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The Czechoslovak State Security (StB¹) and the Vatican: How to Make a Priest and Vatican Diplomat

Czechosłowacka Służba Bezpieczeństwa Państwowego (StB) i Watykan: jak stworzyć księdza i dyplomatę watykańskiego

Abstract: The essay highlights the issue of penetration by the Czechoslovak secret police (StB) into Roman church circles. The StB managed to recruit through various methods several priests from Czechoslovakia, and the case study of Karel Simandl operating from Rome showcases peculiar features of recruitment and agent work. Cooperation lasted for 25 years, where the agent reported not just on the Church in Czechoslovakia, but also for instance on the GDR and Hungary. Although Karel Simandl became heavily compromised, after 1990 he held high-ranking positions in the Czech Church before being permanently assigned to the Vatican's Apostolic Nunciature in Berlin.

Keywords: Czechoslovakia, Vatican, Czechoslovak Secret Police (StB), priest agents, Karel Simandl

Streszczenie: Esej porusza kwestię infiltracji kręgów Kościoła Rzymskokatolickiego przez czechosłowacką komunistyczną Służbę Bezpieczeństwa Państwowego (Státní Bezpečnost, StB), która przy użyciu różnych metod zdołała zwerbować kilku księży z Czechosłowacji. Studium przypadku Karela Simandla, działającego w Rzymie, pokazuje charakterystyczne cechy werbunku i pracy agenturalnej. Współpraca Simandla z StB trwała 25 lat, podczas których agent donosił nie tylko na Kościół w Czechosłowacji, lecz także w NRD i na Węgrzech. Chociaż Simandl został poważnie skompromitowany, po 1990 r. zajmował wysokie stanowiska w Kościele czeskim, zanim został na stałe przeniesiony do Nuncjatury Apostolskiej w Berlinie.

¹ Czech: Státní Bezpečnost (1945–1990).

Słowa kluczowe: Czechosłowacja, Watykan, Státní Bezpečnost, StB, księża agenci, Karel Simandl

As the papal seat and the center of the global Catholic Church, the Vatican was always in the special focus of the Soviet Union and its satellite states in Eastern Europe. The Catholic Church was considered to be one of the more significant ideological enemies of the communist states. Therefore the intelligence agencies of the latter studied and analyzed the organization of the Church and tried to infiltrate as many of their own agents as possible into the Vatican or Catholic circles in Rome.

This article deals with a particular and peculiar case from Czechoslovakia during the 1970s and 1980s.² It had neither a significant bearing on specific Vatican policies during the pontificates of Paul VI and John Paul II nor on those of the Czechoslovak government in that period. Yet it is one of numerous Cold War examples of a continuous intelligence war on the micro level conducted by Eastern Bloc intelligence services no matter the actual political environment. It is also a study of egotistic ambitions and vanity that irresponsibly played into the hands of unscrupulous communist intelligence forces.

As far as sources are concerned, unfortunately the Vatican archives are only accessible up to the end of the pontificate of Pope Pius XII (1939–1958), i.e. not for the period researched here. The archives of the (Czech) Pontifical “Collegium Nepomucenum” in Rome are also unavailable for this period, and the agent priest and his former handlers involved were unwilling to provide any statements. The study has therefore to be based largely on the nevertheless rich material from the StB archives in Prague and some other pertinent sources.

I. The StB in the Vatican

The intelligence services of the socialist states of the Eastern Bloc managed to recruit several churchmen or other collaborators, such as journalists or “Vaticanists” in the city of Rome and the Vatican itself. Another option was to infiltrate their own agents into Rome, have them educated there in theology and eventually ordained as priests.

That there were “leaks” in Rome and the Vatican was known to almost everyone. According to a report by the East German Bishop Gerhard Schaffran of Görlitz from 1968, even Pope Paul VI asked Slovak Bishop Pavol Hnilica³ which documents he

² This study was made possible as part of the project No. DH23P03OVV076 supported by the Czech Ministry of Culture within the NAKI III program.

³ Pavol M. Hnilica (1921–2006) – Slovak Jesuit bishop, 1941 entry into the Jesuit Order, 1950 secret priestly ordination, 1951 secret episcopal ordination, emigration to Austria and Italy, 1964 publication of his episcopal ordination. Hnilica had the confidence of Pope Paul VI and many Catholic faithful from Czechoslovakia. He was a staunch anti-communist.

could give to his own Secretariat of State and which he should rather keep in his private library.⁴

The East German State Security had agents in the Vatican mainly among church journalists, such as Benedictine Father Karl Joseph Eugen Brammertz (1915–1987, IM “Lichtblick”), staff member of the German-language weekly *L'Osservatore Romano*, or Alfons Waschbüsch (b. 1944, IM “Antonius”), Rome correspondent of the “Centrum Informationis Catholicum (CIC),” later of the Catholic News Agency (KNA).⁶ Also, the Polish Security Service (SB) had many agents in Rome among both local and foreign journalists and further among Polish priests.⁷ The KGB for example, in cooperation with the Czechoslovak StB, even managed to have a listening device installed in the lamp of Cardinal Agostino Casaroli in 1987 by the wife of his relative Irena Toretto (Trolerová, listed by the StB as “Lupina”), who may have even worked as his secretary.⁸

II. Objects of Interest to the StB in Rome and the Vatican

The Czechoslovak intelligence service based in Rome focused not only on Italy, but also on the Vatican itself as the “ideological diversion center of the Catholic Church and part of the imperialist front,”⁹ and then as well on some other church institutions outside the ecclesiastical state. By “Vatican,” the StB meant the Pope himself and the administration of the Roman Curia, so in essence the Apostolic See. Any details on the Vatican were of major interest to the intelligence service in order to potentially exploit them for its own purposes. The StB was especially interested in Czech and Slovak emigrants in Rome who were employed in the Curia or otherwise of some importance, and later mostly in those curia employees who were somehow involved in the Vatican’s Ostpolitik vis-a-vis the socialist countries in Eastern Europe.

Another object of StB interest in Rome was Radio Vaticana (RV), which the Czechoslovak communists called a “hate station,” jamming its broadcasting (like the broadcasting of other Western radios such as Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty). Since 1947, RV had been broadcasting in both languages of Czechoslovakia, namely in Czech and Slovak. Only for a short time there was a common editorial office for

⁴ Cf. B. Schaefer, *Staat und katholische Kirche in der DDR*, Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau, 1998, p. 212.

⁵ Meaning “ray of hope” (for the GDR state security) in German.

⁶ Cf. B. Schaefer, “Pater ‘Lichtblick’ OSB und ‘Antonius’ Waschbüsch: Endgültig enttarnt – Spione im katholischen Kirchendienst,” *Imprimatur* 33 (1) (2000); F. Sobiech, “Joseph Ratzinger und die Staatssicherheit der DDR,” *Mitteilungen Institut Papst Benedikt XVI* 13 (2020), pp. 105–137. W. Kaltefleiter and H.-P. Oswald, *Spione im Vatikan. Die Päpste im Visier der Geheimdienste*, Munich: Pattloch, 2006, pp. 298–302.

