

CONTEMPLATIVE DOMINICAN NUNS IN SZEGED

Abstract: The activity of the Dominican Contemplative Nuns is deeply rooted in Hungarian church, cultural and literary history. They were present in Hungary in the 13th to 16th centuries. It was in conjunction with the canonisation procedure (1943) of the best known Hungarian Dominican nun, Blessed Margaret of the House of Árpád (1242–1270) that the Dominican Order and the Hungarian Catholic church decided to re-establish a monastery of Dominican Contemplative Nuns in Hungary. The author shows the process of formation of the new community: a period of 25 years from the first aspirants to the consecration of the monastery. In tracing the events she throws light on the social environment and on the demands to which the new establishment responded.

Keywords: Dominican Order, Dominican nuns, Dominican spirituality, history of the Dominican Order, Dominican Order in Hungary, 20th century Hungarian church history

Prior to the canonisation of Blessed Margaret of the House of Árpád, in the early 1940s increasing efforts were made by the heads of the Dominican province in Hungary and the Hungarian Catholic church to set up a community of Dominican Contemplative nuns in Hungary. At first the idea was to re-establish the monastery that had been founded on Margaret Island in the mid-13th century. In 1944 the official negotiations were halted, but the intention was not dropped. In a letter dated December 1945 a few prominent Catholic figures in Szeged called for the establishment of a community of Dominican nuns in the city. The idea was soon supported by Endre Hamvas, Bishop of Csanád and also by the Dominican province and so a few years later, in September 1948 the contemplative community was formed in the city.

This article aims to outline the background of the establishment. The first section gives a brief overview of the history of the establishment of the Dominican Order and the presence of the nuns in Hungary. The intention is to give a better understanding of the background of the re-establishment. Then I shall attempt to show who thought the time had come and why to set up a female community that, despite its deep historical and cultural historical roots, had not been present in Hungary for more than 300 years. What social needs gave rise to this demand? Who were the persons behind the initiative? I also attempt to answer the question of why Szeged was chosen as the place for establishment of the community.

Dominican nuns in Hungary in the 13th to 17th centuries

The first monastery of Dominican contemplative nuns was set up in Hungary in Veszprem. In 1246 King Béla IV and his wife Queen Mary placed their youngest daughter, then aged four, in this monastery.¹ Their child who was offered to God in gratitude for deliverance from the Mongolian invasion found herself in a community where the principal task of the nuns was to pray continuously for the conversion of the pagans.² The main goal of their community life was to strive to be the prayerful background to the preaching friars of the order. They were helped in this by their triple vow, the psalms, the daily mass, the communal and private prayers and the spiritual readings. In addition to this they did housework and needlework – mainly making liturgical textiles.

In 1252 eighteen nuns moved to the monastery built on the Island of Rabbits (today Margaret Island) opposite Buda. In both places they dealt with the education of girls, bringing up daughters of noble families. On completion of their training most of the girls left the monastery and married, but some entered the order. A manuscript copying workshop operated within the walls of the monastery on the island.³

This flourishing monastic life was destroyed at the beginning of the Ottoman conquest. In the spring of 1540 the nuns fled from the island. The community at first functioned in Nagyvárad, later in Nagyszombat and finally was received by the Clarissa nuns in Pozsony where they continued to live in the Dominican spirit and were allowed to wear their habits. However, they gradually grew old and their numbers dwindled. The last Dominican nun in Hungary, Erzsébet Szegedy died in Pozsony in 1637.⁴

Background of the re-establishment

A Dominican female community was re-established in Hungary in 1868. However these sisters did not live a contemplative life, they belonged to the *regular Third Order* that had been formed, and did outside, so-called apostolic work.⁵

1 On her life, see: BÁLINT 1977. 156-160; on her legend: ÉRSZEGI 1983. 110-179.

2 HARSÁNYI 1938; KIRÁLY 1979.

3 For more detail, see: MADAS 2002, 2003; SCHWARZ 2007.

4 We know far less about the other female Dominican monasteries in Hungary. It is certain that there were also female Dominican communities in Székesfehérvár, Némethi, Lábatlan, Pécs, Beregszász, Beszterce, Kolozsvár, Segesvár and Nagyszeben. BERGOU s.d.; BÓLE 1944; HARSÁNYI 1938. 110-111; SCHWARZ 2007. 258-259.

