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## The Youth Inner Mission and the Soli Deo Gloria<sup>2</sup>

### *Abstract.*

From the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as a parallel field of foreign missionary work, the Hungarian inner mission followed Western (English, German) models and established associations to revive the stagnating religious life and to help those less fortunate in a miserable situation. The urbanisation of the period affected greatly the families moving to the capital, where some of them had become disconnected from their church roots, and the lack of a social safety net led to a high level of poverty and the moral decay that accompanied it. In the first half of my study, I looked at the beginnings of the Hungarian inner mission and then I wrote about evangelising and educating associations for youth and children, such as the Protestant Orphans' Association, the Sunday School Association and the Christian Youth Association, which was modelled on the YMCA. In the second part, I discussed the social and faith-based activities of the specifically Hungarian Reformed Soli Deo Gloria Student Movement.

**Keywords:** inner mission, youth ministry, Reformed Church, SDG, communism

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*“There is a lot of talk about the inner mission whose first task is certainly to care for abandoned and neglected children.”<sup>3</sup>*

The history of the inner youth mission and of the religious association’s work carried out in Hungary is usually very diverse. One could write about many organizations, institutions, and numerous devoted, self-sacrificing members overshadowing their own lives. Gyula Forgács,<sup>4</sup> a Calvinist pastor, wrote about the diversity of the inner mission associations, namely the devotional, charity work, and church society organizations, with the following conclusions: “When spring arrives, it is only in the first few days that it is easy to observe and spot the first flowers opening. But when the warmth of the sun stirs all the life forces, when everything comes to life again, it is almost impossible to put the signs and results of the revival into a certain order.”<sup>5</sup> The “categories” mentioned above merely denote emphasis, as most associations had a mixed definition of their own objectives, and it is not rare for an organization to be engaged in politics besides evangelization or distribute religious literature besides charity work (possibly all four examples appear).

Instead of the systematization and schematic representation of the inner mission, the study at hand would like to present first of all the inner mission and specifically the antecedents of the evangelization carried out among children and youth, as well as its first momentums from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, following which I will present the most significant student union of the Reformed Church in Hungary, presenting the faith and social role of the Hungarian Reformed Soli Deo Gloria Student Movement until its dissolution in 1949.

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<sup>3</sup> GÉRA, Eleonóra Erzsébet (2006a): *Az Országos Protestáns Árvagyület és árvaháza*. In: Kósa, László (ed.): *Reformátusok Budapesten*. Vol. 2. Budapest, Argumentum – ELTE BTK Művelődéstörténeti Tanszék. 917; Mindkét hitvallású evangélikus árvákat segélyező egyesület. In: *Protestáns Egyházi és Iskolai Lap*, 2, 1859/24. 643–644. The translations of all, originally non-English quotations belong to the author of the article.

<sup>4</sup> Gyula Forgács (1879–1941): Reformed pastor in Pécel and Sárospatak, leading figure of Pécel Society, one of the most significant representatives of the second generation of the Hungarian inner mission.

<sup>5</sup> FORGÁCS, Gyula (1925): *A belmisszió kézikönyve*. Pápa, Magyar Református Egyház. 251.

## Background

In order to understand the motivations of the inner mission in the period under study, we must first examine the public perception – also taken up by the leading figures of the inner mission –, according to which Hungarian Protestantism at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was busy struggling to consolidate itself both in public law and material terms,<sup>6</sup> as it had been vulnerable to Counter-Reformation and the Habsburg autocracy for centuries. After the Compromise of 1867, the struggle for consolidation continued; however, it also brought some sort of spiritual weakening, shallowness, and loss of contact – in the critical point of view of the time.<sup>7</sup> Although not the sole cause, it may have contributed to the spiritual discontent – nota bene: alongside the indefeasible merits of the Church leadership of the time. The pastors that had become disillusioned, and who considered one of the most influential theologies of the age, the German (liberal-rational) theological trend, as a “scientific couture”, literally a tragedy, were seeking new ways and methods of preaching the “simple gospel” as inner missionaries.<sup>8</sup>

For this reason, in their opinion, the inner mission, which originated from Western pietism and appeared as a parallel field of foreign mission, was destined to revive spiritual life in our country after the fading of religious devotion, but from then on reacting to numerous social problems, it tried to carry out its service occasionally in a modest, other times in a beautifully flourishing and unfolding manner. Gyula Forgács argues that there are three reasons for the justification of the Inner mission:<sup>9</sup> 1. The

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<sup>6</sup> According to the Reformed Bishop László Ravasz (1883–1975), this process intensified between the two world wars, as one of the objectives of the church public opinion was to achieve a “secondary state church status” and the socio-political weight that this entailed, in opposition to the Roman Catholic political trend.