⁷ Cf. W. Bułhak, *Wywiad PRL a Watykan 1962–1978*, Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2019.

⁸ Cf. “31. odbor I. správy,” entry in *Slovník pojmů komunistických bezpečnostních složek at iBadatelna. Dokumentační portál o Státní bezpečnosti* website, <https://ibadatelna.cz/cs/slovník/31-odbor-i-spravy> (accessed 15 December 2022). K. Pacner, *Českoslovenští vyzvědači*, Praha: Kniha Zlín, 2020, pp. 457–459.

⁹ Archiv Bezpečnostních Složek, Prague (Security Services Archive, hereinafter: ABS), Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 46428, TS JAB – Proposal for long-term deployment abroad dated 18 June 1976.

both languages in RV with Father Václav Feřt SJ as the director. In exile, relations between the two nations of Czechs and Slovaks soon escalated into conflicts, whereby the latter desired to be rather politically independent as the Slovak State had been during the World War II. The exile from Czechoslovakia was thus separated decades before the formation of the Czech and Slovak Republics in 1993 after the Cold War had ended. The other directors of the Czech section of Radio Vaticana were Fr. Petr Ovečka SJ (1953–1970) and Fr. Josef Koláček SJ (1971–2001). Many Czech emigre priests, theologians, and theology students in Rome helped out as editors.¹⁰ Slovak theology students and priests also helped out in their language section of RV.

In general, the Czechoslovak intelligence service focused on all Czech and Slovak emigrants in Rome and in Italy. Both post-1948 and post-1968 emigrants (with regard to Slovaks already post-1945 emigrants) in foreign exile met regularly and formed associations as well as parishes. One of the most important emigrants from Czechoslovakia, who later became known for his radical anti-communism, was the above-mentioned secret bishop Pavol M. Hnilica SJ.¹¹

Candidates for the priesthood among the emigrants lived in the Pontifical Collegium Nepomucenum, which had been established in 1929 in Rome as a college for candidates for the priesthood from Czechoslovakia. The Nepomucenum was later also the home of the Christian Academy, which worked mainly as a publisher of Czech religious literature. In 1963, the Pontifical Slovak Institute of St. Cyril and Methodius was established, where Slovak religious literature was produced and Slovak missions abroad were organized. For Czech pilgrims to Rome, the Czech Religious Center Velehrad was founded in 1969.

All these objects and institutions inhabited or managed by emigrants from Czechoslovakia became targets of StB interest in Rome as “centers of anti-state activity.”

III. The StB Rezidentura in Rome

The Rome Rezidentura of the StB in Italy was one of its largest in Europe after Bonn, London, Paris, and Brussels. In November 1989, for instance, there was one signal intelligence specialist and seven case officers working there.¹² The specific

¹⁰ Cf. S. Vodičková, “Slyšte to, všichni lidé, všichni obyvatelé světa, naslouchejte. O vysílání české redakce Vatikánského rozhlasu,” *Paměť a dějiny* 1 (2014), pp. 45–57.

¹¹ Cf. B. Katrebová Blehová, “Biskup Pavol Hnilica w oczach Państwowej Służby Bezpieczeństwa (Štátnej bezpečnosti),” *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość* 37 (1) (2021), pp. 188–224.

¹² Cf. “Hlavní správa rozvědky SNB – I. správa SNB,” entry at Ústav pro Studium Totalitních Režimů website, <https://www.ustrcr.cz/uvod/listopad-1989/organizace-a-personalie/hlavni-sprava-rozvedky-snb-i-sprava-snb/> (accessed 15 December 2022). Nikola Herpaiová in her bachelor thesis lists only 3 employees of the secret service in 1989 in the Rezidentura in Rome. Cf. N. Herpaiová, *Personální obsazení rezidentur československé civilní rozvědky během tzv. studené války v Itálii – statistické vyhodnocení*, BA thesis at TU Liberec, 2018, p. 33.

feature of the Rome Rezidentura, apart from analysis of the political and economic situation in Italy, was its additional orientation towards the object “Ruler,” as the StB called the center of the Catholic Church. All StB officers though were legalized as diplomats of the Czechoslovak Embassy to Italy.

An infamous event in which the Czechoslovak intelligence service was involved in Italy was the attempted assassination in February 1975 of Jiří Pelikán¹³, a well-known émigré and editor of the exile magazine “Listy” in Rome. On the eve of his birthday, he received a book package. However, it looked suspicious to him; so he opened it very carefully. When he noticed smoke, he threw the package into the corner of the room where it exploded; this was the only reason why he was not injured. This action was carried out by two employees of the Roman Rezidentura, Jaroslav Forst (“Fukan”) and Milan Jelínek (“Brodský”), a new arrival to Rome.¹⁴

IV. Czechoslovak Agents in Roman Church Circles

Among the first agents in the Roman Nepomucenum was Vladimír Třebín (1923–1994, agent “Suchý”). During World War II, Třebín was a writer for the collaborationist organization Vlajka. After the war, he joined the Premonstratensian Order (the Norbertines or White Canons). In 1949 Třebín tried to emigrate, but it did not work out and he was imprisoned for three years until 1952. In 1954 the StB recruited him for cooperation. With the help of the intelligence service he “emigrated” to Rome via Austria in 1956. As a cover, he took with him at the time the unsuspecting Karel Skalický (b. 1934), who later became a professor at Rome’s Lateran University. Třebín lived in the Nepomucenum until 1960 and studied at the Lateran University. During that time, he met regularly with his intelligence handlers. In 1960, he was dismissed from the Nepomucenum because of his behavior and accused of arrogance and homosexual activity. For two years, he then searched in vain for ordination opportunities at the diocesan seminary of Klagenfurt in Austria, and also joined the Teutonic Order. In 1962 he returned to Czechoslovakia and, after additional difficulties, was ultimately ordained to the priesthood. This happened through substantial help from the StB, which had exerted pressure on the elderly bishop Róbert Pobožný. Třebín then remained in priestly service basically until his retirement and continued to work clandestinely for the StB.¹⁵

¹³ Jiří Pelikán (1923–1999) – Czech journalist of Jewish origin. Communist career, 1963–1968 director of Czechoslovak state television. Because of his pro-reformist position during the Prague Spring, he was seconded from television and appointed cultural attaché in Italy. In 1969 he refused the order to return. He received Italian citizenship, and in 1979 was elected to the European Parliament for the Italian Socialist Party.

¹⁴ Cf. R. Schovánek, “Atentát na Pelikána,” *Minulost* 6 June 2015, <https://www.minulost.cz/cs/atentat-na-pelikana> (accessed 15 December 2022).