5 The "hierarchy" of the Dominican Order is built up as follows:

The First Order comprises the friars – (*pater*) and lay brothers (*frater*).

The members of the *Second Order* are nuns living a contemplative life "within the walls" of a monastery; they do not carry out external, apostolic activity. There are two branches within the *Third Order*. The first comprises the *sisters* who commit themselves with vows; they live in a monastic community and besides the life of prayer also carry out external apostolic activity. They form the *Regular Third Order*. The *Secular Third Order* comprises persons who are single or married, who live in their families and the world, striving to live the Dominican spirituality as lay persons.

They chose Blessed Margaret of the House of Árpád as the patron saint of their *congregation*. Their centre, the *motherhouse*, was in Kőszeg, and they also had monasteries and various educational institutions in Kassa, Szombathely, Vasvár, Velem, Szarvaskend, Hódmezővásárhely and Szeged. In the eight decades up to 1948 when the church schools were nationalised, they dealt with the education of girls.⁶

Before the canonisation of Blessed Margaret of the House of Árpád (1943) serious consideration was given to the idea of reorganising the Second Order in Hungary. Because within the order the contemplative nuns were always under the supervision of the friars, the Dominican province took steps for the establishment.

In that period women with a vocation to be *Second Order, Contemplative Dominican* nuns entered monasteries in Austria and Luxembourg. They were trained as nuns there and on their return to Hungary took part in the re-establishment. One of these women was Margit Desits.⁷ She joined the *regular Third Order* in 1901; when she entered the convent she was given the name of M. (Mária) Evangelista. She took her vows on 30 August 1902 in Kőszeg. For two decades she lived and worked as a sister (as a teacher and prefect) in the *Congregation of Sisters of the Order of Saint Dominic named after Blessed Margaret of the House of Árpád*. However, at the age of 45 she left the community: on 26 May 1923 she officially left the regular Third Order and entered the contemplative Dominican monastery in Friesach, Carinthia. In her new community she was given the name Innocencia. After the period of novitiate she took her vows and became a valued member of the monastery. She remained in contact with the Dominican province in Hungary. After she took her vows P. Szádok Szabó, Provincial of the Dominican Friars at that time and P. Domonkos Ratnik, contacted the mother superior of the Friesach convent. Negotiations began on the possibilities and conditions for establishment of the Second Order in Hungary. They counted on Sister M. Innocencia Desits in the re-establishment.

Meanwhile Dr. László Brüchner, Sopron canon informed the Dominican fathers there that three young girls – namely Margit Dankó, her sister Jolán Dankó, and Róza Bédi – would like to become contemplative Dominican nuns. P. Szádok Szabó had thoroughly examined the case and formed the opinion that they would be fit both for the contemplative life, and for participation in the re-establishment of the Second Order. After consultation with the mother superior of the Friesach monastery, he sent the three aspirants to Luxembourg to learn the Dominican spirit and receive training for the order then, after taking their vows, together with Mother Pia, mother superior of Friesach, Sister M. Innocencia Desits and possibly other sisters, were to return home and begin establishment in Hungary.

⁶ MAGYAR 2007.

⁷ Margit M. Evangelista Desits / Innocencia, nun – born: 13 April 1878, Mór (Fejér County); entered: ?; temporary vows: ?; solemn vows: 30 August 1902; left: 26 May 1923; entered the contemplative Dominican monastery in Friesach (Austria): 1924. In 1938, after the Anschluss, she returned to Hungary and again entered the Third Order. Renewed solemn vows: 23 October 1939. †: 27 February 1948, Szombathely.