<sup>7</sup> “Protestant churches, while struggling to secure their existence and then to strengthen their financial and organizational structure, almost imperceptibly lost their inner, spiritual connection with the educated Hungarian middle class.” – RÉVÉSZ, Imre (1992); *Egyháztörténelem*. Budapest, Budapesti Református Teológiai Akadémia. 69.

<sup>8</sup> FORGÁCS 1925, 211.

<sup>9</sup> The inner mission was under attack not only in the beginning but throughout its existence. As well as being seen as a damaging slur on the historic churches, there was also an opinion that the inner mission was unnecessary because a large part of the society was still traditionally attached to the Church at that time.

mission of the Hungarian Reformed Church is not only directed outwards, – by “mission”, it does not only mean the conversion of pagan peoples and the pastoral care of Hungarians abroad<sup>10</sup> –, but it also considers the evangelization of nominal Christians and apostates within the church as its task. 2. There are not only spiritual but also physical problems that Christian diaconia is called to remedy, since “without this ministry, the angelic word is also a sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.”<sup>11</sup> 3. The Church lives in the society and cannot be isolated or independent thereof, so the inner mission can act as a mediator between “the Church and everyday life”. In addition, Forgács also emphasizes that for the Reformed Church the inner mission is only acceptable in the Wichernian sense: inner mission sees its commission in making itself ultimately superfluous, and the Church achieves its ultimate goal: the Christianization of the whole society.<sup>12</sup>

In this definition, those carrying the cause of the Church on their shoulders, including the inner mission and associations, wanted to give a spiritual and physical support and a solution to the people who were confused, disappointed, or disillusioned in their national mourning. The inner mission, which first came into being from abroad, specifically as the leaven of the Scottish mission, and then grew out of the work of several misunderstood and attacked individuals (e.g. Dr Aladár Szabó, Sr),<sup>13</sup> was eventually ratified by the Reformed Church.

The new initiatives were much needed, as urbanization was transforming the whole society. It is no coincidence that, apart from a few rural Reformed associations, their centres of activity are linked to the cities, especially the capital.<sup>14</sup> During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the traditional social structure began to break down, and the era produced the

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<sup>10</sup> For at the turn of the century, this was the primary definition of ‘mission’ in the public consciousness.

<sup>11</sup> FORGÁCS 1925, 38. – 1Cor. 13:1

<sup>12</sup> FORGÁCS 1925, 34–40.

<sup>13</sup> Dr Aladár Szabó, Sr (1860–1944): Reformed pastor and full professor at the Budapest Reformed Theological Academy. He is associated with the initiation and founding of several inner mission organizations (Sunday School, Christian Youth Organization, Lorántffy Zsuzsanna Association, Bethánia).

<sup>14</sup> KÓSA, László (2006): Az egyesületek a budapesti reformátusság életében. In: Kósa, László (ed.): *Reformátusok Budapesten*. Vol. 2. Budapest, Argumentum – ELTE BTK Művelődéstörténeti Tanszék. 1096.

losers of modernization: the social strata that had fallen behind, the young men and women who had grown up away from their parents and families, and the religiously worn out people who had separated from their rural church communities. They summed up the major problem as follows: “The forces of hell tear the hearts from the bosom of godly parents and tear souls away from the Christian churches, if not as an organization, certainly as a spiritual community.”<sup>15</sup> The desire to replace spiritual community has awakened the need to reach out from childhood, especially to those who lack a solid family background and close faith ties, in order to prevent moral decay and the material decline that comes with it.

### Orphan Care

Eng. Theodor Biberauer<sup>16</sup> and the Lutheran pastors György Bauhofer<sup>17</sup> and József Székács<sup>18</sup> were responsible for the foundation of the joint Protestant organization Evangéliumi Árvaápoló Egylet [Evangelical Orphan Care Association] in 1859.<sup>19</sup> The cause of the Protestant orphan mission was publicized in the press, in *Protestáns Egyházi és Iskolai Lap* [Protestant Ecclesiastical and Educational Journal], which invited the Protestant intellectual elite to donate and join. In this article, the Society’s leaders reveal its vision with the following biblical grounding: Jesus says, “And whoever welcomes one child like this in My name welcomes Me” (Matthew 18:5). The admonition is quoted from the Book of Psalms, “Provide justice for the needy and the fatherless; uphold the rights of the oppressed and the destitute. Rescue the poor and needy; save them from the power of the wicked”

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<sup>15</sup> FORGÁCS 1925, 330.

