

MÁTÉ GÁL

**A history of artificial change in the function of sacred spaces
in the early 1960s
Case study of nationalization of two Eger chapels¹**

Pro&Contra 2

No. 2 (2018) 25–47.

¹ The writing of this study was supported by the tender titled EFOP-3.6.1-16-2016-00001. “Kutatási kapacitások és szolgáltatások komplex fejlesztése az Eszterházy Károly Egyetemen (The Complex Development of Research and Services Capacities at Eszterházy Károly University)”.

Abstract

The study focuses on a local conflict in Eger between the state and the Catholic Church in the 1960s. The nationalization of two chapels (belonging to the Girls' School of the Sisters of Loretto and to the Brothers of Mercy Hospital) started in the summer of 1960 in Eger with the assistance of the State Office for Church Affairs. The collectivization, however, provoked great resistance in the Archbishop of Eger.

Keywords: Catholic Church, State Office for Church Affairs, Eger, collectivization, 1960s

Introduction

During the era of Kádárism² those wishing to restrict the appeal and power of the Church tried to prevent the spread of religion but not only through directly targeted administrative procedures affecting priests and the faithful. A few years after the suppression of the 1956 Revolution and War of Independence, in 1958, The Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP) formulated a new type of church policy different to the previous concepts³ strongly marked by Stalinism. According to the Resolution of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party Political Committee (HSWP) of 10 June 1958, the means, methods and speed of the fight against the "clerical reaction" and the "religious worldview" were distinguished. The socialist system's previous decade demonstrated for those who exercised power how it was necessary to act against the churches and the views they spread. As it was stated in the document, religious denominations would exist in the period of socialism for the foreseeable future, so cooperation was "necessary" and "possible" between state and church. At the meeting of the PC, János Kádár, the leader of the party, believed that supreme state organs should negotiate with the high priest, thereby strengthening the sense of interdependence.⁴ The reaction of the Church, however, was that of a political enemy, and its activity was aimed at overthrowing the state and social order, and thus the fight against it, which was not devoid of administrative methods

² The term Kádárism is used according to the definition given by János M. Rainer. For more details see: János M. Rainer, *Bevezetés a kádárizmusba* (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet–L'Harmattan, 2011), 138–148.

³ More details about the church policy of Kádárism: Margit Balogh, "Egyház és egyházpolitika a Kádár-rendszerben," *Eszmélet* 9, no. 34 (July 1997): 69–79. http://www.eszmelet.hu/balogh_margit-egyhazi-es-egyhazi-politika-a-kadar-rendszerben/

⁴ Melinda Kalmár: *Történelmi galaxisok vonzásában. Magyarország és a szovjetrendszer 1945–1990*. (Budapest: Osiris, 2014), 156–157.

either, was a “fight for the defense of socialist power”⁵ The Resolution of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party Political Committee (HSWP) Party Committee (PC) of 22 July formulated stringent guidelines about how to suppress the religious worldview. Regarding the timing of the the “*ideological fight*”⁶ the governing authority urged the organs dealing with church and society to be patient, the terms “*patient, prudent*” were given more emphasis in the directive.⁷ While “clerical reaction” fell chiefly within the competence of state security⁸ and secondly within that of the State Office for Church Affairs (SOCA),⁹ the “management” of the religious worldview was the responsibility of social organisations and mass movements as well as state social organisations, educational institutions and the press¹⁰ besides the SOCA. At the meeting of the PC on 22 July, Kádár recognized the use of indirect, scientific methods in the fight against the religious worldview.¹¹ In reality the atheist state could draw on a wide repository of measures against its rival, and according to the Marxist understanding, pronouncedly old-fashioned and harmful worldview, ranging from forced atheist propaganda and education through discriminatory measures to the continuing nationalisation, even in the Kádár-era, of ecclesiastical buildings functioning as places of worship. With respect to the latter, in the first half of the sixties several successful attempts in Eger can be reconstructed from the sources of the State Office for Church Affairs. The surviving documents suggest that certain urban institutions laid claim to the buildings in question and the office’s chief executive of church affairs of Heves County, and ultimately the State Office for Church Affairs, appeared as an active participant in the implementation. As will be clear from the records, the State Office for Church Affairs was ready to pave the way for the implementation of the claims submitted, whereas it hindered all the steps taken by the Archbishop to protect the churches. Besides the reason for the consequent attack on the denominations and faith, the SOCA urged the properties to be taken into state ownership as soon as possible as the chapels in question, which used to be owned by the Sisters of Loretto of Eger as well as by the Brothers of

⁵ Szilvia Köbel, „*Oszd meg és uralkodj*”. *A pártállam és az egyházak* (Budapest: Rejtjel, 2006), 132.

⁶ Margit Balogh and Jenő Gergely, *Állam, egyházak, vallásyakorlás Magyarországon, 1790–2005. Volume 2.* (Budapest: História–MTA Történettudományi Intézet 2005), 1003.

⁷ Balogh and Gergely, *Állam, egyházak, vallásyakorlás Magyarországon*, 1003.

⁸ For more details see: Géza Vörös, „Állambiztonság és az egyházak,” *Egyházförténeti Szemle* 10, no. 4 (2009): 3–19 <http://www.uni-miskolc.hu/~egyhtort/cikkek/vorosgeza.htm>

⁹ For more details see: Köbel, „*Oszd meg és uralkodj*”, 60–91., Edit Köpeczi Bócz, *Az Állami Egyházügyi Hivatal tevékenysége. Haszonélvezők és kárvallottak*, (Budapest: Akadémia 2004), 14–18., Viktor Attila Soós, *Az Állami Egyházügyi Hivatal archontológiája. Az ÁEH szervezeti felépítése, nemzetközi kapcsolatai és dolgozóinak pályaképe*. (Budapest: Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem 2014).

¹⁰ Köbel, „*Oszd meg és uralkodj*”, 206–212.

