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of the Reformed Church in Hungary



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Content / Tartalomjegyzék

CHURCH HISTORY – EGYHÁZTÖRTÉNELEM – ISTORIA BISERICII

István BOGÁRDI SZABÓ: <i>Pathfinders. István Török (1903–1996) in the Church – Against the Church – For the Church</i>	7
Ferenc PAP: <i>“Unity and Refinement”. Paths and Quests for Organizational and Ceremonial Unity in the First Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century</i>	20
Zoltán BÁRÁNY: <i>The Youth Inner Mission and the Soli Deo Gloria</i>	32
Dániel TÓTH-GYÓLLAI: <i>Debate on the Initiatives of the Faculty of Theology in Debrecen. The Theological Education Designed by Sándor Csikesz and Imre Révész</i>	51
Róbert RIGÓ: <i>The Confiscation of the Landholdings of the Reformed Church in the Kecskemét Reformed Church County (1945–1952)</i>	72
Gábor LÁNYI: <i>Viable Cooperation or Unscrupulous Service? Motivations for Albert Bereczky’s Activity in Church Governance</i>	101

Szabolcs SZETEY: <i>“We Must Participate with the Fruits of Our Faith in Building Socialism”. The Preaching Committee in the Danubian Reformed Church District in the Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century</i>	120
András CSÜRÖS: <i>The “Hungarian Barmen”. The Impact and Reception of the Declaration of Confession and the Barmen Declaration in Hungary</i>	137
Réka KISS: <i>Pathfinding and Connections in the Life of Small Reformed Communities in Budapest. The Contexts of the 1967 YMCA Trial</i>	157
Szilvia KÖBEL: <i>The Significance of Relations between Hungarian and Dutch Reformed Congregations under the Single-Party State – With a Special Emphasis on the Dutch Connections of Dezső Szabó, Pastor in Káloz, in the Focus of the State Security Services</i>	191
Péter NAGY: <i>The Path of the Reformed Church in Elizabeth</i>	209
Gergely HANULA: <i>Changes in the Language of the Reformed Church in the Second Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: The Convergence of Oral History and Big Data</i>	232
ÚTMUTATÓ SZERZŐINKNEK	250
INSTRUCTIONS FOR AUTHORS	256

István BOGÁRDI SZABÓ:<sup>1</sup>

## Pathfinders. István Török (1903–1996) in the Church – Against the Church – For the Church<sup>2</sup>

### *Abstract.*

The life and theological work of István Török (1903–1996) clearly illustrate the alternations of Protestantism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and at the same time reflect the changes in the circumstances of the Hungarian Reformed Church. From the beginning of his career, first as a teacher at the Papal Reformed Theological Academy and then as a professor at Tisza István University of Debrecen, he participated in the theological debates. These reflections helped the orientations of the Church. During the years of communism, his publishing activities were limited, and after 1956 he was suspended from his teaching position. Nevertheless, he delivered many lectures

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<sup>2</sup> The sentence is originally from Hermann Kutter. (KUTTER, Hermann (1938): Vallásosliberalizmus–keresztény szabadság. In: *Protestáns Szemle*. 47, 5. 249. See also: TÖRÖK, István (1943b): Az egyházkritika. In: *Theológiai Szemle*. 19, 4. 200. The present study was carried out within the framework of the *Challenges and Wayfinding in the History of the Hungarian Reformed Church in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* research project (No. 66001R800) of the Church History Research Institute of the Faculty of Theology at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary.





to his former students at the so-called “black conferences”. In the period around the regime change (1989–1991), he rejoined the public life of the Church with several writings. Significant theological turns require freedom, when the Church paves the way for the eternal, even at the cost of conflict or self-restraint.

**Keywords:** Protestantism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, dialectical theology, ethical dimensions of Christian life, freedom of the church

The metaphor of “path” and the associated “pathfinding”, as well as the “loss of path” are key terms in Christianity (*communio viatorum*) – in the narrower sense: history of the church and theology (even) in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. István Török’s (1903–1996) life and theological work demonstrate this because his academic and public work kept track of the alternations of the entire 20<sup>th</sup>-century Protestant (and to a lesser extent the Roman Catholic) theology (its pathfinding, new ways, and wrong turns) on the one hand, and his life and fate also reflect the changes in the circumstances of the Hungarian Reformed Church on the other.<sup>3</sup>

István Török was born on 1 December 1904 in Tiszaeszlár, graduated from high school in Karcag (1923), started his theological studies in Debrecen (1924), and later, as a scholarship holder, completed his studies in Berlin, in Münster, and then in Marburg (1926–1928). In Debrecen, Sándor Csikesz had a decisive influence on him. In Münster, he joined Karl Barth’s circle of students and also listened to the representatives of the dialectical theology – which was then in the developing phase and branching out in many directions –, in particular to Karl Barth’s fellow theologian and friend, Eduard Thurneysen, and the Roman Catholic Erich Przywara. In Berlin, he attended Adolf von Harnack’s lectures, and in Marburg, Rudolf Bultmann’s. In addition, he could attend the lectures delivered by the so-called social gospel’s representative, the elderly Hermann

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<sup>3</sup> The life and the theological work of István Török was comprehensively discussed by HOTORÁN, János Gábor (2019): “...*A kinél pedig az igém van, beszéljeazz én igémet igazán*”, Török István, az igeteológus. Hittudományi doktori értekezés a rendszeres teológia tárgyköréből. Debrecen. 239. <https://dea.lib.unideb.hu/server/api/core/bitstreams/bfa2ac08-f7c6-4ed2-be02-c93c98ad7503/content> (accessed on: 11/30/2023).

Kutter, and the religious socialist Paul Tillich, who later became the proponent of the so-called correlative theology.<sup>4</sup>

In 1929, after his homecoming, he became a substitute teacher of religion in Pápa. From 1931, he became an associate lecturer and then, from 1932, a tenured teacher at the Reformed Theological Academy in Pápa. In 1932, he got his Ph.D. in theology at Tisza István University of Debrecen, and then he obtained a private teaching qualification (habilitation) at the same university in 1940. A year later, István Török was nominated as an extraordinary professor, and in 1945, he was promoted to professor, with tenure at the Ethics Department of the Faculty of Theology. Between 1950 and 1967 (actually until 1957), he worked at the Debrecen Reformed Theological University, by that time teaching dogmatics as well. In the academic year 1957–58, as a consequence of his statements during the 1956 Revolution, he was “sent on sabbatical leave” (in fact, forced into silence), and his ethics lectures at the faculty were entrusted to someone else. He retired in 1968. He died in Debrecen on 11 April 1996.<sup>5</sup>

István Török, as an academic and university lecturer, was already involved in various theological debates (pathfinding) in Hungary since the beginning of his career, which had been going on in the Hungarian Reformed Church between 19<sup>th</sup>-century liberalism and the so-called confessional orthodoxy, cultural Protestantism and the so-called historical Calvinism, as well as between confessional Christianity and dialectical theology.<sup>6</sup> He was an active writer and a beloved lecturer. Between the two world wars, he published several articles in various periodicals such as *Igazság és élet* (Debrecen), *Dunántúli*

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<sup>4</sup> István Török himself wrote about this in 1994, in the volume in which his doctoral thesis, a lecture, and his habilitation thesis were published together in reprint form. In: TÖRÖK, István (1994): *Barth Károly teológiájának kezdetei*. Debrecen.

<sup>5</sup> See his obituary in BARCZA, József (1996): Dr. Török István emlékezete. In: *Confessio*. 20, 3. 75–78. See also KOVÁCS, I. Gábor (2014): *Török István*. In: Kovács, I. Gábor (ed.): *Hit – tudomány – közélet*. Budapest, Eötvös Kiadó. 136–141.

<sup>6</sup> István Török himself provided an encyclopaedic summary of the trends and debates in Reformed theology in Hungary (and with some forays into Transylvania [now Romania] and Upper Hungary [now Slovakia]). *A mai magyarországi református teológia helyzetképe*. In: *Theológiai Szemle*. 18, 1. 28–37. In his introductory note, he indicates that his article was written for the information of German church circles and that he translated it into German himself. I have not been able to find out whether it was published in German.

*Protestáns Lap* (Pápa), *Protestáns Szemle*, or *Theológiai Szemle*. He did not publish but a few minor articles during the years of communism (before 1956), and after his suspension from his teaching position, he was no longer allowed to publish in Hungary.<sup>7</sup>

His main works are: *Barth Károly theológiájának kezdetei* [The Beginnings of Karl Barth's Theology] (Pápa, 1931, doctoral thesis), *Egyház és politika* (Pápa, 1935, essay), *Az Ószövetség értékelése Kálvin Intitutiójában* [Evaluation of the Old Testament in Calvin's *Institutes*],<sup>8</sup> *A lelkész, mint etikus* [The Pastor as Ethicist] (*Igazság és Élet*, 1937. 9–15.), *A házasság keresztyén jellege* [The Christian Aspect of Marriage] (Pápa, 1940, habilitation thesis), *Dogmatika* [Dogmatics] (Amsterdam, 1985, completed in 1971 according to the foreword), *Etika* [Ethics] (Amsterdam, 1988), *Határkérdések szolgálatunkban* [Borderline Issues in Our Service] (Budapest, 1990). The last booklet is a selection of his lectures (thirty-six lectures, letters, and drafts of studies) given after his retirement among his former students at the so-called “black conferences”, and it can be considered a special ecclesiastical “samizdat” because, on the one hand, as István Török stated in the introduction, he gave these lectures in an “atmosphere of fear”, and, on the other, he sent some of them to the official church leadership. In the period around the regime change (1989–1991), he got involved in the public life of the church with several writings, mainly published in *Reformátusok Lapja*, *Confessio*, and *Református Tiszántúl*.

His extensive correspondence, manuscript articles, and studies are preserved in the Library of Sárospatak, and some of them are kept in the Archives of the University of Debrecen.

Many of his eulogies unanimously emphasize the critical nature of his theology.<sup>9</sup> The labels “critical”, “ecclesiological”, and “theological critique” require, nevertheless, careful

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<sup>7</sup> It is characteristic that the representative works on the history of the Church and theology published during the party-state period neglect his work. Cf. BARTHA, Tibor – MAKKAI, László (1983): *Studia et Acta Ecclesiastica V., Tanulmányok a magyarországi református egyház történetéből, 1867–1978*. Budapest, MRE Zsinati Irodájának Sajtóosztálya.

<sup>8</sup> TÖRÖK, István (1936): *Az Ószövetség értékelése Kálvin Intitutiójában*. In: *Kálvin és a kálvinizmus. Tanulmányok*. Debrecen, Debrecen sz. kir. város és a Tiszántúli református egyházkerület könyvnyomda-vállalata. 121–138.

<sup>9</sup> It can be considered a kind of rehabilitation that the solemn synodal resolution (2009) issued on the occasion of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Barmen Declaration published the text of the Declaration in the translation of István Török. He prepared the translation for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1954, but

consideration. Throughout his whole activity, István Török followed the concept determined by the so-called dialectical theology, according to which the special task of theology is a critical (differentiating) examination of all life activities of the Church, with regard to the foundational and maintaining functions thereof, its primary task and service being above all: preaching. In this sense, theological criticism also has a specific ecclesiastical function in church government.<sup>10</sup> Because of his statements and evaluations made during and after the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, this Church and theological criticism conflicted with the assertions, decisions, and theological pretensions of the Church leadership of the time. All these led to his silencing.

First of all, as a specialist, teacher, and publicist, when talking about *times*, the particular periods of the history of the Church, or about theological periods, he insists on necessary distinctions. In this respect, his main work, *Dogmatika*, mostly its outlook on Church history and the chapter(s) on eschatology should be analysed separately.<sup>11</sup> This carefully established and discriminating effort has particular significance for his complex critique of the so-called “theology of the serving Church” because the representatives of this theology constantly celebrated a “new world era” (communism, socialism) as the motivating factor of a new theological era. He formulates it in his *Dogmatika* as follows:

A particular question in church history is: how has the church in the alternating epochs understood and responded to God’s revelation? This response has been different in the Reformation, in the Age of Enlightenment, and different again today, according to the degree of understanding of revelation and changing circumstances. Sometimes the church obeyed, sometimes it resisted, sometimes it sought to serve and sometimes to rule. So, the life of the Church is not repeating itself in some eternal cycle but is moving towards its conclusion during the different eras. In its course, the Church reveals newer and newer features, not only in its missteps, failures, and sins but also in its virtues, blessings,

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it could not be published at that time. [https://www.reformatus.hu/documents/348/2009.11.19\\_A\\_75\\_éves\\_barmeni\\_nyilatkozatról.pdf](https://www.reformatus.hu/documents/348/2009.11.19_A_75_éves_barmeni_nyilatkozatról.pdf) (accessed on 11/28/2023). Earlier on the Barmen Declaration: TÖRÖK, István (1938): *Protestáns Hitvallás*. In: *Protestáns Szemle*. 47, 3. 353–359.

<sup>10</sup> The many uses of the term “criticism” are also explained in detail in several chapters of his *Dogmatika*. Cf. TÖRÖK, István (1985): *Dogmatika*.

<sup>11</sup> Op. cit. I. 2: *A teológia protestáns jellege*; XII: *Az eszkatológia*.

and brilliant works. It is precisely in the critical study of history that the future-shaping influence of Christ's life is revealed in newer and newer ways.<sup>12</sup>

In a presentation on 29 May 1958 (*Our Christianity in the Historical Epoch of Socialism*), which was published (in print) after his death,<sup>13</sup> he also formulates several reservations regarding the expression “epoch” (era). He did not choose the title of this lecture himself, but he deals with the subject almost out of necessity, as a kind of reckoning; he has to give a clarificatory statement because of his utterances in 1956. In December 1956, at a church meeting, he gave a lecture titled *Dissolution and Resumption*, in which he explained the duties of the National Reformed Administrative Committee, established in October 1956, and initiated new elections in the Reformed Church after the former leaders who had compromised themselves with the Stalinist government had resigned.<sup>14</sup> In the first part of the lecture, he demonstrates the necessity and legitimacy of the initiative of the Administrative Committee, and in the second part, he analyses the radio statement made by László Ravasz during the revolution.

In early 1958, on the threshold of the restoration of Stalinist ecclesiastical policy, the church government of the time asked him “thematic” (in fact, interrogatory) questions about how he viewed the “historical era” of socialism, questions of chauvinism and patriotism, cosmopolitanism and internationalism, and about the difference between *corpus christianum* and *corpus Christi*. Even before 1956, but especially during the period of ecclesiastical restoration after the suppression of the 1956 revolution until the change of regime in 1989-90, these were constant topics of the church government's celebratory declarations, official theological theorizations, sample sermons, and statements.<sup>15</sup> In

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<sup>12</sup> Op. cit. 237. [The translations of all, originally non-English quotations belong to Augusta Szász.]

<sup>13</sup> TÖRÖK, István (2000): Kereszténységünk a szocializmus történelmi korszakában. In: *Egyháztörténelmi Szemle*. 1, 2. 88–97.

<sup>14</sup> TÖRÖK, István (1996): *Felszámolás és újrakezdés*. Ed. by József Barcza. In: *Confessio*. 20, 2. 78–83. For how the renewal movement of 1956 worked, see KISS, Réka (ed.) (2007): *Kelt mint fent. Iratok a Református Megújulási Mozgalom történetéből. (1956–1957)*. Budapest, Dunamelléki Református Egyházkerület.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. BOGÁRDI SZABÓ, István (1995): *Egyházvezetés és teológia a Magyarországi Református Egyházban 1948 és 1989 között*. (Societas et Ecclesia 3). Doctoral thesis. Debrecen; HORVÁTH, Erzsébet: *History of the Hungarian Reformed Church through the Communist Era (1945–1989)*. <https://zsinatilevtar.hu/node/18> (accessed on: 11/30/2023); FÜSTI-MOLNÁR, Szilveszter (2008):

response to the questions, István Török clarifies his previous statements! He does not revoke anything from his 1956 lecture, and this is precisely due to his objections against the irresponsible incentive of periodization. In this statement, he denounces the theological trespasses and arrogance of the church governance, just as he did at the end of 1956.<sup>16</sup> Also, instead of a declamatory naming of the ages (eras, epochs), he suggests a sober reflection on the church governance. In speaking of epoch, it is a thorny question what it is that we compare, e.g. socialism with capitalism, technical civilization with the nuclear age, liberal democracies with dictatorships, or some kind of period of peace with the time of war. He asks whether the exclusive use of “the historical epoch of socialism” is appropriate.

Kierkegaard argued that the church will inevitably fail in its work if it makes an absolute reference to the relative because then it will necessarily make a relative reference to the absolute. It wins the world, but it betrays God. Therefore, considering our faith and ministry, I cannot emphasize enough the need for sobriety among my brothers. As the words of the apostle state, “Therefore, be alert and sober-minded!” (1 Peter 4:7). The internal and external credibility of our ministry and the reality of our Church policies depend on our moderation and soberness. I’ve said a lot about this over the years, but it seems I’ve said little. Let me add another example to those I have given so far. I read this justification in regard to the harsh discipline of some of our fellow pastors: “It happened because of his disobedience to the Word of God.”<sup>17</sup> Please let us not say that because the reality is that some of our fellow pastors have been in conflict with the order of our people’s democracy<sup>18</sup> or with the rules of our Church government, which is the reason why they have been disciplined. No one asks us to identify the order of our people’s democracy with the Word of God. Yet, if we were to identify the decisions of our church government with the Word of God, we must consider that even a church decision as broadly and thoroughly biblically justified as the Reformation cannot be identified with

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*Ecclesia sine macula et ruga: Donatist Factors among the Ecclesiological Challenges for the Reformed Church of Hungary, especially after 1989/90.* Sárospatak, SRTA; VAJTA, Vilmos (1987): *Die „diakonische Theologie“ im Gesellschaftssystem Ungarns.* Frankfurt am Main, Vrlg. Otto Lembeck.

<sup>16</sup> István Török’s 1956 statements are presented in HOTORÁN 2019, 186–195.

<sup>17</sup> It can be taken as a reference to the Reformed minister Lajos Gulyás (1918–1957), who was condemned on false accusations and executed after the crushing of 1956 revolution.

<sup>18</sup> People’s democracy was an official term of the Marxist–Leninist state.

the Word of God. The requirement of sobriety in all aspects means: what is divine is divine, and let it remain divine, and what is human is human. Statement is statement, and church policy is church policy. If we confuse the divine with the human, by losing our sobriety, we are no longer in the camp of the reformers but of the fanatics, and we have taken false steps in our ministry. I acknowledge that the opposite temptation also exists, to torn apart or to circumvent the divine by the human. I hope it will be made clear from what follows that this is as far from me as confusing the two.<sup>19</sup>

However, in order to see István Török's utterances not merely as a criticism of the church politics of the time but as statements from a profound thinker, his critical work must be seen as a methodological element of orientation and "pathfinding".