The movement for the canonisation of Blessed Margaret of the House of Árpád and the resulting growing demand to follow the example of Margaret (her voluntary sacrifice for her country) probably played a big part in their being sent out. The First World War, the revolutions of 1918-1919, the French and Romanian occupation of Hungary, the Trianon peace dictate, and then the Second World War all brought great suffering and tribulation for the whole country. In this situation the political leaders encouraged the broadest possible combined efforts of the nation. The Hungarian Catholic church also played an important part in these efforts.⁸ It strove to hold up as examples to follow for the country in its difficulties saints and blesseds who had lived in similarly difficult times but had nevertheless been able to remain true to their faith, their nation and their homeland. Blessed Margaret of the House of Árpád was one of these examples. She lived in a time when the country had to be rebuilt after the Mongolian invasion. Right from childhood until her early death (1270) she remained faithful to her parents' dedication. When she was able to decide for herself on her fate, she chose the Dominican monastery, life dedicated to God and sacrifice undertaken for her nation. She lived a deep, mystical life of prayer, and with her service to the poor and suffering she remained faithful to her monastic vocation in her everyday life. She lived a life full of self-denial and humiliations, but she bore witness with both her life and her death that sacrifice made for the nation is never in vain.

The example of this life was powerful even seven centuries later. This was why the movement for canonisation became so widely supported.

There were contemplative monasteries in Hungary. The Discalced Carmelite Sisters and the Visitation Order were well known and highly valued members of the Hungarian Catholic church. With the establishment of the monastery of Contemplative Dominican nuns, the intention was to create beside these a community that followed the example of Blessed Margaret of the House of Árpád, living a strict monastic life, offering continuous prayer and self-denial for the salvation of souls and in particular for Hungary.

In the Contemplative Dominican monastery in Limpertsberg, Luxembourg the Dankó sisters became candidate nuns, while Róza Bédi became a candidate lay sister. When taking their vows Margit Dankó was given the name M. Margit, Jolán Dankó became M. Antónia, and Róza Bédi became M. Bartholomea. Not long after taking her vows, Sister Margit contracted tuberculosis and died. She was buried in the monastery's cemetery.⁹

In 1937 a new candidate nun arrived from Hungary: Ilona Szegedy who was 23 years old at the time.¹⁰ She was born in Szombathely and came into contact with the Order through the Dominicans there. Because her personality appeared

⁸ BARNÁ 2014a; 2014b.

⁹ As Sister M. Ilona Szegedy recalled, she offered the sufferings she experienced in her life and sickness for the establishment of the Second Order in Hungary.

¹⁰ Sister M. Ilona, Ilona Szegedy – born: 10 August 1914, Szombathely; parents: Lajos Szegedy and Anna Nyitrai; entered the monastery: 1937 Limpertsberg, Luxembourg; temporary vows: 5th August 1939; solemn vows: 27th October 1946. †: 16th December 2011.

to be suitable, the Fathers decided to send her to Luxembourg for training. After she entered the monastery she was given the name M. Ilona.

Thus at the end of the 1930s three young sisters in Limpertsberg, Luxembourg (M. Antónia Dankó, M. Bartholomea Bédi, M. Ilona Szegedy) and two older women in Friesach (M. Innocencia Desits and the mother superior of the monastery, Mother Pia) were preparing to meet the requirements of canon law within a few years, making them suitable to establish a Contemplative Dominican monastery in Hungary.

However, the advance of Nazism thwarted the earlier plans. In 1938 Hitler entered Austria. One of the measures he took was to dissolve the monasteries and so the Friesach sisters too, had to leave their convent. Sister Innocencia was helped to escape to Hungary, where she again requested admission to the congregation of Third Order sisters. In keeping with the rules of the Order, the sister, who was by then 60 years old, completed the novitiate for the third time and on 23 October 1939 once again took her solemn vows. Although for twenty years she had earlier been called M. Evangelista in the congregation, after her return she was able to retain the name of M. Innocencia she had been given in the Second Order. She did not leave the Third Order again. She was in charge of the hostel for students of the sisters' schools in Kőszeg and later in Vasvár. According to one of the Order's records, "she painted and embroidered beautifully". She died in 1948 in the monastery in Szombathely.