¹¹ Kalmár, *Történelmi galaxisok vonzásában*, 157.

the Mercy Order were considered noted sites of religious life in Eger. This paper, with the use of detailed case studies, highlights how the rural representatives of the one-party system – in one case specifically for the definite benefit of the worldview propaganda of the state – violated ecclesiastical sovereignty, and attempts to illustrate how they restricted not only the Catholic Church but the freedom of religion of local society as well by their administrative steps taken in their cooperation.

The need for nationalization

In the summer of 1960 Emil Borai,¹² chief executive of church affairs received two letters from some institutions of the county town with the purpose of appropriating some church properties. As will be explained, both letters were posted to the higher authorities in July 1960, and shortly after to the chief executive of the State Office for Church Affairs in Eger, who forwarded the information first orally and later also in writing to András Madai,¹³ deputy head of the department. Although it is not proved unequivocally by the sources, it is possible that the claims were lodged at the behest of the SOCA and the County Council. This hypothesis can be supported by the fact that Borai made a petition to the Office for Church Affairs on 3 July 1960, the date before the two letters arrived, in which he asked for approval to evacuate the former monastic chapels situated in Eger and owned by the state as registered with the land registry.¹⁴ The expropriation of buildings did not happen overnight; it is quite sure that prior to nationalization the chapels belonging to the Girl's School of the Sisters of Loretto and the Brothers of Mercy Hospital in Eger were not given over by the office immediately, so it could happen that a rural party worker encouraged the claimants to submit an application either through an intermediary or in person. With the applications in his hand, Borai could promote his interests more effectively towards the office, however, in light of the sources it is possible to say that due to the determination of the church leadership such actions did not always result in immediate success, either.

Following the report of the chief executive of the church affairs in Eger addressed to the State Office for Church Affairs dated 3 July 1960, on July 23 1960 Ottó Újvári, headmaster of Szilágyi Erzsébet Girls' Grammar School submitted a request to the State

¹² For more details of Emil Borai's career see: Máté Gál, "Egy összeférhetetlen vidéki megbízott 1956 utáni karrierje. Borai Emil, az ÁEH egri egyházügyi főelőadójának tevékenysége 1956–1969 között," *Aetas* 32, no. 1. (2017): 121–142.

¹³ For more details of András Madai's career see: Soós, *Az Állami Egyházügyi Hivatal archontológiája*, 277.

¹⁴ MNL OL XIX-A-21-b 57. box 2. item, Emil Borai's letter to Károly Olt of 25 July 1961. 1.

Office for Church Affairs, which was forwarded by István Strbák,¹⁵ head of the Heves County Council's Cultural Department to Emil Borai.¹⁶ The building which hosted the grammar school at 8 Lajos Kossuth Street, Eger, was seized from the Sisters when schools were nationalized in 1949, in 1950 the order was further compromised by the burden of being scattered. However, the chapel belonging to the institute remained open to the faithful while services were held there. The headmaster of the grammar school set his eyes on the chapel and the sacristy, which after nationalization, along with the building of the school were registered in the name of the Ministry of Culture – as was stated in Strbák's covering letter.

It was not by chance that Emil Borai joined the line of those who supported the efforts appropriate the chapel and the sacristy for such a purpose or more accurately, he joined the queue of its initiators. In spite of the nationalization of the Girls' School of the Sisters of Loretto the school church remained in the hands of the Catholic Church, more precisely in those of the Inner City Roman Catholic Main Parish Church of Eger, thus it remained open to the faithful in the fifties and at the beginning of the sixties. In addition to the secular community, the former order members¹⁷ also attended Mass here. Of the latter it is important to mention the nun Irén Bárány and the student Erzsébet Kövér as they took care of the chapel's affairs, the operation of which was helped by donations. Masses were celebrated by dr. József Tóth,¹⁸ a teacher of theology at that time.¹⁹ In addition to the State Office for Church Affairs the church intelligence of Heves County's State Security also showed a keen interest in the religious life going on there. The chapel attracted the attention of the political police because particularly in the first half of the 1950s – in addition to family visits – it served as an important venue for the spiritual direction exercised by nuns among young people. On the evidence of the documents, the Ministry of Interior had the chapel watched vigilantly even in the Rákosi-

¹⁵ István Strbák was head of the Heves County Council's Cultural Department between December 10, 1957 and July 31, 1961. Zita Cseh, "Heves megye tisztikara 1950-1990" in *Heves megye történeti arcbontológiája (1681–)1687–2000*, ed. Péter Bán (Eger: Heves Megyei Levéltár, 2011), 294.

¹⁶ MNL OL XIX-A-21-b 46. box 2. item The Takeover of the Chapel and Sacristy Located in the School Building.

¹⁷ Irén Bárány, Etelka Wéber, Magdolna Balázs, Gizella Wolszky, Adrienn Ambrus, Erzsébet Kövér, and Erzsébet Barczy nuns and students of the Sisters of Loretto attended services regularly in the chapel of the convent. ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-11762/2. 129.

¹⁸ Dr. József Tóth (1915–1990) was a teacher of theology in Eger from 1940, spiritual director from 1942, and in 1943 he was appointed a school inspector. In 1948 he was arrested and after being released, he filled the position of bishopric advisor from 1949. Schematism of the Archdiocese of Eger, 1963. 69.