¹⁵ Cf. O. Blažek, “Vladimír Třebín. Životní příběh agenta StB v kněžském katolickém exilu v Římě,” *Marginalia historica* 6 (1) (2015), pp. 9–37.

In the same year as Třebín had returned to Czechoslovakia as a not particularly successful agent abroad, another Czech candidate for the priesthood and agent arrived in Rome. Jozef Král (b. 1938), who was interrogated by the StB in 1958 as a member of a secret group of the lay apostolate and very soon worked as agent “Magnus,” “emigrated” to Rome in 1962 under the guidance of the StB. There he lived in the Nepomucenum, studied theology, and was ordained as a priest in 1971. From 1977 to 2001, he worked as an editor of the Slovak section of Radio Vaticana. Furthermore, he had contacts especially with Slovak emigrants in the Slovak Institute of St. Cyril and Methodius and also visited the apartment of Bishop Hnilica. He cooperated with the StB until November 1989.¹⁶ This did not seem to be a major problem for the Catholic Church in Rome after the end of the Cold War; currently he is a canon of the Roman Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore.¹⁷

In the 1960s and 1970s, there were also additional priests in Rome from whom the StB was able to obtain information, especially those who either wanted to move back to Czechoslovakia for good, or those who at least wished to meet their parents and relatives again after many years in exile. For example, Jaroslav Kunčík (b. 1934), who lived as a priest in the Nepomucenum at the same time as Cardinal Josef Beran, continued to work in the Velehrad house. There he acted as agent “Sud” from 1968 and hoped for a return to Czechoslovakia with his Italian mistress.¹⁸ Vladimír Boublík (1928–1974), a professor of fundamental theology at the Lateran University, who probably never had signed a formal cooperation with the intelligence service, met as “Detva” with the staff of the StB Roman Rezidentura from 1964 until his death in 1974 when he was at home in Czechoslovakia visiting his sick mother.¹⁹ The StB also gained a lot of information from Vatican diplomat Ján (John) Bukovský (1924–2010), who was allowed to travel to the Eastern Bloc countries as a staff member of Cardinal Agostino Casaroli in the Sacred Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs. At the same time and because of his travel assignments, Bukovský had to have contacts with “representatives” of the Czechoslovak embassy in a kind of semi-official capacity. He was listed in the StB files as “CANDA” without having formally signed a cooperation agreement.²⁰

¹⁶ Cf. S. Vodičková, “Slyšte to,” p. 55; ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 43094.

¹⁷ Cf. “The Chapter,” Papal Basilica of Saint Mary Major website, https://www.vatican.va/various/basiliche/sm_maggiore/en/capitolo/capitolo.htm (accessed 15 December 2022).

¹⁸ Cf. K. Pacner, *Českoslovenští vyzvědači*, pp. 447–451; ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 45124.

¹⁹ Cf. O. Blažek, *Proměny diskurzů českého katolického exilu v Itálii 1962–1969*, PhD thesis at Faculty of Education, Charles university, Prague, 2017 (online: <https://dspace.cuni.cz/handle/20.500.11956/91943>); K. Pacner, *Českoslovenští vyzvědači*, pp. 451–453.

²⁰ Cf. ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 10442 (Object: Ruler – Vatican), Subfile No. 119. The StB wrote of CANDA in 1976: “Useful contact working directly in the Vatican. There is both no prospect and no motive to get him to cooperate.” ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 38826 (Personal file of “Brodský”), Minutes of meeting with Brodský, 18 June 1976.

In the 1980s, the milieu of Czech and Slovak emigres from church circles in Rome was “enriched” by Jindřich Holeček (b. 1954). Holeček had studied history and archival studies in Prague until 1978, and at the faculty there he was known as one of the enthusiastic Marxists. During his military service, he had become an informant for military counterintelligence. Afterwards he was employed by the civilian intelligence service as a “convert” to the underground church, especially the Dominican Order (“Čerich,” “Juvan”). His information led to the closure of a secret printing house of the Dominican sisters. In 1982, with the help of the StB, he “emigrated” to Rome where he studied theology. In 1985, he was expelled from the Nepomucenum for disciplinary offenses. Afterwards he joined the Pauline Order, since as a diocesan candidate for the priesthood he had no chance for ordination. Until November 1989, he met with his StB case officer in Rome. In 1993, he received the priestly ordination as a Paulist in Brno²¹ and nowadays he is active in rural pastoral care.

V. The Case of Karel Simandl: Prelude in Czechoslovakia

Family Background

Karel Simandl comes from the district town of Znojmo in South Moravia, where he was born in 1955. He was the youngest child and had an older sister and brother. His father was a baker, his mother worked as a cook in a children’s home. She was very fond of children and took some from that home to her house on weekends. At work, the mother survived an explosion in the kitchen with some victims, experienced a nervous breakdown and fell ill with cancer. When Simandl was just 10 years old, his mother died. The family was religious and the mother’s great, perhaps even last wish was that Karel would become a priest. He served in the church as an altar boy and later organized the younger altar boys. In that process, he became acquainted with several priests and religious sisters from the Znojmo area and was in close contact with Dominican priests from Znojmo. From 1969 onwards, he had letter correspondence with Czech Jesuit Petr Ovečka, and later also with Fr. Josef Kolář SJ, both editors of *Radio Vaticana*, and also with Salesian Vojtěch Hrubý, the director of the pilgrimage house Velehrad in Rome.

In 1973, his father remarried and moved to a different city. Karel was 17 years old at that time and both of his older siblings were already married. His seven years older sister took care of Karel until 1974, when she moved away from Znojmo with her family. After that, Karel continued to live alone in his parents’ house (before he moved in 1975 to a small apartment) and finished his years at high school. His aunt and her daughter helped him out when he was sick.

Simandl, a gifted student and devout Catholic, applied to the Faculty of Theology in Litoměřice in 1974 after graduating from high school. But he was not admitted,

²¹ Cf. S. Vodičková, “Slyšte to,” p. 55; ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 47468.

probably because of a fixed low admission rate, which had been reintroduced by the communist regime after the end of the Prague Spring in 1968. Of course, the regime also hindered the study of theology in other ways. Simandl had to enter a profession for a living and began to work at a post office. Religious sisters provided him with the opportunity to study theology secretly with Franciscans or Salesians. For a brief time, he lived in Prague for a month in the autumn of 1974 and worked in the hospital as a paramedic. But then he returned to Znojmo and rejected the option of secret theological studies.²²

A Letter to the Minister

In December of 1974, the then 19-year-old Karel Simandl did something that hardly any other aspirant for priesthood before him had ever undertaken; he wrote directly to the Czechoslovak Minister of the Interior, Jaromír Obzina²³, and offered his services to the StB: “Namely, I would like to cooperate with the Czechoslovak intelligence service, and that is why I am turning to you. [...] According to my acquaintances, I am a very intelligent, friendly person who makes contacts with unknown people very easily. People trust me because of my nature and behavior. I would be very interested in working in the service of the Czechoslovak secret service, and I would like to make up for my previous behavior by my honest, devoted work and help our socialist homeland in its defense against machinations of the reaction. I have realized that especially in church circles there are very many enemies of our socialist life. I could use my abundant former knowledge of the church’s life. [...] I believe I fulfilled the requirements to become a collaborator of our intelligence service. I have a sincere interest in this work.”²⁴

This letter did obviously not remain without a response. First Simandl was inconspicuously checked, by both technical services (probably telephone tapping, opening of mail, etc.) and agents (both the Dean of Znojmo and the Dean of the nearby place of Vranov, a priest who had taught Simandl in Latin, were StB agents).

