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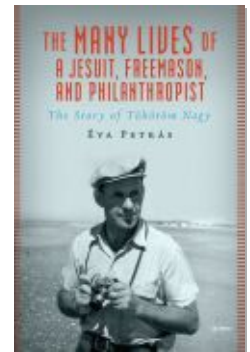
I. "Mother, Dreams Don't Lie..."

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I.

“MOTHER, DREAMS DON’T LIE...”¹

*“I was born for bigger things! The glowing, ideal, real life.
[...] Now if I have to give motives for an act of mine, let my
first motive be: ‘ad astra!’”²*

1.

In 1946, Nagy had a series of photographs taken of himself, which he called *Álarcok mögött* (Behind masks). In the photos he sports a series of disguises he wore during and after World War II, such as “a driver at the Csonka Machine Factory,” “Transylvanian high school teacher,” “Finnish university professor,” “Jewish merchant returning home after deportation,” “ship’s fireman on the Black Sea,” and “Vatican diplomat.” Compellingly, the last picture in the series shows Nagy “decent and normal”—disguise-free—as a Jesuit.³ The series reflects his personality, revealing his predilection for adventure and risk-taking, his adaptability and willingness to act, his ambition, intelligence, and eccentricity, along with just a tinge of egocentrism. All these traits must be borne in mind when examining Nagy’s later life, since, despite its various twists and often hard-to-follow internal and external events, they seem to be its only consistencies. One colleague in the Catholic corporative movement would write of Nagy that:

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- 1 The excerpt, from Sándor Petőfi’s poem *Jövendölés* [Prophecy] is quoted in Nagy’s diary when describing his mother’s prophetic dream. Manuscript Collection of the National Széchényi Library, (henceforth OSZK Kt.) f. 216/1.
 - 2 *Motívumok* [Motives]. Szeged, January 6, 1929. Here, Nagy lists 107 reasons for joining the Jesuit Order, with this among them. OSZK Kt., f. 216/7. (Sic itur) ad astra = “(Thus one journeys) to the stars!” (Virgil: *Aeneid*)
 - 3 *Álarcok mögött* [Behind masks]. OSZK Kt., f. 216/19.

“His fate is an incomprehensible and scary labyrinth to me.”⁴ In all likelihood, this view was shared by many.

Töhötöm Nagy’s life began simply enough. He was born on June 23, 1908 in Bozítópuszta,⁵ a part of Magyarcsernye, Torontál county, into a Transylvanian family from Székelyudvarhely (now Odorheiu Secuiesc in Romania). His father, Vilmos Nagy (1871–1932), was an employee of the Hungarian State Railways,⁶ which meant the family needed to move several times during Töhötöm’s childhood. His mother, Margit Varga died early in his life, with Erzsébet, his half-sister, being born of his father’s second marriage.⁷

Töhötöm spent his childhood in Piski, Hunyad County, entering the Gyulafehérvár Roman Catholic Secondary School in 1918. He completed his first year there with “satisfactory” results.⁸ According to the school bulletin, he left on October 14, 1919, shortly after the beginning of the schoolyear, due to “his parents leaving Transylvania,” a fate which befell many Transylvanian Hungarian families seeking a new life within Hungary’s new borders in the aftermath of World War I.⁹ Töhötöm’s studies would continue in Kisújszállás,¹⁰ their new home, at the Calvinist secondary school. Here too, his progress was rated “satisfactory,” roughly corresponding to a C in the American educational system.¹¹ He completed his

4 Takáts, “*Futok a kitűzött cél felé...*”

5 Bozítópuszta is now a Serbian village called Aleksandrovo, in the Banat region of Vojvodina.

6 He is mentioned as a railway conductor in the 1909 almanac of Hunyad County. Cf. Dénes, *Hunyadvármegyei almanach*, 48. Vilmos Nagy chief conductor 1918–1920. Based on records of the Gyulafehérvár Roman Catholic Secondary School. On the State Service questionnaire concerning Töhötöm Nagy, his father’s occupation is stated as having been “railway chief officer.” Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security (henceforth ÁBTL) 3.2.1. 1584/1. 30.

7 *Questionnaire*. Budapest, September 15, 1966. ÁBTL 3.2.1. 1584/1. 30–31.

8 Kárpiss, *Az Erdélyi*, 13.

9 *Registration form for 1919/1920 schoolyear*. Gyulafehérvár Roman Catholic Secondary School.

10 The Nagy family lived at 27 Kossuth Street, in Kisújszállás. OSZK Kt., f. 216/145.

11 At this time, “satisfactory” was better than “sufficient” and “insufficient”; but worse than “good” and “excellent.” Thus, on the continental scale (from 1–5), he would have received a ‘3.’ Ignoring the exceptional events of his life, Nagy astutely cast his own image and was deft at brand building. As such, we can hardly be surprised that he is remembered as having been an “outstanding student” and an “exceptional athlete, who was once national junior champion in artistic gymnastics.” Takáts, “*Futok a kitűzött cél felé...*” The data available does not entirely support these statements. Nagy is not listed among the students who received a *matura* graded “good” or “excellent” in the academic results section of Kisújszállás Calvinist Secondary School bulletins. When his name is mentioned, it is

matura (roughly equivalent to high school graduation) in 1926 and applied to study history and geography at the Péter Pázmány Royal Hungarian University’s Faculty of Humanities,¹² before opting instead to join the Society of Jesus later that year.