In order to do this, we need to consider a variety of circumstances. First of all, István Török is extremely reserved when it comes to big words (epoch, age, etc.). This methodological suspicion can be observed in almost all of his publications. So, it is not just a matter of a kind of authorial or lecturing attitude or an inclination to speak out more courageously when the work cannot be published but also of thoroughness and methodical thinking when there is no obstacle to publication. In 1943, he published a long article, which originally was a lecture given at a pastoral training course in Tiszántúl, entitled *Korunk teológiai kérdései* [The Theological Questions of Our Age].<sup>20</sup> Its main aim was to help pastors in their orientation and their theological reflection.<sup>21</sup> First, according to the encyclopaedic arrangement of theology (biblical research, church historical considerations, systematic theological subjects, religious pedagogy), he reports on the main movements of the 1930s and 1940s (mainly in the German-speaking area), indicating that there was a turnaround in theological research and church discourse compared to the previous decades, which, however, is neither an escape from scholarship nor the introduction of absolutely new theological topics but rather a reorientation of theological research, which places the theological studies that were previously considered important or insignificant into a new (special) context.

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<sup>19</sup> TÖRÖK 2000, 88.

<sup>20</sup> TÖRÖK István (1943a): *Korunk teológiai kérdései*. In: *Theológiai Szemle*. 19, 3. 151–162.

<sup>21</sup> Already in his doctoral thesis, he expresses his view that the search for the path of "priest-theologians and theologian-priests" is the elementary task of theology. TÖRÖK, István (1931): *Barth Károly teológiájának kezdetei*. Doctoral thesis. Pápa. 3.

He then turns to so-called topicalities. Nevertheless, his choice of topics is not random. He brings up controversial issues that have played a significant role in the theological reflection and church life in the following decades. He presents and thoroughly criticizes Rudolf Bultmann's programme of demythologizing, pointing out that it can be seen as a return to 19<sup>th</sup>-century theological liberalism.<sup>22</sup> He discusses Karl Barth's critical views on infant baptism.<sup>23</sup> He presents and comments on the relationship between Protestantism and Catholicism in the light of the changing reception of Luther, including a church political approach concerning Hungary. Here he discusses the thesis of Joseph Lortz (1887–1975), Roman Catholic Church historian in Münster, popular and controversial at the time, namely that if there had been a reform synod of the medieval church at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Luther would have been a reformer of the Catholic Church.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, Luther's effort must be regarded as a particular truth, and as such the pure ideals in partiality of the Protestant Reformation can be adopted into the whole of Catholicism.<sup>25</sup> Török declares this proposal to be an empty trick in the light of the Hungarian experiences, but he does not urge anyone to further fight over the

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<sup>22</sup> The Hungarian aspects of the philosophical and theological reception of Bultmann are presented by IGNÁ CZ, Lilla (2007): *Hermeneutika és teológia Rudolf Bultmann gondolkodásában*. Doctoral thesis. Budapest, ELTE BTK.

[https://doktori.btk.elte.hu/phil/ignacz/ignacz\\_dissz\\_hun.pdf](https://doktori.btk.elte.hu/phil/ignacz/ignacz_dissz_hun.pdf) (accessed on: 11/30/2023).

<sup>23</sup> Török is referring to Barth's ideas in the late 1930s. Later, in *Kirchliche Dogmatik* IV/4 (1967), Barth set out his objections to infant baptism in detail. Partly with reference to Karl Barth, in the mid-1990s, there was also a debate in the Hungarian Reformed Church about infant baptism. Literature review and summarizing: FEKETE, Károly, ifj. (1995): A keresztséggel kapcsolatos tanulmányok kritikai összefoglalása. In: *Theológiai Szemle*. 38, 6. 363–370.

<sup>24</sup> Lortz's much-discussed thesis, alongside Toynbee's historical-philosophical comments, could have inspired István Bibó's famous *Uchrónia, ha a Zsinati mozgalom a 15. században győzött volna...* (1968).

<sup>25</sup> It is worth noting that such a presentation of the Reformation appeared as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most notably in the apologetic work of the Spanish Roman Catholic Jaime Balmes (1810–1848), which was also published in Hungarian translation: BALMES, Jakab (1865–1866): A protestantismus és katholicismus vonatkozással az európai polgárisodásra I–II. In: *Magyar Egyházirodalmi Iskola*. 28–29 (1865–66). In the 1950s, Balmes's apologetic argumentation again became the focus of attention. Also, most recently: BRAD, Gregory (2015): *The Unintended Reformation*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press.



religion of children born in mixed marriages<sup>26</sup> or to engage in political and cultural struggles to assert the numerical representation of denominations, but he rather encourages to theological reflections. He says that the Reformation must be examined not for its external motives but for its internal reasons. Otherwise, while the unionist-Catholic propaganda is whitewashing Luther, it is still blackening today's Protestantism with the sins previously ascribed to Luther. The permissive proposal of Lortz may give the impression that Protestantism's separation is an outdated attachment to a historical mistake. This is how he summarized: "One thing is certain, if... instead of serious theological work, we respond to Rome with well-worded denominational peace declarations, this attitude, however unintentional and sincere, is a sign that we have taken the hook that has been carefully prepared for us without thinking. We have taken it, but we are not even a hair's breadth closer to the unity of faith we have longed for."<sup>27</sup>

One other annotation further illustrates the methodological nature of the discretion (theological criticism). At the end of his lecture, he also discusses World War II and offers a warning about Hungary's involvement. He points out that the issue of war does not require "political pomposity" but theological testimony, and in this – he notes – Karl Barth, whom he admires, did not always find the "most appropriate word".<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, he asks, whether the often-used term "crusade" just fell out of use after the outbreak of

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<sup>26</sup> The question of the obligation to educate children in religion has been a major area of religious struggle for centuries. Although it was abolished in civil law in 1868, the refusal of a baptismal pledge continued to be a sign of religious loyalty in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the enforcement of a pledge was the subject of constant Protestant complaints. In his habilitation work on marriage, István Török addresses the question in several places (in: TÖRÖK, István (1940): *A házasság keresztyén jellege*. Pápa. 29–31, 69–74); he separately discusses a proposal to prohibit church members who have the pledge from communion (Török, István (1937): *Csak kárhozatot ennék és innék a reverzálist adó egyháztág az úrasztalánál?* In: *Dunántúli Protestáns Lap*. 48, 49. 235–236.

<sup>27</sup> TÖRÖK 1943a, 160.

<sup>28</sup> Török refers not only to the fact that Karl Barth was constantly speaking out against Germany during World War II but also to his letter to Joseph L. Hromádka, published in 1938, when Czechoslovakia was occupied by the Germans, in which Barth described the fight of the Czech soldiers against the Germans as a fight for the Church of Jesus Christ. Barth's letter also caused a storm in Hungary. The letter is presented in Nagy, Barna (1938): *Barth Károly politikai teológiája*. In: *Sárospataki Református Lapok*. 33, 48. 238.

the Second World War,<sup>29</sup> or it was simply that the Church's use of the word was influenced by political discourse, that is, at the decisive moment (i.e. when Hungary entered the war), our eloquent Prime Minister was no longer talking about a crusade, but he said that we were participating in the war because we wanted to sit at the negotiating table during the future peace negotiations.<sup>30</sup>

He continues:

If political leaders showed such sobriety, at least in the use of words, why did church leaders have to make a strange bid on them: to say something bigger at any cost with less sobriety? Why did they have to be more irresponsible than the “sons of the world”? But the church leaders, he adds, could have considered theological reflection. “For the crusade – if we dare to use that pretentious word – has spiritual preconditions. If we promote a crusade without a careful consideration of the spiritual presuppositions, we will not be “sanctifying” the “profane” but profaning the holy. The crusade is therefore not a political question but a theological one, and we should not try to avoid this theological question by saying that the Bolsheviks are slaughtering the priests, so the crusade against them is an *eo ipso* crusade. With this theological nonsense, we serve neither an ecclesiastical nor a national purpose but only gather burning coals on our own heads. The one who is called to be a guard must indeed be on guard, and the watchman's duty includes the vigilant and constant exercise of theological criticism, even in relation to our use of words beyond the pulpit.<sup>31</sup>

In the summary of his lecture, referring back to all the topics, he says, “If these questions, which have been taken only by way of example, had come to us during World

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<sup>29</sup> It is worth noting that Pope Pius XI's anti-communist encyclical *Divini Redemptoris* (19 March 1937) – at least in its English and French versions – uses the term “crusade” (*crusade, croisade*) in two senses: the crusade of communism against humanity (§9) and the crusade of prayer and penance against communism (§58). The encyclical was published five days after the anti-Nazi encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge*. The term “crusade” took on a whole new dimension during the Cold War. Under communism, it became a buzzword of co-operative church politics. For instance, the editorial *Helsinki után, Genfelőtt* published in *Az Út* (10–16 July 1955) and HROMÁDKA, Jozef (1959): *Az egyház a hidegháború korában*. Paper presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> session of the Christian Peace Conference in Prague. In: *Theológiai Szemle*. 2, 5–6. 181–182.

<sup>30</sup> Reference to statements made by Prime Minister László Bárdossy (1890–1946) (1942–42), who justified Hungary's entry into the war (11 April 1941) by saying that this would make it possible to revise the Vienna awards (1938, 1940–42).

<sup>31</sup> TÖRÖK 1943a, 161.

War I, they would probably have caused greater confusion in our ranks than they do today. The significance of the theological turn that began between the two world wars is exactly that the Church turned our hesitant gaze to its Head and its Lord. In our responses, and in the whole post-turnaround settlement, there will be as much time resistance as there is respect for it.”<sup>32</sup>

In his statements after 1945, but especially in the context of the 1956 Revolution and the church renewal movement (which were only made public after 1989), István Török always asserted this ultimate criterion, namely the Christological perspective. It is a different matter that, in asserting this, he was confronted with the church leadership and had to fight against the Church for the Church. It was in fact not during World War I that the “greater disorder” hit the church but after World War II, after the communist takeover and the suppression of the 1956 Revolution. Lasting theological turns require freedom; more precisely, when the Church makes use of its evangelical freedom, even at the cost of conflict or resignation, it opens the path to the abiding.


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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

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Ferenc PAP:<sup>1</sup> 

## “Unity and Refinement”. Paths and Quests for Organizational and Ceremonial Unity in the First Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century<sup>2</sup>

### *Abstract.*

This article explores the efforts of the Hungarian Reformed Church in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to achieve uniformity and refinement in its worship practices. The desire for a unified Hungarian Reformed worship service had been a hallmark of previous centuries, leading to a long journey of development in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The standardization of the liturgical praxis aimed to create a sense of shared identity and eliminate historical variations in regional worship practices and customs. The movement for liturgical unity had been ongoing for centuries, with earlier attempts including church district agendas published in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The publication of the Liturgical Book [*Istentiszteleti Rendtartás*] in 1930, which is the first official Agenda for the whole Reformed Church in Hungary, marked a culmination of efforts towards liturgical unity. The paper highlights the tension between achieving uniformity and preserving diversity within a religious tradition.

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<sup>2</sup> The study was carried out within the framework of the *Challenges and Wayfinding in the History of the Hungarian Reformed Church in the 20th Century* research project (No. 66001R800) of the Church History Research Institute of the Faculty of Theology at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary.



**Keywords:** liturgics, history of liturgy in the Reformed Church in Hungary, liturgical book, 20<sup>th</sup> century, worship practices

"The Hungarian Reformed Church expressed its spiritual unity also in organizational unit during the Synod in Debrecen."<sup>3</sup> – says the foreword to the *Liturgical Book* published in 1930 and officially implemented in 1931, fifty years after the constituting synod held in Debrecen. Homiletical and liturgical instructions and explanations are attached to the text of the canonical regulations issued in the form of a synodal resolution. The embodiment of the unified Reformed Church organization in ecclesiastical law, the Synod, which was authorized to issue liturgical regulations, created after the 1881 Synod, gives the entire Reformed Church in Hungary a new, consistent ritual book: "The Reformed Christian Church in Hungary establishes the following regulation of worship."<sup>4</sup> The added comment is an important statement of liturgical history: "This book is the fruit of decades of ordinance reform in the Hungarian Reformed Christian Church. This reform was inspired by the idea of *unity and refinement*."<sup>5</sup> Strongly associated with Bishop László Ravasz, bearing his handprint and theological vision, the liturgical book, known as the "Ravasz-ágenda", actually compiled by an editorial board, is still in the public awareness, being on the one hand a liturgical book that, consciously or not, still defines the practice, style, and language of Hungarian Reformed worship, and, on the other hand, it is the fulfilment of centuries-old aspirations. In this study, we want to provide some context to the history of the *Liturgical Book*, intended to be consistent and issued with the intention of standardization.

The publication entitled *Reformátusok a kegyelem trónusánál – A magyar református istentisztelet megújulásának teológiai alapelvei* [Reformed Believers at the Throne of Grace – Theological Principles for the Renewal of Hungarian Reformed Worship], published by the Liturgical Committee of the General Convention, makes the following statement based on historical experience:

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<sup>3</sup> RAVASZ, László (comp.) (1930): *Istentiszteleti Rendtartás*. Budapest. [V].

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit. [3].

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. The quoted sentence was included unchanged in the 1950 draft of *Istentiszteleti Rendtartás* [Liturgical Book], which was intended to amend the 1930 edition. Ibid.

The unity of the Church is not a ceremonial uniformity but a common faith and hope: “one Lord, one faith, one baptism”. It is wrong if this results in a confusing mess. Identical forms that express cohesion are needed. Individualism must be rejected by the law of love. It is desirable that anyone anywhere should be able to participate in Hungarian Reformed worship in such a way that they feel a sense of home and belonging that strengthens our unique identity.<sup>6</sup>

Our Reformed confessional document, the Second Helvetic Confession, also deals with the issue of ceremonial unity and diversity, or “variety”. In compliance with the Reformed tradition, the confession emphasizes the need and importance of unity and identity of doctrine and faith rather than the uniformity of liturgical and ceremonial practices.

Today, having in our churches different rites in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper and in some other things, nevertheless do not disagree in doctrine and faith; nor is the unity and fellowship of our churches thereby rent asunder. For the churches have always used their liberty in such rites, as being things indifferent. We also do the same thing today. (*Second Helvetic Confession* XXVII, 2)

*The unity of the church is not in external rites.* Furthermore, we diligently teach that care is to be taken wherein the truth and unity of the Church chiefly lies, lest we rashly provoke and foster schisms in the Church. Unity consists not in outward rites and ceremonies, but rather in the truth and unity of the catholic faith. The catholic faith is not given to us by human laws, but by Holy Scriptures, of which the Apostles’ Creed is a compendium. And, therefore, we read in the ancient writers that there was a manifold diversity of rites, but that they were free, and no one ever thought that the unity of the Church was thereby dissolved. So we teach that the true harmony of the Church consists in doctrines and in the true and harmonious preaching of the Gospel of Christ, and in rites that have been expressly delivered by the Lord. And here we especially urge that saying of the apostle: *Let those of us who are perfect have this mind; and if in any thing you are otherwise minded, God will reveal that also to you. Nevertheless let us walk by the same rule according to what we have attained, and let us be of the same mind* (Phil. 3:15–16). (*Second Helvetic Confession* XVII, 27)

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<sup>6</sup> FEKETE, Károly (ed.) (2010): *Reformátusok a kegyelem trónusánál. A magyar református istentisztelet megújulásának teológiai alapelvei*. Budapest, Kálvin. 14. [The translations of all, originally non-English quotations belong to Augusta Szász.]

In the first centuries of the Reformation, the traditions of the so-called "liturgical areas" played a decisive role around Europe and in the Hungarian geographical regions, which must and can be interpreted and evaluated in their own historical, ecclesiastical, historical, and cultural context. The researcher is confronted with a bewildering variety of worship traditions and practices, based on historical sources, agendas, canons, ritual rules and descriptions, hymnbook types, and various historical sources. Due to the historical, ecclesiastical, and cultural contexts mentioned above, our sources show a slightly or highly different liturgical practice in the regions of Eastern Hungary, Upper Hungary, Transdanubia, Transylvania, and the so-called Tiszáninnen region. Historical sources always draw on historical antecedents, organizing, describing, and shaping normative claims about the practices of worship that became common knowledge.

Our early, 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>-century, often sketchy, tract-like liturgical sources and their authors already mention the diversity in the wrong sense, variety, in many cases individualism and fragmentation in ritual matters. The sources of liturgics and agenda history show that prominent church figures, often church leaders, bishops, whose task as church governors in the Reformed tradition was to supervise and oversee the rituals and acts of worship, published from time to time their publications with normative intentions to guide in matters of worship at least once in every century. With one or two exceptions, such as the ritual book of Máté János Samarjai (Lócse, 1636; RMNy, 1654),<sup>7</sup> there were agendas and, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century on, mainly small agendas (agendas' extracts) which described and prescribed the ritual duties of the pastors/preachers, the performance of "holy acts".<sup>8</sup> The ordinances broadly regulate what the preacher says, concentrating on the liturgical practices and the bound texts of the rites, regulating primarily the rite of baptism and communion, the two sacraments as well as the wedding ceremony. These may include the tradition of mothers going to church for the first time after childbirth, the description of churching of women, public penance, ecclesiastical exhortation, sometimes the election of a judge and very rarely the texts for

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<sup>7</sup> HELTAI, János (2008): *Műfajok és művek a XVII. század magyarországi könyvkiadásában (1601–1655)*. Budapest, OSZK – Universitas. 206.

<sup>8</sup> PAP, Ferenc (2012): Báthori Gábor (1755–1842) liturgiai öröksége és a Pesti Egyház Ágendája (1796) a korszak összefüggésében. In: Pap, Ferenc (ed.): *Illés lelkével. Tanulmányok Báthori Gábor és Dobos János lelkipásztori működéséről*. Budapest, KRE – L'Harmattan. 14–16.



funerals, and then, building on 18<sup>th</sup>-century precedents, starting from the 19<sup>th</sup> century the description of the rite of confirmation has gradually appeared in the agendas.<sup>9</sup>

With the exception of the ritual description found in the 1574 gradual of Gál Huszár (RMNy 353), the order of the full service or the preaching service without communion is practically not found in the sources until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century; at most, it can be reconstructed by taking into account individual sources by analogy although in this case it is always a question of the extent to which a single source or data can be extended to a larger area or to several liturgical geographical areas.

