnák divided the members of the presbytery among himself, János Horváth, and the county church affairs officers: he thus meticulously assigned which presbyter was to be worked on by whom. It is not known how successful the individual efforts at persuasion were, but the effectiveness of the work is indicated by the fact that five members of the council resigned from their posts.[71]

Sub-point f.) was also impeccably fulfilled, namely that „Ordass's main supporters must be dealt with, with particular care."[72] The essence of this was that Ordass's closest colleagues and friends were to be completely prevented from carrying out „agitational activities."

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69 *Evangélikus Élet*, 27 April 1958.

70 MNL OL XIX-A-21-a, Box 11, E-9-18/1958, Survey of Youth Work in the Area of the Lutheran Church, 14 April 1958.

71 Gyula Dedinszky (the father of Ordass's future son-in-law), Károly Hafenscher (Ordass's colleague, pastor of Deák Square), Lóránd Boleratzky (district prosecutor), Károly Karner (professor of theology), and council members József Nagy and Lajos Jugovits. See EOL III/2. Southern Lutheran Church District from 1952, Southern District Council Meetings 1958, 27 May 1958.

72 MNL OL XIX-A-21-a, Box 11, E-9-18/1958, Survey of Youth Work in the Area of the Lutheran Church, 14 April 1958.

The third and final point of the scenario contains the resolutions to be adopted at the presbytery meeting – which was to be convened under point two, sub-point a.). Firstly, it must establish that since the resignation of László Dezséry, the district has no legally elected bishop. Then it must state that Lajos Ordass cannot be considered a bishop (for the reasons already detailed above). Finally, the presbytery should make contact with the competent state authorities – that is, the Presidential Council – regarding the matter of filling the episcopal office. At the presbytery meeting on 27 May, everything happened exactly as written.[73] The presbytery meeting referred the matter of László Dezséry's resignation to the Presidential Council.

The resolution of the Presidential Council was passed three weeks later, on 17 June – the day after the execution of Prime Minister Imre Nagy.[74]

On 19 June, Ordass received a letter from János Horváth, informing him that the Presidential Council of the Hungarian People's Republic had not consented to László Dezséry's resignation of 30 October 1956.[75] In the final entry of his pro memoria, Ordass comments on this: „Personally, I feel a sense of liberation. The fate of the church weighs upon me."[76]

On 14 June, Superintendent József Darvas once again convened the presbytery of the Southern District for 24 June to discuss the resolution of the Presidential Council.[77] It is a particularly interesting detail that in this series of measures, executed with such precise consistency hitherto, they failed to pay attention to the minor point that on the day the presbytery meeting was convened, the Presidential Council had not yet officially passed its resolution; it would do so only three days later.

At the presbytery meeting, the resolution of the Presidential Council was read out, after which the assembly established that the bishop of the

73 EOL III/2. Southern Lutheran Church District from 1952, Southern District Council Meetings 1958, 27 May 1958.

74 MNL OL XIX-A-21-d, 009-4/1958.

75 MNL OL XIX-A-21-a, Box 11, E-9-28/1958, Resolution concerning the resignation of Bishop László Dezséry.

76 MNL OL P 2173, Box 16: Pro Memoriae. The negotiations of the representatives of our Lutheran Church with the representatives of the state authorities, 58.

77 EOL III/2. Southern Lutheran Church District from 1952, Southern District Council Meetings 1958, 24 June 1958.

Southern Church District had been László Dezséry continuously since 1952. The body requested Ordass to hand over the episcopal office to Dezséry and asked for God's blessing on his future life.

Then János Horváth, who was also present at the meeting, took the floor. He expressed his welcome that the Southern Church District had taken another step forward in settling its relationship with the state by returning to the correct path after a reactionary leadership directed by counter-revolutionary forces. He expressed his gratitude to László Dezséry for the dedicated work he had carried out as bishop to ensure that the relationship between the state building socialism and the church was always harmonious. He announced that the ministerial commissioner, Károly Grnák, would be recalled, and the *kongrua* would be paid retrospectively to the church district.

After this, Bishop László Dezséry himself spoke. At the end of his hours-long speech, which slandered Ordass (among others), he announced his resignation.[78] With this, he had played the role assigned to him in the charade. He never again took part in the life of the church.