Although he remained close to his family, his entrance into the Jesuit Order fundamentally altered the dynamic of their relationship. The telegram which he sent to his parents informing them of his decision read: “Leaving on Friday forever. Please come at once.”¹³ In his diary, he noted that

They rushed to Budapest desperately to say goodbye.—They arrived at 10 AM, coming to the institute for the deaf and dumb, where I taught while studying at university. There was great crying and begging. I just laughed it off. I gave my clothes away. [...] My train was due to leave at 1 PM. They accompanied me to the station, begging all along that I would see some sense, not act the fool, and not become a Jesuit. And the train left. A huge feeling of liberation washed over me...¹⁴

From the available data, it would appear that this decision was made with all the fervor of a vocational awakening, and with every intention of a life-long commitment, a mere two months after the young man had relocated to Budapest. He departed the capital for the novitiate at Érd, a small town not far away, where Imre Mócsy, already a novice and later to become one of his closest confederates, met him at the station—along with others—on November 12, 1926.¹⁵

as one of the “satisfactory” students. He was in fact successful at a gymnastics championship in his 8th year of schooling, however, this amounted to a silver medal won at a local competition for his performances on the parallel and horizontal bars. *Bulletin of the Kisújszállás Calvinist High School (Secondary School until 1922/23) 1920/21, 1921/22, 1922/23, 1923/24, 1924/25, 1925/26.*

12 Takáts, “*Futok a kitűzött cél felé...*”

13 *Telegram*, Budapest, November 10, 1926. OSZK Kt., f. 216/1.

14 *Diary excerpt* [Szeged], November 12, 1939. OSZK Kt., f. 216/13. His decision was not altered by his father’s mentioning Töhötöm’s boyhood love interest, Lujza Straub, whom he referred to as his fiancée in his book *Jezsuiták és szabadkőművesek* [Jesuits and freemasons].

15 “Since there was nobody to pick me up, I asked to go on the back of a cart. But after a few meters, Béla Német and Imre Mócsy appeared.” *Diary excerpt* [Szeged], November 12, 1939. OSZK Kt., f. 216/13. and “Today marks the 20th anniversary of my joining the Society [of Jesus]. I went to Father Mócsy’s to celebrate this fine day.” *Diary excerpt*, Rome, November 12, 1946. OSZK Kt., f. 216/20.

Béla Bangha,¹⁶ the first Jesuit Nagy had met in his life, exerted an indirect influence on his choice. Bangha held lectures in Kisújszállás while Töhötöm was in his fifth year of high school, one of which, according to Nagy's diary, had deeply moved him. At the end of the event, Nagy was introduced to Bangha by his divinity teacher, who, as he found out later, remarked to Bangha that he could become a fine Jesuit. Bangha turned to the 15-year-old boy possessed of a good psychological sense:

[t]he next day we traveled together to Budapest, because I was to visit Bishop Majláth.¹⁷ We became such good friends on the train, that we went on foot from Nyugati railway station to the KSV's¹⁸ printing house and rushed through the halls. Father Bangha introduced me as "a young man eager to learn," who wants to see a real printing house. This was where I saw a typesetting machine for the first time in my life. Then we took a fiacre to [Saint Stephen's] Basilica, and I continued on foot to [Széchenyi] Chain Bridge... [...] This was my first meeting with Father Bangha. It left a deep impression on me. [...] Father Bangha also played a crucial role in my joining the order. My calling was strange and almost miraculous. I decided suddenly one evening that I was to be a priest. It was becoming a priest then, nothing more. Secular or monastic, and which order of the many, I didn't know. I just wanted

Imre Mócsy SJ (1907–1980) was a Jesuit, and holder of doctoral degree in theology from the University of Innsbruck, and later, at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, where he taught in the Department of New Testament Studies from 1944 on. Several years later, in 1947, he returned to Hungary. He was subsequently imprisoned from 1949–1954 and again from 1965–1968. In between these periods, and after his second release from jail, he worked as a manual laborer for the Hungarian State Railways, before retiring in 1970. See his autobiography: Mócsy, *Hagytam magam szerettetni*. On the chronology of his Jesuit life see Bikfalvi, *Magyar jezsuiták*, 155.

Béla Német SJ (1907–1971) was a Jesuit and moral theologian. He lived in Klagenfurt from 1959 until his death. Bikfalvi, *Magyar jezsuiták*, 164–65.

16 Béla Bangha SJ (1880–1940) was a Jesuit, theologian, orator, editor, and Catholic press innovator. Bikfalvi, *Magyar jezsuiták*, 25. For more on his life, see Nyisztor, *Bangha Béla*, and more recently Molnár and Szabó, *Bangha Béla SJ*, and Klestenitz, *Pajzs és kard*.