<sup>16</sup> Theodor Biberauer (1829–1913): railway engineer. He was involved in the foundation of the German-speaking congregation in Pest and the Bethesda Hospital.

<sup>17</sup> György Bauhofer (1806–1864): Lutheran pastor, journalist.

<sup>18</sup> József Székács (1809–1876): Lutheran pastor, writer, academician, Bishop of the Lutheran Church District of Bánya.

<sup>19</sup> It is noteworthy that this noble association started its work in the very year when the Protestant churches in Hungary were threatened on the most serious scale by the Habsburg imperial power, which wanted to effectively abolish the autonomy of the Reformed and Lutheran churches by the provisions of the Protestant Pact.

(Psalms 82:3–4). Or, according to the Apostle James, the sincere offering of the Christian man: “Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained from the world” (James 1:27). With the encouragement of these three passages of Scripture, the objectives of the Orphans’ Association were presented to the public, with a view not only to caring but also to teaching, since the Association’s “ars poetica” was not to establish a nursery or an ordinary orphanage but an institution of pure Protestant spirituality, providing an education that would ensure a suitable career for the future.<sup>20</sup> It was acknowledged from the beginning that the maintenance of such an institution on its own and the running of an independent residential home would involve great financial sacrifices, but after the formation of the Orphans’ Association, Pál Török<sup>21</sup> concluded his presentation of the statutes of the Association with the following divine promise: “Leave your fatherless children; I will preserve them alive” (Jer. 49:11). Immediately after its foundation, the leadership of the Orphans’ Association set itself the short-term goal of helping orphans, half-orphans, and children under 12 years of age who were neglected and who could be considered essentially orphans, by placing them with families of “Christian character” and entrusting the care of these families to its members.<sup>22</sup> However, the orphan ministry progressed so quickly that after a year, in 1860, the first orphanage opened with seven children, and by the end of the year there were ten and in the following year 15 residents.

Soon Mór Ballagi became one of the main spokesmen, patron, and President of the Association, and in *Protestáns Egyházi és Iskolai Lap*, which he edited, he regularly called for further donations and membership. In his synthesis written on its tenth anniversary of the Orphans’ Association, he expressed its significance in the following lyrical statement:

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<sup>20</sup> GÉRA 2006a, 917–941. 917.

<sup>21</sup> Török Pál (1808–1883): Reformed pastor of Pest, later Bishop of the Danubian Reformed Church District.

<sup>22</sup> Among these families, too, the Fleischers are remembered with great gratitude, “who, as if the good God had created them for that very purpose, cared for the orphans they had placed in their hands with the true parental wisdom of a parent.” – BALLAGI, Mór (1869): Az ágostai és helvét hitvallású országos árvaegylet története. In: *Protestáns Egyházi és Iskolai Lap*. 12, 50. 1571–1582. 1574.

All the sorrows of the human bosom are contained in this word: orphan! In the hardest heart, the string of compassion is struck when it hears this word, which interprets so much raging anguish. Or whose heart has not been broken once or twice, at the sight of those unfortunates who, having been abandoned in their infancy, multiply in our streets the number of those who, ceasing to be the burden of society, become its scourge and continue their free lives until they become its villains by miserable accident.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, there was not only an emotional side to the mission's support of the orphans but also a social side. The wealthier should take care of orphans early on because it would ultimately contribute to the security of society if those better off could enjoy their own possessions "undisturbed". He criticizes those who are short-sighted in their greed and fail to admit that it is ultimately in the best interest of the upper classes to prevent orphans from being deprived.

However, the Orphans' Association did not define its mission solely on the basis of this selfish reckoning or "long-term investment", but in fact it put great emphasis on providing emotional support and peace of mind to orphaned children.

During its early history, the orphanage experienced several changes of management and soon got into a period of crisis. It took fifteen years to find a manager (or orphanage father) whose dedication, charisma, and perseverance would lead to the orphanage's eventual success. Lajos Brocskó<sup>24</sup> served at the institution for nearly 60 years, more than 50 of which he managed the orphanage, and under his guidance some 2,000 orphans were raised.<sup>25</sup> Called the "Hungarian Pestalozzi", the teacher received prestigious state and royal honours, and the Lajos Brocskó Orphans' Association was founded in his honour by his pupils, collecting Christmas presents, donations for orphans leaving the home and for snacks. A telling twist in Brocskó's story is that the elderly father of the orphans finally handed over the reins after a long period of service, and, although he never felt ill, he passed away the day after moving out and retiring.