In June 1975, it finally came to the recruitment of the agent: “The goal of the recruitment is to educate, study, and compromise him in the ČSSR as an agent, for a long-term deposition in 1976 or 1977 into the object ‘RULER’ [...] For espionage, besides contacts, he has some personal and other requirements, such as a fairly good knowledge and orientation about church issues, regulated by the effort of a future priest, a very polite and intelligent behavior, an ability to win the trust of people even

²² Cf. ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 46428.

²³ Jaromír Obzina (1929–2003) – 1953–1956 studied at the (communist) party college in Moscow, 1973–1983 Minister of the Interior, 1983–1989 Deputy Prime Minister.

²⁴ ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 46428, Letter of 1 December 1974 from Simandl to Obzina. According to Card. Dominik Duka, Simandl went this way after the advice of a priest he knew, who was a member of the Organization of Peace Priests (and certainly an agent). Cf. M. Zrno, “Jsme stále decimováni padesáti lety komunismu. Rozhovor s královéhradeckým biskupem Dominikem Dukou OP,” http://www.listar.cz/2007/jsme_stale_decimovani_komunismem_20070124.htm (accessed 15 December 2022).

in a hostile environment, also ambition, distrust, and quick reaction. [...] The named is acquired due to the combination of the ideological and psychological motive.”²⁵

At the same time, the intelligence service was aware that Simandl had an almost panicked fear that his cooperation with the StB might be revealed. On the 1 July 1975, the decisive interview with the StB took place in a hunter's lodge. Shortly before, Simandl had suffered the rejection of his second application to the Theological Seminar in Litoměřice. At that time, however, he had already been in contact with StB for three months. Thus, it is possible that the secret service influenced the application to the Theological Seminar because the StB had its own different plans with Simandl. Before the interview in the hunter's lodge, he had already delivered to the StB 27 written reports with information about church circles.

Three people from the StB were present at the interview: from the 31st Department of the I Directorate (Správa) of the Ministry of Interior (counter-espionage, ideological diversion, and emigration) the representative of the Head of the Department, Václav Lenert (“Lahoda”), then Miloš Dospiva (“Kotva”), and finally a representative of the Brno StB branch. At the end of the meeting, Simandl signed the cooperation agreement with the intelligence service.

During the interview, the plan of sending Simandl to Rome in the long run was discussed in detail; it would be up to him to decide whether he would graduate in theology, or whether he would want to move to journalism or political science after a few years and possibly start a family. He could also decide to work at the Vatican as a layman. “JAB,” the agent name assigned to him, “is assuming the second option for now,” the StB report stated. Karel Simandl was assured that in this case of faked “emigration,” he would not suffer any material damage in the sense of loss of property at home in Czechoslovakia. His return to the home country would be facilitated if necessary.²⁶

Areas of “Work” for Agent “JAB” in Czechoslovakia

At the above meeting, Simandl was given several tasks to prove himself to the StB before the envisaged move to Rome. He had to correspond with emigrants in Rome, such as the Jesuits Koláček and Ovečka, and the Salesian from the Velehrad House, Hrubý. Sometimes Simandl also wrote his letters from Poland and received responses to a Polish address.

His second area of operation was monitoring the underground church in Brno that organized secret studies of theology. By 1975, the StB already knew a lot about the structure of the Koinótés community founded by Felix M. Davídek (1921–1988)²⁷, and about his secret episcopal ordination and many secretly ordained clerics.

²⁵ ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 46428, Proposal of 6 June 1975 for recruiting the agent.

²⁶ Cf. ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 46428, Report dated 2 July 1975 on obtaining the employee.

²⁷ Felix Maria Davídek (1921–1988) – ordained priest in 1945, imprisoned 1950–1964. Afterwards, he organized the secret study of theology and founded the Koinótés community. In 1967, he received the episcopal ordination in secret. The Koinótés community broke up over the issue of women's ordination. Several

Simandl specifically knew Ivan Vladimír Vítek CFSsS (1931–2000), a priest secretly ordained by Davídek in 1968 and a member of the Congregation of the Petrites.²⁸ Unfortunately, more detailed information about these contacts of Simandl in Brno have not been preserved because many documents and all reports from that period have been destroyed by the StB.

In May 1976, Simandl moved to Brno in accordance with the wishes of the secret service. At that time, there were a total of 32 secret meetings. He delivered a total of 80 handwritten reports on characteristics of his personal contacts, especially with priests critical of the regime. Furthermore, he also provided information on secret theological studies in Prague and Brno. Simandl was characterized as very reserved and suspicious, ambitious, intelligent, complacent, solitary, and with a tendency to pessimism. His interests were said to include history (Baroque period), nature, individual tourism, culture, books, and music. “He is almost fearfully tidy.”²⁹ In Brno, Simandl lived in a sublet with Mrs. Julie Weinbergerová, who as a deeply devout Catholic worked with young people and maintained close contacts with the underground church. She also knew the editor of Radio Vaticana, Josef Koláček SJ, who himself had been secretly ordained as a priest by Felix Davídek.

Simandl’s third application to the Seminar of Theology in Litoměřice, this time only formal, was again unsuccessful. At that point, he was already being prepared for his “emigration” – he was taught observations, ciphers, forms of communication, etc. Furthermore, Simandl wrote to Josef Koláček about his intention to make a trip as a tourist to Tunisia in the fall³⁰ from where his “escape” to Rome was supposed to be staged.

Simandl also had contacts in Poland. The first time he took part in a theological summer camp was in the summer of 1973. In 1975, Simandl was even able to visit a bishop in Cracow who informed him about the possibility of studying theology in secret.³¹ The name of the bishop is not provided; Cracow Archbishop and Cardinal Karol Wojtyła had four auxiliary bishops during that time. Since the 1960s, dozens of Czechs and Slovaks had secretly been ordained as priests in Cracow by the resident Polish bishops there.

independent groups of the underground church though continued to exist further. Cf. P. Fiala and J. Hanuš, *Die verborgene Kirche. Felix M. Davídek und die Gemeinschaft Koinótés*, Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2004. E. Vybíralová, *Untergrundkirche und geheime Weihen. Eine kirchenrechtliche Untersuchung der Situation in der Tschechoslowakei 1948–1989*, Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2019.