17 Gusztáv Majláth (1864–1940) was a Transylvanian bishop.

18 KSV = Központi Sajtóvállalat (Central Press Company), founded by Béla Bangha in 1918. An umbrella organization encompassing cultural, scientific, and political Catholic media outlets between the two world wars. Tibor Klestenitz has written multiple articles on its history, see e.g. Klestenitz, "Bangha Béla," Klestenitz, "A Központi Sajtóvállalat," and Klestenitz, "Katolikus sajtó."

to celebrate masses and hear confessions... The next day, when I began to implement the previous night’s decisive with resolve, I stopped bewildered for a moment early in the morning: Where exactly should I go? My first thought was to join the Archdiocese of Eger, but that was just a fleeting possibility. Soon, I clearly decided for the monastic lifestyle, and began to seriously consider the Dominican Order [...] As I was thinking for a few moments of becoming a Dominican, it dawned on me: What about Father Bangha? I want to be just like him! I want to be Father Bangha the Second! [...] I was amazingly conceited, and I had an almost sickly ambition. What I saw in Jesuitism—apart from an elevated concept of priesthood—was to be a great man, like Father Bangha!¹⁹

Nagy saw the Society of Jesus as offering him a way to realize his call for greatness, a desire he had possessed since childhood. When he joined the order, he completely abandoned his old life, even destroying his diary. Thankfully, this destruction was not thorough, as he retained some fragments, which he referred to as his “thrown-away diary.” This includes those passages in which he describes his mother’s dream, and his feelings about it.²⁰ The prophetic dream was deeply ingrained in the young boy’s psyche, and his choice of destiny fundamentally determined by it.

My mother said to us one morning that she had had a very interesting dream. From then on, this dream was to play a crucial role in my secular life, and motivate me to aim high, since I half believed in it. The dream went as follows: the entire family was on its way to a large house. Many people lived there, and they did various odd jobs, like cobbling, but their main duty was to guard a strange well. This gigantic windlass well stood in the yard and was extremely deep. It dated back to the Árpád dynasty [9th and 10th century AD], even the Hungarian conquest [895 AD], and its wheel was so huge, that it could only have been spun by one of the conquering chieftains, but none had been born since to even make it budge. [...] We approached this well, and I said I could spin

19 *Diary excerpt* [Florence], March 28, 1940. OSZK Kt., f. 216/13.

20 It is obvious from the description, that although he says “mother,” his foster mother, Erzsébet Kiss (1891–1968) is meant.



Töhötöm Nagy in 1926

it. My mother asked me not to do it, first because it was exceedingly heavy, and second because I might get into trouble. The guardians of the well looked out of the window, and cocked their heads, what was I up to? Then I grabbed the wheel and started spinning it with incredible force. My family and the guardians stared in awe, for it had been a millennium since anyone did this. But all of a sudden, the wheel gave and pulled me into the well and I fell. My mother ran to the spot, trying to see me, all the while shouting my name, but there was only a distant moan and my cries for help. There, I died.²¹

Immediately after describing the dream, Nagy went on to recall his reaction at the time:

[w]hen my mother told me this, I gave it a lot of thought. They looked at me with a certain holy respect, and I could feel it from the way they talked, that great things were expected of me. I would often say from then on: “Mother, dreams don’t lie.” I walked the dusty roads of Kisújszállás like a prince. I started to detest people. “I!” This magical concept appeared to me more and more vividly. I was becoming self-aware completely and irrevocably. [...] I wanted to be Napoleon. I was thinking of future battles, I even thought of myself as a superior being. It had little basis, but it was not completely lacking the truth.²²

21 Excerpt from the “*thrown-away diary*.” Szeged, 1929. OSZK Kt., f. 216/1, 56–59.

22 Excerpt from the “*thrown-away diary*.” Szeged, 1929. OSZK Kt., f. 216/1, 56–59.

Stimulated by the opportunity to begin what he saw as his extraordinary life, he decided at 18 to follow in the footsteps of Saint Ignatius and become a soldier of Christ.

2.

The Society of Jesus had been founded by Saint Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556). This modern order was approved by Pope Paul III in his papal bull *Regimini militantis ecclesiae* (*To the Government of the Church Militant*), issued in 1540, wherein he recognized the new order, specifying its mission as spreading the faith through preaching, charity, youth education, and spiritual exercises.²³ Subsequent to the recognition, Saint Ignatius and his followers, by way of the Order’s Constitution, developed the organizational framework that defines the Society of Jesus to this day. In order to boost their efficiency, Saint Ignatius created a centralized government within the order, and defined various degrees of membership in the Society. As such, a final commitment was and remains possible only after a prolonged period of preparation. In ecclesiastical terms, the Society of Jesus is exempt, placing it not under the jurisdiction of the local bishop but, rather, as directly answerable to the Pope. The supreme body of religious administration is known as the General Congregation of the Order—the *Congregatio generalis*—which is responsible for electing the Superior General. He is the supreme leader of the Society of Jesus, appoints its provincial superiors and local administrators—assistants and provincials—and decides on admissions and dismissals.