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<sup>23</sup> Op. cit. 1571.

<sup>24</sup> Brocskó Lajos (1851–1932): educator; he served at the orphanage of the National Protestant Orphans' Association's from 1874 to 1932, first as a tutor and later as the manager. Also, he was one of the pioneers of introducing the Swedish *slöjd* (Swedish handicraft education) in Hungary.

<sup>25</sup> GÉRA 2006a, 932.

During World War II, the Swedish Embassy's board protected the house, but as the Russian front passed through the country the soldiers rendered the building uninhabitable, even the window frames were removed. Teaching at the orphanage school slowly resumed in March 1945, but after the Communist takeover in 1948, it was first nationalized, and then, two months later, a decision was taken to close it down for good. The orphanage teachers were assigned to institutions in Budapest as tutors, and the manager also took on a teaching job at a girls' high school. In 1949, the political police summoned the management and demanded detailed accounts of the Association's assets, ordering them to "voluntarily" dissolve it. The Hungarian Lutheran Church took over the Association's foundation, its real and movable property, and the foundation was finally dissolved in 1950. For a few years, there were attempts to use the building for charitable purposes, but in 1952 the former orphanage was nationalized. It was only after the change of regime in 1990 that the building, now called the Lutheran High School Dormitory, was returned to the ownership of the Lutheran Church.<sup>26</sup>

### Sunday School

The cradle of Sunday school work was England, where the first Sunday school was founded in 1780 by Robert Raikes to help the children of impoverished working-class families. Due to the geographical distance and the aforementioned domestic and ecclesiastical political situation in Hungary, it is not until the 1840s that we can find the first signs of a domestic Sunday school association in the Scottish mission in Hungary, but at that time Sunday school activities were only carried out locally, within the mission.<sup>27</sup> After the consolidation of the state and the church, the Reformed Theological Academy of Pest became the focal point of the new inner missionary effort.

The first signs of the inner mission in theology are described by Aladár Szabó, Sr's enrolment in theology in the 1880s, when the pastoral training academy in Pest was

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<sup>26</sup> Op. cit. 940–941.

<sup>27</sup> KOVÁCS, Ábrahám (2006a): A magyarországi vasárnapi iskolai mozgalom kialakulása és szervezeti megerősödése. In: Kósa, László (ed.): *Reformátusok Budapesten*. Vol. 2. Budapest, Argumentum – ELTE BTK Művelődéstörténeti Tanszék. 997–1013. 998.



“the stronghold of liberal theology; religious fervour was in its ebb”.<sup>28</sup> It was for this reason that Aladár Szabó took the initiative and set up a small circle around himself, where he invited those with similar religious aspirations to Bible study. According to the legend, a Bible salesman from a Scottish mission happened to walk in on them on one of these occasions and was so amazed by the unusual Bible study that he ran to the Scottish mission’s pastor, Andrew Moody, with the good news. A few years later, Aladár Szabó, who is also known as the “father of the inner mission”, married Irma Biberauer, one of the initiators of the Sunday school, who organized Sunday school education first in her own home and later around the city with the help of the theologians in Budapest. A kind of awakening began within the walls of theology, and more and more people became involved in the teaching. It should be noted that the development of the Sunday school started at the same time as the Christian Youth Association [Keresztyén Ifjúsági Egyesület – KIE], so there was a significant overlap between the schoolteachers and the members of the Association. As with all innovations, the emergence of inner mission in theology was not without negative repercussions since it took a piously, or even dogmatically, evangelical-pietistic stance against rationalism. It is recorded, for example, that in the academic year 1882–1883 a senior in theology made it known in a strident voice against the inner mission movement that “he does not tolerate supernatural dogmas”<sup>29</sup> (during the period of the autocracy of liberal theology, for example, the historicity of the miracles of Jesus or the bodily resurrection itself).

The Sunday school movement found recognition in the forums of the Reformed Church and gained a rapidly growing popularity, so, for example, in 1885, there were already 11 Sunday schools in Budapest, with 780 students.<sup>30</sup> After ten years, the associations (Christian Youth Association and Lorántffy Zsuzsanna Association) took part in the Budapest theology, then took over the organization of the schools, and later these two associations were responsible for their operation. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the leader of the movement was János Victor (the eldest), who, encouraged

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<sup>28</sup> KÓSA, László (2006b): *Szabó Aladár és az Új óramutató*. In: Kósa, László (ed.): *Reformátusok Budapesten*. Vol. 1. Budapest, Argumentum – ELTE BTK Művelődéstörténeti Tanszék. 511–522. 512.