The acts of worship, especially the celebrations of baptism, communion, and wedding, had to be polemically focused on in the agendas, as their course and the way individuals recurred to them expressed the sense of belonging to the given denomination, thus to the Reformed confession, and guaranteed the realization and maintenance of pure doctrine and practice in accordance with the Scriptures and the creeds. In the agendas, and especially in the sermons and teachings of the agendas and rituals, the separation and dissociation from other denominations – most firmly from Roman Catholic practice – were especially emphasized in order to avoid identification or a mixing of denominational practices among the faithful.

Throughout Europe, the history of Reformed worship can largely be described as an agenda history.<sup>10</sup> One of the outstanding tasks and significance of the agendas was to draw clear boundaries between Catholicism and Protestantism, as well as to mark out more easily permeable denominational areas between Protestant practice, including Lutheran and Reformed, and hymnbooks and hymnbook traditions that had their roots in common traditions but which gradually became denominationally separated by the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>11</sup>

The first third of the 17<sup>th</sup> century saw the birth of the agenda tradition, which has continued to play a dominant role to this day. We consider István Nyilas Milotai's Agenda (1621/1622) to be *the* Agenda, the reference point, which has defined and

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<sup>9</sup> PAP, Ferenc (2021): Konfirmáció a 19. század elején a dunamelléki egyházkerületben. In: Siba, Balázs – Szabóné László, Lilla – Kaszó, Gyula (eds.): *Hitben növekedni – ősi gyökerek és új hajtások. Tanulmányok Németh Dávid hatvanötödik születésnapjára*. Budapest, KRE – L'Harmattan. 201–220; PAP 2012, 73–88.

<sup>10</sup> BIERITZ, Karl-Heinrich (2004): *Liturgiik*. Berlin – New York, de Gruyter. 536–565.

<sup>11</sup> H. HUBERT, Gabriella (2004): *A régi magyar gyülekezeti ének*. Budapest, Universitas. 270–283.

influenced the history of Hungarian Reformed worship for centuries and has had an impact to this day.<sup>12</sup>

The difficulty of research is that our liturgical history up to the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (contrary to the methodology of liturgical history research still prevalent in the 20<sup>th</sup> century) cannot be written and assessed merely on the basis of ritual books and agendas.

The concept of "agenda" has undergone several changes in meaning in Protestant theological-liturgical language over the past centuries. *Liturgika* by Ferenc Tóth, a theology professor in Pápa,<sup>13</sup> which in Csaba Fekete's words "is the first Hungarian Reformed *liturgy compendium*",<sup>14</sup> gives the following definition:

[...] the Greek Fathers understood the word [*leitourgein*] [...] the preoccupation with the sacred things belonging to the formalities of worship: and hereinafter the word *Liturgia* signifies the manner of the entire formalistic devotions as established<sup>15</sup> and of the Church Servants in their occupation and their obligations around the Ceremonies and, in a more general sense, the phrases the so-called Agendas written and approved of by the Church, which the Church Servants say and do when they conduct a certain Church ceremony. In Latin, the Liturgy is called now *Officium* or *Ordo Agendi* or *Agenda* and *Cursus Ecclesiasticus*.<sup>16</sup>

In his memoirs, Mihály Könyves Tóth writes:

Although this term, *Agenda*, in the ecclesiastical sense, includes all the formulas (phrases) which are given to the pastor as the norm in the commonly accepted and established Liturgical Book: notwithstanding, in the idiotism rooted in everyday speech, the *Agenda* was especially and primarily the pastor's text by the communion table before communion.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> FEKETE, Csaba (2009): Milotai Nyilas István Ágendájának változatai. *Református Egyház*. 61, 6. 131–140.

<sup>13</sup> TÓTH, Ferenc (1810): *Liturgika*. Győr. 46.

<sup>14</sup> FEKETE 2009, 133.

<sup>15</sup> *Interpret as 'set', 'ascertained' (?)*.

<sup>16</sup> TÓTH 1810, 8.

<sup>17</sup> KÖNYVES TÓTH, Mihály (1996): *Emlékirat a tiszántúli református egyházkerület életéről (1855)*. Debrecen, TtREL. 249.

Ferenc Tóth, in his work *Lelki pásztori gondviselés* [Pastoral Care], published in 1806, before the publication of his *Liturgika*, also identifies the concept of the agenda with the ceremonial speech:

“The Agenda should be meaningful, but not always the same; which, in order not to depart from the traditions, should take into account the agendas that have come before it. It will be well if the new minister should first say the agenda to which the people are accustomed. For if he says the new one, the listener, noticing the change, will think that the minister wants to change the religion. Briefly, the servant must conform to the traditions which is accustomed in the Superintendency.”<sup>18</sup>

The agenda by the 19<sup>th</sup> century referred both terminologically and practically to the liturgical act rather than to the sermon associated with the ritual.<sup>19</sup> Most cases it contained and regulated only those elements and sections of the liturgy which was meant to be performed by the preacher or in some cases the schoolmaster or cantor leading the liturgy. Over time, the administration of the sacraments became more of an individual kind of worship, and the communion, usually six times a year, became an easily neglected appendage or side-element of the preaching service.

The agendas offer very little information about congregational and ritual singing, while our Hungarian Protestant and Hungarian Reformed church music and hymnbook history is a rich framework and impression of the history of worship, culture, and literature, obviously reflecting and being adapted to the liturgical practice of the time and materialized within this framework. The lack of resources can be explained by the fact that there was no need for defensive and polemical norms compared to the acts already mentioned (baptism, communion, wedding).

Ravasz’s agenda tradition was also nourished by the deep roots of the Hungarian Reformed worship practice and reality, passed down from generation to generation and integrated into consciousness, becoming accepted and standardized. The publication of the Liturgical Book was preceded not only by a study of the liturgical history and practice of the other Protestant confessions in Hungary and Europe but also by the

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<sup>18</sup> TÓTH, Ferenc (1806): *Lelki pásztori gondviselés*. Győr. 42.

<sup>19</sup> PAP (2012), 15.

practice of the time. Actually, the origins of most of our bound texts of worship can be traced back to the written and printed antecedents of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

As we have pointed out, our historical sources have been urging for centuries the unification of a diverse, fragmented, often individualistic liturgical practice. *Istentiszteleti Rendtartás* [Liturgical Book], implemented in 1931, was preceded by the publication of *Ágenda – A magyar református egyház liturgiás könyve* [Agenda – The Liturgical Book of the Hungarian Reformed Church], edited by László Ravasz in 1927. Ravasz stated in the foreword:

The development of our Hungarian Reformed Church in the spirit of Calvinism progressed from smaller to larger units. For a long time, church districts were more or less [sic!] powerless entities, not to mention that the whole Hungarian Reformed Church was represented only by the Buda Synod (1791); only 90 years later: the Synod of Debrecen including Transylvania. The Debrecen Synod created the Universal Convention. The Universal Convention worked zealously and successfully to build unity. Securing of constitutional unity was followed by securing liturgical unity.<sup>20</sup>

At the Buda Synod, liturgical issues and misuses (especially in funerals) were discussed. A committee was appointed to work out a liturgy, and the need for a unified hymnal also emerged.<sup>21</sup> The common hymnal was published only in 1806, becoming official from 1813, and after the Buda Synod, the theological taste of the time led to the publication of the following district agendas (Dunántúl: Fábrián József, 1805; Dunamellék: Göböl Gáspár, 1806; Tiszáninnen: Lácza Szabó József, 1814 and <sup>2</sup>1832).<sup>22</sup>

The 1927 Agenda is the "comprehensive result of the work began around 1900 for the creation of a unified liturgy" that started after the Constituting Synod of 1881 and went on in several stages, after several attempts and facing several forced transformations and difficult historical situations.<sup>23</sup> In the "preface" to this historical overview, Ravasz gives a detailed history of the decades leading up to its publication.<sup>24</sup> As professor of

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<sup>20</sup> RAVASZ, László (ed.) (1927): *Ágenda. A magyar református egyház liturgiás könyve*. Budapest. [1].

<sup>21</sup> PAP 2012, 45–50.

<sup>22</sup> Op. cit. 52–53.

<sup>23</sup> FEKETE, Károly (2006): A református liturgikák története a XIX–XX. században. In: *Collegium Doctorum*. 2, 1. 183.

<sup>24</sup> Ravasz 1927, [1]–7.

practical theology in Kolozsvár/Cluj, he himself prepared for his liturgical work as Bishop of the Dunamellék Church District through his academic work and his writings published from 1915.<sup>25</sup>

In the post-1900 period, there was a comprehensive discussion in the church press about the distortions in the celebration of the Holy Communion, the connection of the Holy Communion to the preaching service as an appendix, the connection between the Holy Communion and penance, the number, content, and phenomenon of penitential and communion questions related to the celebration of the Holy Communion.<sup>26</sup>

The demand for the introduction of the *Scripture reading (lection)* as a separate Bible reading during worship appeared in literature and public discourse from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the ancient Christian and international Protestant practice has appeared in our worship order and practice thanks to the work of László Ravasz.<sup>27</sup>

The name of the official ritual book (*Agenda*) from 1927 was replaced by the title *Istentiszteleti Rendtartás*, published in 1930 and introduced in 1931, because the common liturgical book – in contrast to the previous traditions of the church, which contained sketchy and partial descriptions of ritual – presented and regulated the entire life and practice of the church worship with the intention of describing and prescribing, and it sought to eliminate points identified as historical deviations. It sought unity and perfection. The novelty of the 1927 edition, its contemporary guidance and “its significance is given by the fact that it embraced all the occasions of worship, gave a rich parable, and set forth in its preface the principles of Reformed worship. The publication of the basic liturgical statements, which was received by all pastors, equalled the publication of a standard, core liturgy book.”<sup>28</sup>

The end of the long 19<sup>th</sup> century, the need for a theological change of style, as well as several historical, political, and theological traumas that shook the world and the Hungarian nation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and then split Hungary and the Reformed Church, contributed significantly to the long-term and clear reception of the *Agenda*

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<sup>25</sup> FEKETE 2006, 182–183.

<sup>26</sup> A kérdéshez lásd: PAP, Ferenc (2015): Bűnbánat és úrvacsora: szertartási, teológiai és terminológiai kérdések. In: *Teológiai Fórum*. 9. 4–14.

<sup>27</sup> The issue was last tackled by BALOGH, Dávid (2023): *A lekcio a magyar református istentiszteleti gyakorlatban*. Doctoral thesis. Budapest.

<sup>28</sup> FEKETE 2006, 182–183.

and the intricate formation of the Hungarian Reformed identity in the 20<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> centuries.<sup>29</sup> The Agenda and the Hungarian Reformed worship life, which was truly unified and reshaped, built and strengthened a community of faith and language and became a point of reference. Following the liturgical history of the preceding years, the innovation and novelty of the ritual book, which was indeed distributed to all congregations, could achieve centuries of impact and renewal. It is striking that the 1927 publication, which had not yet been raised to the official level, was generally more accessible than the official *Istentiszteleti Rendtartás* of a few years later, presumably for the reasons given above.

The *Agenda* and then the *Istentiszteleti Rendtartás* cannot be interpreted without the precedents, being the child of its time. Each liturgical turn can only be evaluated in the light of its antecedents, but the question of singing and the hymnal, among other things, cannot be separated from the worship. The 1921 reform of the so-called Reformed hymnal, used since 1806, reached an absolute low in the rich Hungarian Reformed/Protestant hymnological treasure on the one hand, and it did not help the cause of worship, but even worsened it on the other hand.<sup>30</sup>

The fact that the Synod that established *Istentiszteleti Rendtartás*, making use of the *ius liturgicum* and describing the Church's life of worship, liturgical orders, and acts in homiletic and liturgical instructions, has been a step forward and still quantum leap today,<sup>31</sup> whilst the rest of the book includes a set of examples for practising pastors.

Károly Fekete summarizes his critical assessment by looking back at the context and developments of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries:

through the Agenda, the clergy as a whole absorbed an approach that was actually based on Schleiermacherism, when the influence of Barthian theology began to appear in our country already in the late 1920s. Another criticism is that Ravasz did not consistently apply the order of Calvinist liturgy in the homilies. The liturgy of the Lord's Supper is bound up with the desire to replace adult catechesis and lacks the eschatological joyfulness.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> SZETEY, Szabolcs (2016): *Adatok a magyar református prédikációs gyakorlat újraértékeléséhez 1784–1878 között*. Budapest, KRE – L'Harmattan. 55.

<sup>30</sup> CSOMASZ TÓTH, Kálmán (1950): *A református gyülekezeti éneklés*. Budapest. 193–196.

<sup>31</sup> RAVASZ 1930, [3]–48.

<sup>32</sup> FEKETE 2006, 183.

The lines of appreciation clearly show that the typically long and protracted liturgical works could not have reflected the precursors of the theological turns that were then taking place or the theological and liturgical insights and demands intensifying from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and that those who drafted the liturgical works brought and always bring with them the blessings or burdens of their own theological and ecclesial socialization. The publication of a new hymnal in 1948, which represented a truly significant change in church music and theology, as well as Ravasz's intention to further develop his own work and the liturgy draft of 1950, could not be achieved for reasons of church policy,<sup>33</sup> so the revision of the earlier significant work failed,<sup>34</sup> or, rather, its formalization could not take place. Instead, in 1985, due to its particular theological and party-state context, a dubious *Istentiszteleti Rendtartás* was introduced, which was questionable in some points from a liturgical-historical and liturgical point of view, and therefore poorly received,<sup>35</sup> being one of the major building blocks of a still unsolved situation.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> KOVÁCS, József: (2003) A Magyarországi Református Egyház 1948/51-es liturgiai reformja. In: *Sárospataki Füzetek*. 2003/2. 57–77.

<sup>35</sup> PAP, Ferenc (2016): Harminc éves az Istentiszteleti Rendtartás. Zárójeles és lábjegyzetes úrvacsorai kérdéseink nyomában. In: Zsengellér, József – Kodácsy, Tamás – Ablonczy, Tamás (eds.): *Felelet a Mondolatra. Tanulmányok a 60 éves Bogárdi Szabó István tiszteletére*. Budapest, PRITA – KRE – L'Harmattan. 337–355.

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Zoltán BÁRÁNY:<sup>1</sup> 

## 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 lemondatásának 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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*Dániel TÓTH-GYÓLLAI*<sup>1</sup> 

## Debate on the Initiatives of the Faculty of Theology in Debrecen. The Theological Education Designed by Sándor Csikesz and Imre Révész<sup>2</sup>

### *Abstract.*

This study examines the reform initiatives for theological education in the Reformed Church in Hungary during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, focusing on the period between 1912 and 1940. Central to this examination are the reform plans developed by Sándor Csikesz and Imre Révész, particularly their 1937 draft aimed at unifying pastoral training. The research contextualizes these reforms within the broader historical and ecclesiastical framework, analysing the efforts and challenges faced by the Faculty of Theology in Debrecen. The study highlights the various debates and controversies sparked by the proposed reforms, particularly the opposition

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<sup>2</sup> The study was carried out within the framework of the *Challenges and Wayfinding in the History of the Hungarian Reformed Church in the 20th Century* research project (No. 66001R800) of the Church History Research Institute of the Faculty of Theology at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary.



from other theological academies and the broader church community. Through detailed exploration of historical documents, this paper sheds light on the motivations behind the reforms, the resistance they encountered, and their lasting impact on theological education within the Hungarian Reformed Church.

**Keywords:** curriculum, Reformed Church in Hungary, theological education, pastoral training, reforms

## Backgrounds of the Study

In the second year of my doctoral research, I was mainly concerned with the reform plans for theological education in the Reformed Church in Hungary, specifically focusing on the period between 1881 and 1940, during which the curricular reforms of the five and later four theological academies in Hungary were overseen by the General Convention, more precisely its Educational Committee and the National Conference of Theology Teachers (hereinafter: NCCT). The minimum requirements for the curriculum draft were set by the Convention for each pastoral training institution as early as 1883,<sup>3</sup> whereas in the subsequent regulations (1911, 1924, 1930, 1940)<sup>4</sup> we can find passages on the examination system and the training of the future generation of pastors. The Convention's task was primarily to accept and, so to speak, "take account" of the common framework (which basically drew only the outlines of curriculum), rather than to plan and design it. Their implementation was the responsibility of the maintaining church districts (in practice, the academies themselves), being bound to report annually to the Convention through the General Curriculum Committee. At first, the content and details of the curricula were discussed and elaborated by boards formed of the theology teachers of the pastoral training institutions concerned (chaired by the bishop of a church district), and from 1921 by the NCCT.

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<sup>3</sup> See: The General Convention Protocol: 16 September 1883, No. 64, 41–46.

<sup>4</sup> On the subjects, examinations, and educational aspects of the time, see: TÓTH-GYÓLLAI, Dániel: „Anyaszentegyházunk életszükséglete”. *Az egységes lelkészképzés reformjai a magyarországi református egyházban 1883–1940 között*. Budapest, Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Hittudományi Kar. 18–82. [https://htk.kre.hu/images/doc/kiadvanyok/monografia/Anyaszentegyhazunk\\_eletszukseglete\\_2023\\_2.pdf](https://htk.kre.hu/images/doc/kiadvanyok/monografia/Anyaszentegyhazunk_eletszukseglete_2023_2.pdf) (accessed on: 30 May 2023).

As part of the programme of the research workshop, I have also examined a shorter timeslot of this period, particularly exposed to the challenges and the quest for new paths in our Church, which was defined in terms of pastoral training by the fact that one of the four theological institutions was a faculty. In my study, I would like to present the initiatives of the professors of the faculty in Debrecen aimed at a common pastoral training, especially the 1937 draft by Sándor Csikesz and Imre Révész, as well as to examine their context from the perspective of church history.

## Sándor Csikesz and Imre Révész's Reform Agenda

### *Background, Church Historical Context*

The said reform agenda, the outlines of which had already appeared in 1936 at the conference of the National Association of Theological Students in Debrecen, in a lecture by the later rector of the university, Sándor Csikesz<sup>5</sup> – which is mentioned in several memoirs of Csikesz's life as perhaps the most striking piece of the practical theology teacher's own series of *bold* ideas<sup>6</sup> – was in fact a joint idea with Imre Révész, the Dean of the Faculty of Theology, which they had been contemplating since the early 1930s.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See: CSIKESZ, Sándor (1941): Theologiai és egyházi feladatok, melyek megoldása az új lelkésznevezésekre vár. In: Módis, László (ed.): *Csikesz Sándor emlékkönyvek 3.* Debrecen. 167–168. On 20 June 1936 [Sándor Csikesz], at the National Conference of Theologians in Debrecen, in front of an audience of perhaps several hundred young theologians from all parts of Greater Hungary (i.e. before a *qualified* large audience), he outlined the details of this *draft*. RÉVÉSZ, Imre (1942): *Felvilágosító megjegyzések D. Dr. Kovács J. István „A lelkészképzés reformja” c. munkálatához.* Debrecen, Archives of the Transibiscan Reformed Church District II.5.a.4.