There are four levels of membership in the Society of Jesus: (1) Novices; (2.) Scholastic, or studying members; (3.) Perpetual helpers/*coauditores spirituales*, among whom are priests (Fathers), and assisting laypeople (Brothers); (4.) and *Professi* who have taken the final, fourth vow. Novices take a simple perpetual vow after a two-year trial period called the Novitiate, after which they become scholastics. Their studies in humanities are followed by several years of practical training (*magisterium*), which is capped by a theological education. During or after this, they are ordained into the priesthood, after which they perform pastoral, social, or educational duties, referred to as apostolic tasks. The final year, involving a third trial

23 Bangert, *A jezsuiták*, 27.

period of spiritual training, the tertianship, then follows. Once complete, the profession and the fourth solemn, and final, vow are made. In total, studies can take anywhere from 12–15 years, measured from the date of entrance into the order. Since the Society was conceptualized primarily as a missionary order, the Final Vow states that *professi* will go wherever the Pope sends them.²⁴

After attempts in the sixteenth century to establish themselves in Hungary, the Jesuits expanded from Nagyszombat (today Trnava, Slovakia) College, founded in 1615 by Péter Pázmány. The order evolved continuously and played a crucial role in the reformation of Hungarian Catholicism as well as the Counter-reformation, and in a broad sense, the history of Hungarian culture.²⁵ Although Pope Clement XIV suppressed the order in 1773 in his *breve*²⁶ *Dominus ac Redemptor* “for the peace and tranquility of the Church” owing to the role the Society of Jesus had played in diplomacy and politics, thus temporarily interrupting its evolution. It was rehabilitated in 1814 and its activities in Hungary resumed in 1853.

A major development came with the secession of an independent Hungarian province from the common Austro-Hungarian province in 1909. This represented the culmination of a long process, as the need for an independent Hungarian branch had been discussed several times both during the prosperous periods of the Habsburg Empire, and, more concretely, following the order’s restoration in the nineteenth century.²⁷ Hungarian Jesuits underwent training at Nagyszombat until 1920, when, following the Treaty of Trianon, these facilities were transferred to Szeged, Érd, and Budapest. The college of humanities relocated from Pozsony (now Bratislava, Slovakia) to Innsbruck, Austria in 1910. There, theologians belonging to the Hungarian Province could continue their studies at the Jesuit Petrus Canisius College, which became Collegium Maximum, possessing Faculties of Philosophy and Theology.²⁸ Apart from their training facilities, the Hungarian Society of Jesus possessed an impres-

24 Bangert, *A jezsuiták*, 42, and O’Malley, *The Jesuits*, 17–30.

25 Bánkúti, *Jezsuiták a diktatúrában*, 23–28.

26 O’Malley, *The Jesuits*, 104–106. A *breve* or papal brief (*litterae apostolicae in forma brevis*) is a “simple” apostolic document (in contrast to a *bull*), sealed with red wax, and issued by the Pope usually to celebrate an anniversary.

27 Petrush, *Száz év*, 359–78, and Fejérdy, *Provincia Hungariae*, 13–22.

28 On the history of the Innsbruck Jesuit college see Coreth, *Das Jesuitenkolleg Innsbruck*.

sive infrastructure that included high schools and boarding schools in Kalocsa²⁹ and Pécs,³⁰ and convents in Budapest, Hódmezővásárhely, Kaposvár, Kispest (today part of Budapest), Mezőkövesd, Nagykapornak, and Szeged. The Hungarian province also operated missionary posts in Kolozsvár (today Cluj-Napoca, Romania), and Daming, China.³¹ In particular, the Jesuit Order flourished during the interwar period, with its development reflected in the community’s growth from 182 (1910) to 406 (1949) members.³² This boom ran parallel to the so-called Catholic renaissance, which saw a revival of religious life in Hungary from the 1890s.³³

The encyclical *Rerum novarum*, issued in 1891 by Pope Leo XIII, changed the Catholic church’s history. From then on, through renewed social teaching, the magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church expounded its ideas on economic and social problems arising during the modern age, as well as the interests of faith. With this, Pope Leo XIII fomented a revival of Catholicism at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His advocacy of increased Catholic involvement in ideologically-driven social and political organizations, was coupled with a religious renewal that sought to rekindle Catholicism’s values in secularized European societies.³⁴ The experience of World War I provided a new impulse for this renewal of religious life, and, as a result of historical and spiritual influences, an resurgence can be observed in Hungary during the 1920s.

3.

Töhötöm Nagy entered the Society of Jesus during a time of relative prosperity, both for the Hungarian Catholic church and for the Hungarian Jesuit Province, making him a shaper of his era by way of his activities with the latter.