<sup>29</sup> KOVÁCS 2006, 1001.

<sup>30</sup> Op. cit. 1008.

by the London Brotherhood, founded a separate organization in 1904, the Budapest Sunday School Association.<sup>31</sup> It is worth mentioning the further growth of the movement: in 1903, there were 138 schools with 4,818 pupils and 436 teachers, while by 1923 there were 403 schools with 21,970 pupils and 1,139 teachers.

## **The Youth Ministry**

From its first attempts, the Children's and Youth Inner Mission sought to provide spiritual fellowship. In 1892, the aforementioned Dr Aladár Szabó, a theology teacher returning from a study trip in England, drew attention to the need for the work of the Association in a lecture he gave to the interested youth, especially the theologians, and encouraged the audience: "Let glory come to our church and to the walls of our institute so that from here the movement for the youth may go forth, from the bosom of the youth, under the banner of the Lord Jesus."<sup>32</sup> After a few months, the Budapest Reformed Youth Association was formed, modelled on the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA).<sup>33</sup>

The work of the associations also met with opposition, and many were reluctant to accept the replanting of foreign institutions in their home country.<sup>34</sup> Due to reasons of length, I will not go into detail but will mention that in addition to the YMCA, the Scout Movement and the Hungarian Evangelical Student Fellowship.<sup>35</sup> (MEKDSZ), the organization of the World Student Christian Federation, were also adapted. These associations had different profiles and coexisted in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, sometimes in alliance and sometimes in competition.

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<sup>31</sup> Op. cit. 1009.

<sup>32</sup> FORGÁCS 1925, 226–227.

<sup>33</sup> Initially, the name "Christian" was intended to be licensed by the authorities, but the growing anti-Semitism of the time made them suspicious of this particular adjective, so for ten years it could exist as part its name as a "Reformed" association, but the Christian Youth Association was interdenominational.

<sup>34</sup> FORGÁCS 1925, 276.

<sup>35</sup> The community went directly into the work with a great sense of responsibility since it confessed that "this association, if it evangelizes the Hungarian students, it evangelizes Hungary". See op. cit. 283.

At the turn of the century, some of the inner missionaries admitted that no breakthrough had been achieved, and so they waited for a better opportunity, and only “then did they blow the trumpet”.<sup>36</sup> This opportunity was not long in coming since, curiously enough, as in the case of the Reformation Mohács, the tragedy of the Trianon Peace Treaty after World War I brought about the expansion of the inner mission.

### **The Soli Deo Gloria Reformed Student Movement**

The generation of theologians who founded Soli Deo Gloria (SDG) Association could already look back on a long history, as we have seen above, it was mainly the theologians in Budapest who started the Sunday school work. The already mentioned Reformed Youth Association in Budapest became stagnant after a while and consisted mostly of theologians, and in 1900 the members of the Budapest youth studying at the Kálvin Square Theology School specifically worked to form a Theologians’ Association. It was only after this moment that the Soli Deo Gloria Association, patronized by Professor Jenő Sebestyén and based on Reformed principles, reached a larger scale.

If one wants to get an idea of the SDG’s initial mission, a handbook from the period will be of great help: Dezső Fónyad, in his 1936 chronicle of the organization and operation of the SDG, discusses in detail the history, principles, and methods of the Association.<sup>37</sup> In the historical section of this work, he explains that the spirit of the SDG is not without precedent since the formation of the movement was also influenced by various evangelical student organizations, such as the KIE or the MEKDSZ, and the SDG approached Reformed youth with the specific demand that they find their mission in the *Reformed* Church after their encounter with Christ and live out our confessions in all areas of their lives.<sup>38</sup> According to Dezső Fónyad, after World War I, the so-called

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<sup>36</sup> Op. cit. 276.

<sup>37</sup> FÓNYAD, Dezső (ed.) (1936): *Bevezetés a diákmissziós munkába*. Budapest, Soli Deo Gloria Református Diákmozgalom.