<sup>6</sup> HŐS, Csaba (2019): *Csikesz Sándor lelképásztori eszményképének elemei a lelképásztori munkában és lelkésznevelésben.* Sárospatak, Hernád Kiadó. 62; FEKETE, Károly (2019b): Református teológiai oktatás a Debreceni Egyetem keretein belül 1912–1950. In: Baráth, Béla Levente – Fekete, Károly (eds.): *Őrállóvá tettek. Műhelytanulmányok a debreceni teológiai oktatás és református lelkészképzés 1850–2000 közötti történetéhez.* Debrecen, TTRE–DRHE. 165.

<sup>7</sup> Both authors gradually presented the draft to the ecclesiastical public in lectures, studies, and essays. See Révész's own list in: RÉVÉSZ 1942, 2; CSIKESZ, Sándor [year missing]: *A magyar református teológiai képzés egységes rendszere.* TrREL I.26.2. 1–5; CSIKESZ 1941, 167–168.

From Révész's 1942 memoirs, we know<sup>8</sup> that together with Sándor Csikesz they approached László Ravasz in November 1937 to ask the pastoral president of the Convention for his opinion on their plan, which they communicated in detail to the other members of the faculty of theology, winning their approval.

After the discussion, Ravasz asked the two theology teachers to prepare a memo of what had been said in the face-to-face conversation, for the sole purpose of making it easier for him to recall its contents in his later confidential discussions. "He stated he considered the ideas raised to be of much more serious and far-reaching importance than he had been prepared to take a stand on them and commit himself in any direction in advance"<sup>9</sup> and that further action on the plan should be taken by the presidencies of the church districts,<sup>10</sup> making it pending on the opinion of the lay President of the Convention, Jenő Balogh.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The only detailed description I have found is in this manuscript.

<sup>9</sup> The translations of all, originally non-English quotations belong to Augusta Szász. See: RÉVÉSZ 1942, 1.

<sup>10</sup> The archival documents speak about the later negotiations only indirectly. A copy of the memorandum prepared by Csikesz and Co. was sent by Chief Elder Jenő Balogh to the bishops of the church districts in a letter at the end of January 1938 with the following text: "The Rector and Dean of the Faculty of Theology of the Hungarian Royal István Tisza University of Debrecen, Hungary, submitted as an informal proposal a memorandum on the reorganization and unification of pastoral training. We have the honour to send you a copy of this work for your kind consideration, noting that we understand that this matter may be discussed at the following national conference of theology teachers. Please accept, Your Excellency, the assurance of our highest consideration." Synod Archives 2.d.66.d., 7630/1937. The letter draft can be read in the online collection, too: TÓTH-GYÓLLAI: *Anyaszentegyházunk*, 618.

<sup>11</sup> Among the letters in the Synod Archives, there is one from Ravasz to Jenő Balogh, which shows that the draft was probably discussed in person by the two before being presented to the bishops. The letters sent later were signed by Balogh alone, so we can assume that the chief elder was responsible for the further settlement of the matter based on an agreement between them. "This memorandum was handed over by the Rector and Dean of the Faculty of Theology of the University of Debrecen, professors Sándor Csikesz and Imre Révész, following a preliminary discussion. Please be so kind as to read it. With your kind permission, we should discuss the matter before its contents are made known to anyone." The letter is available in the online collection, too: TÓTH-GYÓLLAI: *Anyaszentegyházunk*, 619.

But, while these confidential discussions were still underway, all three theological academies had learned from different sources and had formed an opinion on the basic concepts of the draft by March 1938. The shadows of the later “catastrophe also rose”,<sup>12</sup> and thus the professors in Debrecen put aside their more far-sighted ideas, saying that “the public opinion of a Hungarian Reformed Church in the throes of a world catastrophe is not a suitable environment for a calm and productive discussion.”<sup>13</sup>

Despite the war, the debate on the draft did take place – and under rather unfortunate circumstances, as a few days before the February session of the NCCT, which drafted the final proposal for the 1940 curriculum, Béla Vasady, a theology professor in Debrecen, published his colleagues’ reform ideas in a study on the past and present of pastoral education, with the consent and support of Révész and Csikesz.<sup>14</sup> “The material published at an inconvenient time”<sup>15</sup> already stirred great opposition at the conference, and in 1941, on behalf of the academies of Pápa, Sárospatak, and Budapest, Theology Professor István J. Kováts of Budapest<sup>16</sup> replied in a 64-page-long discussion paper to Béla Vasady’s 49-page study subsequent to the adoption of the curriculum reform and the extension of the training to five years.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> RÉVÉSZ 1942, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Vasady’s study was written in December 1939, and first published in seven consecutive issues of the magazine *Lelkészegyesület*, which he edited at the time (the last issue of 1939 and the first six of 1940). The final part of the work was published after the conference of theology teachers held in Pápa on 2–3 February 1940, and thus after the closure of the matter (by theology teachers) concerning the future of pastoral training. Nevertheless, Kováts’s criticism is justified since the conference had already received its mandate for curricular reform on 20 April 1939, and the date of the February conference was known well in advance to the guests. The timing of Vasady’s study can therefore be interpreted without malice as creating ‘unnecessary anxiety’, as we read in the introduction to István J. Kováts’s discussion paper.

<sup>15</sup> KOVÁTS, J. István (1941): *A lelkészképzés reformja. Válasz Vasady Béla dr. hasonló című tanulmányára*. Budapest, Bethlen Gábor Irodalmi és Nyomdai Részvénytársaság. 3.

<sup>16</sup> For his life see: KÖBEL, Szilvia (2021): Egy élet prédikációja: Kováts J. István (1880-1965) portréja. In: Petrás, Éva (ed.): *A 20. századi magyar protestáns közéletiség arcképcsarnoka*. Budapest, Gondolat – Barankovics Alapítvány. 83–110.

<sup>17</sup> Kováts, as he himself writes, willingly undertook the task of summarizing the comments of the three academies of theology in a discussion paper, on condition that “we wait until the



Kováts's article summarizes all the faulty aspirations that he sees in Vasady's work related to the transformation of the theological academic training in Debrecen into a faculty of theology, and it considers the Csikesz–Révész plan as presented by their colleague a harmful idea in every respect as well as dangerous to the Church as a whole.<sup>18</sup> The truly inconvenient time for debate does not even bring the possibility of consensus. In January 1942, at an extraordinary meeting of the Faculty of Theology in Debrecen, Kováts's paper was discussed, being considered unfair and misleading,<sup>19</sup> and Révész himself wrote a confidential manuscript about his disappointed reflections, which he concluded as follows:

But those who, even now, thirty years later, find it necessary to raise the reproachful voice about the Transtibiscan district and Debrecen on that certain transfer (by which many understand a sale!) should first examine themselves and the attitude of the church region they represented and feared: do they have a historical and perhaps other kind of right to this reproach? To love, fear, and protect our own: a human right and duty. To recognize our own in others with the eyes of love and to fear and protect them as our own: a Christian virtue. I. Cor. 12:12, 26, 27. This is my last word on this matter for the foreseeable future.<sup>20</sup>

### *Description of the Draft*

In the following, after a brief introduction to this reform proposal giving rise to major controversies and no small disagreement, we will discuss two major issues that appeared in connection with it, based on István J. Kováts's and Béla Vasady's works.

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question is resolved in the Convention and the work on our theologies starts according to the new curriculum so that the professors of the academies of theology may not be remotely accused of responding to the draft spread by Vasady only because they feel their very existence is threatened." KOVÁTS 1941, 4–5.

<sup>18</sup> Op. cit. 4.

<sup>19</sup> "[Kováts] is essentially directed against the existence of the Faculty of Theology under the University of Debrecen." See: DE HTK 1941/Protocol 42, 31 January 1942. 7<sup>th</sup> Extraordinary Session, no. 249.

<sup>20</sup> RÉVÉSZ 1942, 3.

The closest text that remained accessible regarding the oral accounts on the content of the Csikesz–Révész plan is a copy of a 5-page memorandum to László Ravasz, as an unofficial, unsigned, and undated manuscript.<sup>21</sup>

The authors start their memorandum with the following questions: “How could the nationally universal significance and vocation of the Faculty of Reformed Theology in the Hungarian Reformed pastoral education be asserted as effectively as possible for the benefit of the Hungarian Reformed Church? [...] How can a healthy and reasonable cooperation be established between the faculty and the theological academies of the Hungarian Reformed Church?”<sup>22</sup>

The answers to their questions are first based on the following points: 1) The Faculty of Theology in Debrecen has state-funded infrastructural facilities that the other three theological schools will not have in the foreseeable future due to lack of financial resources. 2) Insufficient resources in the three academies mean that some department positions are permanently vacant. 3) In Debrecen, non-theological subjects are taught to the highest standard by academic staff from other faculties, while the academies struggle with delivering them. 4) The academies – due to the smaller number of theologians and the sacrifices of the church districts – are much more intimate, and thus more suitable for emphasizing the important educational aspect of pastoral training, while in the case of the Debrecen faculty none of these factors are applicable, and thus “the relation of the Transtibiscan district, i.e. of the absolute majority of Hungarian Reformed Churches, to the issue of pastoral training is not sealed with so many sacrifices...”<sup>23</sup> 5) A radical change in church policy could entail the dissolution of the Faculty of Theology, which would mean that the universal Church would have to bear the burden of maintaining all four academies of theology, which would be worsened by the possible lack of state aid to the church and schools.

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<sup>21</sup> A 5-page typed document with handwritten corrections – see: ZsL 2.d.66.d. 2643/1937. The Memorandum is also available online: TÓTH-GYÓLLAI: *Anyaszentegyházunk*, 620–624. The manuscript is hereafter referred to with its own page numbering, the authorship of Csikesz and Révész, and the title *Memorandum*.

<sup>22</sup> Csikesz–Révész: *Memorandum*, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Op. cit. 2.

The authors' response emerging from the above points is that in order to eliminate this great waste of resources and "shape the spiritual unity, the common confessional spirit, the social and possibly political behaviour of the Hungarian Reformed Church",<sup>24</sup> the "pastoral training of the universal Church should also be unified", and the faculty of Debrecen and the three theological academies should be involved in it according to a unified programme, with an appropriate division of labour.

The details of their perspective in this sense are: *All and any future pastors of the Hungarian Reformed Church...*

1. ...would begin their studies in Pápa in a preparatory year,<sup>25</sup> which has long been declared necessary, where they would study the Hungarian Bible, the creeds, hymn books, biblical languages and Latin.
2. Then they would go to Debrecen for four years of academic training.
3. Then, instead of serving as curates, they would go to Sárospatak and Budapest for one year each, where they would first learn about the problems of rural and small-town congregations, then the institutional life of big-city congregations and the universal Church, and receive practical training in this sense.

After presenting the framework, Csikesz and Révész summarize the values of their agenda as follows:

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<sup>24</sup> Op. cit. 3.

<sup>25</sup> The Convention finally introduced the first preparatory year into the 1940 curriculum and the qualifying examination at the end of it, but before that, the introduction of the practice of German and French Protestant pastoral training model had been repeatedly discussed since the 1920s. See, among others: *Lelkészképzésünk reformja. A theol. tanárok konferenciájának memorandumuma*, 1921, 2, ZsL 2.d.66.d. The memorandum is also available in the online collection: TÓTH-GYÓLLAI: *Anyaszentegyházunk*, 399–403; TÖRÖK, István: Munkálat a konventi jegyzőkönyv 91/1933. sz. határozata tárgyában. In: *A pápai ref. theol. akad. tanári kar 1933. november 21-én tartott rendes ülésének jegyzőkönyve*, no 3, point 15, par. 2. The draft is also available in the online collection: TÓTH-GYÓLLAI: *Anyaszentegyházunk*, 578–582; the outline submitted by the Academy of Reformed Theology of Sárospatak on the matter of the curriculum reform, 1938, 3–4, ZsL 2.d.66.d. The draft is also available in the online collection: TÓTH-GYÓLLAI: *Anyaszentegyházunk*, 636–641.

The Hungarian Reformed pastoral education would be brought under unified and universal church control much more than it is possible under the current system without losing the advantages given by the relationship with the state. It is worth reflecting on what the creation of a unified Hungarian Reformed pastoral morale would mean if the possibility of a regular change of location for all the theology students of the Hungarian Reformed Church during their theology years could become a reality, and, on the other hand, by their legations, they could become acquainted with the whole face and every historical landscape of the Hungarian Reformed Church and to form a unified spiritual body during these seven years, the like of which has never been seen before in the history of the Hungarian Reformed Church. But perhaps it is not an exaggerated prescience to say that there have never been times in the history of the Hungarian Reformed Church when such a unified pastoral body was needed as it will be needed in the future.<sup>26</sup>

The time had not come for the implementation of this undoubtedly revolutionary and tempting project – perceived as such mostly by its supporters in Debrecen – and neither had it come for its discussion when its content with Béla Vasady’s own additions, pro and con arguments, biased and enthusiastic statements, was published as part of his study (or rather as its core).<sup>27</sup>

Some of the angry criticisms in István J. Kováts’s article were due to this ill-chosen time, others perhaps to Vasady, and a third part was probably aimed at the pathfinding endeavour of the theology professors in Debrecen, which was becoming increasingly burdensome for the Church.

## The Theological Education in Debrecen Seeking for a Path

### *The Faculty of Theology and Pastoral Education*

It is already clear from the Csikesz–Révész memorandum that this draft did not become so important for the professors in Debrecen only from the point of view of the

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<sup>26</sup> Op. cit. 4.

<sup>27</sup> In this connection, we can read Kováts’s blunt opinion: “We cannot conceal the impression, which became stronger and stronger as we read the study that the whole thing was written to defend and spread this draft.” KOVÁTS 1941, 9.

universal ecclesiastical interest. On the one hand, Kováts accuses Vasady of being inclined to propagate such a biased plan towards Debrecen because, unlike the relatively slow decrease in the number of students at the three academies, the faculty in Debrecen faced rapid depopulation (between 1933 and 1940, the number of students was more than halved).<sup>28</sup> However, perhaps more significant than this circumstance at the time of the draft's inception was the evolving situation in Debrecen's pastoral training upon its transformation into a university. This included the absence of a specific church affiliation, educational support, and a close integration with church-related activities.

As early as 1913, the Transtibiscan Reformed Church District discussed the possibility of establishing a separate, church-managed institute focused on pastoral education alongside the faculty. Ferenc Kiss, who was later entrusted by the district with the organization and management of the said institute, stated in his inaugural address that the Faculty of Theology of the State University of Debrecen cannot be assigned the practical training of future pastors but rather only the teaching of theoretical knowledge. The Institute for Pastoral Education<sup>29</sup> established by the church district “to conduct pastoral training within its own competence for the purposes of the Church”<sup>30</sup> states in its regulations<sup>31</sup> that any student of the faculty of theology may be admitted to pastoral studies only if he has been a member of the Institute at the same time as was pursuing his studies. The dual training was far beyond the capacity of the average theological student, especially in the period after 1932 when the university classes were held in the central building in Nagyerdő and the afternoon classes of the boarding school and the pastoral education in the College, the two being at a minimum of 30-minute walk away from each other.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> See *Appendix 1*.

<sup>29</sup> On its history, see: FEKETE, Károly (2019a): A Lelkészképző Intézet. In: Baráth, Béla Levente – Fekete, Károly (eds.): *Őrállóvá tettek. Műhelytanulmányok a debreceni teológiai oktatás és református lelkészképzés 1850–2000 közötti történetéhez*. Debrecen, TTRE – DRHE. 195–227; CSOHÁNY, János (1988): A korszakváltások évszázada (1849–1950). In: Kocsis, Elemér (ed.): *A Debreceni Református Kollégium története*. Budapest, MRE Zsinati Iroda Sajtóosztálya. 255–258.

<sup>30</sup> KOVÁTS 1941, 45.

<sup>31</sup> Regulations of the Higher Educational Institute of the Reformed College of Debrecen. Proposal, 1914, *Lelkészegyesület* 11(1918), 390.

<sup>32</sup> CSOHÁNY 1988, 256.

The idea of extending theological education to five years, which can also be attributed to Csikesz and Révész (and the then Director of the Institute, Károly Erdős), is also closely connected to the case of the Debrecen Institute for Pastoral Education.<sup>33</sup> Commissioned by the General Assembly of the Transibiscan Reformed Church District, the proposal submitted to the General Convention by Sándor Csikesz puts forward the introduction of a 12-month course for curates who have passed the first pastoral qualifying examination, which would be compulsory and a requirement for service in congregation. The course would have been hosted by two pastoral-training institutes, one in Budapest (for graduates from Pápa and Budapest, sponsored by the two districts and the Budapest congregation) and the other in Debrecen (for graduates from Sárospatak and Debrecen, sponsored by the two church districts and the Debrecen congregation). According to the arguments of the three-member committee, these two locations are suitable because of (1) the theological boarding school, which is spacious enough to provide a common management and control, (2) the wide field of missionary work and the already existing organizations and deaconess-training institutions, (3) the universities and other cultural institutions. The draft also proposes a detailed curriculum for the fifth year, interspersed with various pastoral exercises (some examples: agriculture, government and administration, church arts, the life of the pastor, history of the church districts, visiting internships). The initiative, which came up again every year at the Convention between 1925 and 1930, was repeatedly rejected by all three church districts except the Transibiscan district, for financial reasons. And although this draft became a pioneer for the basic concept of the later 1940 curriculum reform,<sup>34</sup> it would

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<sup>33</sup> Cf.: Minutes of the committee sent alongside Resolution no. TtRE 390/Nov. 1923, 3 April 1924, No. 4, 3–4; Church District Protocol, 9 June 1925, No. 68, 50–54.