Nagy was a novice in Érd for two years, before studying humanities in Szeged between 1928 and 1931. He took his First Vow on November 13, 1928.³⁵ Having studied philosophy like many of his fellow Jesuit novices,

29 Lakatos, “Jezsuita oktatás-nevelés,” 75–93, and Bikfalvi, “*Mindent Isten...*,” 53–78.

30 Bánkúti, *A pécsi Pius Kollégium*.

31 Vámos, “A támingi misszió.”

32 Pálos, *Viharon*, 12, and Nyisztor, *Ötven esztendő*, 124–27.

33 For more on this see Petrás, *Társadalmi tanítás*.

34 Casanova, *Public Religions*, 11–39; Casanova, “A Public Religions – újragondolva.”

35 *Text of my First Jesuit Vow Szeged*, November 13, 1928. OSZK Kt., f. 216/9.

he commenced his magisterial work at the Kalocsa Archiepiscopal High School (hereafter, KAHS). There, from 1931 to 1934, he was dormitory supervisor and a P.E. teacher.³⁶ The KAHS had been maintained by the Society of Jesus since 1860, and was, by the time of Nagy's arrival, nationally renowned.³⁷ Among others, Ottokár Prohászka³⁸ studied there in the early 1870s, fondly referring to his Jesuit teachers in his memoir as "illuminating men."³⁹ Among his famous teachers were the composer Alajos Hennig (1826–1902), the nephew of Franz Liszt; Kálmán Rosty (1832–1905), a renowned speaker and literature teacher; Mike Tóth (1838–1932), a mineral collector who taught there for 56 school years, and Gyula Fényi (1845–1927), who conducted world-renowned research on the Sun from the school's observatory.⁴⁰

However, Kalocsa was not a career for Nagy, but a site of preparation. We do not know the precise date, however it was most likely during the spring of 1931, when Nagy was visited in his scholasticate [in Szeged] by his fellow Jesuit, Jenő Kerkai.⁴¹ Kerkai was several years ahead of Nagy in his Jesuit training, and on this occasion was bringing KAHS students to Szeged as their chaperone on a field trip. After meeting Nagy, he informed him in his room that he was looking for collaborators on his new projects and had thought of him. Kerkai informed Nagy that he should expect another 9–10 years of training, but—if he felt like it—he could work with Kerkai on this new project in the interim. Nagy remembers Kerkai's argument:

36 The daily political newspaper *Pesti Napló* [Budapest journal] reported his transfer in the description of Jesuit dispositions. *Pesti Napló*, August 4, 1931, 11. He lived in the Stephaneum building of the KAHS, as seen in the *Magyar Kultúra's* [Hungarian culture] "Our Authors" address section, a journal he submitted articles to. *Magyar Kultúra* (20) 1933/23.

37 Lakatos, "Jezsuita oktatás-nevelés," 88.

38 Ottokár Prohászka (1858–1927) was an influential Hungarian Roman Catholic theologian, writer and rhetor, later Bishop of Székesfehérvár.

39 Here, Antal Petrich quotes from Prohászka's diary: Petrich, *Száz év*, 192.

40 There is even a crater on the Moon named after Gyula Fényi.

41 Jenő Kerkai SJ (1904–1970), was a Jesuit, best known as the founder, principal organizer, and national president of KALOT, which was formed in 1935. Arrested in 1949, he was sentenced to 10 years in prison, which he completed after a brief respite in 1956/57. When released in 1959, he worked as a manual laborer at MAHART, the Hungarian Shipping Company in Dunaharaszti. He would later become a curate at the ecclesiastical social home in Püspökszentlászló. From 1964 until his death, he lived in Pannonhalma, at the Benedictine Abbey priest pensioners' home. Bikfalvi, *Magyar jezsuiták*, 113. For more on his life see, among others: András, Bálint and Szabó, *Kerkai emlékezete*; Balogh, "A 'Kisatya'" 42–72; Cseszka, "Jezsuita életút," 683–92; on his role in KALOT: Ugrin, *Emlékezéseim*; on his trials: Bánkuti, *Jezsuiták a diktatúrában*, 96–98.

We’re living in the century of mass movements. To get the power you need masses and not the select few bleeding hearts or the handful on top. And the road to the masses isn’t love, their ears have become coarse with all the betrayal and plunder, they don’t expect alms or consolation, but rights. Whoever gives them the right to a better life, that’s whose God they will worship. Let us, the Church, give it to them, and they will believe in us again. [...] Nowadays, the real apostolic way, the one that doesn’t want to patch things up or make pure souls shinier, is the way of social justice and social mass organization. [...] We have to be a step or rather a sprint ahead to accomplish “the greater glory of God.”⁴²

Kerkai went on to say that he wanted to begin socially organizing the peasantry, as opposed to the urban workers, because “no one has cast eyes on them with a large-scale program yet. We’re breaking new ground! The promise of success is there...”⁴³

Nagy was invited to participate and, if receptive, Kerkai would appeal to the Provincial Superior, a life-changing exchange Nagy later reconstructed: “There, that afternoon, I saw these heavy truths light as day, and they have sunk into my soul for a lifetime.” Nagy agreed, and the plan was developed further. “We are going to start a social peasant movement. We are going to work from the bottom up, organizing youth. We will use them on the broadest cultural, economic and spiritual grounds for organizing, that is, we will start with managerial training courses, and as years go by, as the youth grow up, so will the movement. In an almost biological sense, they will mature into a general peasant movement.”⁴⁴ Kerkai and Nagy agreed that, while in Kalocsa, Nagy would continue social outreach work among the students Kerkai had gathered, since Kerkai was

42 Töhötöm Nagy, *Korfordulón* [At the turning point of an era], OSZK Kt., f. 216/185, 29–31, and Töhötöm Nagy, *Jezsuiták és szabadkőművesek*, 98–99. (Unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent quotes are from this edition.) “Greater glory of God” is a reference to the Jesuit motto: *Ad maiorem Dei gloriam*, “for the greater glory of God.” The discussion’s accuracy cannot be verified using contemporary sources. In terms of content, the discussion seems to reflect Nagy’s views of the time. The idea of social organizing work as an apostolic mission seems to have crystallized following the death of Fr Bangha in 1940. On this, see the relevant parts of the next chapter and his diary: *Diary excerpt* [Florence] May 23, 1940. OSZK Kt., f. 216/13.