The presbytery accepted Dezséry's renewed resignation and referred it to the Presidential Council for acceptance. Lajos Ordass was retired.[79]

The Presidential Council consented to this second resignation of Dezséry's on 21 August 1958,[80] thereby making it possible for Zoltán Káldy to take the episcopal seat, who would then determine the life of the Lutheran Church for almost the entire Kádár era. The installation of Zoltán Káldy took place on 4 November 1958, the second anniversary of the crushing of the freedom fight in blood, signalling the victory of the socialist „revolutionary" forces in the Lutheran Church.

78 EOL III/2. Southern Lutheran Church District from 1952, Southern District Council Meetings 1958, 24 June 1958.

79 EOL III/2. Southern Lutheran Church District from 1952, Southern District Council Meetings 1958, 24 June 1958.

80 MNL OL XIX-A-21-a, Box 11, E-9-34/1958, Submission of an extract from the minutes of the meeting of the Council of the Southern Lutheran Church District held in Budapest on 24 June 1958.

CONCLUSION

The fact that it became clear at the November 1957 negotiations that Ordass was genuinely autonomous and would not be willing to satisfy the will of the Party-state on either the domestic or foreign policy front meant that the state had to suffer a serious loss of prestige: it had to abandon, in several stages, its strategy detailed above and its image as a power that respected the autonomy of the Lutheran Church.

The first step was when, following the model of the Catholic and Reformed churches, it introduced sanctions in the Lutheran Church and appointed the ministerial commissioner. The second step was when it brought itself to remove Lajos Ordass – whom it had rehabilitated and allowed to return to the episcopal seat, the vice-president of the Lutheran World Federation and a likely future president – once again, and this time permanently, from church public life. It is a rare case in history when we can so clearly unmask the cold pragmatism of the Party-state and its cynical intention of creating the appearance of legality as in the case of Ordass's second removal. The scenario prepared for this purpose is therefore a particularly valuable document and piece of evidence.

In this most intensive period of Kádár's terror and the reprisal for the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the behaviour shown towards Ordass gives a glimpse of the typical power mechanism of the classic Kádár era – though at that time by no means yet characteristic – and its policy towards the Lutheran Church. The essence of this power mechanism was that the state sought to avoid direct, public intervention in the church's internal affairs. Instead, it strove to pull the strings from the background, through the layer of church leaders it controlled by hand, its extensive agent network, and threats uttered in closed circles. The domestic political benefit of this was that the members of the church perceived the oppression directly from their own leaders, not from the state authorities, and thus their potential anger and grievances were also directed more towards them. The foreign policy benefit was that church leaders who appeared autonomous and capable of negotiation to the West – and perhaps popular (cf. Ordass) – could represent their home mother church, and thus had a chance to become integrated into the direct operation of international organisations. Although the Party-state first developed this foreign policy objective concerning the Lutheran

Church for the person of Ordass,[81] it did not abandon its intention in this regard even after the bishop's second removal: already in the 1960s, we can see signs that it was trying in every way to smooth the foreign career of the new, cooperative church leadership, especially that of Zoltán Káldy, who replaced Ordass.[82]

The impact of Lajos Ordass's second episcopate – despite the bishop's removal – remained significant and defining throughout the entire Káldy era. The Káldy-led church leadership consciously set itself against Ordass, and treated the bishop himself as a kind of taboo figure, whose person was made taboo: it was not proper to bring him up, to speak of him, and at most one could only allude to him in veiled language. However, precisely for this reason, the relationship to him – the Ordass complex – like a subterranean stream, fundamentally determined the operations of the church and its leaders.[83]

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81 Cf. the top-secret report by State Office for Church Affairs President János Horváth to the party leadership (December 1952). Published in Pap 1992, 320–324.
82 Kertész 2014.
83 The series of volumes entitled *The Net* (*Háló*) deals with the church leaders of the post-Ordass Kádár era and their state security connections. The studies and scholarly explorations published therein all support the existence of the ‹Ordass complex'. See Mirák 2010; Mirák 2014; Mirák 2020.

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