<sup>34</sup> In 1933, János Marton (then the theological rapporteur of NCCT and of the Convention's Committee on Universal Curriculum) recalls the importance of the Transibiscan Plan as a historical memory, when, in fulfilment of the mandate received in Resolution No. 5 of the Conference of Theology Teachers at its meeting of 3 February 1933, he submitted a memo to the Convention on the reform of the theological curriculum and collected historical arguments for transforming the training into a 5-year programme: "The proposals put forward by the Transibiscan Reformed Church District clearly show that the curriculum reform of 1924 did not meet all legitimate requirements." In 1933, the Convention declares its commitment to the five-year programme and invites the Conference of Theology Teachers

still be difficult to separate the original idea from Debrecen's desire to provide in some way a well-sustainable training for its students, closely linked to the life of the whole of the Church. At the end of his study published in 1941, Kováts is sharply vocal in his conclusions drawn from similar observations:

Finally, it cannot be denied that the Transtibiscan church district, freed from the burden of pastoral training, had for many years listed its pastoral training institute only on paper, which was supposed to complement the work of the theological faculty in a practical and spiritual educational direction, until now it has filled a chair, but it has still not created a separate theological boarding school, which it should have created even without the common pastoral training, and which it planned for the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the college.<sup>35</sup>

### *Tensions between Church and State*

We can also notice the contradictory nature of the statement in the Csikesz–Révész memorandum, namely that, if the plan were implemented, pastoral education would be more under universal church control than before. While it is possible that Csikesz and Révész were discussing an ideal scenario and intended to elaborate on the details of its implementation in a calm discussion, the 23 years of operation of the Debrecen faculty had not necessarily validated their assertion thus far.

The founding document of the university and the article of the law establishing the university already set clear limits on the extent of church control,<sup>36</sup> which consisted only in the fact that the Transtibiscan Reformed Church District had a certain right (actually a veto) in the qualification of candidates for the teaching positions on the

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to draft a curriculum. MARTON, János (1933): A theologiai képzési idő öt évre emelése a református theologiai akadémiákon. TTOK előterjesztés. In: *Church District Protocol*. 3 May 1933, No. 90, Annex 3, 364. The study is also available in an online collection: TÓTH-GYÓLLAI: *Anyaszentegyházunk*, 570–577.

<sup>35</sup> KOVÁTS 1941, 25.

<sup>36</sup> See: Church District Protocol, 16 April 1912, No. 105; Church District Protocol, 15 May 1914, No. 124.

one hand, and the ordination examinations could still be undertaken by the pastoral qualification committee of the Transibiscan Reformed Church District on the other.

The Convention of 1912, in the light of this future framework, states in Resolution 105 that: “[The General Convention] strongly regrets that by this fact the leadership of one of the strongest institutions of Hungarian Reformed higher education is falling out of the hands of the Reformed Church.” In the same Resolution, the Convention agreed to the petition of the Transibiscan district and at the same time took the initiative to discuss and monitor the impact of the case on other pastoral training institutions. Two years later, a six-member committee is appointed, chaired by Bishop Dezső Baltazár, to make a proposal on the matter. The drafter of the document is Károly Nagy, Professor at the Faculty of Theology in Kolozsvár/Cluj, the Chief Registrar of the Church District of Transylvania, who begins his 4-page work with an examination of the political significance of the formation of the University of Debrecen within the church and state education policy. He recognizes the positive effects of this joint step for both sides but at the same time is very clear about the possible dangers it may entail in the future, which would be unforeseeable at the time:

...but the time must come when [the state] will directly demand, at least in return for and as a condition of its financial support, that the pastors of all religions and denominations to whom it entrusts the religious and moral leadership of a part of its citizens should form their own world and life views under the influence of the culture and especially of the scientific life of the time so that the clergy, regardless of the denomination, may be a serious cultural factor in national progress and not a hindrance to it.<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, Nagy devotes most of his petition to discussing the impact of the establishment of the university on theological higher education and the future of pastoral training in the universal Church,<sup>38</sup> and his position is very similar to that proposed by Csikesz and

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<sup>37</sup> NAGY, Károly (1915): Előterjesztés a lelkészképzés és nevelés tárgyában. In: *Church District Protocol*, 29 May 1915, Annex 19 to the Resolution of the Convention No. 160/1915, 489; also published in: *Dunántúli Protestáns Lap*, 26(1915), 18. 141–143. The text is also available in the online collection at: TÓTH-GYÓLLAI: *Anyaszentegyházunk*, 392–396.

<sup>38</sup> Nagy sees the foundation of the University of Debrecen as a turning point for Reformed higher education.



Révész. He sets up his thesis by emphasizing one of the main issues of pastoral education (the impoverishment of the academic climate):<sup>39</sup> “Ennobling competition can only take place between equals” since “competition between those of different rank and power makes the stronger one despised and cynical and the weaker one insidious and deceitful.”<sup>40</sup> The solution he suggests to the existing problem is: “There is only one way to eliminate the disadvantages of unequal competition: by discontinuing the activity of the academies and organizing competition between different theological faculties – with the parallel competition of departments – in the existing single university faculty.”<sup>41</sup> It is not surprising that Kováts also refers back to this much earlier work in his discussion paper:

Thank God, the prediction of the Convention Committee’s document on the academies withering away and becoming inferior did not come true. The committee’s rapporteur, Károly Nagy, who had the heavy burden of the Transylvanian bishopric at a sad time of separation from us, visited Budapest several times to treat his serious illness. We met him several times at the theological seminary. The ailing bishop, awaiting his end with true Christian patience, spoke to us several times in a tender and humble voice about how much he had erred in the past and how God had made him see differently. These were among the views he expressed as rapporteur to the committee... What would have become of the Transylvanian Reformed Church and of the Hungarians in Transylvania during the difficult decades of oppression if the theology of Kolozsvár [now Cluj] had been merged into the only university before the collapse!<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> “Our former university colleges, over time and amidst the ever-increasing vicissitudes of circumstances, have more or less fallen out of the role of being equal peers in the world’s scientific progress. They have been gradually, and for the most part, reduced to the role of vocational schools or rural academies. These institutions have become second-rate scientific institutes, where the scientific atmosphere, with the exception of a few privileged individuals and epochs, has grown poorer due to their isolation from contact with other scientific disciplines. Without competition, they have secured for themselves the monopolistic prerogatives of their own narrow circle.” NAGY 1915, 489.

<sup>40</sup> Op. cit. 490.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> KOVÁTS 1941, 63.

In any case, the proposal had a considerable echo in the church journals of the time: the *Dunántúli Protestáns Lap* republished it in full, László Ravasz wrote its review in *Protestáns Szemle*,<sup>43</sup> and József Pongrácz elaborated it in *Dunántúli Protestáns Lapok*.<sup>44</sup> However, the Convention and the Universal Doctrinal Commission did not consider the contents of the document to be timely and made their decision subject to a 4-5-year impact study on the Faculty of Theology in Debrecen. Reality proved the right of the caution of the Convention because as soon as the university had opened, the reports on the annual operation of the theological institutes ceased to include the report of the faculty in Debrecen for years, and when the Convention repeatedly requested the Transibiscan Reformed Church District to allow it to exercise its right of supervision granted by the Church Act over the pastoral education in Debrecen, the Transibiscan Reformed Church District asked the Minister to instruct the Faculty to report to the Convention on the education of theologians. The Minister of Religious Affairs replied that he could not instruct the Faculty of Theology under the University of Debrecen to report to a *third party authority* on the theological education provided by the Faculty. In response, the church district was forced to instruct the Director of the Institute for Pastoral Training to draft the necessary report.

Moreover, the professors of the Faculty of Theology in Debrecen did not participate in the theology teachers' conferences for quite some time, and according to Kováts, "even when they did attend, they repeatedly stated that the decisions of our church were not binding on them."<sup>45</sup> The implementation of curricular reforms, which fell in the competence of the General Convention, was not fully feasible for the Faculty of Theology. In the case of the 1940 curricular reform, for example, the Institute for Pastoral Training made the following statement:

The teaching staff in theology [...] is in favour of the introduction of five years of theological education as soon as possible. It has not, however, developed a curriculum because this faculty has to follow the curriculum of the university, which is in itself

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<sup>43</sup> RAVASZ, László (1916): Erdély. In: *Protestáns Szemle*. 28, 7–8. 484–485.

<sup>44</sup> PONGRÁCZ, József (1916): A theologiai internátusról I., III. In: *Dunántúli Protestáns Lap*. 28, 43. 346; 28, 45. 361.

<sup>45</sup> KOVÁTS 1941, 46.

redundant compared to the curriculum and syllabus of the theological academies. It is the position of our faculty, therefore, that what the General Convention will pin down in the five-year curriculum will be accepted as a minimum requirement, but otherwise, by the nature of things, it will retain the university curriculum.<sup>46</sup>

It is worth noting, however – as mentioned by several Debrecen church historians who have written about the history of the college of the period<sup>47</sup> –, that the idea of the Protestant University of Debrecen long preceded the idea of the University of Debrecen.<sup>48</sup> Imre Révész wrote about it in his 1942 memorandum, quoted below:

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<sup>46</sup> Institute for Pastoral Training of the Transtibiscan Reformed Church District, Resolution 51/1938–39, 27 December 1938, ZsL 2.d.66.d. 8450/1938.

<sup>47</sup> CSOHÁNY 1988, 249–252; FEKETE 2019, 117–128; FEKETE, Károly (2007): Adalékok a Debreceni Egyetem „református” jellegének megragadásához. In: Brezsnaynszky, László (ed.): *A „Debreceni Iskola” Neveléstudománytörténeti vázolata*. Budapest. 376–398; SZENTPÉTERI KUN, Béla (1941): *Az egyetem alakulás története: a Kollégiummal való kapcsolatok továbbélése az egyetemnek mint egységnek életében*. Debrecen.

<sup>48</sup> As a background, it is worth mentioning the Synod of 1891/92, which also focused on the major topic of the establishment of a Protestant theological faculty and the discussion of the idea of a Protestant university. See Synodal documents: Report of Synodal Commission 15 on the two faculties, 25 November 1892. In: *Protestáns Egyházi és Iskolai Lap* 35(1892/53), 804–805; 35(1892/54), 827. In the years preceding its foundation, *Protestáns Egyházi és Iskolai Lap* published a series of studies on the Protestant university: PUBLICANUS (1892): *Protestáns egyetem*. In: *PEIL*. 35, 21. 289–292; SZÖTS, Farkas (1894): *Egyesült protestáns állami theologiai fakultás*. In: *PEIL*. 37, 50. 785–787; ZSOLDOS, Benő (1896): *Theologusaink és az egyetem*. In: *PEIL*. 39, 21. 323–324; SZÖTS, Farkas (1897): *Felső oktatásunk reformjához*. In: *PEIL*. 40, 10. 145–147; SZABÓ, Aladár (1901): *A lelkészképzésről II*. In: *PEIL*. 44, 19. 289–292; RAFFAY, Sándor (1904): *Néhány szó a lelkészképzésről*. In: *PEIL*. 47, 25. 389–90; OBJEKTIV: *A lekipásztori hivatal és az arra való képzés IV*. 49(1906/39), 610–613; VERESS, Jenő (1908): *A lekipásztör-képzés reformja I–II*. In: *PEIL*. 51, 48. 759–760; 49. 775–778; VERESS, Jenő (1911): *A prot. theol. fakultás körül*. In: *PEIL*. 54, 24. 387–389. Farkas Szöts’s following studies also deal with the subject: SZÖTS, Farkas (1900a): *Egyetemi protestáns theologiai fakultás*. In: *Protestáns Szemle*. 12, 5. 313–324; SZÖTS, Farkas (1900b): *Protestánsok egyházi tömörülése I–II*. In: *Protestáns Szemle*. 12, 9–10. 538–549, 617–632.

Before the idea of the establishment of a state university in Debrecen had even arisen, for many decades in the last third of the past century and at the beginning of our century there was planning, action, and large-scale sacrifice in favour of a national Protestant or Reformed university to be established in Debrecen with the appropriate construction, development, and refurbishment of the College. And the failure of this great plan [...] was due to no other reason than the open or veiled jealousy of the other Reformed and Evangelical districts, their reluctance to sacrifices, and the unhealthy outgrowths of particularism that became apparent even then.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, the idea of the University of Debrecen and the Faculty of Reformed Theology was not such a loaded idea a few decades earlier as one might assume from reading István J. Kováts's discussion paper. As a simple example, we can take Kováts, thirty years younger, who was studying in Edinburgh, and reading the minutes of the lengthy negotiations on the Hungarian public education budget (at a time of inter-denominational battles), put pen to paper and sent an editorial to *Protestáns Egyházi és Iskolai Lap* titled *Protestáns theologiai fakultást!* (For a Protestant Theological Faculty!), in which he commented on the issue:

It is precisely for this reason that we not only raise our voices in the strongest terms against the theological faculty of the third Hungarian university becoming Roman Catholic, but [...] we strongly request, even demand, that the faculty of theology of the third university become Protestant! Taking the national aspect into account, Kosice has been pushed into the background, Bratislava falls away, and only Debrecen and Szeged can be considered. And the question of the faculty of theology of the third Hungarian university definitely gives priority to Debrecen.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> RÉVÉSZ 1942, 3.

<sup>50</sup> KOVÁTS, J. István (1907): *Protestáns theologiai fakultást!* In: *Protestáns Egyházi és Iskolai Lap*. 50, 6. 84–86; 50, 7. 103.

## Summary

Sándor Csikesz and Imre Révész's project, which in many respects is of interest to Debrecen, but which nevertheless aims at the benefit of the universal Church and the highest and best quality of pastoral education, still has many questions that deserve to be discussed in conditions suitable for debate. Both the arguments put forward in favour of their draft and the criticisms levelled at them contain elements worth reflecting on in the context of pastoral training in our Church today. The heated debate over the reform ideas reveals that Sándor Csikesz, Imre Révész, István J. Kováts, and Béla Vasady, and similarly the theology faculty staff in Debrecen, Budapest, Sárospatak, and Pápa, all felt the pressing need to find a solution to the following issues: the training of pastors should be the joint responsibility of the Church (shared among church districts, church counties, and congregations) financially, spiritually, and intellectually alike; the particularity of each training location should be emphasized as much as possible; it was necessary to reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of theological training at the faculties within the university, especially from the perspective of the church–state relationship; the Church's responsibility to provide the highest-quality academic and spiritual education and training for its undergraduates.

And although the combination of many historical, ecclesiastical, and personal circumstances, as well as the sharply different conclusions drawn from individual experiences, have hindered a full consensus on pastoral training in our Church in these extraordinary times, the debaters' enthusiasm, courage, honesty, and commitment to the Church can stand as an example for those focusing on pastoral education today.

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**Appendix 1. Comparative table covering the number of students**

	Sárospatak					Budapest				
	I	II	III	IV	Total	I	II	III	IV	Total
1937	13	15	13	14	56	I only found data on the total number of classes.				79
1938	16	17	19	19	72					69
1939	8	14	14	20	56					69
1940	10	8	14	14	43					62
	Pápa					Debrecen				
	I	II	III	IV	Total	I	II	III	IV	Total
1937	8	10	9	14	40	35	44	36	44	157
1938	18	12	13	15	54	28	41	40	41	146
1939	8	18	13	12	52	15	21	39	38	119
1940	6	12	18	13	44	12	17	23	41	93



Róbert RIGÓ:<sup>1</sup> 

## The Confiscation of the Landholdings of the Reformed Church in the Kecskemét Reformed Church County (1945–1952)<sup>2</sup>

### *Abstract.*

In my study, I examine how the newly established communist government in the Kecskemét Reformed Church County, located in the central part of Hungary, deprives the congregations of their landholdings, which are one of their most important financial bases. As a result of increasing pressure from the party-state, the “nationalization” of the church lands took place gradually, up until 1951, when all remaining areas had to be offered to the state for “purchase”, under strictly fixed conditions. During the process, congregations lost their financial independence and became vulnerable to state funding.

**Keywords:** forced nationalization of landholdings, confiscation of church lands, abolition of the financial independence of churches

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<sup>2</sup> The study was carried out within the framework of the *Challenges and Wayfinding in the History of the Hungarian Reformed Church in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* research project (No. 66001R800) of the Church History Research Institute of the Faculty of Theology at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary.



From 1945 onwards, the state sought to gradually marginalize and eventually disrupt the churches, a decisive part of this process being the liquidation of the churches' material basis, assets, and institutions. The nationalization of church land from 1945 on, lasting until 1951, the takeover of the vast majority of church schools by the state in the summer of 1948, followed by the nationalization of church buildings, tenement buildings and business facilities, the termination of church associations and foundations, the expropriation of their assets and their transfer to state control played a decisive role in this process.<sup>3</sup> As an integral part of the process, the state also targeted to eliminate the bourgeois and wealthy peasant class that supported the churches with substantial donations, and thus, deprived of their wealth and income, they could no longer assume this role.<sup>4</sup> The land owned by congregations was of fundamental importance in the life of the Reformed Church, as it was also used to cover the salaries, i.e. the remuneration of pastors, cantors, and bell-ringers,<sup>5</sup> and the maintenance of various educational, social and health institutions and the staff's salaries, were financed by the income from land donated by private individuals through foundations set up for this purpose. In my paper, I will try to capture this process in the Kecskemét Reformed Church County, whose activity was terminated in the summer of 1952.<sup>6</sup> I will describe the process in more detail using the example of one of the country's most prosperous Reformed congregations,

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3 See more in: Rigó, Róbert (2022a): A reformátusok vagyonának államosítása Kecskeméten. In: Kiss, Réka – Lányi, Gábor: *Hagyomány, Identitás, Történelem 2021*. Budapest, KRE HTK Egyháztörténeti Kutatóintézet. 253–286.

4 RIGÓ, Róbert (2022b): Pártállami „szociográfia” a hatvanas évek vallási életéről. In: *Fornás*. 2022/2. 28–64.

5 The pastors' remuneration included the cash allowance determined by the session, the stole fee (the fee paid by the congregants to the pastor after a funeral or a baptism), the benefits in kind, which usually consisted of the parsonage and garden, the land or its rent, often firewood and other benefits in kind to a certain extent (pork, fat, poultry, eggs, honey, etc.).

6 The Kecskemét Reformed Church County stretched to the western part of the present-day Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County, the southern part of Pest County, and the eastern part of Bács-Kiskun County, as far as the disputed Kiskunhalas. In 1952, the old districts were wound up and, in the interests of administrative controllability and state administration, were adjusted to the county boundaries established in 1950. The process involved the replacement of deans, the retirement and transfer of pastors. See more: KOVÁCS, Bálint (2006): *A kecskeméti szolgálat évei 1942–1957*. Kecskemét, Emmaus. 84–91.

the Kecskemét Reformed Congregation, and will also discuss the Danubian Reformed Church District.