¹⁹ ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-11762/2. 129–130.

era. According to the report of June 12 1952, by an agent with the code-name of “József Kocsis”, Gizella Wolszki, a nun provided about “100 children religious education illegally in the chapel of the order’s cloister of the Sisters of Loretto two weeks before First Communion”.²⁰ The agent’s report was close to reality, the nuns did organise a choir for monks and secularists after 1950, as well as helping children for religious education and for the sacraments. The members of the Cistercian clergy of Eger facilitated the “illegal” educational activities of the former members of the order. The Sisters became the helpers of Imre Debreczeni Sixtus, and after the mysterious death of Debreczeni in 1954, of the monk Mihály Elek Kalász in St. Bernard Parish. Previous research²¹ demonstrated that, following Debreczeni’s death, the longstanding team of religious teachers was shaken and ultimately personal conflicts led to the dissolution of the group. It was Magdolna Balázs who undertook spiritual leadership for the longest period until her internment in 1958.²² After the disintegration of the group, the chapel and its sacristy stood in the way of those wishing to suppress the church as it still remained under the supervision of the Sisters and also served as a venue for religious ceremonies. In his report on nationalization, dated December 28, 1961, Emil Borai assessed the previous situation of the building, finding it to be maintained by the nuns “for their own benefit”, completely distorting the Sisters’ original efforts and concealing their real essence.²³

Otto Újvári, headmaster of the school gave three reasons for expropriating the chapel and the room:

1./ The school does not have a gymnasium and a ceremonial hall. As a result, in the last school year, we could only solve the problem of physical education by using the gymnasium of the Pedagogical College. However, the College cannot do without its gymnasium for the next school year, as it is expanding to be a four-year college. The school does not have a ceremonial hall, either. Consequently, we could organize school ceremonies and events only at the Tiszti Klub (Officers’ Club), each time by paying for it and we would be forced to adapt to the Club’s time schedule. I note that the students’ hostel attached to the school does not have a ceremony hall, either, so it does not have a single room where the pupils could be brought

²⁰ ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-11762/2. 31.

²¹ For more details see Bernadett Wirthné Diera, *Katolikus hitoktatás és elitképzés a Kádár-korszakban. – Az 1961-es “Fekete Hollók” fedőnevű ügy elemzése* (Budapest: Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem, 2012), 227–239.; Bernadett Wirthné Diera, “Az egri “Fekete Hollók”,” in *Mából a tegnaptól. Képek Magyarország 19. és 20. századi történelméből.* ed. Cúthné Gyóni Eszter, Szilágyi Adrienn, and Wirthné Diera Bernadett (Budapest: Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Új- és Jelenkori Magyar Történelmi Tanszék, 2005), 227–238.

²² Wirthné, *Katolikus hitoktatás és elitképzés a Kádár-korszakban*, 230.

²³ MNL OL XIX-A-21-d 10. box 007-46/1961 The Fourth Quarter Summary. December 28, 1961.

together for a meeting. 2./ The school does not have a language room at all. So we often have to hold language lessons in a part of the corridor designated for meeting with parents. When preparing the timetable, we have great difficulties due to the bifurcating system (sic!) as we do not have a language room. 3./ The introduction of polytechnic education would also require a classroom to be available. The sacristy would be suitable for this purpose.²⁴

It is striking that the headmaster of the school simply referred to a lack of space in his argument, while the public education institution claimed the buildings with educational purposes. Regarding the lack of a gymnasium, it must be mentioned that the problem was known to the leadership of the town. The question was also raised in a document entitled “*Report on the Situation of the Physical Education and Sport Movement in Eger and its Main Tasks of the Year 1960*” prepared for the meeting of The Eger City Executive Committee on 19 April 1961. Flórián Magvasi described the anomalies affecting secondary school physical education in the city as follows: “Secondary physical education takes place based on the designated curriculum. Unfortunately, the lack of a gymnasium hinders schools from achieving even better results.”²⁵ The document “*On the Discussion of The Urban Policy Plan to be Submitted to the Party Committee*” was also mentioned at the same meeting of the committee. János Kocsmár,²⁶ president of the Executive Committee, the agenda rapporteur, placed the expansion of the Erzsébet Szilágyi Girls’ Grammar School among “the possibilities of the efforts taken by the socialist system and the city leadership to increase the standard of living of the population”. It is interesting that the concept of settlement development did not only highlight the possibility of the putting the chapel to use, as evidenced by the remark in the material. “Note: it seems to be appropriate to realize the expansion by moving the dormitories functioning in the schools from there and establishing new buildings for the dormitories.”²⁷ Presumably Kocsmár wanted to use the dormitory building as a gymnasium as well. Surprisingly enough, Ottó Újvári considered the building of the school church to be suitable for this purpose, but was probably not entirely convinced of the practical implementation of the idea himself; he

²⁴ MNL OL XIX-A-21-b 46. box 2. item The Takeover of the Chapel and Sacristy Located in the School Building.

²⁵ MNL HML XXXV-29-3/64. p.u. The Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of April 22, 1960. A Report on the Situation of Physical Education and Sport Movement of Eger and the Main Tasks for the Year 1960. 2–3.

²⁶ János Kocsmár was president of the Executive Committee of the City Council between 1 November 1953 and 31 December. 1954. József Bertha and Ferenc Szaniszló, *Heves megye tanácsi tisztségviselői 1950–1990* (Eger: Heves Megyei Levéltár, 1991), 40.

²⁷ MNL HML XXXV-29-3/64. p.u. The Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of April 22, The Planning and Politics in Urban Development of the City Council of Eger. 1960–1975. 8.

merely wanted to confirm his claim on the property by flagging an already registered problem. Újvári's letter addressed to the headquarters of the State Office for Church Affairs in Budapest finally reached the chief executive of Heves County on 2 August with the help of Strbák. As a sign of his support István Strbák added the following remark to the headmaster's words: "If your higher authority approves of the closure of the chapel registered in the name of the Ministry of Culture with the land registry and makes it possible, we will use the chapel for cultural educational purposes with the consent of the State Office for Church Affairs."²⁸