The German army occupied Luxembourg in May 1940. A few months later, on 25 February 1941,¹¹ they dissolved the monastery of the Contemplative Dominican Nuns in Limpertsberg. The nuns were taken in trucks to Eberhardsklausen close to the German-Luxembourg border (but in German territory).¹² A small contemplative Dominican community had been operating here since 1919, established by the Limpertsberg community. Shortly after the nuns were divided into groups and taken elsewhere. Fifteen of them – including the Hungarian nuns – went to Arenberg, to the monastery of Third Order sisters.¹³ From here the Hungarian sisters managed to return to Hungary and joined the province of the Third Order sisters named after Blessed Margaret of the House of Árpád.¹⁴ At first, they were placed in the monastery in Kassa that had been returned following the First Vienna Award (1938). After this was lost their paths diverged in 1944: Sister M. Antónia Dankó was sent to the monastery in Kőszeg, M. Bartholomea Bédi to the monastery in Szeged, while M. Ilona Szegedy was given a place in the newly established study house in Budapest. But they all retained the hope that the establishment would be made soon and the contemplative life could begin in Hungary.

In this way the Hungarian nuns trained and prepared in the Second Order were in Hungary when, on 23 July 1943, Pope Pius XII proclaimed Margaret of the House of Árpád a saint.¹⁵ On 26 July, 1943, three days after the proclamation in

11 As Ilona Szegedy recalls, this day was Shrove Tuesday

12 Today Klausen – Rhein-Pfalz district, Germany. The monastery still stands, but it is empty.

13 Today part of Koblenz – Rhein-Pfalz district, Germany. The monastery still functions.

14 Communication from Sister M. Ilona Szegedy.

15 GERGELY 1984. 318-319.

Rome, the regular annual meeting of the heads of the Third Order nuns began in the Kőszeg motherhouse. The general mother superior reported that the Dominican fathers and the heads of the Hungarian Catholic church saw that the time had come to establish a contemplative monastery on Margaret Island. Prince Primate Jusztinián Serédi proposed the establishment of a health spa, the revenues from which could ensure the livelihood of the nuns settling on the island. The assets of Sister M. Jozefa Ébner, a member of the Third Order would have provided the initial capital for launching the establishment.¹⁶ Two (unnamed) ladies also contacted the fathers saying that they would like to join the new community and would contribute their dowries to the costs of the foundation. One of them offered 22,000 crowns for the purpose and the other 150,000 crowns. But neither the sisters nor the Dominican fathers gave approval for their admission. However, they offered to care for the two ladies for as long as they lived, to receive them as lifetime regular holiday guests in the health spa to be set up.¹⁷

A few months later, on 26th December 1943, Provincial Bertalan P. Badalik informed the congregation of Third Order sisters in writing about the meeting of the province held in Sopron by the Dominican Fathers. They decided there that they would still like to establish Second Order nuns living a contemplative life on Margaret Island, but they would not use the participation of the Third Order for this.¹⁸

Due to the events of the Second World War, official talks on establishment of the convent were stopped in 1944. The date for its establishment was shifted to an increasingly distant future, but discussions continued in the background. On the part of the Dominican Fathers, it was mainly P. Bertalan Badalik, P. Lajos Implom and P. Domonkos Ratnik who dealt with the matter. After the end of the war they began to look for a smaller house in Budapest suitable for use as a monastery, where a community could begin its life as soon as possible. In the search for a building they drew on the assistance of M. Ilona Szegedy, the Second Order nun who had returned from Luxembourg in 1941. The fathers regarded her as the most suitable person to head the future community.

In this situation, in January 1946 a new location and a new opportunity cropped up unexpectedly.