After the advance of the Red Army in East-Central Europe and the Soviet invasion of Hungary, church leaders expected that the operation of the churches in the new regime would worsen since they had already experienced the church policy of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, which had followed the Soviet model and established a communist dictatorship a quarter of a century earlier.<sup>7</sup> Already at that time, the Office for the Liquidation of Religious Affairs was established, with the primary aim of confiscating church property, thus accelerating the crippling of the churches.<sup>8</sup> According to a decree, a liquidation committee sent by the local councils could take all movable and immovable property from the congregations, except sacred buildings and objects. Thus, churches, chapels, and prayer houses were not nationalized, but manses and other church-owned buildings were. In the manses, the pastors could continue to stay as tenants, but in more than one case other people were moved in with them.<sup>9</sup> The churches were already severely affected by the land policy of the communist dictatorship, according to which the congregation had to hand over all agricultural land exceeding 100 acres to the local government. The holdings of church foundations and associations were also nationalized. The confiscation of church property resulted in very different practices in different local communities: in some places, everything was left as it was, while others sought to nationalize almost all movable and immovable property, even the church, the prayer house, or the pastor's personal belongings. The role of the local directorates and the identity of those who carried out the inventory proved decisive in this process.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> At the end of World War I, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy collapsed, and two-thirds of the territory of historic Hungary was annexed by neighbouring countries. The country's form of government changed from a kingdom to a republic in the autumn of 1918 and then to a communist-controlled soviet republic from 21 March 1919 to 1 August, when it became a kingdom again.

<sup>8</sup> CSÜRÖS András (2021): *Református egyházi élet a Tanácsköztársaság idején. A magyar reformátusság egy válságos korszakban*. Budapest, Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem – L'Harmattan Kiadó. 64–67; RIGÓ, Róbert (2023): Kecskeméti reformátusok a forradalmak idején (1918–1922). In: *Forrás*. 2023/7–8. 91–121.

<sup>9</sup> FAZEKAS, Csaba (1997): A „Vallásügyi Likvidáló Hivatal” 1919-ben. In: Pölöskei, Ferenc – Stemler, Gyula (eds.): *A múltból a jövőbe. Tanulmányok*. Budapest, ELTE BTK. 83.

<sup>10</sup> CSÜRÖS 2021, 92.

In the early spring of 1945, the fights were still going on in Hungary when the new land law was published under pressure exerted by Vorosilov, the Soviet chairman of the Allied Control Committee, mainly in order to strengthen the social acceptance of the Soviet occupation.<sup>11</sup> In Hungary, the unequal social distribution of land had been an unsolved problem for decades, leading to increasing social tensions between the two world wars, so land distribution was necessary, but it was not carried out with economic interests and ecclesiastical considerations in mind. The post-war situation was described by Bishop László Ravasz at the April 1945 meeting of the Danubian Reformed Church District as follows: “The world has never seen a more unscrupulous, unwise, and evil policy. Now here is the result: the capital city destroyed, capital and industry confiscated and scattered, the land unclaimed and uncultivated, and a helpless chaos which may soon be like a brawling mob striking the torch of the mongrel and giving the signal: finders keepers.”<sup>12</sup> László Ravasz blamed the politics during World War II, especially after the Arrow Cross takeover, for the consequences of the German and then Soviet occupation, for the country’s transformation into a theatre of war and the chaotic situation, for the German and then the Soviet raids.

Local, municipal land-claiming committees took a total of 5.6 million acres, 35% of all land, from its former owner, creating state farms on some of it, and 3.2 million acres were distributed among some 642,000 claimants in parcels averaging five acres, thus winding up large private and church-owned estates.<sup>13</sup> In practice, the reorganization of land ownership was completed within a few weeks and went hand in hand with numerous abuses: for example, the Dél-Pest County Land-Claiming Committee stated on 21 January 1946, “The actions of some committee members in the allocation of land were so aberrant that they seriously endangered the implementation of the land reform and its public interest not only in Kecskemét but also nationwide.” In many cases, the

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<sup>11</sup> In 1935, 85% of the landowners had less than 10 acres and held 20% of the total land, while the large landowners, who held 0.2% of the land, held 30% of the total land. ROMSICS, Ignác (2001): *Magyarország története a XX. században*. Budapest, Osiris. 283–284.

<sup>12</sup> KREL, Documents of the Kecskemét Reformed Church County, box 91, 60/1945. Excerpt from the report of Bishop László Ravasz, 10 April 1945.

<sup>13</sup> ROMSICS 2001, 284. [The translations of all, originally non-English quotations belong to the author Augusta Szász.]

members of the land-claiming committees arbitrarily redistributed land already allocated, allocated land to those who were not entitled to it, exchanged allocated land, failed to document changes in ownership, accepted gifts from claimants and even demanded them.<sup>14</sup>

The lay landowners received symbolic compensation for the expropriation of their estates, but the churches could not expect any compensation, and in addition to the land, the equipment, the remaining livestock, and the farm buildings were also taken away. Article 50 of the Decree of the Temporary National Government (M. E. 600/1945) allowed churches to retain their land as benefice, and Article 17 allowed the Church to keep ownership of land for cultural and public foundation purposes, up to a maximum of 100 acres on the basis of a decision of a three-member committee.<sup>15</sup>

Many abuses were possible under Article 12 of the Decree, according to which if there was not enough land available locally, the National Land Settlement Council decided that the entire land plot could be allocated, in which case the maximum 100

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<sup>14</sup> For example, the chairman of the Kecskemét Land-Claiming Committee, Ferenc Szabó, was suspended in August 1946 because Mrs Jenő Gyuris, who appeared before the County Land Settlement Council, said that her husband had been allocated 10 acres of land, and then “when he received the ownership deed, Ferenc Szabó demanded that they give him 15 kg of beans and a litre of milk a day for the land. They gave the milk to Ferenc Szabó for 3 months, and when they were informed by the other land claimants that they were not obliged to provide these services, Ferenc Szabó reduced the allowance to 4 acres. His daughter, Gyuláné Csikós received 1.5 acres of vineyards, from whom Szabó demanded 500 pengő, 1 litre of brandy and a piglet. She could not give him the pig, so Ferenc Szabó took the grapes from them after the harvest.” RIGÓ, Róbert (2014): *Elitváltások évtizede Kecskeméten*. Budapest – Pécs, ÁBTL – Kronosz. 305.

<sup>15</sup> Decree No 17. §-Article 17 states that “a committee of three members, composed of delegates from the Ministries of Agriculture, Public Welfare and Education and Religious Affairs and acting with the assistance of experts, shall be responsible for reviewing all special-purpose land to determine whether the cultural or foundation purpose is in the public interest, the amount of land required to achieve it and whether the cultural institution or foundation has other sources of income that make the land nonessential. If the aforementioned committee finds that the cultural or foundation purpose is not in the public interest, the foundation land shall be used in its entirety. Any land in excess of the area of land required to achieve the purpose (which shall not exceed 100 acres), or the entire land in the case of the purpose being satisfied from other sources of income, shall also be bought off.” ROMSICS, Ignác (ed.) (2000): *Magyar történelmi szöveggyűjtemény 1914–1999*. Budapest, Osiris. Vol. I. 392.

acres had to be allocated elsewhere.<sup>16</sup> The practical implementation of the land reform usually depended on the intentions of the local and county land distribution committees. On 2 July 1945, the National Land Settlement Council issued a decision in principle on church land matters, which made it virtually impossible for the church to own land for keeping up its institutions. The resolution also stated that where the land under congregation ownership reached 30 acres, the church could not claim any more land, and that in towns where there were several congregations, the total area of land owned by the church could amount to 100 acres at most.<sup>17</sup> This also meant that congregations that had no land at all, or only less than 30 acres, could claim more until reaching the said overall surface. The Council of the Danubian Reformed Church District had already drawn the attention of the deans to this possibility after its meeting on 10 April 1945 so that these congregations could apply for land or for a property supplement.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, the Temporary National Government practically ordered the expropriation and division of ecclesiastical land exceeding 100 acres, similarly to the regulations in the Soviet Republic. We can distinguish three stages in the nationalization of the Reformed Church's estates: the first took place immediately after World War II in 1945–46, the second between 1948 and the spring of 1951, and the third in the summer and fall of 1951, when almost all church estates had to be “offered” to the state.

Countrywide, the Reformed Church owned 102,000 acres before 1945, out of which 54,056 acres had been appropriated by the end of the first phase. According to the

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<sup>16</sup> According to Article 12 of the Decree, “100 acres up to 100–1,000 acres, and irrespective of their size, the land estates of jurisdictions, municipalities, and churches, and, subject to the outcome of the procedure described in Article 17, 100 acres of agricultural property in foundation estates are exempt from redemption. If, however, the land available for distribution in a commune or distribution group is insufficient in relation to the number of claimants, the National Land Settlement Council may order the entire land holdings of the natural person affected by the redemption to be claimed. In such a case, the redeemed person shall be allocated 100 acres of land of the same quality in another part of the country.” ROMSICS 2000, 391.

<sup>17</sup> HORVÁTH, Gergely Krisztián (2018): *Szovjetizálás és ellenállás a Veszprémi egyházmegyében, Dr. Kögl Lénárd pályája az 1940–1960-as években*. Budapest, MTA BTK TTI. 47–49. The full text of the Decision can be found in *Annex 1* – op. cit. 233–235.

<sup>18</sup> KREL, Documents of the Kecskemét Church County, box 91, 39/1945. Confidential Excerpt from the meeting of the Danubian Reformed Church District Council, 10 April 1945.

Covenant minutes of 15–16 April 1947, more than half of the land, 25,617 acres had been taken from 139 congregations, and 28,439 acres from 36 institutions and foundations.<sup>19</sup> In the course of the land distribution, a total of 1,184 acres were allocated to 71 congregations and one foundation. The total loss of the Reformed Church in the 1945 land confiscation was 52,872 acres.<sup>20</sup> Nearly half of the estate was still kept. Between 1945 and 1948, instead of compensation, the financial government paid income supplemental state aid and congruent aid to clergymen,<sup>21</sup> and after 1948, the amount of state aid was set by an agreement with the Reformed Church.<sup>22</sup>

In Hungarian historiography, the nationalization of church land before the change of regime was deemed “necessary” in order to “abolish any feudal privileges” of the church. In 1985, Jenő Gergely, referring to progress, considered the seizure of church lands as necessary due to civilization, democratization, and secularization. After the fall of communism, studies were carried out on the process in the individual bishoprics,

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<sup>19</sup> The Roman Catholic Church was even more adversely affected by land confiscation, as 765,684 acres of its land were nationalized in 1945, leaving 111,759 acres. The reason for this is that the Roman Catholic Church had more extensive diocesan and archdiocesan estates. For example, before the land reform, the Bishopric of Veszprém had 50,513 acres, and the Veszprém Chapter had 47,683 acres, the income from which was used to maintain religious, cultural, and educational institutions as special-purpose assets. In the field of education, there were two teacher-training colleges, seven junior high schools and 564 elementary schools, as well as the seminary of Veszprém. After the “land reform”, the diocese had a total of 655 acres, only 0.6 % of the previous land holdings. HORVÁTH 2018, 45–61.

<sup>20</sup> FODORNÉ NAGY, Sarolta (2006): *Történelmi lecke. A Magyar Köztársaság és a Magyarországi Református Egyház között 1948-ban létrejött „Egyezmény” megkötésének körülményei és hatása különös tekintettel a nevelésre.* Budapest–Nagykőrös, Dunamelléki Református Egyházkerület. 153.

<sup>21</sup> The issues of the congrua and state aid are in many ways intertwined, but there are also significant differences between them. The congrua meant a decent financial provision for pastors and teachers, which the state was expected to provide if the congregation could not. State aid was a budgetary resource in case of need and was divided into four forms: supplementary income, investment, school and church aid. There was considerable debate about what the state could expect in return and whether it could be acceptable at all. See more: KOVÁCS, Kálmán Árpád (2016): *Az államsegélyes egyházpolitika és a reformátusok a századfordulón (1868–1898).* In: Ujváry, Gábor (ed.): *VERITAS Évkönyv 2015.* Budapest, VERITAS Történetkutató Intézet – Magyar Napló. 13–28.

<sup>22</sup> BALOGH, Margit (1997): *A demokratizálódás kudarca(i).* In: Kollega Tarsoly, István (EIC): *Magyarország története a XX. században.* Vol. II. Szekszárd, Babits Kiadó. 374–405.

dioceses of the Roman Catholic Church, but a national synthesis is yet to be carried out.<sup>23</sup> In the case of the Reformed Church, there were a few case studies on the subject in the last year.<sup>24</sup>

The Reformed Church tried to protect its interests, preserve its landholdings within the limits of the law at various levels. In the following, I will discuss how and to what extent land was nationalized in the first period between 1945 and 1946 and what steps were taken by the church districts, church counties, the congregation of Kecskemét, and the session of Szeremle, a small village south of Baja, to protect their land.

### Reactions of the Danubian Reformed Church District to the Nationalization of Church Land

The Bishop of the Danubian Reformed Church District, László Ravasz, wrote to the Dean of the Kecskemét Reformed Church County, József Jóba, on 20 April 1945, enclosing “for information in full confidence” the letter of the district presidency to the Prime Minister, the Minister of Agriculture, and the National Land Settlement Council “concerning the land reform”. He recorded that the district estate amounting to 5,000 acres had been taken away without any prior consultation, which the district had “either obtained from the pious donations of individual congregants or purchased with sums collected very frugally from the pennies of the congregants, mostly simple poor people, to secure the material existence of the church as a physical prerequisite for its great ministry”. They stated that the church leadership considers a fairer distribution of land as an important task, accepting that the implementation of the decree, which was quickly promulgated without prior consultation, has begun, but requested fairness, which “the cultural and national importance of our church deserves”. They stressed that:

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<sup>23</sup> One of the most significant studies on the subject is the first 110 pages of Gergely Krisztián Horváth’s volume on the Diocese of Veszprém, as well as BÁNKUTI, Gábor (2012): *Mozaikok a Pécsi Egyházmegye életéből 1948–1951. között*. In: Bánkuti, Gábor – Varga, Szabolcs – Vértesi, Lázár (eds.): *A 20. század egyház- és társadalomtörténetének metszéspontjai. Tanulmányok a Pécsi Egyházmegye 20. századi történetéből*. Pécs, Pécsi Püspöki Hittudományi Főiskola, 205–221.

<sup>24</sup> See the studies by Éva Bíró, Sarolta Fodorné Nagy, and Róbert Rigó referenced herein.



we believe it is crucial that the government adopts the position that all church property is a trust [...]. The church is first and foremost a targeted system since it is a set of ministries and missions. Therefore, we can say that all the property of the church is a special trust, and we ask that each and every church property be treated accordingly and with benevolence. This is, of course, even more so of all those parts of the property whose purpose is historically laid down in charters or deeds of donation and wills.<sup>25</sup>

On 1 May 1945, László Ravasz informed the deans that negotiations were being held with the government on the distribution of church land, explaining the harmful consequences of the decree and asked for compensation for the church. Five thousand acres of land in the church district had already been distributed, and only three estates had been reported to have retained 100 acres each. These measures were challenged by the church district. The situation was aggravated by the fact that they were unable to contact the users of the land, the local government, or the tenants. The bishop stated that the existence of the theological seminary of the district was “threatened by the most serious danger”; the seat had suffered damage of 2-300 thousand pengő. Income from the estates was lost because the tenants had been robbed during the passage of the front line. The church had no income and could not pay its employees. At that time, the only income that could be counted was the payment of district annuities by the congregations that were able to do so at all. The Bishop recorded that “We have intervened several times in the strongest form with the state government on the matters of the congrua,<sup>26</sup> seniority benefit, and state aids in general.” The government promised to pay, but due to lack of funds, it could not. The bishop’s report published in June stated that the

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<sup>25</sup> KREL, Documents of the Kecskemét Church County, box 91, 32/1945. László Ravasz’s letter to Dean József Jóba, 20 April 1945.

<sup>26</sup> The word *congrua* comes from the Latin *sustentatio congrua* ‘adequate provision’ – when the clerical position was not accompanied by adequate remuneration, it was supplemented by the state. In secularized states, it is an important instrument of state power over the clergy. After the nationalization of church lands, clergymen lost their means of subsistence, and therefore the *congrua* played a decisive role in their subsistence. After 1951, the State Office for Church Affairs assigned pastors on a personal basis, and its disbursement or withdrawal was an important instrument of power. *Katolikus lexikon*. Available at: <http://lexikon.katolikus.hu/K/kongrua.html>.

position of pastors' entitled to a congrua was considered by the government an official position, aligned with the pay grades of civil servants. Church schools received a salary supplement from the state because teachers' land was also nationalized.<sup>27</sup> With the confiscation of church land – even before the nationalization of schools in 1948 –, they were in a difficult financial situation, with no prospects in many places. The bishop again stated, "I regret to point out the total financial ruin of the church counties of the Danubian District." The Bishop also recorded that 16 pastors of the church district had not yet returned to their places of ministry, seven had been arrested or interned, and nine had been taken prisoners of war. In July, the congrua started to be paid, so that many had some income for the first time in months.<sup>28</sup>

In his bishop's report dated 22 November 1945, Ravasz dealt specifically with the land reform, describing that the Church considered it necessary to distribute land more fairly, but they could not imagine that the state would "expropriate up to 100 acres of land belonging to churches, foundations, and schools, a land reform which makes economic equipment and facilities, farm buildings erected at great expense redundant, a land reform which offers practically no compensation".<sup>29</sup> He also recorded that of the 5,400 acres of the district, 300 were retained in principle, but in actual fact there were only 100 acres left.

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<sup>27</sup> Point 7/c and point 9 of the state's agreement with the Reformed of 7 October 1948 also dealt with the cantor-teachers' land. Accordingly, the cantor's salary land for cantoral duties remained the property of the church. ERDŐS, Kristóf (2011): A Magyar Köztársaság és a Magyarországi Református Egyház 1948-as egyezményének vizsgálata. In: J. Újváry, Zsuzsanna (ed.): *Összekötnek az évezredek.* (Pázmány Történelmi Műhely Történelmi Tanulmányok, 3). Budapest – Piliscsaba, Pázmány Péter Katolikus Egyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kar, Történettudományi Intézet – Szent István Társulat. 323.

<sup>28</sup> KREL, Documents of the Kecskemét Church County, box 92, 82/1945. Status Report of the Danubian Reformed Church District, May–July 1945.

<sup>29</sup> László Ravasz's 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> Bishop's Reports (22 November 1945) in: Kiss, Réka – Lányi, Gábor (eds.) (2023): *Ravasz 100, Püspöki jelentések.* Budapest, Dunamelléki Református Egyházkerület – KRE HTK ETKI – Kálvin Kiadó. 409.