²⁸ Cf. ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 46428, Report dated 2 July 1975 on obtaining the employee. Vítek is “driver of the psychiatric clinic, actively involved in the secret study and consecration in Brno with his friends Josef Fiala, Stanislav Štěpaník and others. Vítek also reckoned with JAB, but because in the autumn of 1975 the member of the group Štěpaník was arrested, mutual contacts, also the activity of the group, ceased. Vítek is financially supported by the religious sisters, he gives them the blessing.” ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 46428, Memorandum dated 18 May 1976.

²⁹ ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 46428, Memorandum dated 18 May 1976.

³⁰ Cf. ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 46428, Memorandum dated 18 May 1976.

³¹ Cf. ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 46428, Memorandum dated 18 May 1976.

The “Kompromat”

Before a recruited agent was sent abroad, he had to compromise himself in the eyes of the StB with compromising material (“kompromat” in KGB diction³²) and thus become permanently tied to the intelligence service out of fear of being exposed. Simandl had compromised himself in multiple regards by his handwritten letter to the Minister of Interior, by handwritten signatures to confirm financial rewards, and by dozens of reports about his acquaintances in church circles, among others from the secret theology studies of the Franciscans and the underground church in Brno. Furthermore, he had allowed himself to be photographed at a meeting with the StB people in front of the hunter’s hut, where the intelligence officer had put his hand on Karel Simandl’s shoulder.

The Assigned Mission of Karel Simandl: An StB Asset in Rome

Before being sent to Rome, it was agreed that Simandl could return to Czechoslovakia if the Czech priests in Rome with whom he was in contact (Kolářek, Hrubý, Ovečka) refused to help him to study theology and become ordained in Rome. In Tunisia itself, where the “escape” was to be staged, one or two meetings with the StB were planned.

Before the journey, Simandl received training in several subjects: Intelligence services in Italy (methods of Italian counterespionage), the situation in Vatican and in the Roman Curia (political currents, Eastern Policy of the Vatican under Casaroli), Czech priest emigration in Rome, and studies at the University Pro Deo. Furthermore, technical necessities for conducting espionage were discussed: Forms of personal connection with StB handlers (ordinary/extraordinary meeting, password, recognition signs, changing appointments, warning signals), and the non-personal contact (“dead drop” aka dead letterbox and cover addresses). The preparations went into much detail – for example, in case of danger a newspaper should be held in the right hand, which was supposed to mean “do not approach.” Meetings with StB superiors were to take place every two months, ideally in another country, preferably Austria) in the summer.

The Tunisia trip was paid for by the StB in full. In addition, it was agreed that Simandl would receive 500 Czechoslovak Korunas monthly on his account. His pension insurance in Czechoslovakia would be paid all the time. He was promised that his family would not be discriminated against, and in the case of his return he would receive “amnesty,” appropriate accommodation, and employment.³³

In September 1976, Simandl traveled to Tunisia and “escaped” from there as a “refugee from communism” to Rome. At the airport, he declared that he wanted to become a priest and go to Nepomucenum. The then rector of the this Papal College,

³² *Компрометирующий материал* (*komprometiruyushchiy material*) in Russian, i.e. “compromising material.”

³³ Cf. ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 46428, Agent “JAB” – Proposal for long-term secondment abroad dated 18 June 1976.

František Planner, came to pick him up there. Josef Koláček helped him with the residence permit for Italy, as Radio Vaticana had contacts with the Italian Ministry of the Interior.³⁴ His studies in theology were also financially supported by Anna Beran, the chief secretary of Caritas in Vienna, and her office collaborator, Flavia Zincke.³⁵

In Rome, StB officer Milan Jelínek “Brodský”³⁶ became his handler. Simandl successfully studied at the Lateran University, and in December 1981 he was ordained as a priest. Almost no documents or reports from this period have been preserved in his file as most were destroyed. However, some reports have been preserved as found in other files, such as in the large case-file (so-called “object case-file”) on the “Object Ruler.”³⁷ Some receipts remained in his file, for example from December 1980, or from March and August 1981, when he met in Vienna with his handlers. Before those meetings, around the academic year of 1978/79, Simandl did not attend any meetings – at that time there was allegedly a “spymania” in the Nepomucenum and he was afraid.³⁸ Otherwise he regularly received financial support from the StB, so for instance in December 1980 in Vienna 150,000 Italian Lira, in December 1981 300,000 Lira, or in July 1988 900,000 Lira.³⁹

Certainly, Simandl informed the intelligence service during that time about other residents of the Nepomucenum, his fellow students and his superiors. The StB agents in Nepomucenum (at that time “JAB,” “Fortis,”⁴⁰ “Udatný”⁴¹) were supposed to monitor each other. Simandl was also tasked with suggesting potential other agent recruits from Nepomucenum, attending events in Velehrad House or the Christian Academy, learning more foreign languages, and strengthening his position in the college and within the emigration.⁴² Obviously, most of the time Simandl had to

³⁴ Interview by Eva Vybiralová with Fr. Josef Koláček SJ, 29 May 2018.

³⁵ E-Mail from Father Josef Rudolf Erkner, former secretary to Berlin Cardinal Joachim Meisner, to the authors, 14 October 2024.

³⁶ Milan Jelínek “Brodský” (b. 1944) – graduate of the studies of philosophy, history and sociology (he called himself a “doctor of philosophy”). In 1968, he completed a course at the school of espionage, after which he dealt with the Vatican issue and the issue of priests-emigrants. He had a good knowledge of foreign languages. In 1974–1981 he was in Rezidentura in Rome. In 1981–1982, he attended a one-year study at the spy school in Moscow. From 1982–1984, he was Representative of the Head of the 31st Department of the I Directorate (Správa) of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (counter-espionage, ideological diversion and emigration). From 1984–1990, he was Head of the 31st Department (after the 1988 StB-reform of the departments Head of the 26th Department). Dismissed from the service in 1990. Cf. ABS, Personnel Files of the Members of the Ministry of Interior, No. 2799/44.

³⁷ Cf. ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 10442 (Object: Ruler – Vatican), Subfile No. 172.

³⁸ See ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 38826 (Personal file of “Brodský”), Minutes of meeting with Brodský, 9 March 1978.

³⁹ Cf. ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 46428, Subfile 030.

⁴⁰ Agent “Fortis” – PhDr. Jiří Marsa (1945–2015) – after studying at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University in Prague, he worked at the National Museum in Prague and then at the Regional Centre for State Monument Care and Nature Conservation in České Budějovice. In 1978, he emigrated via Austria to Rome, where he studied theology. After returning to Czechoslovakia, he married. ABS, Fond Investigative files, File No. V.4331 CB; F. Kvapil, “Velký muž s kloboukem,” *Hlubocký zpravodaj* 4 (2022), p. 9.