16 Vilma Ébner (widow Mrs Aurél Duschek) Sister M. Jozefa – born: 3rd March 1877, Budapest; entered the monastery: 5th December 1937; temporary vows: 23rd December 1938; solemn vows: 23rd December 1941; †: 31st October 1963, Hejce (Roman Catholic Care Home). Data gathered by the author from the Book of candidates entering and the Deceased of our congregation.

17 *Annalen der Congregation.*

18 *Annalen der Congregation.*

The invitation to Szeged

With her organising work Sister M. Innocencia Simóka¹⁹ who lived in the Szeged monastery of the Third Order sisters and worked as a kindergarten teacher played a very important role in the national movement initiating the canonisation of Blessed Margaret of the House of Árpád. It seems likely that it was also her contribution behind the document addressed to P. Bertalan Badalik, signed by a few intellectuals in Szeged on 27th December 1945, the feast of John the Divine. In this they ask the Dominican Principal to accept a house in Szeged since, given the situation in Budapest at that time the establishment of the convent on Margaret Island was not possible in the foreseeable future, so that the establishment could eventually start from the small community to be created in Szeged.²⁰ The authors of the text also mentioned that there were few members of monastic orders on the Great Plain and no contemplative monastery at all. The signatories²¹ expressed the hope that the Szeged house of the Dominican Contemplative nuns could open at the approaching great feast of the Csanád diocese, the 900th anniversary of the death of the martyr bishop Saint Gerard²².

Endre Hamvas Bishop of Csanád, who lived in Szeged, supported those making the request. A close acquaintance of Sister M. Innocencia Simóka, Mrs Mihály Tóth – widow of a Szeged municipal councillor – offered the 20-room house and garden in the town centre at No. 3 Madách Street that she had inherited from her husband and all her assets. At the same time she also indicated that she herself wished to enter the community. Sister Innocencia requested her church superior Sándor Kovács, Bishop of Szombathely, and was granted permission to leave the congregation of apostolic sisters and to be transferred from the Third Order to the Second Order. Sister M. Euphemia Bucsy, who had returned from the Gleisdorf monastery of the Dominican Sisters in Austria at the end of the war would also have joined them. Because Bishop Hamvas was unable to contact Provincial Bertalan Badalik in January 1946, and as he was informed by the Innocencia sisters that they were unable to contact the sisters in Luxembourg, and the authorisation of the Holy See and the Dominican Provincial was not needed for the new establishment, he gave his approval for the organisation of the monastery.

However Bishop Hamvas was troubled by the matter. In June 1946 he requested the Jesuit P. Antal Petrich, a teacher at the theological seminary in Szeged, to

19 Sister M. Innocencia Katalin Simóka – born: 4th October 1896, Herény (Vas County); parents: Jakab Simóka and Ilona Csempez; entered the monastery: 18th April 1927; temporary vows: 20th April 1928; solemn vows: 22nd August 1931; †: 10th July 1956, Jászberény (Roman Catholic Care Home). Data gathered by the author from the *Book of candidates entering and the Deceased of our congregation*.

20 Szeged – *Episcopal Archive of the Csanád Diocese (Szeged)*. IV. doboz 49/946.

21 The members of the “Committee formed to advance the establishment of a Second Order convent in Szeged”: Sándor Bálint, chairman of the committee, Géza Havass, secretary to the bishop, Dr. Lajos Dávid, retired university professor, Dr. Ödön Gaál, public prosecutor, Dr. Györgyi Sáfrán, teacher, Ilona Acsay, Csanád diocese head of KALÁSZ, P. István Békési SJ, Csanád diocese head of KALOT, and János Pálincás and Lajos Szegvári representing the Congregation of Mary.