<sup>38</sup> Neo-Calvinism, or historical Calvinism, formulated as a fundamental principle the thesis that Calvinism has a message not only in the dogmatic field but also as a *worldview*. See: LÁNYI, Gábor (2022): Sebestyén Jenő, a történelmi kálvinizmus és a Soli Deo Gloria Református Diákszövetség. In: *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai, Theologia Reformata Transylvanica*. 67, 1. 226–240. 231.;

“general Christianity”, with its “bona fide flatness”, could not give the church the impetus to become stronger, and therefore a movement with solid Reformed principles was needed.<sup>39</sup> This direction was the path of “historical Calvinism”, originating in the Netherlands but marked out in Hungary by the theological professor Jenő Sebestyén, which affirms the omnipotent sovereignty of God over materialistic ideologies and expects the Reformed Christian man to embrace the worldview that he should live every aspect of his life according to the Calvinist doctrine and the creeds that flow from it.<sup>40</sup> Soli Deo Gloria Reformed Students’ Movement translated this into its mission statement to educate a generation to the Calvinistic worldview who will become persons of faith who are self-consciously faithful in complementing their personal faith with this worldview.<sup>41</sup>

The movement was founded in Somogykiliti, near Lake Balaton, in the area of today’s Siófok; one of the founding members and then enthusiastic leader, Zoltán Töltéssy, gives an account of the circumstances:

“On 11 July 1921, the empty auditorium of the wooden theatre in Siófok witnessed a strange sight. On the stage, 30 very young students stood around a table with rotten legs and, one by one, stepping up to the flimsy structure, dipped a pen and signed a piece of paper. In the meantime, from the depths of their hearts, the famous Calvinist psalm wept mournfully, calling home: In Thee we have trusted from the beginning...”<sup>42</sup>

At the beginning, the aim of the Association was to inspire the generation of Reformed theologians of the time to more sacrificial work and to guide students who had chosen theology for reasons other than vocation or livelihood towards genuine, proper service. I quote one of the most important sentences from the Confession of Faith from Somogykiliti: “We who participated in this conference have clearly seen, by the grace of

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LÁNYI, Gábor (2021): Sebestyén Jenő (1884-1950) és a történelmi kálvinizmus. In: Petrás, Éva: *A 20. századi magyar protestáns közéletiség arcképcsarnoka*. Budapest, Barankovics István Alapítvány – Gondolat Kiadó. 13–32.

<sup>39</sup> FÓNYAD 1936, 10.

<sup>40</sup> Op. cit. 11.

<sup>41</sup> Op. cit. 31.

<sup>42</sup> Zoltán Töltéssy’s description, published in op. cit. 14.; Psalm 90

God, that only one who has had a spiritual encounter with Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour and who is in living communion with the Eternal God can be a true pastor.”<sup>43</sup>

Thus, in the early years, the movement recruited only theologians, but very soon the mission of the Association took a new direction, and by 1924 a large number of lay students had already attended the Gödöllő conference.<sup>44</sup> Later we can see that, contrary to the original intention, theologians were in minority, but this was subsequently seen by the leadership as a positive change of direction.

From the very beginning, the Association organized conferences and promoted the principles of the movement throughout the country, but in the first phase it did not yet develop into a national organization, a process that would evolve in the following period. According to Dezső Fónyad, around 1926, the federation began to become institutionalized and as a result won over a wide section of the population. This is proven by the increased number of smaller organizational units (colleges). The colleges were the “Reformed friendly societies” established in educational institutions and secondary schools, members of the national movement.<sup>45</sup> According to Géza Soos, the colleges functioned essentially as local SDG small societies, with 15-20 secondary school students attending weekly sessions.<sup>46</sup> In 1928, two major events took place: firstly, the purchase of the Balatonszárszó plot, which later became the scene of many summer meetings, and, secondly, the start of the Palm Sunday conferences in the Kálvin Square church, attracting large crowds. Around 1933, the next era of the movement began, when the Association was given a new vision and, now in agreement with the various student missionary organizations, it imagined the creation of a united “Reformed Youth Movement” and later the “Hungarian Youth Movement”, which would have built a united Hungarian front for the cause of “happy, powerful Hungarians”, but this idea later failed.

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<sup>43</sup> Resolution of the theologists’ meeting in Somogykiliti, 1921, published in op. cit. 16.

<sup>44</sup> Op. cit. 17.

<sup>45</sup> For an example of how colleges worked, see: LÁNYI 2022, 259–296. 272–276.

<sup>46</sup> SOOS, Géza (1936): *Szervezés és szervezet*. In: Fónyad, Dezső (ed.): *Bevezetés a diákmissziós munkába*. 252–261.