The plaintive letter of 26 July 1960 from dr. Gábor Osváth, director of the hospital, titled "*The Storage Situation of the Hospital*" provided a genuine reason for the other claim, which arrived somewhat later.²⁹ It must be added to the event that Osváth wrote about to the Health Department of the Executive Committee of Heves County Council and not to the State Office for Church Affairs, and Osváth – at least in the report described below – did not come up with any ideas for solution. The message of the hospital director was forwarded specifically to Emil Borai, chief executive of church affairs by dr Ferenc Szabó, deputy head physician on August 2. In his assessment of the situation, he gave a report on the newly-refurbished pharmacies and the newly established infusion laboratory section, and the document explained in a relatively detailed way what difficulties were encountered independently of the expansions. According to the doctor, the place proved to be too small for the storage tasks, the placement of the bandage remained unresolved, and the hospital would have needed a warehouse of about 40 square meters for this. The bandage was temporarily placed in the basement of the establishment, but due to the lack of space the prescribed quantity was not purchased. Furthermore, the question of where to store the three-month-stock of medical drugs also became problematic; according to the hospital director, on the date of the letter they were able to store a stock for about a month, so the report also referred to a claim for a dry room of 300 square meters that could be said to be ideal. The problem was further aggravated by the stock of drugs managed by the pharmacy company, which occupied two big wards intended to admit and place approximately forty mentally ill patients. In Orváth's view, this problem could be solved by having a warehouse of between seventy and one hundred square meters.³⁰

²⁸ MNL OL XIX-A-21-b 46. box 2. item The Takeover of the Chapel and Sacristy Located in the School Building.

²⁹ MNL OL XIX-A-21-b 46. box 2. item A Report on the Storage Situation of the County Hospital.

³⁰ A claim for an explosive's storage magazine of about 50 square meters was also mentioned at the end of the letter; however, it is less relevant for our topic. MNL OL XIX-A-21-a 46. box 2. item A Report on the Storage Situation of the County Hospital.

Ferenc Szabó, deputy head physician attached his report to the letter of 2 August that he sent to Emil Borai, and at the same time, proposed a solution for the lack of space. “If your higher authority approves of the closure of the chapel owned by the hospital as registered with the land registry and makes it possible, we will use the chapel for storing medicine, with the consent of the State Office for Church Affairs.”³¹ Szabó was thinking of the church which belonged to the former monastery of the monks of the Brothers of Mercy Order, situated in Knézich Károly Street, Eger, which, like the chapel in the convent of the Sisters of Loretto, remained open to the faithful even after nationalization.

The literature on the history of the monastery, church and hospital³² highlighted the cruel fate of the Baroque building. After the nationalization of the 1950s, its furniture was dispersed to the Theological College of Eger as well as to various parishes in the Archdiocese of Eger.³³

The nationalization of Brothers of Mercy Hospital chapel

On August 6, 1960, Emil Borai sent his two papers on the two churches to András Madai, deputy head of the department, together with several other documents requested by Madai.³⁴ The assessment of nationalization depended now on the leadership of the State Office for Church Affairs, but it did not go smoothly. It transpired from Emil Borai’s report of November that Pál Brezanóczy,³⁵ apostolic governor had attempted to settle the matter within his own jurisdiction in favour of the church. Borai was particularly annoyed at the resistance, on the one hand, because in his view the case was an accurate judgement in so far as “Brezanóczy’s promises are worth nothing”, on the other hand, the sources suggest that Pál Brezanóczy routinely tried to gain an advantage in highly important questions by avoiding Borai. In his report of March 23, 1959, the chief executive of church affairs

³¹ MNL OL XIX-A-21-b 46. box 2. item, dr. Ferenc Szabó, head physician’s letter to Emil Borai.

³² Of the most current it is worth mentioning the doctoral dissertation of Mária Mónika Lipp written in 2012. The study summarizes, completes, and corrects the research results revealed earlier at some places. Mónika Mária Lipp, *Az egri irgalmasrendi kolostor, templom és kórház XVIII. századi berendezése* (Budapest: Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem, 2012).

³³ Lipp, *Az egri irgalmasrendi kolostor*, 3–4.

³⁴ MNL OL XIX-A-21-b 46. box 2. item, Emil Borai’s letter of August 2, 1960 to András Madai.

³⁵ Dr. Pál Brezanóczy (1912–1972) came to Eger in 1952, where he was vicar of the Hungarian parts of the Ordinarium and Diocese of Szatmár. In 1956 he rose to the rank of a prebendal vicar, from 1959 he was apostolic governor, from 1964 bishop of Eger, and from 1969 archbishop of Eger. The Schematism of the Archdiocese of Eger, 1975. 158.

remarked that the attempt to fill the key positions of the Diocese of Eger with so-called “democratically thinking priests” kept stalling. The main reason for this is that although Brezanóczy was apparently inclined to complete the task, he went to Budapest at the time of the implementation and tried to prevent the ideas of the executive from being realized.³⁶ In his heart-broken letter coming from the legacy of Imre Miklós,³⁷ addressed to Károly Olt,³⁸ president of the State Office for Church Affairs, the chief executive of Eger blames Miklós for this situation, and his successes achieved by means of tricking the apostolic governor, who, according to the chief executive’s remarks, maintained a friendly relationship not only with Brezanóczy but also with his cousin Ernő, who lived in Germany.³⁹

All indications were that the governor also intended to take similar actions in order to save the two chapels. In his letter written to the Madai Emil, Borai evaluated the plan of the priest as follows:

Namely he [Paul Brezanóczy – the author’s note], agreed with the State Office for Church Affairs that he would vacate the former chapel of the Brothers of Mercy in Károly Knézich Street in February 1961 at the latest, and would give it over to the hospital, the owner as registered with the land registry. At the same time, he asked secretly for reregistration so that he could have a good laugh at our expense declaring that »he is not able to vacate the building as it is church property«. It was a very common method used by the governor, and it requires quite strong attention to be noticed in time.⁴⁰

Although Brezanóczy had in fact asked for the three properties to be recorded in the land registry altogether, the chief executive for church affairs only called the attention of the office to the attempt to reregister the chapel of the Brothers of Mercy Order. He did this because the State Office for Church Affairs and the apostolic governor had up to that point only conducted negotiations about the property in Knézich Károly street, which eventually ended with the agreement mentioned by Borai. At that time, the office did not give an order to the governor that the chapel on the territory of Szilágyi Erzsébet Girls’ Grammar School should be vacated.⁴¹ Borai enclosed the letter of 4 November

³⁶ MNL HML XXXV-22/12. group./6. box/57. Church Summary Report, 23 March 1959.