22 24th September 1946.

look into the questions of canon law regarding the establishment. It was found that, in contrast to the *regular Third Order* the *contemplative nuns* came under the jurisdiction not of the bishop of the given diocese, but of the Dominican Fathers. Thus it was not the bishop but the male order that had the right to establish a new community. On 26th August 1946 Endre Hamvas discussed the matter in person with the Provincial Bertalan Badalik.²³ At this meeting Bishop Hamvas also learnt that the Fathers were engaged in well advanced negotiations with Rome – with the Apostolic See and the centre of the Dominican Order – on re-establishment of the Second Order in Hungary. And also that Sister M. Innocencia Simóka and her companions had failed to inform him that contemplative nuns with vows had been living in Hungary for years.²⁴ However firmly Sister Innocencia claimed that she and Sister Euphemia could simply transfer to the Second Order and be founding members of the monastery, the church rules did not allow this. After the meeting the bishop suspended his approval for operation of the monastery, then joined the petition of the fathers in which they sought the authorisation of the Holy See for establishment of the Second Order. The Bishop of Szombathely withdrew his permission for the transfer of Sister M. Innocencia Simóka. The heads of the Order refused the entry of Mrs Mihály Tóth, but they did not exclude the possibility of her participation in the life of the future community as an external member. But they found the building in Madách Street suitable for the purpose of a monastery, and since the widow maintained her offer of the house, preparations for the settlement in Szeged began in the autumn of 1946.

The fathers would have liked to appoint as leader of the community M. Ilona Szegedy who had returned from Luxembourg in 1942. However, there was the problem that – as she had entered the order in 1937 and in keeping with the rules in 1939 took her temporary vows for three years – because of the German occupation, the transfer of the convent then her escape to Hungary, she had been unable to take her solemn vows. From 1942 she renewed her temporary vows each year, trusting that after the war came to an end she would be able to return to her original community and take her solemn vows there in conformity with the Church Laws and the rules of the order. The Second World War ended in the spring of 1945, but there was no chance of returning to Luxembourg and later returning from there. The fathers therefore decided, in view of the extraordinary situation, to seek approval from Rome, from the Apostolic Holy See and the centre of the Dominican Order for her to take her vows in Hungary. The permission arrived and on 27th October 1946 Sister Ilona was able to take her solemn vows in her

23 Bertalan Badalik was born in 1890 in Hódmezővásárhely; he entered the Dominican Order in 1908, he was ordained in 1914 in Graz. He was head of the Hungarian Dominican province from 1938 to 1946. After his appointment ended, he became prior of the Dominican monastery attached to the Dominican church in Thököly Street, Budapest. On 30th July 1949 he was appointed Bishop of Veszprém by Pope Pius XII. On 15th August 1957 he was interned in Hejce by the state security force and kept under house arrest. Because of his serious illness he was allowed to leave for Budapest on 5th September 1965 with the permission of the State Office for Church Affairs. He died there on 13th October 1965. He was buried in Hódmezővásárhely, the place where he was born.

24 Sister Innocencia must have known about this as one of them, M. Bartholomea Bédi was serving in Szeged and Sister Innocencia was her companion in the monastery in Hóbiárt basa Street.

place of service at that time, in the chapel of the Third Order Dominican sisters' Budapest monastery, in the presence of P. Domonkos Ratnik, on behalf of the Dominican Provincial P. Bertalan Badalik. With this she became fit under canon law to lead the future community.²⁵

Provincial Bertalan Badalik had already in 1945 reached an agreement on the matter with the mother superior of the Dominican nuns in Limpertsberg. He had informed her that Sister Ilona was expected to take her solemn vows, and asked for two sisters from Luxembourg to take part in the Hungarian establishment. The mother superior in Luxembourg was not surprised by the request. It was for this reason that they had accepted the Hungarian aspirants, begun their training, and prayed every day for ten years for the establishment of a community in Hungary. But after the war ended things did not proceed as smoothly as they would have liked. Because of the transfers their community was still small and weak, it would take time for them to strengthen and be able to send sisters to a new establishment. Obtaining official papers was also a problem. Under the political conditions at the time, it appeared to be difficult for nuns with Luxembourg citizenship to move to Hungary. This left the possibility of establishing the community from Hungary and only with Hungarian nuns.