⁴¹ Agent “Udatný” has not yet been identified.

⁴² Cf. ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 38826 (Personal file of “Brodský”), Minutes, 2 April 1979.

study theology diligently, in order to manage to receive a licentiate or doctorate in theology and canon law and thus to be able to work in ecclesiastical administration (Roman Curia) or in Vatican diplomacy.⁴³

He also helped out in the Czech editorial office of Radio Vaticana, since the editors had called on all Czech priests and candidates for the priesthood in Rome to help with the radio. Fr. Josef Koláček SJ, the head of the Czech section at the time recalled: “Regularly Simandl, Holeček and maybe someone else helped [...] Simandl quite regularly, Holeček a few times [...] In retrospect, I was aware of Simandl’s interest in our filing cabinet, having seen him rummaging through it once or twice. It didn’t even occur to me that it was suspicious.”⁴⁴ Simandl even (co-) organized a survey of the Radio audience for statistical purposes. He noticed that some listeners preferred to send their letters from Poland or Hungary.⁴⁵ Otherwise, he revealed Josef Koláček’s contacts with an artist and secretly ordained priest from Brno, Ludvík Kolek.⁴⁶ Already in Brno, Koláček had been warned by secret bishop Felix Davídek that there might be StB agents in the Vatican. Probably because of this, he did not keep important data, such as an address catalog, at the Radio, but in his apartment inside the Vatican.

Simandl wanted to study at the Pontifical Diplomatic Academy after graduation, but he was not accepted. It was precisely during this period that his cooperation with the intelligence service lapsed, as stated in a report.⁴⁷ He himself stated that at that time there was spy mania in Rome, and he saw this as the reason for the rejection of the application by a Czech to the Diplomatic Academy because of a potential suspicion of contacts with the secret service. Therefore, in April 1983, he provided to his handlers a letter for the Minister of the Interior stating his rejection of further cooperation.⁴⁸

This point is interesting; after eight years of – by StB standards – successful cooperation, Simandl wanted to withdraw. However, in 2003 when his StB past became public in the Czech Republic, the end of the first phase of his cooperation was dated several times to the period immediately after his arrival in Rome in 1976. Simandl was said to have revealed his contacts with the intelligence service to the rector of Nepomucenum, František Planner, and Spiritual Director Tomáš Špidlík SJ, which

⁴³ Cf. ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 38826 (Personal file of “Brožský”), Minutes, 13 August 1979.

⁴⁴ Interview by Eva Vybíralová with Fr. Josef Koláček SJ, 29 May 2018.

⁴⁵ Cf. S. Vodičková, “Slyšte to,” p. 56; ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 10442 (Object: Ruler – Vatican), Subfile No. 172, Annex to the minutes from the meeting with agent JAB, 16 July 1979.

⁴⁶ ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 10442, Subfile No. 172, Annex to the minutes from the meeting with agent JAB, 27 December 1979.

⁴⁷ Cf. ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 46428, Subfile 012, agent JAB – Addendum to Memorandum of 21 December 1987.

⁴⁸ Cf. ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 46428, Subfile 012, agent JAB – Addendum to the memorandum of 21 December 1987. Whereas still at least in June 1983 JAB met with “Brožský,” who in the meantime had returned to the Prague headquarters. Cf. ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, Provalové karty [“failure cases cards”].

Špidlík later even confirmed. When Simandl was contacted by the Czechoslovak embassy in Rome after his arrival, he was supposed to deliver his letter to the Minister of the Interior.⁴⁹ However, this did not happen in 1976 but seven years later. It was due to his own unfulfilled ambitions, not because of advice from the Nepomucenum after his alleged revelations there.

For the next few years, Simandl studied for a doctorate.⁵⁰ In 1985, he was sent to the USA, where he worked in pastoral care for Czech-Americans in Berwick, Pennsylvania, from September 1985 to February 1986.⁵¹ The background of his deployment to the USA was to distance himself from the Czechoslovak secret service.⁵² However, he did not really prefer to go to America. He had met Cardinal Joachim Meisner in Vienna before and explored the possibility of working as a priest in the diocese of Berlin, something which did not materialize.⁵³ Simandl spent then only half a year in America. In all likelihood, he felt unhappy there and thus asked his bishop for the Czechs in the diaspora, Jaroslav Škarvada, for permission to return to Europe.⁵⁴ After Berwick, he then worked for a year as a parish administrator in Valle San Silvestrino in South Tyrol in Italy.⁵⁵

Soon after, Simandl really advanced in his career and from 1987 he was working in the Congregation for Bishops. Josef Kolářek admitted: "It surprised me, because from an unknown guy he suddenly became... [...] But behind it again, this is my opinion, is the excellent work of the secret police and certain 'acquaintances' [...] It is as if they are moving each other up higher and higher [...] But I learned about this affiliation later. When he was here, I thought to myself: the guy is lucky."⁵⁶

⁴⁹ Cf. press release of the Czech Bishops' Conference, 17 April 2003, in: T. Zdechovský, "Náhly odchod generálního sekretáře ČBK. Kolem rezignace Karla Simandla panují nejasnosti," *Christnet* website, 27 October 2004, https://www.christnet.eu/clanky/3127/nahly_odchod_generalniho_sekretare_cbk.url (accessed 15 December 2022).

⁵⁰ The topic of his dissertation was "The Church and the Czechoslovak State in the years 1948–1952." He received a doctorate from theology only in 1992 from the Lateran University. Cf. "Karel Simandl," Wikipedia entry, https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karel_Simandl (accessed 15 December 2022). Ten years later Simandl lectured in fundamental theology at the Catholic Theological Faculty of Charles University in Prague.

⁵¹ Email from Rachel A. Bryson (Secretary of Public Relations/Diocese of Harrisburg) to Bernd Schaefer, 10 March 2022.

⁵² Cf. M. Zmo, "Jsme stále decimováni padesáti lety komunismu."

⁵³ E-mail from P. Josef Rudolf, Erkner, former secretary to Cardinal Meisner, to Bernd Schaefer, 5 February 2022.

⁵⁴ So according to ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 46428, Subfile 012, agent JAB – Addendum to Memorandum of 21 December 1987.

⁵⁵ Cf. "Karel Simandl." In his StB file, there is a different chronology and mention of Milles and Dobbiaco in South Tyrol.

⁵⁶ Interview by Eva Vybíralová with Fr. Josef Kolářek SJ, 29 May 2018. It does not follow from the ABS files that the intelligence service helped Simandl to the interesting position at the Congregation for Bishops. According to Josef Král (agent MAGNUS), Simandl was later one of the candidates for the higher post of Ján Bukovský at the State Secretariat, and probably he himself had such ambitions. At the same time, he should have had good chances because he was a friend of Bishop Giovanni Battista Re, the Secretary of the Congregation of Bishops. Cf. ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 46428, Subfile 025, agent ASTER – instructions, 25 September 1989, ASTER – preparing the way to the meeting, 6 December 1989.