43 Nagy, *Korfordulón*, 31, and Nagy, *Jezsuiták és szabadkőművesek*, 100.

44 Nagy, *Korfordulón*, 34, and Nagy, *Jezsuiták és szabadkőművesek*, 100–101.

transferring to Innsbruck that autumn to study theology. Following their discussion, Kerkai returned to Kalocsa, and Nagy put aside his other ideas for the future, appealing to the Rector on that very next day for permission to read books on sociology and social policy.

Thus, Nagy arrived at Kalocsa for his *magister* years full of excitement, convinced that his eyes had been opened to a field that stimulated his entire skillset. He read everything from Marx and Engels to Catholic philosophers. Following Kerkai's example, he discussed various models for small-scale action with his students: They organized a small sales co-operative, they published *Regnum*,⁴⁵ a student newspaper, and they refined their rhetorical and public speaking skills.⁴⁶

Social issues were popular foci of the intelligentsia throughout the 1930s, and the Jesuit Order, where strong views were formulated, was no exception.⁴⁷ The encyclical *Quadragesimo anno* issued by Pope Pius XI in 1931, marking the 40th anniversary of *Rerum novarum* provided the issue with a new impulse by advocating renewed participation of the Catholic Church in solving social issues through a reinterpretation of corporatism.⁴⁸

On the basis of works by Jesuit thinkers—primarily those of Heinrich Pesch, Gustav Gundlach, and Oswald von Nell-Breuning—Pope Pius XI envisioned a model of society in *Quadragesimo anno* where advocacy

45 *Regnum* was first published in 1928. Kerkai, *A kalocsai kollégium*.

46 Nagy, *Korfordulón*, 36, and Nagy, *Jezsuiták és szabadkőművesek*, 106. He had already written about social issues in the high school journal: Töhötöm Nagy, "Szociális idők szellemében" [In the spirit of social times]. In *Kalocsai Kollégium. A Kalocsai Jezustársasági Érseki Gimnázium intézetének lapja és kongregációs értesítője* [Kalocsa dormitory. Journal and congregational bulletin of the boarding school of the Kalocsa Jesuit Archbishop High School], Kalocsa, 1–2 February 1932.

47 For example, Fr Elemér Csávossy and Fr László Varga. On the issue, see Hámori, "Jezsuita társadalmi gondolkodók." Töhötöm Nagy later wrote specifically about Csávossy's role and writings. Nagy, *Korfordulón*, 37–42. Elemér Csávossy SJ (1883–1972), was a Jesuit theologian, teacher, and writer. He served as provincial Superior from 1949, was arrested in 1950, freed from the Vác prison in 1956, and lived thereafter in Pannonhalma. On his life see Bikfalvi, *Magyar jezsuiták*, 47. László Varga SJ (1901–1974), was a Jesuit and sociologist. On his life see Bikfalvi, *Magyar jezsuiták*, 239. By the 1930s, a consensus had been reached by a wide swath of Hungary's intellectual elite that the Horthy regime needed reform owing to the extreme political, economic, and social problems the country was facing. Here, it is sufficient to reference the birth of the so-called 'populist movement,' or the then already half-century long struggle of Hungarian social democracy.

48 As J. Chappel argues, "Corporatism was a transnational response to a transnational economic crisis," which influenced also the Catholic thought on economy and society. Chappel, *Catholic Modern*, 126.

through corporatism, rather than on the basis of class, would facilitate the peaceful coexistence of different groups. The end result, he held, would be a more just and equitable society.⁴⁹ Thus, in the 1930s papal social teaching drove Catholic sociological reflection (both lay and clerical) on the Church’s social presence, which, beyond the Church’s traditional charitable activities, took the form of theoretically and practically elaborating on new possibilities.⁵⁰

In the 1934/1935 school year, Nagy was afforded the opportunity, keeping with ecclesiastical trends as well as those of international social and scientific thought, to deepen his theoretical interest in social issues, by beginning theological studies in Innsbruck. Kerkai was still there, and even if primary sources are lacking, we can be fairly confident that they picked up the thread of their last conversation, with Kerkai further elaborating on his plans.