³⁷ For more details of Imre Miklós’s career see: Soós, *Az Állami Egyházügyi Hivatal archontológiája*, 280.

³⁸ Olt Károly (1904–1985), president of the State Office for Church Affairs from June 2, 1959 to October 20, 1961. Soós, *Az Állami Egyházügyi Hivatal archontológiája*, 286–287.

³⁹ Emil Borai, October 14, 1959. 5.

⁴⁰ MNL OL XIX-A-21-b 46. box 2. item, Emil Borai’s report to András Madai, November 4, 1960.

⁴¹ Emil Borai asked the SOCA for permission for the nationalization of the chapel again on July 25, 1961.

1960 written by the chief pastor, addressed to the Administration Department of the Executive Committee of Eger City Commission as incriminating evidence.

The paper cited above reveals how Brezanóczy attempted to keep the churches mentioned so far and St. Ann's Chapel located at 29 Széchenyi street in church use through the Administration Department by evading the State Office for Church Affairs.⁴²

Subject: Reserve of the section of religious service of nationalized church buildings in the land registry.

When the properties owned by the former Roman Catholic religious orders of Eger were nationalized, the places of worship/churches and chapels on the property were also rewritten into the newly opened land registry. The actual ownership and relationship of use of the churches for their intended purpose were not affected by this measure, and thus the churches continued to remain uninterruptedly in church ownership and use. It appears to be necessary to clarify issues related to the maintenance tasks, and therefore you are kindly requested to settle the right of ownership of the church buildings below in the land registry, i.e. please make a decision about making corrections in the land registry according to the actual ownership of the churches indicated below in accordance with the drawings and land register attached, and notify our authority about it as well.

The buildings in question requiring settlement in the land registry are as follow:

- 1./ In the lrf (land register file) of No 2824 of Eger, tn 900 (topographical number), the church of the Brothers of Mercy Order in Károly Knézich Károly Street,
- 2./ In the lrf (land register file) of No 10245 of Eger, sn 2 (serial number), tn 65 (topographical number), church in Széchenyi Street,
- 3./ In the lrf (land register file) of No. 797 of Eger, tn 417 (topographical number), the church from the convent of the Sisters of Loretto in Kossuth L. /former Káptalan/street...⁴³

In spite of the instructions of the State Office for Church Affairs, Brezanóczy chose a roundabout way, and in his letter written to the Administrative Department he referred to the fact that in essence nationalization did not affect places of worship and - tactically - he requested their settlement in the land registry under the pretext of maintenance tasks. In addition to the above-quoted text request, the chief pastor also attached three schematic drawings, three land registers and three copies of the land registry review to the document. The claims of the apostolic governor were legally funded, and

⁴² St. Ann Hospital Church in the Main Street of Eger functioned under the management of the Girl Guides Association of Saint Vincent, i.e. under that of the Sisters of the Mercy Order from 1858 to its nationalization; however, it was not affected by state takeover.

⁴³ MNL OL XIX-A-21-b 46. box 2. item, Pál Brezanóczy's letter to the Administrative Department of the Executive Committee of the Eger City Committee, November 4, 1960. Eger.

evidence can be found for it in a source prepared specifically in defence of the chapel of the school for girls. Brezanóczy elaborated on why such “misunderstandings” might have occurred in more detail. The institutions carrying out the nationalization failed to execute the division in the land registry between the so-called external and internal places of worship of the monastic buildings. In fact, the external places of worship escaped nationalization.⁴⁴ It is well-known today that the nationalization carried out in several stages did not spare even those properties owned by the church which were not affected by the regulations.⁴⁵ The fact that during the collectivization, the properties of monastic orders were taken completely into the ownership of certain state organs and institutions without any division despite the regulations, the fate of the sacred activities going on in the buildings was in essence at the mercy of those wishing to impose restrictions on the church.

Brezanóczy’s effort failed to achieve its goal as the state apparatus cooperated effectively at the expense of the Catholic Church at this time, too, in much the same way as many times before. Before answering the Chief Pastor’s letter, Tibor Bukta,⁴⁶ head of the Administration Department informed Bora of the requests. Bukta must have acted in accordance with the rules of the time, and any management and exchange of property by the churches could only be authorized by the State Office for Church Affairs.⁴⁷ “I notify you that the settlement of the ownership right of the church buildings designated in their application is currently not timely based on the information provided by the chief executive for church affairs. If you still wish to settle the land register status, you should also send the consent of the chief executive for church affairs” – said the letter from the head of department.⁴⁸ Bukta also attached a copy of the reply of the chief pastor to the chief executive for church affairs and a copy of the document with the previously quoted request sent by Brezanóczy. With the evidence in hand, Borai could reveal Brezanóczy’s new “machinations” before the State Office for Church Affairs, which, of course, reinforced the importance of his own job and the priest’s “double-game”.

⁴⁴ MNL OL XIX-A-21-b 57. box 2. item, Pál Brezanóczy’s letter to Olt Károly, August 7, 1961.

⁴⁵ For more details see: Attila Horváth, “A vallásszabadság korlátozása és az egyházak üldözése Magyarországon a szovjet típusú diktatúra idején,” *Polgári Szemle* 10, no. 1–2 (2014): 310–335. http://epa.oszk.hu/00800/00890/00058/EPA00890_polgari_szemle_2014_1-2_586.htm

⁴⁶ Tibor Bukta’s appointment was accepted by the Executive Committee of the Eger City Committee of the HSWP on 28 November 1958. MNL HML XXXV-29-3 1. box 32. p.u. The Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Eger City Committee of the HSWP of 28 November 1958.