## **Nationalization of Congregation Estates in the Kecskemét Reformed Church County**

On 28 June 1946, the Universal Covenant asked the deans to send a statement of the extent to which land confiscation had affected the congregations in their church counties.<sup>30</sup> They also asked for a report if a congregation had acquired land. The dean then asked the congregations for a statement on the matter, and the data was aggregated. In the Kecskemét Reformed Church County, the following areas were nationalized in 1945: 44 acres in Abony, all the land was taken away, so here the congregation did not have any of the land as required by the Decree. In Cegléd, 730 acres and 375 fathoms<sup>31</sup> were nationalized (of which school endowment land was 275 acres and 938 fathoms). In Kecskemét, 404 acres and 470 fathoms of land were taken from the congregation and distributed. In Kiskunhalas, 2,492 acres were nationalized, the largest amount of land in the church county; the second largest was in Nagykőrös, 1,736 acres and 452 fathoms of land. In Dévaványa, the church county owned 94 acres and 934 fathoms of land, which were fully nationalized. A total of 5,501 acres and 924 fathoms of land were confiscated from the church county and its congregations during the 1945 land confiscation. Four congregations received land: Kiskunfélegyháza: 25 acres, Prónayfalva, later Tázlár: 15 acres, Szolnok: 30 acres, and Újszász: 15 acres – 85 acres in total. No land was seized in the congregations of Jászberény, Jászkisér, Kerekegyháza, Soltvadkert, Tiszavárkony, and Tószeg, but they did not receive any either. Prónayfalva (Tázlár) was dependent on the congregation of Soltvadkert as a filial church, where the 252 acres of the estate of the Budapest Reformed Theological Academy, legacy of Szathmáry Sándorné, were taken away, and the congregation received 15 acres of it. In Kiskőrös, the session applied for land, but their application was rejected.

Rev. Benjámin Ván of Kishunhalas wrote in detail about the land that was taken away. The congregation owned 191 acres in the Balota plain, 910 acres in the Debeák Szarkás plains, of which 500 acres were forest, 10 vineyards and orchards, 155 acres in the

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<sup>30</sup> In the future, it would be worthwhile to search for these church county reports in the Synodal Archives and in the county archives.

<sup>31</sup> A fathom was a unit of land, each side of a fathom being one fathom, i.e. 189 centimetres, equivalent to 3.6 square meters, a juger/jugerum being 1,600 fathoms.

Felsőkistelek plains, of which 18 vineyards and 7 orchards. There was a castle on the estate featuring a large cellar, 1,200 hl of wine storage capacity, holding 300 hl of wine, modern winegrowing equipment, 9 horses, and 20 cattle; another 12 acres in the Pirtó plains, 10 acres of the precentorial meadows by the town, and 5 acres of gardens in the Sziget area. There were 240 acres of glebe in the Balota plains and another 43 acres in the Füzes plain. Significant estates were also taken from the church endowments: 29 acres from the orphanage foundation, 897 acres on the outskirts of Kiskunfélegyháza, “an endowment estate owned by the Reformed public redemptive estate of Kiskunhalas, and the perpetual usufructuary was the Szilády Áron Reformed Secondary School in Kiskunhalas, with the proviso that if this school should for any reason lose its Reformed character, the usufruct would cease and revert to the Reformed public redemptive commonage of Kiskunhalas”. Benjamin Ván listed the remaining church estates; the congregation was not left with 100 acres, which was challenged against in vain. So, here, too, the law was not observed: instead of 100 acres, one was left for the glebe, and 291 acres were left for the foundation instead of the 100 allowed, although a large part of this was poor-quality sandy land.

The pastors of Nagykőrös reported that 698 acres and 213 fathoms of land in the outskirts of the town, another 42 acres and 1,482 fathoms in the outskirts of the nearby Jászkarajenő, and 135 acres and 657 fathoms of land in the outskirts of Dánszentmiklós, making a total of 876 acres and 452 fathoms of land, were taken from the congregation. The boarding school of Arany János High School had another 860 acres of land, which was encumbered by a surviving spouse’s usufruct, but this was also claimed, so a total of 1,736 acres and 452 fathoms were nationalized. The congregation was left 100 acres, including the two pastors’ glebes. They left the 8 acres of endowment land of Jenő Dóczy, 1/3 of which belonged to the high school, and Cs. Kiss’s land amounting to 38 acres, which belonged to the teacher-training school foundation. The inter-ministerial committee of three granted 100 acres of land to the teacher-training institute; the session had requested that 62 acres of the endowment land in Dánszentmiklós be kept, but they had not yet been informed.

Rev. László Kővári from Kocsér reported that the 51 acres of plough land of Ambrus V. Farago’s endowment, which he had established for the material needs of the local church, were “saved by declaring 41 acres as glebe, 5 acres as precentorial land, and 5 acres as bell-ringer’s land, which was approved by the local body of the Land Settlement

Committee”. The Szolnok Reformed Congregation applied for and received 15 acres of glebe, 10 acres of precentorial and 5 acres of bell-ringer’s land, a total of 30 acres, which they were to repay over twenty years, but they were unable to pay the first instalment because of financial difficulties.<sup>32</sup>

It is clear from these cases that the local land-claiming committees had very different practices regarding the nationalization of church land. For example, in Abony, no land was left at all, not even the legal minimum; in Kiskunhalas, more than 100 acres of endowment land was left – at the same time, the congregation’s property land was not secured; in Nagykőrös, more than twice 100 acres of land was left. In Kiskőrös, the session applied for land in vain, but did not receive it, while in Szolnok the pastor, the cantor, and the bell-ringer were also provided with land as benefice.<sup>33</sup>

### **Nationalization of the Estates of the Kecskemét Reformed Congregation**

In 1930, Kecskemét was the fourth most densely populated city in the country. The town had extensive suburban areas. In 1941, 59% of its 87,269 inhabitants and in 1949 62.3% of its 88,369 inhabitants lived in suburban farms.<sup>34</sup> In 1950, Kecskemét became the seat of the newly created Bács-Kiskun County. At the same time, a good part of its outskirts was annexed, so the city’s area decreased by more than 70% and its population by 35%.<sup>35</sup> In the separated areas, nine new villages were created to serve as

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<sup>32</sup> KREL, Documents of the Kecskemét Reformed Church County, box 93, 307/1946. Statement on the effects of land reorganization in the Church County of Kecskemét. June 1946.

<sup>33</sup> The 57 congregations of the Vértessalja Reformed Church County owned 2,200 acres of land, but due to the predominance of large estates during the land reform, there was a relative “land abundance”, i.e. more land was available for distribution, so 77 acres were taken from the congregations and 287 were given to them.<sup>33</sup> László Ravasz’s 25<sup>th</sup> Bishop’s Report (21 November 1946) in: KISS – LÁNYI 2023, 466.

<sup>34</sup> RIGÓ, Róbert (2016): Kecskemét helye a városhierarchiában és társadalmi változások a népszámlálások tükrében. In: *Forrás*. 2016/7–8. 81–84.

<sup>35</sup> In the outskirts of Kecskemét, in 1950, Bugac, Lakitelek, and Nyárlőrinc became independent settlements; in 1952, Ágasegyháza, Helvécia, Hetényegyháza, Szentkirály, and Városvölgy; in 1954, Ballószög. SZILÁGYI, Zsolt (2019): Mezőváros a tervszalonon. Az 1957. évi kecskeméti Várorendezési

supply centres for the surrounding farms.<sup>36</sup> The Kecskemét Reformed Congregation had been building up an extensive educational system from 1564; besides the high school, a college was established in the 1830s, but seminary was transferred to Pest in the 1850s, followed by the law academy in the 1860s and the teacher-training college in 1918. By the end of the Horthy era, the congregation's most significant income came from the rent of shops, business premises and tenement houses downtown and from church taxes, at which time the landholding amounted to 507 acres. The land usually got into the ownership of the congregation as bequests or endowments. The yield from the land was not a major source of income for the budget, but it was more important for the pastors, the cantor's salary, and the boarding school students' meals.<sup>37</sup>

Already during the Soviet occupation, the congregation's farms suffered significant losses. In December 1944, Rev. Bálint Kovács reported to the mayor of the town that the congregation had 20 horses, 28 carts, 45 cattle, 160 pigs on their 507-juger property and that they had a model farm in Talfa and Szentkirály. Kovács wrote that during his visit on 5 December, after the passing of the front, the farms had only four or five cows and calves and eight pigs, and no horses, leaving most of the land unploughed and barren. The church was supposed to pay the wages of 50 men, but all that was left was the money in the mite box, barely enough to pay for anything.<sup>38</sup>

On 10 April 1945, on behalf of the congregation of Kecskemét, Dr Gyula Joó, the Chief Elder, and Rev. Bálint Kovács wrote a petition to the local claiming committee, in which they stated that they had received information about the seizure and distribution of their lands. They requested that this process be stopped, the allotment of the lands be cancelled, and "all our properties be left in our ownership and possession undisturbed".

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terv rekonstrukciója, illetve történeti földrajzi (szekuláris) kontextusa. In: Horváth, Gergely Krisztián (ed.): *Vakvágány. A „szocializmus alapjainak lerakása” vidéken a hosszú örvényes években* 2. Budapest, MTA BTK – NEB. 436.

<sup>36</sup> BELÉNYI, Gyula (1996): *Az alföldi városok és a településpolitika (1945–1963)* (Dél-alföldi évszázadok 7). Szeged. 38.

<sup>37</sup> SZABADOS, László (2000): *A Kecskeméti Református Kollégium története 1945-től az 1948-as államosításig*. Kecskemét, Kecskeméti Református Kollégium Gimnáziuma. 46–47.

<sup>38</sup> KREL, Administrative church documents III/I., box 19, 1944–1945, 156. Bálint Kovács's Report to the mayor, dated December 1944.

It was then argued that the vast majority of the congregations' total land area, 344 and a half acres out of the 507 acres, was endowment land. These were listed in itemized form, with the donor and purpose of the trust. Most of the endowment estates were left to the church after death by persons closely connected to the church, such as chief elders and elders, mainly for educational and social purposes. For example, in the Kisfái plains, the property of 17 acres of 954 fathoms was bequeathed to the congregation by the late Chief Elder László Szeless, by a separate testamentary deed, as endowment for the care of the pastors' widows and orphans. The 50-juger estate of Balázs Györffy in Talfa was bequeathed by the late Chief Elder for educational purposes. The Hankovszky grove in the built-in area of Hunyadváros was bequeathed by Elder Zsigmond Hankovszky in the form of an 8-juger-815-fathom endowment for the maintenance of the teacher-training school. The 16 acres of 1,328 fathoms in the Talfája plains were the endowment estate for the cantor's remuneration, and a 16-juger estate there served the cultural and charitable purposes of the Bodor Zsuzsánna Girls' Home.

The other category of endowment estates was donated to the congregation by the city of Kecskemét for the purposes of education and pastors' salaries. The town of Kecskemét donated half of the 61 acres of 1,402 fathoms in the Talfája plains, the so-called "Kezeshévesi estate", to the congregation for school and boarding purposes. In the farm centres around the town, the town donated 30 acres in Méntelke, Kadafalva, and Szentkirály as benefice for the local pastors. In Szentkirály, 70 acres of the 116 acres received by the congregation in the 1920 Land Reform were granted for the remuneration of pastors serving in the town. In the Csáktornya vineyard, two acres and 1,402 fathoms of vines were provided for the remuneration of the local pastors. With regard to the endowment estates, it was hoped at that time that they would be retained for their cultural and educational purpose because, according to their reasoning, "All these endowment estates serve such noble religious and philanthropic purposes that they will undoubtedly be exempted from redemption by the committee to be set up pursuant to paragraph 17 of Decree 600/1945, all the more because these purposes cannot be achieved in any other ways given the scarcity of our congregations' funds and because the individual properties are all less than 100 acres." Finally, it was recorded that the properties in the built-in area exceeding 16 acres, on which the schools, tenements, and buildings were located, and the cemetery occupying 9 acres, were exempt from the official requisition. This left 144 acres

to the church, of which 100 acres were exempt under the Decree, with the additional 44 acres requested to be exempted to ease the church's cultural burdens.<sup>39</sup>

On 3 May, the congregation of Kecskemét filed an appeal to the superior body, the County Land Settlement Council, as the local land-claiming committee had nationalized all but 100 of the 507 acres. They asked that the church land be exempted and retained in the church's property. Again, the appeal described the 344 and a half acres of endowment land as "being endowment donated for various purposes and at various times by various persons". It was noted that since all endowment estates were under 100 acres, each estate was exempt under the Decree. Pastoral and precentorial glebes were also exempted as special-purpose properties. "Besides, paragraph 17 of the Decree requires a special committee to decide on them." These lands could therefore not be used until the committee was set up. Exemption of the remaining 144 acres is requested under Article 12 of the Decree. Finally, it was explained that the will of the endowment holders would also be annulled by the nationalization and distribution of these estates, as "it would be unfair to make use of these small endowment estates, also because they were established by faithful members of the church, common men without exception, attached to our church, from their hard-earned wealth. In this way, they sought to establish a lasting memorial of their gratitude to their church."<sup>40</sup>

According to the report compiled in the summer of 1946, the Reformed congregation of Kecskemét was deprived of the endowment property established from the donations of six private individuals, which amounted to a total of 160 acres and 105 fathoms. A further 130 acres of land, which served as the benefice of the farm pastorates on the outskirts of the town, were seized and put at the disposal of the church by the town. An additional 114 acres and 365 fathoms were taken from the congregation's property, for a total of 404 acres and 470 fathoms.<sup>41</sup> According to a later statement, the

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<sup>39</sup> KREL, Documents of the Kecskemét Church County, box 91, 33/1945. Letter on behalf of the congregation of Kecskemét from Dr Gyula Joó, Chief Elder, and Rev. Bálint Kovács to the local land-claiming committee, dated 10 April 1945.

<sup>40</sup> KREL, Documents of the Kecskemét Reformed Church County, box 91, 36/1945. Appeal of the congregation of Kecskemét to the County Land Settlement Council, 3 May 1945.

<sup>41</sup> KREL, Documents of the Kecskemét Reformed Church County, box 93, 307/1946. Report on the effects of land reorganization in the Kecskemét Reformed Church County. June 1946.



1945 land confiscation took 313 acres of 2,550 gold crowns (hereafter AK) of pure income land from the congregation.<sup>42</sup>

This uncertainty may have been due to years of dispute over the status of estates. In the following years, the main problem was that, although several petitions were filed to exempt endowment lands from nationalization, claiming that they were less than 100 acres and that the income from the land was used to maintain their schools, no satisfactory solution to the ownership problem could be found. During 1945, the congregation made several petitions for exemption from the nationalization of the endowment lands but usually received no response. On 12 April 1946, the Finance and Agriculture Committee of the Session of the congregation recorded the current situation of the church lands, according to which 66 acres in the Belső-Talfája were rented to three tenant farmers on condition that all obligations of service be fulfilled jointly. The estate in Külső-Talfája was divided, but the new owners had not yet occupied it, so the church took it over. The benefice of pastors' widows was not divided, the orchard in Kisnyír was divided but not yet occupied by the new owners, and the 30-juger estate in Szentkirály was not yet seized. Kálmán Csikai requested that the session give him other 10 acres of land instead of the 10 acres seized during the Méntelek land distribution, "which he hopes to recover", as benefice, which was voted for.<sup>43</sup> So, in this transitional period, some of the land that had already been divided up had not yet been taken over by the new owners, and the congregation tried to keep it as cultivated agricultural land.

In February 1947, the congregation again applied for the exemption of the endowment lands from nationalization, for which a statement was made of the current situation of the lands, according to which the foundation originally owned 242 acres, of which only 43 acres remained, as the rest had been distributed. The church had 158 acres, of which an area of 61 acres and one of 17 acres were left, and the larger one was included in the 100 acres left by decree. In addition to these, congregation, averaging

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<sup>42</sup> KREL III/I., box 33, 189/1951. Letter by Rev. Endre Tóth to the Ministry of Finance, dated 10 October 1951.

<sup>43</sup> KREL, Minutes of the Session of the Kecskemét Reformed Congregation II/3, 1946–1999. Report of the Finance and Agriculture Committee on the situation of church lands, 12 April 1946.

30 acres, which had been established around farm churches in the extensive outlying areas, were left to the church. In the petition, the congregation sought to have the remaining 100 acres of church land permanently assigned and the endowment lands be kept.<sup>44</sup>

Bálint Kovács, a pastor in Kecskemét, mentions in his memoirs the uncertainties among pastors and cantors due to the land reform, whose income was mainly secured by the income from the glebe:

It's true that the law ordered the churches to be given 100 acres, but who took that into account amidst the revolutionary spirit?! There were parts where the provision was observed, and there were some others where it was not. So, indeed, there was confusion about the future. But there were exceptions, like Talfája, where the college foundation land was not disturbed for a while, not even the gardens of the Bodor Zsuzsánna Home. All these institutions, schools, and boarding schools received the materials they needed to feed their residents. However, several endowment landholdings were seized and distributed without regard to everyone and everything. [...] Knowing all this, the farm pastors shared their concerns about both religious education and land with each other and their fellow pastors in the circle of pastors in Kecskemét in the still existing Church District of Kecskemét. [...] The monthly pastoral society meetings were also attended by the religion teachers of Kecskemét. After devotions and prayers, the meetings discussed the regulations and events in the public church and then the situation in Kecskemét and its surroundings with the changes in the town and the farms. [...] At the same time as religious education, the land issue was never left untouched. There were times when land was seized, and other times when it was left. All this caused increasing uncertainty for pastors serving on the farm, especially where there were children in the family.<sup>45</sup>

In parallel with the confiscation of the church's land, the congregation felt that it would be worthwhile to make the farms belonging to the urban congregation independent because after the implementation of the Decree it seemed they would be able to retain more land and, as an independent congregation, the pastors there would be entitled to

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<sup>44</sup> SZABADOS 2000, 49.