In the mean time coordination with Rome, the process of authorisation and petitions continued but the matter advanced only very slowly. After the elections in 1948 the communist party came to power in Hungary and this brought political changes. The state expropriated Mrs Mihály Tóth's house. It was divided into multiple apartments, only a small space was left for the widow and strangers moved in to the house. In May 1948 news came that one of the apartments would become vacant in early June. The Dominican Provincial at the time, P. Lajos Implom asked the Superior of the Third Order sisters, M. Remigia Schindele, to give her approval for sisters M. Ilona Szegedy and M. Bartholomea Bédi to move into the apartment when it became vacant, before others applied for it. A few weeks later the Third Order allowed M. Euphemia Bucsy and M. Augusztina Niczky to move into the house as well.²⁶ However P. Lajos Implom firmly refused to allow M. Innocencia Simóka to transfer to the Second Order.

In September 1948 Endre Hamvas Bishop of Csanád consecrated the monastery placed under the protection of Blessed Margaret of the House of Árpád. M. Ilona Szegedy became the superior, and the members of the community were M. Bartolomea Bédi, M. Euphemia Bucsy, M. Antónia Dankó and M. Augusztina Niczky²⁷. The nuns regarded their primary aim as being continual prayer and expiation for Hungary in its difficult situation, for the Hungarian Catholic church and the conversion of souls. Although they lived in the centre of the city, in a

25 A Dominican male monastery operated in Szent Domonkos Street, attached to the Dominican church in Thököly Street. At the request of the fathers the Third Order sisters established a small community here in 1945. The principal task of the five sisters placed here was to run the fathers' household.

26 In the same weeks talks were held on the nationalisation of the church schools.

27 Jolán Niczky – Sister M. Augusztina – born: 18th May 1905, Budapest, entered the monastery: 18th August 1927, temporary vows: 1928; solemn vows: 1932; †: 1st May 1971, Budapest. I have not yet found any information on an earlier connection with the Second Order.

place that was ill suited to the contemplative monastic life, they strove to create inner silence so that they could concentrate as fully as possible on their prayers.

Epilogue

They had barely two years of life together. Although the nuns did not live in complete withdrawal from the world – on the major feasts they held mass in their chapel and awaited believers for the Act of Adoration – their community was too small and too young to leave a deep imprint either on the church or on the life of the city. Their quiet life of expiation and prayer did not attract the attention of the outside world. This was despite the fact that the establishment took place after 25 years of preparation and it meant the re-establishment of an order that had a long history but had not been present in Hungary for three hundred years. Nor did contemporaries show interest in the fact that this happened in a place where the contemplative, monastic way of life had not been present for three centuries. This silence and silencing was due in great part to the change that had occurred in the social and political environment that did not favour the contemplative or even the monastic way of life.

With the dissolution of the monastic orders in 1950 the Dominican nuns had to leave their monastery too. They had to put aside their monastic habit and take secular jobs. But their vocation did not end. Their vows remained valid and each of them strove to keep their promise to God under the changed circumstances. Although they went their separate ways, they offered their lives, work, prayer, renunciations and trials for the same common goal: the Dominican Order and the conversion of souls.

The former monastery building still stands in Madách Street in Szeged, but no one today knows what an important effort was once made in this private house. This is why I have attempted with this article to outline the background of the establishment and to evoke the memory of those who made so many sacrifices for the creation of the community.²⁸

²⁸ I would like to express my thanks to the Apostolic Congregation of the Dominican Nuns named after Saint Margaret of the House of Árpád for permission to examine the archive of the order. I also gratefully preserve the words of Sister Ilona Szegedy († 2011), who shared with me her memories of the establishment of the Szeged monastery.

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Fig. 1. Hungarian nuns in Luxembourg: Soror Margit, Soror Annuntiata, Soror Bartholomea. Photo from the 1930s.



Fig. 2. Dominican nuns in Szeged (from left to the right) Augusztina Niczky M., Bartholomea Bédi M., Eufémia Bucsy M., Ilona Szegedy M., Antónia Dankó M. Photo 1949.