Agent “ASTER”

In Rome, it was common for young priests to take care of old bishops and cardinals and live in their apartments. This was how Simandl also came in contact with Cardinal Corrado Bafle (1903–2005), formerly in the Vatican Secretariat of State and later Nuncio in Germany, and benefited from his knowledge and network.⁵⁷ In May 1988, Simandl resumed his cooperation with StB. Nothing is stated in his case-file about his motivation at that time. Several times, based on his own much later assertions, a hypothesis was mentioned that he was a double agent. But it is very hard to imagine that Simandl’s superior, Cardinal Bernardin Gantin, Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops, knew about Simandl’s activity for StB⁵⁸, or why the Holy See would want to run “double agents.”

Personal reasons are more conceivable; perhaps Simandl wanted to visit his homeland again after 14 years. In September 1988, he even submitted a request for clemency to the President of the ČSSR, which, however, the StB at the district and national level did not support.⁵⁹ Or at least he wanted to meet his relatives in Italy – his brother applied to the Czechoslovak authorities for a trip to Italy for his whole family.⁶⁰

Between May 1988 and January 1989, Agent “ASTER,” as Simandl was now called, submitted six reports, mostly in the form of documents. The StB rated the quality of this material with 100 percent value. Furthermore, Simandl came regularly to the meetings, and also to two instruction sessions in Austria. In total, there were to be eleven meetings. The agent was financially rewarded for his work.⁶¹ The StB even prepared a German forged passport for him, in case of a quick necessary withdrawal of the agent to Czechoslovakia if he were to be compromised.

The material handed over by Simandl in this phase of his cooperation has been preserved in his case-file. It includes the list of participants in the meeting of religious superiors or a report on the situation of the Catholic Church in the GDR conceived by him in Czech – it is a summary of the German-language reports, so-called

⁵⁷ Cf. interview by Eva Vybíralová with Fr. Josef Kolářek SJ, 29 May 2018. When Simandl moved to Germany in 1992, this service with Card. Bafle was taken over by Jan Vokál, now Bishop of Hradec Kralove. Cf. “Mons. JUDr. Ing. Jan Vokál, JU.D.,” Králový Hradec Diocese website, <https://www.bihk.cz/biskupstvi/diecezni-biskup> (accessed 15 December 2022).

⁵⁸ Simandl’s being double agent was the only argument in Czech church circles for the inexplicable fact that Simandl was not punished after the StB relationship became known in 2003, but moved to a good position in Berlin.

⁵⁹ Cf. ABS, Object File (OB) 335 BN, Amnesty 1988 – Notice of Position on List of Persons, 20 December 1988.

⁶⁰ See ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 46428, Subfile 025, agent ASTER – Instructions, 23 June 1989. It cannot be ruled out that Simandl met his relatives in a third country, such as Yugoslavia, as was suggested by the head office as early as 1978. Cf. ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 38826 (Personal file of “Brodský”), Minutes of meeting with Brodský, 9. 3. 1978.

⁶¹ Cf. ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 46428, Subfile 012, agent ASTER (JAB) – Evaluation of Cooperation with agent, 23 January 1989.

Quinquennial reports, which every diocesan bishop has to submit to the Vatican prior to his “Ad-Limina” visit to Rome every five years. It is precisely these reports for the period between 1982 and 1986 that form the bulk of the material Simandl gave to StB. From the GDR, there were reports from the main jurisdictional districts and dioceses of Berlin, Magdeburg, Erfurt-Meiningen, Schwerin, and Dresden-Meissen. Each of these reports covered dozens of pages and contained highly sensitive information, especially the report by Cardinal Meisner for both parts of the divided city of Berlin. The archival access period for such documents in Berlin is currently 60 years after its origins.⁶² There were also Latin reports from three Hungarian dioceses: Esztergom, Kalocsa, and Eger. Simandl wrote a Czech excerpt for these. And of course, he gave to the intelligence service reports written in Latin, Czech or Slovak from most dioceses in Czechoslovakia.

Where did this highly confidential material come from, to which often not even the secretaries had access?⁶³ The bishops were supposed to deliver their reports prior to their “Ad-Limina” visits in Rome to the Secretariat of State. If this was the case, it could be that Simandl got the reports in some way from Josef Erwin Ender.⁶⁴ Indeed, Ender, who headed the German-language section of the State Secretariat, was also skimmed by GDR agents Waschbüsch and Brammertz.⁶⁵ But it is also possible that these reports ended up directly in the Congregation of Bishops, where Simandl worked.

From May 1989 at the latest, Simandl again failed to appear at the arranged meetings. Only on 5 December 1989, this is after the demonstrations in Czechoslovakia in November 1989, did he come to another meeting in Rome. At the same time a meeting was arranged for 27 December 1989, this time now already in Prague. Officer “Orlík” and especially Milan Jelínek “Brodský,” who in the meantime had become the head of the 31st Department, were present. “The main goal of the meeting was to clarify the prospects of further secret cooperation, especially in light of the new political circumstances. The agent was assured that the safety of his person is not threatened, and in this sense the guarantees for the future were given. [...] He

⁶² Email from Dr. Gotthard Klein, Diocesan Archive Berlin, to Bernd Schaefer, 8 February 2022.

⁶³ This was confirmed in the e-mail by Josef Rudolf, Card. Joachim Meisner’s former East Berlin secretary: “Of course, I myself did not get a look at it, this document was typed very secretly by his West Berlin secretary. He [Card. Meisner] was able to trust her 100 percent.” E-mail from Josef Rudolf to Bernd Schaefer, 4 February 2022. Josef Michelfeit, then Vicar General in Schwerin, knew the reports of his jurisdiction: “Bishop Theissing gave them to me as his GV [vicar general] to proofread. Then they went via Cardinal Meisner to West Berlin for forwarding to Rome. [...] I remember that at that time a secret bishop in the underground church in the then CSSR [Josef Blahník] often told me that there were leaks in the Vatican. Therefore, he asked me to let certain information come directly to the Pope.” E-mail from Josef Michelfeit to Bernd Schaefer, 4 February 2022.

⁶⁴ Erwin Josef Ender (1937–2022) served as head of the German-speaking section of the Secretariat of State 1970–1990, Apostolic Delegate to Sudan and Somalia 1990–1997, Nuncio to the Baltic countries 1997–2001, Nuncio to the Czech Republic 2001–2003, Nuncio to Germany 2003–2007.

⁶⁵ See footnote 6.

understands the cooperation as a form of dialogue. [...] Of crucial importance are the development prospects of Agent Aster and his envisaged career in the apparatus of the Vatican Curia.”⁶⁶ Gifts were also prepared for Karel Simandl for this meeting: two records, a crystal ashtray, and two cufflinks with Czech shells.⁶⁷ The third gift in particular shows how well the intelligence service knew Simandl, his ambitions and his emphasis on appearance.