Nagy would complete a single year in Innsbruck, thereafter continuing his theological studies in Szeged.⁵¹ However, his jaunt to Innsbruck saw his and Kerkai’s paths cross, at least in terms of physical location and life station, as the latter also returned to Szeged following his ordination. There, as part of his apostolic work, Kerkai founded KALOT, with two lay collaborators, György Farkas⁵² and József Ugrin.⁵³ In a brief period, KALOT would grow to become the most successful corporative movement attempting to tackle social issues in Hungary.⁵⁴

During this time, Nagy’s training continued. He had already begun publishing in Kalocsa, with his first writings appearing in *Magyar Kultúra* [Hungarian culture], a Jesuit periodical founded by Béla Bangha in 1913. However, Nagy also wrote an article for *Korunk szava* [The voice of our age],

49 On the text see Tomka and Goják, *Az egyház társadalmi tanítása*, 57–103.

50 On this see Petrás, “A Splendid Return.”

51 Bikfalvi, *Magyar jezsuiták*, 162.

52 Dr. György Farkas (1908–1991), was a lawyer, managing secretary of the KALOT between 1935 and 1939, principal of the KALOT’s people’s college in Erd between 1942 and 1946, member of the (Christian) Democratic People’s Party from 1945, and later member of Parliament.

53 József Ugrin (1910–1993), was one of KALOT’s main organizers, and a member of Parliament for the (Christian) Democratic People’s Party in 1947.

54 KALOT changed from a “Secretariat” to an “Association” following the amendment of its statutes in 1938, having gained independence and become national in scope. On KALOT’s history see M. Balogh, *Egy jezsuita apostoli küldetés*, 94–125. and M. Balogh, *A KALOT*. On corporative movements see also: J. Gergely, “Katolikus hivatásrendi mozgalmak,” 3–42.

a reformist Catholic periodical started in 1931.⁵⁵ First, he wrote feuilletons until one of the editors at *Magyar Kultúra*, Zoltán Nyisztor,⁵⁶ commissioned him to write reviews. These evolved into lengthier articles, very similar to studies, on social topics framed in the popular sociological manner of the 1930s, as well as on issues concerning the Church's social presence.⁵⁷

Nagy's social sensitivity was intensified not only by his growing academic and political interests, but also by news about the his own family's deteriorating financial situation: "[s]ometimes my development in this direction was given a push by family trouble, impoverishment, misery!"—he recorded in his diary.⁵⁸ After his father's death, in response to the difficulties his family was facing, he wrote desperately: "Their cruel situation is unspeakably painful. I just cannot cope with it. [...] Crazier and crazier plans were rattling around in my head every day. Then it occurred to me that I should leave everything today. Everything! And sell myself in a single set of clothes to the Communists."⁵⁹

In reading the above, it becomes apparent that, during his formative years as a Jesuit, Nagy's personality was shaped by multiple impulses, all of which pointed in what was more or less the same direction. The interrelationship between his studies, his reflections, and his experiences collated into a unified, coherent world view, supported by spiritual exercises, individual spiritual guidance, and the comradery of the Jesuit brotherhood.

55 Töhötöm Nagy, "Magára hagyott tanyavilágunk" [Our abandoned farmlands], *Korunk Szava* (1932/4): 7–8.

56 Zoltán Nyisztor (1893–1979) was a journalist and Catholic priest, best known as a defining personality of Hungarian public life during the interwar period. He also served for nearly 15 years as the editor of *Magyar Kultúra*.

57 E.g., "Az élő szemét" [The living garbage], *Magyar Kultúra* (1932/3): 140–42; "A sátán bibliája" ["Satan's Bible"], *Magyar Kultúra* (1932/6): 275–76; "Review of Sándor Schmidt: Családvédelem és gyermekvédelem" [Protecting families, protecting children], *Magyar Kultúra* (1932/7): 326–27; "Akár a vadvizetek" [Just like wild rivers], *Magyar Kultúra* (1932/10): 461–62; "Krisztust...kenyeret!" ["Christ...Bread!"] *Magyar Kultúra* (1932/12): 573–75; "Háborús pápák és béke-pápák" [War popes and peace popes], *Magyar Kultúra* (1932/13–14): 51–54; "A nyomor mint keresethalmozás" [Misery as an accumulation of earnings], *Magyar Kultúra* (1932/15–16): 153–55; "Mezőgazdaságunk válsága" [The crisis of our agriculture], *Magyar Kultúra* (1933/2): 66–71; "Szociális problémák a diákok között" [Social issues among students], *Magyar Kultúra* (1933/9): 398–402; "A szovjet, mint szövetséges" [The Soviet as an ally], *Magyar Kultúra* (1933/23): 479–80; "Feltámadt misztériumdrámák" [Mystery-plays resurrected], *Magyar Kultúra* (1935/3): 317–19; "A Szovjet újabb kudarca" [Another failure of the Soviet], *Magyar Kultúra* (1935/2): 261–64.