⁴⁷ Horváth, “A vallásszabadság korlátozása és az egyházak üldözése”, 310–335.

⁴⁸ MNL OL XIX-A-21-b 46. box 2. item, Tibor Bukta’s letter to the Main Authority of the Archdiocese of Eger November 16, 1960.

According to the “*negotiation and agreement*” conducted by president Károly Olt with the governor, deputy president Imre Miklós and András Madai, deputy head of department, he called on Paul Brezanóczy to surrender the chapel of the Brothers of Mercy Order on 2 February 1961, and the State Office for Church Affairs gave him a respite for this until 15 February 1961. Olt closed his ordinance with the following sentence: “At the same time, I also notified Emil Borai, ministerial commissioner about the content of my letter.”⁴⁹ Presumably the president intended this as a warning, pointing out to the chief pastor that the handing over of the chapel would take place under the close supervision of the chief executive for church affairs, so further resistance would be meaningless. Pál Brezanóczy responded to Olt’s request on 8 February. “I took notice of your much-esteemed notification of 2 February 1961. I have put a stop to holding worship services in the former chapel of the Brothers of Mercy Order and I will place the chapel vacated at the disposal of the County Hospital as far as possible during this month – according to the discussion and agreement with Emil Borai, ministerial commissioner...” – as was written in the reply addressed to the president of the State Office for Church Affairs. Brezanóczy was unable to do anything against the ever-tighter administrative pressure despite of his network of contacts developed during his leadership over the years, and the chapel was handed over for the use of the hospital No 1 of Eger on 1 March 1961. After that, the sacred space functioned as a medical warehouse and archives. The archbishopric started taking stock of the furnishings found in the hospital church in February, the process, dated 13 to 15 February 1961 could be found on the source remaining from the time. Most of the paintings, sculptures and some of the gold objects were delivered to the Theological College of Eger. The other objects were placed in different parishes of the Eger Archdiocese, many were sent to museums.⁵⁰ In 1961, there were three bells in the church: the bells named in honour of the Heart of Jesus, the Godly St. Joseph and St. Joseph came into use in a parish due to the change of function.⁵¹ In his report of July 25, 1961, addressed to Olt, Borai diminished the significance of the chapel in a cynical manner, according to his observations the transfer took place “in an orderly manner” “without any remarks made by the faithful”.⁵²

⁴⁹ MNL OL XIX-A-21-a 22. box E-14-1/1961 The Handover of the Chapel of the Brothers of Mercy Order of Eger and the Suspension of the Vicar József Mátéffy.

⁵⁰ Lipp, *Az egri irgalmasrendi kolostor*, 4.

⁵¹ Lipp, *Az egri irgalmasrendi kolostor*, 55.

⁵² MNL OL XIX-A-21-b 57. box 2. item, Emil Borai’s letter to Olt Károly. July 25, 1961. 1.

The nationalization of Girl's School of the Sisters of Loretto chapel

However, the original purpose of the source quoted above was not merely to report on the handing over of the hospital church of the Brother of Mercy Order, but specifically to settle the status of the chapel belonging to the old monastic school for girls in accordance with the intentions of the state. As was mentioned above, the headmaster of the Szilágyi Erzsébet Girls' Grammar School made an attempt to achieve the expropriation of the building – which failed in spite of all his efforts – first with the support of the chief executive for church affairs, and then behind his back with the support of the head of the cultural department. The chief executive for church affairs repeated his wish by engaging the support of more noted 'assistants': the Heves County Party Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, the Heves County Council and the Eger City Council. In July 1961 Emil Borai also argued that the chapel was under state ownership and by using the kind of phraseology familiar from the state security records, he said that "besides 10–20 elderly ladies the chapel is not visited by anyone except by the nuns from other parts of the country who maintain their illegal relationships here."⁵³ After this, he outlined his action plan and the foreseeable effects of the events.

Expecting that the permission will be granted, we are planning to close the church during the school break and open it in winter under the management of the City Council where concerts will be held. In the event of the closure of the room, there may be no interruption in the practice of faith, as there are 18 churches in Eger and the main parish is 40 meters, and the former Church of the Minorites is 60 meters from here, not to mention the others. At the same time, they are not visited by the faithful, either.⁵⁴

By 1961 the plan of expropriation was modified in such a way that after taking over the school chapel the number of classrooms of Szilágyi Erzsébet Girls' Grammar School would not increase, but that of the public educational venues of Eger. However, as far as the future possession and use of the chapel are concerned, in the autumn of 1961 there is discernible uncertainty and conflict between the leadership of the town of Eger and the educational institution. At the meeting of the City Council on 6 October 1961, chairman János Kocsmár mentioned the surrender of the school chapel to the Girls' Grammar school in connection with the social celebrations organised in an atheistic manner. Kocsmár's contribution demonstrates that in addition to the "anti-clerical" commitment the city council's endeavours in relation to the chapel were also fuelled by practical reasons. "We should not agree with this proposal regarding the handover of the

⁵³ MNL OL XIX-A-21-b 57. box 2. item, Emil Borai's letter to Olt Károly. July 25, 1961. 1.

⁵⁴ MNL OL XIX-A-21-b 57. box 2. item, Emil Borai's letter to Olt Károly. July 25, 1961. 5. 1-2.

church.⁵⁵ We cannot place the people in the wedding hall of the City Council any more. We can seat only 10 people. It should be left as a wedding hall.”⁵⁶

On August 2, Károly Olt informed Emil Borai that he supported his ambition, and at the same time he wrote a message supplemented by Borai’s arguments to Brezanóczy, apostolic governor.