Prelate Karel Simandl: Epilogue in Prague and Berlin

In December 1989, Karel Simandl had presumably met with his StB handlers for the last time. He continued to work at the Congregation for Bishops until 1992, thus the transfer to the Secretariat of State he aspired to did not occur. In 1992, he received his doctorate with Lateran University and the ecclesiastical title of “Chaplain of His Holiness.” From now on, he was addressed as Monsignore. In the same year he became a secretary in the Apostolic Nunciature in Germany in Bonn.

When in 1995 the Czech bishops were looking for a new Secretary of the Czech Bishops’ Conference, the choice of Karel Simandl seemed ideal. He knew foreign languages, had experience in the Roman Curia, and had been a secretary of a Vatican Nunciature. The later bishop and Cardinal Dominik Duka OP, then provincial superior of the Dominicans, also recommended Simandl.⁶⁸ The reason was probably that Simandl was trusted by some representatives of the underground church, and Duka himself knew secret bishop Stanislav Krátký. Karel Simandl visited Bishop Krátký in his country parish near Znojmo shortly after the fall of communism in 1989. Krátký and other representatives of the underground church described to him problems they had with the recognition of their consecration. At the same time, they had sent documents to Rome through Simandl to Cardinal Gantin, prefect of the Congregation for Bishops. Krátký assumed that Simandl submitted this material properly.⁶⁹ As a secretary of the Czech Bishops’ Conference, Simandl was considered reliable and hard-working. He co-organized various international meetings and received another papal title in 2002, Prelate of His Holiness.

A year later in 2003, a scandal broke out. The name of Karel Simandl and his cover name “JAB” appeared on a list of StB agents of the Ministry of the Interior. At that time, only the first phase of Simandl’s cooperation with the StB was known and in a rather truncated and misleading form – he was said to have succumbed to StB recruitment as a young 19-year-old, and soon after his arrival in Rome he sup-

⁶⁶ ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 46428, Subfile 025, Annex to the minutes from the meeting, 27 December 1989.

⁶⁷ ABS, Fond I. Správa SNB, File No. 46428, Subfile 025, agent ASTER – Service Report, 27 December 1989.

⁶⁸ Cf. M. Zrno, “Jsme stále decimováni padesáti lety komunismu.”

⁶⁹ Cf. J. Mazanec and S. Krátký, *K plnosti. Rozhovory Jana Mazance s dobrým bratrem a biskupem skryté církve*, Brno: Cesta, 2004, pp. 131–132.

posedly had terminated any further cooperation.⁷⁰ Simandl offered his resignation as Secretary of the Czech Bishops Conference in 2003, which was not accepted because his cooperation with the StB was viewed only as a misconduct of a young man. Spiritual Director Fr. Tomáš Špidlík SJ, who confirmed Simandl's version before the bishops, was obviously not aware of the full picture.

However, in the course of 2004 "new facts came to light, on the basis of which a re-evaluation of the situation, a call for resignation, and its acceptance occurred," according to the Czech Bishops' Conference.⁷¹ No further explanation was given, but it is obvious that the remaining material from the time of StB agent "ASTER" had been found. This was too much for the Czech bishops, who asked Simandl to leave the Czech Republic and live abroad.

Very soon Simandl ended up in the Vatican Nunciature to Germany which had since moved from Bonn to Berlin. The then Nuncio in Germany, Josef Erwin Ender, knew Simandl very well from both the Vatican and Prague. The former had moved from Prague to Berlin as Nuncio a year earlier and now took Simandl to Berlin. Although Simandl did not get his former position of secretary, he has been working as an employee of the Nunciature ever since. According to Ender, a reasonable job had to be found for Simandl "because of his talents." Ender, and also the later Nuncios, were satisfied with his work.⁷²

It seemed almost bizarre that a former agent, who had delivered top-secret documents of East German bishops to the communist secret service, now got a Vatican position in Berlin and had to send reports about the German Church, and in part from the same bishops, to the Vatican. At the time of Simandl joining the Nunciature, some of the authors of the 1986 Quinquennial reports from the former GDR, such as Bishop Joachim Wanke of Erfurt (born 1941) or Cardinal Joachim Meisner (1933–2017), Archbishop of Berlin until 1989 and subsequently Archbishop in Cologne, were still alive and in office.

In 2014, reporters Nikolaus Harbusch and Hans-Wilhelm Saure of the German newspaper BILD published a story on their front page titled: "He Spied on the Vatican: What is an ex-Stasi Man Doing in the Pope's Embassy?"⁷³ The editors asked his superior, Nuncio Nikola Eterović, and Karel Simandl for comments but

⁷⁰ Simandl even suspected that his name might not be on the list because he clearly refused to continue working for StB (in fact, he did so only after eight years of intensive collaboration). Cf. press release of the Czech Bishops' Conference of 17 April 2003, in: T. Zdechovský, "Náhly odchod generálního sekretáře ČBK."

⁷¹ Cf. press release of the Czech Bishops' Conference, 25 October 2004, in: T. Zdechovský, "Náhly odchod generálního sekretáře ČBK."

⁷² Telephone conversation between Eva Vybíralová and Josef Erwin Ender, 13. 6. 2022.

⁷³ Cf. N. Harbusch and H.-W. Saure, "Er spionierte den Vatikan aus. Was macht ein Ex-Stasi-Mann in der Papst-Botschaft?" *Bild* 2 September 2014, <https://www.bild.de/politik/inland/stasi/agent-im-vatikan-er-hat-fuer-die-stasi-den-papst-ausspioniert-37494578.bild.html> (accessed 15 December 2022)

they refused. Likewise, Karel Simandl did not take up the offer of the authors of this article in 2023 to explain his motives and answer their questions in writing after he actually read them, although he had first agreed to do so by telephone.

Conclusion

The case of Karel Simandl is a pertinent example of how a communist intelligence service successfully acted to recruit and run an agent within the Catholic Church. Karel Simandl, after signing his agreement for collaboration (which he himself had offered without being forced or blackmailed), followed almost exactly the path the StB had laid out for him. Except for a few intermittent years, he practically never served in pastoral care. He pursued during his whole life a prominent ecclesiastical career he could neither have launched nor pursued without the essential support of the StB at certain turnpoints of his life. Even a major public scandal did not put an end to this career, to the contrary. For many Catholics, especially from the former Eastern Bloc, it is irritating that a discredited Secretary of the Czech Bishops' Conference was employed in the Apostolic Nunciature in Berlin without either Western (Ender) or Eastern European (Eterovic) Nuncios willing to recognize the problem of hiring a severely compromised employee, one who had up to 1989 had no reservations about spying on fellow Catholics and, among others, about delivering reports from the same bishops first to communist intelligence services until 1989 and as church diplomat in a Nunciature to the Vatican thereafter.

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