SDG was socially sensitive, and the movement too recognized that some of its own members were also disadvantaged and materially deprived, and so it sought to provide them with opportunities. For this reason, they set up student hostels and boarding schools for young students. To coordinate this work, a Student Social Committee was set up to collect and distribute donations and organize meals. In addition to providing food for poor students in the canteen, Zoltán Töltéssy's idea was to organize a weekly meal for needy students in the Reformed families of the capital. Töltéssy was an important link in this field not only because of his social ideas but also because of his fundraising campaigns when at receptions and at the end of lectures he "revealed the great idea and plan smiling, with true ingenuity and amazing suggestiveness". Fónyad writes about him, "[Zoltán Töltéssy] was the bravest panhandler and the best evangelical beggar of the revivalist age."<sup>47</sup> SDG also called its own members to give, and from its earliest days in 1923, they emphasized tithing as a biblical principle. SDG held that since we have received everything, including our money, from God, we must use our money in a stewardship manner, that is, we must use it in a way that is accountable to God, and, of course, for His glory.<sup>48</sup> SDG was concerned not only with the life of faith but also with social mission. In a memoir, the Reformed Bishop János Bütösi, who served in the USA, compared how SDG provided something different from, for example, the other evangelistic organization of the time, Bethania: "They came to Alcsút to convert, and we went to Szárszó to find ways of service for our people. In addition, SDG was a social service organization."<sup>49</sup>

In addition to the above, the history of SDG shows that around 1930 there was a major generational and leadership change. Zoltán Töltéssy died in 1932, aged only 32, and shortly afterwards Géza Soos took over the intellectual and technical leadership of the movement. At the same time, there was an opening towards taking responsibility

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<sup>47</sup> FÓNYAD 1936, 80.

<sup>48</sup> Op. cit. 83.

<sup>49</sup> MOLNÁR, Sándor Károly (2011): A két világháború közötti protestáns egyesületek belépési nyilatkozatainak elemzése. In: *Egyháztörténeti Szemle*. XII, 1. 109–124., Alcsút was the centre of another religious association (Bethánia) which main aim was to convert people to Christianity and teach how to live a better sanctified life.

for social and societal problems. In the spirit of the ideals of the Gospel, SDG used a number of methods to turn its mission into “small change” such as the involvement in the village research programme in Sárospatak (led by Kálmán Újzászy), participation in the establishment of people’s colleges, and also several lesson plans on the Hungarian nation are included in the work plan of the college.

The members of the SDG Alliance affirm the need for God’s rule in all aspects of national life. They strive with all their heart and soul for the realization of “Regnum Christianum”. They place the God-ordained self-interest of the Hungarian nation above all human interests. They fight with all their might against the eclipse of the Hungarian race on the land that God has given it and preserved for it in the storms of a millennium. The members of the SDG Alliance are deeply imbued with the knowledge that they can best serve our country through the ideals of the Gospel.<sup>50</sup>

As one of the most important results, I would like to mention the links between SDG and the so-called populist writers, mainly grouped around solving the social problem of the peasant population. SDG high school students did a lot to promote the cultural inclusion of the farming population, who were considered to be underdeveloped, by visiting the farms on the Great Plane on Sundays and organizing cultural and religious days for them.<sup>51</sup> Within SDG, there was a segment that was committed to the plight of the “3 million Hungarian beggars” and also spoke out in a hostile voice against the governments of the 1930s, for example, on the issue of land reform. The populist writers and the SDG members who sympathized with them published in journals such as *Kelet*

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<sup>50</sup> Conceptual programme in Balatonszárszó, 1928, published in: FÓNYAD 1936, 36 and in: SOOS, Géza (1938): *Mit akar a SDG mozgalom?* Budapest, Soli Deo Gloria Szövetség. 9–10. The term ‘race’ in the quote needs clarification. It is important to note that this phrase should not be confused with the biological race implying superiority in the later Nazi ideology, which was derived from social Darwinism, since the word ‘race’ was often used as a synonym for ‘nation’ in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as Nóra Szekér explained in detail in her dissertation – see: SZEKÉR, Nóra (2009): *A magyar közösség története*. PhD dissertation. Budapest, Pázmány Péter Katolikus Egyetem, Történelemtudományok Doktori Iskola. 28–34.

<sup>51</sup> See: Rigó, Róbert (2022): *A Soli Deo Gloria Református Diákszövetség Kecskeméten*. In: *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai, Theologia Reformata Transylvanica*. 67, 1. 278–282.

*Népe, Válasz* and, of course, *Magyar Út*, which was published by SDG (and edited by Béla Pap and later Gyula Gombos).<sup>52</sup>

One of the most important milestones of the social mission was the workers', peasants', and students' meetings held in 1942 and 1943 at the SDG conference centre.<sup>53</sup> These meetings were linked to the annual Hungarian Brotherhood Conferences.<sup>54</sup> The conferences were organized for several reasons: primarily the foreign and domestic political crises (the fall of the Bárdossy government and the Soviet military successes) brought the underground resistance participants and government critics closer together and made them ponder ways to build a future for post-war Hungary, and, on the other hand, the person of the president of the alliance (Géza Soos) was a sufficient guarantee to the state that no anti-government movement would emerge from these meetings.<sup>55</sup>

Dezső Fónyad sees the conference as an “intellectual and spiritual ignition point” where youth touched a “hornet’s nest” in the then unstable political circumstances, as left-wing popular writers and right-wing resistance members and “third passengers” sought post-war opportunities.