58 Excerpt from the "Thrown-away diary," Szeged, 1929. OSZK Kt., f. 216/1, 59.

59 Diary excerpt [Szeged] May 11, 1937. OSZK Kt., f. 216/13.

Upon his return to Szeged from Innsbruck, the next turning point in Nagy’s Jesuit life—his ordination—approached. Throughout his various assignments, he had consistently met the mark, performing his duties without difficulty, to such an extent that his superiors harbored no serious doubts as to his suitability and the authenticity of his vocation. However, as a rite of passage, ordination, approached, his inner doubts began to grow. These stemmed not from the lack of faith, but rather, from self-doubt. In his extant diary excerpts, he recorded the ebbs and flows of his spiritual life. sometimes he was wont to rationalize his problems with intellectual rigor, while on other occasions he would, in impulsive bursts, stylize himself as an “impudent intruder,” still searching for his place in God’s plans:

[s]ometimes I’m not even knocking on Heaven’s door, I’m banging. I’m tugging at the handle. Like our Lord Jesus had said, the violent shall seize Heaven. We can twist the meaning of these words however we like, let the exegetes come, they still mean that after a thousand self-denials we have to elbow our way to the gates and knock and make noise until God opens up for us and fills our pockets with grace. I didn’t invent this incessant knocking, the Lord Jesus explained it to us in not one, but two parables so that we should understand it well. I believe in the Gospel and I know it wasn’t written so that in the end we wouldn’t live in the way it prescribes. We do a lot of posing before the Lord Jesus, but he wants us to be natural and honest. And what is more honest than becoming positively impudent intruders in our hunger for grace? This is the theory of banging on the door.⁶⁰

Still, he felt isolated on multiple occasions:

[A]gain, the feeling of spiritual emptiness has appeared to me several times. I don’t live as grace-consciously as being a son of God would require. This empty life is horrible! [...] I feel like a sapling that was uprooted from the forest, and planted far, far away. I’m standing here

⁶⁰ *Első találkozások Istennel* [First meetings with God], Letter 6; *Az arcátlan tolakodó* [The impudent intruder], OSZK Kt., f. 216/16, 32.

alone, without an heir, without roots really. [...] Sometimes I run around on the terrace or in the yard as if in a cage, I want to scream in pain: I am so depressed by confinement, that small spot of blue sky.⁶¹

At this point, Nagy was so overcome by malaise that he would remark years, even decades later that before his ordination, that he had seriously considered leaving the order.⁶² Ultimately, he did not; however, he often went through periods of trials and tribulations while continuing preparations to become a priest.

As his enthusiasm displaced doubt and fear, however, Nagy realized that he was not as alone as he had thought: many were concerned about him and his well-being. He recorded a discussion with his Provincial Superior in his diary which took place when Fr Jenő Somogyi⁶³ presented him with his characterizations and opinions just prior to his ordination. Nagy was confronted with several critical comments, some of which leveled rather strong accusations against his personality traits. He saw these as fair, and offering a road to further development: “he is wont to immediately tie himself,⁶⁴ but it’s apparent that he overcomes himself; he has big ambitions; he likes to brag; he can be cruel and rude; he is very impulsive, but he at once strongly restrains himself.”⁶⁵ At the end of their conversation, Fr Somogyi revealed a new perspective to him as if it were a natural fact: “regarding the far future, he confirmed what he had said earlier: I was expected to go to Budapest, since—as he said—I write easily and speak well. But this time he added: my organizational skills will first be put to a test. I believe he referred to me taking over leadership of the youth organizations from Fr Kerkai, while he completed his probation. This would be the test.”⁶⁶

61 *Diary excerpt* [Szeged] January 13 and 22; February 8, 1937, OSZK Kt., f. 216/13.

62 *Töhötöm Nagy’s letter to Erzsébet Nagy, Mrs Lajos Bihary*. Buenos Aires, 7 July 1948. Nógrád County Archive, National Archives of Hungary (henceforth MNL NL) XIII. 30. *Documents of the Bihary family*.

63 Jenő Somogyi SJ (1879–1954), was a Jesuit, and Provincial Superior between 1935 and 1942. Bikfalvi, *Magyar jezsuiták*, 210–211.

64 = be stubborn

65 *Diary excerpt* [Szeged] April 13, 1937. OSZK Kt., f. 216/13.

66 *Diary excerpt* [Szeged] April 13, 1937.

Nagy only came to understand the matter’s significance later on, but for the time being, he felt reassured about the path that had been lain before him.

I talked with Fr Kerkai today. He said Fr Provincial promised him my involvement in the movement right after I’d completed theology. It’s incredibly beneficial to me. Almost inconceivably beneficial. I am to drop into an excellently prepared job: I just have to continue it. Senior position at once: national secretary-general, diocesan director. I can get to know the people, pick up dialectal terms from the peasants. I can get familiar with the national leadership. I can gain prestige. I can acquire experience in social, economic issues, I can practice organizing. Anyway, and by any human standard, the best possible start! [...] I feel immensely active, a swift initiative! I have bold impulse in me, I can make people work. Then again, if I can manage, I’m already in, and I’m on my way.⁶⁷

When, on June 24, 1937, 400 years to the day after the ordination of Saint Ignatius and his colleagues, Töhötöm Nagy was ordained along with others, according to his enthusiastic diary entries, the young Jesuit priest basked in God’s grace.⁶⁸ And, although he had years of training ahead of him, he was ready to make his mark in the world.

67 *Diary excerpt* [Szeged] April 17, 1937.

68 *Diary excerpt* [Szeged] June, July 1937. OSZK Kt., f. 216/13. Also ordained were István Csér-Palkovits, Lajos Máriás (Gologi), Tibor Palánkay (Gausz), Mihály Legeza, László Palotay (Pájer), and József Szabó.