The Heves County Council submitted a request to the State Office of Church Affairs asking for the handover of the state-owned chapel in Szilágyi Erzsébet Girls’ Grammar School. As there is another church near the chapel, the closure will not cause a trouble for the Catholic faithful from the aspect of faith. Therefore, the Office agrees with the request of the County Council. I kindly request the Lord Governor to take action that the room in question should be handed over to the County Council by August 20, 1961.⁵⁷

According to the President’s intentions, the handover was supposed to take place under Emil Borai’s vigilant supervision. Knowing the true picture of the city’s religious life and the defaults related to nationalization, Pál Brezanóczy, apostolic governor asked the President of the State Office for Church Affairs in a letter to change the position of the office.

To my knowledge, the situation in Eger today is the same as it was in 1950; the former monastic churches and chapels serving the religious purposes of the faithful are in fact in church property and use, but the relevant land registry division has not happened until now or at least it has not been implemented by the state. Let me also mention that every place of worship has its regular attenders and they would not be able to endure the cessation of the use of its usual place of worship without a shock. I was obliged to experience this in the case of the chapel of the Brothers of Mercy Order as well, the regular attenders of which were up to a tenth of those of the Chapel of Mary. Moreover, the Chapel of Mary in question is also a historic building, so this also suggests that it should remain for its original goal and purpose. I also wish to notify Mr. President that I also have a personal dedication to the sanctuary together with the faithful of Eger, as this chapel is considered to be a shrine in Eger and its surroundings and therefore I must reveal – without exaggeration, – that the planned measure may cause unrest, indignation, and despair in fairly large crowds of believers. I pay attention to the needs of the City of Eger continuously, especially in the field of urban development and I also support them as far as it is possible. However, in the case brought up I had to put

⁵⁵ Kocsmár meant here the fulfilment of Ottó Újvári’s claim.

⁵⁶ MNL HML XXXV-29-3/3. box/99. p.u. Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of Eger City Committee of October 6 1961. 3.

⁵⁷ MNL OL XIX-A-21-b 57. box 2. item, Károly Olt’s letter to Pál Brezanóczy, August 2, 1961.

the matter of the chapel into the proper perspective, and bearing in mind and presenting the interests and emotions of the faithful population of the city, I have to ask that the City Council should disregard its takeover for the sake of the peace of our city.⁵⁸

Thus, the rather critical tone of the apostolic governor's letter proved Borai's malicious statement that the religious community of Eger had put up with the vacating of the hospital church without any shock wrong. In connection with the takeover of the school chapel, however, Pál Brezanóczy drew the attention of the State Office for Church Affairs to the fact that it had much more regular attendees than the church mentioned above. From the chief pastor's sentences it can be concluded that it was not only the faithful population of the county seat, but also people from the surroundings, or even Catholics living farther away visited it to worship.⁵⁹ Finally, Brezanóczy also expressed his fears about the use of the historic building for other purposes, because – as he wrote – it could cause great bitterness and outrage among the people, which could disturb the peace of the settlement.

The apostolic governor, who repeatedly took action against the endeavours of the State Office for Church Affairs, finally met the representatives of the Office personally on 17 August 1961; unfortunately, the sources make no mention of who exactly was present and where the meeting took place. The exchange of views could not have taken place without conflict as in his note taken about the event in ink on the back of his letter addressed to Brezanóczy, Olt Károly ordered András Madai to watch also – besides Bodai – the handover of the chapel to the county council on 21 August. Madai's written statement on the document of 1 September 1961 expressing the laconic "I've taken steps" proves that he was supposed to have come to Eger on the day of the handover, and he could have seen for himself that the chapel was surrendered to the state with no resistance. In his fourth quarter report of December 28, 1961 Emil Borai referred to the actions affecting the two chapels among the local successes of church policy. In his report Borai mentioned the renewed function of the school chapel, which, in addition to housing concerts, would become suitable in the future for holding name-giving ceremonies and weddings filled with "*socialist content*", i.e. those that would be organised in concord with the pattern expected in the era.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ XIX-A-21-b 57. box 2. item, Pál Brezanóczy's letter to Károly Olt, August 7, 1961. 1–2.

⁵⁹ It is possible that the faithful coming from other settlements and nuns of the Sisters of Loretto from other places might have provided a basis for the theory of illegal meeting places created by Emil Borai.

⁶⁰ MNL OL XIX-A-21-d 10. box 007-46/1961 The Fourth Quarter Summary of 28 December 1961. 5.

The bargaining between the City Council and Szilágyi Erzsébet Girls' Grammar School finally resolved in favor of the county seat. The frustration of Ottó Újvári, headmaster of the school and with it the dispute over the property ownership could have been somewhat dampened by the fact that Szilágyi Erzsébet Girls' Grammar School was also developed with some of the overall allocation of 65 million HUF for the expansion of urban grammar schools in the framework of the so-called "Second Five-Year Plan".⁶¹ That the State Office for Church Affairs finally decided in favour of Eger could have been due to the fact that in 1961 the Heves County Party Committee "took a decision that the local councils should also facilitate the aesthetic development of the place and equipment of social celebrations". "Experience shows that in many cases the atmosphere and emotional impact of church premises have a significant impact on people" – stood in the document of 1964 on the position of "atheistic and anti-clerical propaganda".⁶² The chapel as a church building seemed to be an ideal place for organizing "social festivals filled with socialist content". The wedding hall of the City Council was not able to fully perform its tasks due to a lack of capacity, and the church came in especially useful in this situation. The State Office for Church Affairs was delighted to support this type of use, since the building would serve the purpose of the office: it was possible to replace church rituals with "*socialist festivals*" by this. The City Council began the establishment of "*the right circumstances*" in the first half of the 1960s through a continuous process of informing the public. The newspaper of the Heves County Commission of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP) and the County Council, *Népújság*, authored an article about the topic, though rather succinctly, for the first time in the section "*Events, News*" of its issue of November 14, 1963. "The chapel of the Sisters of Loretto in Kossuth Lajos Street will be converted into a wedding hall in Eger. 200 thousand Forints will be spent on the conversion works" – this is what the population of the county could read.⁶³ The city administration seems to have taken care of representation in line with the central intentions, as half a year later, *Népújság* already wrote that there would be "a call for proposals for the members of the Heves County Arts Working Group for the interior decoration of the room."⁶⁴

⁶¹ MNL HML XXXV-29-2/1. box /32 p.u. The Minutes of the Meeting of the Party Committee of the Eger City Committee of the HSWP of 16 November 1961. Discussion of the second five-year plan. 5.