After World War II, SDG’s life was revived and the movement felt the blessings of the awakening within its own framework, but several factors, most notably the youth-phobic policies of the emerging communist power, indirectly ended SDG’s mission. The last General Assembly was held on 17 December 1949, when it declared the dissolution of the Union, thus unwittingly fulfilling the Party’s main wish declaring its voluntary dissolution.<sup>56</sup> A curious addition was made to the minutes of the last General

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<sup>52</sup> The magazine *Magyar Út* first appeared as *Új Magyarság* and was later published as *Magyar Út*, after the name change, as a magazine first owned by SDG and later by Béla Pap.

<sup>53</sup> SVÉD, László (2013): Az 1942, 1943-as évek balatonszárszói találkozójának ifjúságtörténeti előzményei. In: *Múltunk*. 2013/1. 101–147.

<sup>54</sup> SZEKÉR, Nóra (2017): *Titkos társaság*. Budapest, Jaffa. 149.

<sup>55</sup> SVÉD 2013; also confirmed by: KISS, Réka: A magyar Wallenberg. Soos Géza. In: Czókos, Gergely – Kiss, Réka – Máthé, Áron – Szalai, Zoltán (2020): *Magyar hősök. Elfeledett életutak a 20. századból*. Budapest, Mathias Corvinus Collegium Alapítvány, Nemzeti Emlékezet Bizottsága. 383.

<sup>56</sup> In most cases, the justification was that the church had “taken over” the tasks, so there was no longer a need for a separate association. A sophisticated method used by the communists was to have the organizations “voluntarily” declare dissolution.



Assembly (which, incidentally, were not included in the minutes' volume but were on a separate sheet of paper). The reasons given for the dissolution and “becoming redundant” were that not only had the Church taken over the functions of SDG, but “all the objectives that SDG served are being carried out by the Reformed Church and *state bodies*, and therefore the Association declares its dissolution”.<sup>57</sup>

It is also important to add that after the departure of the previous SDG leadership (Soos, Vataj, Bognár), the organization was led by a leadership that did not meet the competence of its predecessors and seemed to be trying to adapt to the new direction. György Orgoványi<sup>58</sup> was elected president on 25 July 1948, and in his first speech he said, “I know that this election has not gone smoothly. It was a question of whether our Association would commit itself to being a youth organization and whether it could fully embark on the narrow path of faith and obedience.”<sup>59</sup> The elevation of the theology of the narrow path to a collaborative church-political programme is typically associated with the Bishop Albert Bereczky, who, as it is well known, took over the mandate in the same year after László Ravasz, who had been forced to resign.<sup>60</sup> Later, in 1950, the amendment of the Brotherly Message circular and the Missionary Decree completely abolished the possibilities of student evangelization, and the following decades were marked by scarce occasions of free youth evangelization in parishes, sometimes in secret, sometimes disguised as summer camps.

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<sup>57</sup> Synodal Archives (hereinafter: ZSL), fonds 24., box 2., 17 December 1949.

<sup>58</sup> György Orgoványi (1913–1985): Reformed pastor. Missionary curate in SDG (1947–1948) and then pastor of the university mission (1948–1950), pastor in Karcag (1950–1956), Jászkisér (1956–1959), Cegléd (1959–1966), and Budapest-Kőbánya (1966–1985).

<sup>59</sup> ZSL fonds 24, box 2, 25 July 1948. 101.

<sup>60</sup> LÁNYI, Gábor (2023): “Inkább okos voltam, mint erős”. Ravasz László lemondásának körülményei (1948). In: Kiss, Réka – Lányi, Gábor (eds.) (2023): *Ravasz 100, Püspöki jelentések*. Budapest, Dunamelléki Református Egyházkerület – Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem – Kálvin Kiadó. 49–52.; Lányi, Gábor (2019): Bishop Albert Bereczky (1893–1966). A Life Full of Questions. In: Kovács, Ábrahám – Shin, Jaeshik (eds.): *Nationalism, Communism and Christian Identity: Protestant Theological Reflections from Korea and Hungary*. Debrecen – Gwangju, Debreceni Református Hittudományi Egyetem – Honam Theological University and Seminary. 128.

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