⁶² MNL HML XXXV-22/12. group/1. box/20. p.u. The Situation of the Atheist and Anti-clerical Propaganda. Department for Agitation and Propaganda. The report sent to Department for Agitation and Propaganda of the Central Committee of the HSWP of 30 September 1964. 12.

⁶³ *Népújság*, November 14, 1963. 6.

⁶⁴ *Népújság*, March 1, 1964. 6.

Emil Borai produced a report entitled “*On the Situation of the Churches and Sects of Heves County*” for the State Office for Church Affairs on 16 October 1965. The activities of former monks living in the county were also included in the nineteen-page analysis. At that time the chief executive pointed out the “illegal” function of the chapel again, reaffirming the need for expropriation, and he himself also reported on the reconstruction.

The leader of the Church Supply Committee functioning in the Archbishopric, dr. Irén Bárányi, former headmaster of the Loretto school, with a wide range of contacts all over the country with whom she conducts extensive correspondence, plays an important role in the direction of the monks. The order chapel situated in the nationalized Szilágyi Erzsébet Girls’ Grammar School, which they also used for illegal meetings, had been managed by them until the past years. They occasionally met Mária Hajagos, Superior General of Kecskemét and Mária Krigovszki,⁶⁵ [sic!] Provincial of Budapest here.⁶⁶

It is almost certain that the Sisters did not lose touch with each other during the period of dispersal, either, so it is not unimaginable that the church served as a meeting venue for them.⁶⁷ Borai and the state security may have deduced from their correspondence that in addition to the Cistercians, their educational work with the young was carried out under the “double guidance” of the former prior of the Loretto school and the principal.⁶⁸ In his report, Borai finally closed the section about the chapel by presenting the reassuring result for the state authorities. “The chapel of the Sisters of Loretto mentioned before was handed over to the management of the Council, where an extremely glamorous concert and wedding hall⁶⁹ is being built.”⁷⁰ It is a typical expression of the “great opportunities” of weddings in the Kádár era, as the event is a grand, community celebration, and people did not really mind if the institutional system of socialism contributed to its success.⁷¹

⁶⁵ MNL HML XXXV-22/12. group./6. box/57. A Report on the Situation of the Churches and Sects of Heves County. 16 October 1965. 14.

⁶⁶ MNL HML XXXV-22/12. group./6. box/57. A Report on the Situation of the Churches and Sects of Heves County. October 16, 1965. 14.

⁶⁷ Bernadett Wirthné Diera came to a similar conclusion during her research carried out in connection with the case “Black Ravens”. For more details see: Wirthné, *Katolikus hitoktatás és elítélés a Kádár-korszakban*, 230.

⁶⁸ ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-11762/2. 351.

⁶⁹ For more details about wedding hall see: *Népújság*, January 28, 1966. 4.

⁷⁰ MNL HML XXXV-22/12. group./6. box/57. A Report on the Situation of the Churches and Sects of Heves County. October 16, 1965. 14.

⁷¹ Kalmár: *Történelmi galaxisok vonzásában*, 159-160.

Summary

The reconstructed case studies illustrate amply for us the typical examples of the administrative steps taken by the authorities that affected the Hungarian Catholic Church and the faithful and that could be witnessed even in the sixties. People might have vivid memories of the story of nationalizations concerning real estate due to the nationalization of church schools and the dissolution of religious orders. It is, however, well-known today that this process took place over several stages, and we can find examples that strengthen this proposition even in the consolidation period of the Kádár regime. One of the most important things to notice from the case of Eger is that although the need for state takeover was formulated by certain particular institutions, it also served the purpose of the “struggle” between the state policy on religion and the atheist worldview. Due to the artificial change that took place in the function of sacred spaces the number of sites available for religious society to practice their faith was reduced, while at the same time the modern-style wedding hall converted from a school chapel was supposed to give specifically the wedding ceremonies organized in the “atheist manner” a competitive advantage.

Emil Borai, chief executive for church affairs of the SOCA, who knew his way around the local organizations since he had started his career in 1954, played a prominent role in the chain of cooperation that the authorities conducted in the interest of the state takeover. Due to the attitude of the governor Pál Brezanóczy, who was primarily under his control, Borai might have known from the beginning that it would not be easy to carry out nationalization. However, this circumstance not only highlights the cool relationship and the diplomatic struggles evident between the chief executive and the chief pastor, but also the political acumen of Pál Brezanóczy, who otherwise showed great willingness to cooperate with the state. The apostolic governor did not put up with the handover of the churches which were so important for and popular with religious people, he tried to exploit his extensive contacts as well as locally available opportunities. Despite the reports tailored to the needs of the central leadership the handover of the buildings did not seem to have escaped the outrage of society. In 1990-1991, when the church and school building converted to a wedding hall were returned to the management of the Sisters of Loretto, a debate ensued about the fate of the chapel in the press. The comments of readers, the detailed analysis of which is beyond the scope of this paper, brought to the surface again the grievances that had first occurred nearly forty years prior.⁷²

⁷² For more details see: Máté Gál, “Egri egyházi ingatlanok “állami használatba vétele” az Állami Egyházügyi Hivatal közreműködésével a Kádár-korszakban,” in *RMJ60. Tanulmányok a hatvanéves Rainer M. János tiszteletére*, ed. Máté Fábrián and Ignác Romsics (Eger: Líceum, 2017), 69–93.

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