<sup>45</sup> KOVÁCS 2006, 77.

a congrua. To this end, Bálint Kovács visited two staff members of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education, who visited the farm churches and found that they could only provide state aid if they became independent. The independence of the farm congregations had already begun, first in January 1947, when Rev. Kálmán Csikai of Méntelek submitted his proposal to the session, and then the farm congregations started to work towards independence. The session accepted the payslip of the farm pastors, and then the congrua committee met in Kecskemét between 9 and 11 May 1947 with representatives of the Ministry of Religion and Public Education, the Ministry of Finance, and the congregation. At the meeting, the congrua of the pastors of the five new congregations was determined, the positions of the pastors of the Kecskemét Reformed Church County were discussed with the county board, and, finally, the agreement was recorded in minutes as follows:<sup>46</sup>

Before the land reform, Kecskemét was able to cover all its expenses from its own resources and did not need any state aid. However, the land reform, nationalization, and the devastations of war radically changed the financial situation of the congregation. The congregation maintained several institutions: schools, a nursing home, a dormitory, a law academy, boarding schools, all of which had suffered, one might say, 100% damage to their interior design. The congregation must concentrate all its efforts on the restoration of these buildings and institutions, and therefore cannot give the farmstead pastors an allowance that would ensure them minimum living conditions. For the two central pastoral positions, it is not asking for any State aid, but for the five farmstead pastoral positions, it is asking for the Treasury to take over the remuneration of these posts in full.<sup>47</sup>

Thereafter, the first independent pastor, Balázs K. Nagy, was ordained in Helvécia on 26 September 1948, then in the Kecskemét Reformed Church County the service of Dean József Jóba expired, and Zsigmond Büky, the pastor of Cegléd, was elected in his place, so the next pastor, Sándor Sima, was ordained only on 12 February 1952 in Szentkirály, and on the same day Pál Lengyel was ordained in Lakitelek. In parallel with this process, these settlements were administratively separated from the expanded boundaries of Kecskemét.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Op. cit. 76–84.

<sup>47</sup> Op. cit. 80.

<sup>48</sup> Op. cit. 82–84.

## **Nationalization of the Church Land in Szeremle**

Szeremle is situated in Bács-Kiskun County, southwest, a few kilometres away from Baja, near the Danube. The Reformed congregation had 96 acres of land, half of which belonged to the pastor and the other half equally to the two teachers. According to the 1945 decree, since the landholding here did not reach the 100 acres specified in the decree, it should have been exempt from nationalization. However, the local land-claiming committee decided that since there was not enough land to allocate to the land claimants, the Reformed Church's land would be parcelled out, and it would be provided with land elsewhere. The National Land Settlement Council instructed the local committee to come to an agreement with the church on this matter. The chairman of the local committee and the session held negotiations in November 1945 and agreed to retain 15 acres of glebe, 10 acres for the teacher and 5 acres for the bell-ringer from the 96 acres, to allocate the remaining 57 acres – which the new owners could take possession of on 15 October 1946 – and to provide replacement land in the outskirts of Baja. The deal froze because of the one-year deadline for taking possession, but eventually a similar arrangement was reached through the intervention of the National Council. During the nationalization of the church schools in 1948, the state also took possession of the 18 acres of teachers' land, so the teachers who had been working in the church schools also lost their benefices and were left with only the state salary.<sup>49</sup>

## **A New Wave of Nationalization of Church Land**

The state imposed increasingly onerous levies and payments on the remaining church land. In 1947, the state imposed a property tax on churches, which meant a new challenge to congregations. Rev. Endre Tóth of Kecskemét summarized the facts of the local property tax issue to Bishop Albert Bereczky.<sup>50</sup> In 1947, the local congregation was

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<sup>49</sup> BÍRÓ, Éva (2023): Az egyházi földek elvesztése az 1945-ös földreform és a földfelajánlások következtében a Szeremlei Református Egyházközségben. In: Kiss, Réka – Lányi, Gábor (eds.): *Hagyomány, Identitás, Történelem 2022*. Budapest, KRE HTK. 573–582.

<sup>50</sup> On the church leadership's conformity with the state, see in this issue: KISS, Réka (2024): Pathfinding and Connections in the Life of Small Reformed Communities in Budapest. The

estimated a property tax of HUF 239,043, which was to be paid over three years, amounting to nearly HUF 80,000 a year. On 29 September 1947, the congregation, together with the Roman Catholics, the Lutherans, and the Israelites of Kecskemét, submitted a petition to the Minister of Finance, asking for a reduction or cancellation of part of the property tax imposed. It was proven that they could not pay the said amount because the rent of the properties was frozen at the 1939 levels and a public tax of 115% was imposed. The property tax would be 50-60% of the rent, so the public tax would increase to 170%, more than one and a half times the tax on the rent received. Meanwhile, much money was spent on buildings damaged during the war and on rebuilding schools, which is why the churches were asked to be exempted from the property tax.<sup>51</sup> They received a refusal order from the Minister of Finance in September 1948, but later they did not pay either, as they would not have had any money left to pay the 12 employees. They asked the bishop to try to intervene in their case through the State Office for Church Affairs (ÁEH).<sup>52</sup>

The church leaders encouraged the congregations to offer their remaining land to the state on a voluntary basis after the nationalization wave of 1945, and on 14 September 1949 they concluded an agreement with the Hungarian state to this effect. The Covenant and Synod Presidency stressed that the draft agreement provided for the possibility of “continuous donation until 31 December 1952”, after which it would expire. The draft

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Contexts of the 1967 YMCA Trial. In: *Studia Universitatis Babeş–Bolyai, Theologia Reformata Transylvanica*. 69, Supplement I. 157-190; LÁNYI, Gábor (2024): Viable Cooperation or Unscrupulous Service? Motivations for Albert Bereczky’s Activity in Church Governance. In: *Studia Universitatis Babeş–Bolyai, Theologia Reformata Transylvanica*. 69, Supplement I. 101-119; SZETEY, Szabolcs (2024): “We Must Participate with the Fruits of Our Faith in Building Socialism”. The Preaching Committee in the Danubian Reformed Church District in the Mid-20th Century. In: *Studia Universitatis Babeş–Bolyai, Theologia Reformata Transylvanica*. 69, Supplement I. 120-136; 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. 123–140.

<sup>51</sup> SZABADOS 2000, 50–51.

<sup>52</sup> KREL III/I., box. 33, 1950–1951, 203/1951. Letter from Rev. Endre Tóth to Bishop Albert Bereczky.

agreement included the Presidency of the Universal Covenant as the seller, as well as the representative of congregations, church districts, church counties and the foundations, associations, and institutions administered by them. The purchase price for the properties offered in 1949 was HUF 70 per registered gold crown of income,<sup>53</sup> HUF 65 in 1950, and in 1951–52 only HUF 60; if the property also had a farm building, an additional 5 forints per registered gold crown of income was paid. The purchase price was to be paid by the State to the Covenant Presidency in instalments over a period of twenty years, without interest. The State acquired ownership of the estate on the date of acceptance, and the Church received the benefits of the property and paid the public encumbrances for the year of sale. The draft agreement was followed by an informative text stating that it did not affect the freehold rights of the landowners, but that if they “wish to offer their property, the property will be taken over subject to the above conditions”.<sup>54</sup> The terms of the agreement were very unfavourable to the congregations – the longer they waited, the less they received. The price was paid in instalments over twenty years; they received no interest, and finally they did not even receive the whole sum. However, the extremely high tax burden and the obligation to hand over the land meant that it was not a rational decision to keep it.

The circular letter of the Universal Covenant of 30 July 1951 accelerated and made compulsory the transfer of church estate, as the Presidency “calls upon all congregations, church districts, and church counties of the Reformed Church in Hungary, the institutes and institutions maintained by them, as well as their responsible leaders and bodies, to offer – in their own interest – all church land in accordance with the agreement between the Hungarian state and the Reformed Church on the subject of church land, without delay, but no later than 1 September 1951 so that the state may take possession of them immediately after the harvest”. Church-owned cottages and their associated land of up to 800 fathoms did not have to be transferred. For larger areas, a decision to transfer had to be taken “without delay”, at which point it was no

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<sup>53</sup> The value of a juger of arable land in Hungary, which was introduced in 1875, is an indicator of the net income of a juger of arable land, i.e. its fertility, location, and cultivability.

<sup>54</sup> Decision of the Covenant and Synodal Presidency Council on church property. Budapest, 14 September 1949. Published in: *Református Egyház.* 1(1949), 15. 14–15. Published by: BÍRÓ 2023, 579–581.

longer a voluntary offer but rather that those who would not vote for a “forced sale” were threatened with being fined. The elders were also threatened that if they were reluctant to vote in favour of the transfer of church land to the state, “all legal consequences arising from this fact shall be borne jointly and severally by the elders”. The session were therefore to vote nominally. The donation of land had to be made at the local council, and a report on the decision had to be sent to the session and to the presidency of the Covenant.<sup>55</sup>

On 15 August 1951, an addendum to the Covenant circular was received, according to which “800 fathoms of land per person may be retained for each church employee. A church payee was a professional church employee whose role was mainly clerical.” In addition to the minister, the cantor and the bell-ringer could be such beneficiaries if they received a congrua for their employment. Such land was in particular the garden belonging to the parsonage. “Where there is such a garden and its area exceeds 400 fathoms, the payee cannot claim a special area supplement. However, if this garden exceeds the retained 800 by 1 to 200 fathoms, the surplus needs not be offered and split off, but may be retained by the employee. If the church’s garden is less than 400 fathoms, he may apply for an addition up to 800 fathoms from either the built-in area or the periphery.” The 800 fathoms that could be kept could be of any type of cultivation, and no multiplier was required for vineyards and orchards. At the same time as the land was offered, the living and dead stock had to be offered, for which the state provided for payment of compensation. Cemetery land was not to be transferred to the state.<sup>56</sup>

At the meeting of the elders of the Kecskemét congregation held on 19 August 1951, Chief Elder Dr József Szabó presented the Covenant’s circular and the proposal of the meeting of the united financial, legal, and agricultural committee held on 12 August 1951, as well as the additional circular letter of the Covenant. The chief elder announced that the session had already offered part of the church lands to the state on 4 April 1951, at which time the last remaining lands were negotiated. The session decided by roll-call vote to offer – in addition to the properties already offered to the state for purchase –

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<sup>55</sup> Circular letter of the Presidency of the Ref. Universal Covenant on the donation of church land, KREL III/I. 1950–1951. Box 33, 140.

<sup>56</sup> Amendment to the circular letter of the Presidency of the Ref. Universal Covenant on the donation of church land. KREL III/I., box 33, 1950–1951, 149.

the agricultural properties still owned by the church to the state, a total of 127 acres in eight parcels, together with the buildings on them, and requested the transfer or cancellation of the debts on the properties. It was also stipulated that after the land had been offered, the congregation would keep 2 acres of vineyards with a house and a yard in the Csáktornya dűlő in the outskirts of Kecskemét as benefice for the five beneficiaries. In Lakitelek, the land kept for the vicarage and the congregation house and in Szentkirály, Helvécia, Méntelek, and Ágasegyháza the church and congregation gardens were retained. The decision on the donation was sent to the competent authorities.<sup>57</sup>

On 2 November 1951, Endre Tóth wrote to Dean István Gaál<sup>58</sup> because the congregation had been imposed such a significant obligation to pay the in-kind contributions on the land already donated to the state that it could not fulfil it. That is why he tried to find out what could be done in this situation. The production of bread, fodder, and maize did not reach the amount required to be delivered, so the pastor suggested that the value of the levy should be transferred to the “purchase price” of the land. The dean replied that he should contact Roland Kiss in person,<sup>59</sup> who might be able to help him in this hopeless situation through his connections at the ministry.<sup>60</sup>

The former owners, i.e. the congregations, were not allowed to decide how to use the instalments of the purchase price for the land, being bound to ask the Covenant for permission to spend the money, and the application had to specify what they wanted to use it for. It was the practice that, with the permission of the Covenant, these sums could only

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<sup>57</sup> KREL III/I., box 33, 1950–1951. 154. Decision of the Session of the Kecskemét Reformed Congregation on the donation of church landholdings to the state.

<sup>58</sup> Rev. István Gaál (1891–1970), pastor in Törökszentmiklós (1922–1958), Dean of Nagykunság (1937–1958), temporarily managed the Transbiscan Reformed Church District in 1956. SZABADI, István (2012): Névtár. In: Szabadi, István (ed.): „Szorultságomban tág tért adtál”, *Balla Árpád református lelképásztor hagyatéka*. Debrecen, Tiszántúli Református Egyházkerületi és Kollégiumi Levéltár. 523.

<sup>59</sup> Roland Kiss (1888–1967) was the Chief Elder of the Danubian Reformed Church District between 1949 and 1958, lay President of the Universal Covenant. From 1945, he was Member of Parliament, then state secretary at the Ministry of the Interior and then Minister of Defence. SZABADI 2012, 525.

<sup>60</sup> KREL III/I., 1950-1951., box 33, 217. Rev. Endre Tóth's letter to Dean István Gaál.



be used for property renovation, building renovation, and construction.<sup>61</sup> For the allocation of building materials, the churches had to obtain the consent of the State Office for Church Affairs (ÁEH).<sup>62</sup>

## Summary

Until the end of World War II, Reformed pastors, cantors, teachers, and bell-ringers made a decent living largely thanks to the land owned by the congregation and its institutions as well as civil organizations. In addition, the *deputatum*, i.e. the benefice from the crops (cereals, firewood, wine, salt, honey, meat, eggs, etc.), which was fixed in the pastors' payslip, ensured their livelihood, which the congregants produced on their own farms and which was increasingly paid for in cash in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the same time, it should be noted that individual congregations had very different amounts of land, those with a strong Reformed tradition and peasant background having up to several thousand acres and significant educational institutions – such as Kecskemét, Kiskunhalas, or Nagykőrös –, while the congregation of Szolnok, for example, with a Catholic majority, had no land at all, and the priest's income was already partly provided by the state.

The nationalization of church land and the increasing tax burden and in-kind contributions imposed on farming congregants have endangered the livelihood of pastors and their families. In 1952, a comprehensive study was made of the financial situation of the pastors in the Bács-Kiskunság Reformed Church County, clearly showing the great financial deterioration and vulnerability. The *deputatum* of the village pastors amounted to a few thousand forints a year, but several of them reported that they had not even received the previous year's salary, as the congregants had had no money to give. After 1945, the most secure monthly income for pastors was the *congrua* provided by the state, which amounted to HUF 600, or HUF 800 including family allowance. Usually, the repayment of the peace loan was deducted from this amount before the payment, reducing the low amount by HUF 50-100. In this difficult economic situation, the pastors were in debt; they could not meet their obligations to pay their contributions, and, according

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<sup>61</sup> BÍRÓ 2023, 586.

<sup>62</sup> LANTOS, Edit (2009): 1958 és a templomépítés divatja. In: Ö. Kovács, József – Kunt, Gergely (eds.): *A politikai diktatúra társadalmiasítása*. Miskolc, ME BTK. 32.

to the data sheets, almost all pastors had loans, many of them also tax arrears, which increased further in 1952.<sup>63</sup> Pastors often took care of their elderly family members and also wanted to have their children schooled. Kálmán Nagy, pastor of Érsekcsanád, noted that he had sent 640 of his monthly income of 701 forints to his children studying at the high school in Budapest, so the three of them had left 61 forints to live on.<sup>64</sup> Pastors' wives, who often had teaching qualifications, were usually not given jobs appropriate to their qualifications. It can be concluded that the nationalization of the Reformed Church's lands curtailed the financial independence of the pastors and left them in a vulnerable position, increasingly dependent on the state for their income, resulting in a rough cooperation with the state.

In the 1945 land redistribution, the original legal settlement would have left a relatively significant amount of land in the possession of congregations (hundreds of acres) and would have provided land for the maintenance of public institutions, but with the advance of the communists, the pressure on the churches increased, and with the progress of forced collectivization and the replacement of the church leadership, by the early 1950s the Reformed congregations had lost the land they had been given. In the process of land distribution, it can be seen as a valid argument that congregations with larger landholdings were supposed to contribute more to the landless farm workers' access to land, something to which the church leadership itself was open. Taking into account the educational, cultural, and social commitments of the individual congregations, a fairer arrangement could have been established whereby landless congregations could have been given estates as benefices. In 1945, there was an attempt to do so, but local conditions in many places overrode this even then, and with the advance of the communists, the confiscation of all land and church institutions became increasingly dominant. All in all, we must agree with Gergely Krisztián Horváth's statement regarding the Reformed Church that "The 1945 land distribution was a well-designed, well-organized, masterfully timed

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<sup>63</sup> In 1952, the average monthly wage in the public sector in Hungary was HUF 928. BALÓ, György – LIPOVE CZ, Iván (1987): *Tények Könyve 1988*. Budapest, Móra Könyvkiadó. <https://www.arcanum.com/hu/online-kiadvanyok/TenyekKonyve-tenyek-konyve-1/1988-2/magyarország-3C8C/gazdaság-3CD7/> (accessed in: April 2024).

<sup>64</sup> SZABÓ, Bence: *Lelkészorsók a hatalom hálójában. A hitélet visszaszorításának egzisztenciális eszközei*. (manuscript).

campaign of the Communist Party, disguised as a democratic movement, to eliminate the economic foundations of rival political forces and world views.”<sup>65</sup> We might add that the story did not stop there, it continued into the early 1950s.

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<sup>65</sup> HORVÁTH 2018, 85.

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Gábor LÁNYI:<sup>1</sup> 

## Viable Cooperation or Unscrupulous Service? Motivations for Albert Bereczky's Activity in Church Governance<sup>2</sup>

### *Abstract.*

Albert Bereczky is one of the controversial figures in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century history of the Hungarian Reformed Church. Bereczky was a genuine and authentic leader of those who fought for the inner spiritual renewal of the church between the two world wars, a church organizer, a well-known and respected preacher, who saved many by risking his life during the deportation of Hungarian Jews to extermination camps, for which he was posthumously awarded the honorary title "Righteous Among the Nations" from the Yad Vashem. However, the communist state apparatus established after World War II found in him the person who, by placing him at the head of the Reformed Church, could bring about a radical reduction of the public and social role of the Church almost without any resistance. So, the question arises: how and why could Bereczky, whose Christian commitment was hard to question, become the servant of the dictatorial state apparatus with its atheistic ideology?

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Our study attempts to record the possible intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that might explain this dilemma, while also providing a general insight into Albert Bereczky's life.

**Keywords:** Bishop Albert Bereczky, Zoltán Tildy, Church–state relationship, communist persecution of Christians, collaboration

## 1. Intrinsic Motivations

### 1.1 *The Power of Origin*

As for the intrinsic motivations, Albert Bereczky's origin deserves attention first. According to a rumour that was already widespread during Bereczky's lifetime, Bereczky was the illegitimate child of Count Albert Apponyi, a prominent diplomat of the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy. Aside from the accounts saying that Bereczky himself repeatedly stated this,<sup>3</sup> we only have indirect evidence to prove it.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, even if this situation

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<sup>3</sup> The earliest state security reports treated it as a fact that Albert Bereczky was the son of Count Apponyi, although this suited them to emphasize Bereczky's class antagonism and his connections with aristocratic reactionary individuals. In any case, all this shows how widespread the rumour was. See the Historical Archives of the State Security Services (hereinafter referred to as ÁBTL) O-9047 61. 22 March 1946; Miklós Mester considered the rumour true. See MESTER, Miklós (2012): *Arcképek. Két tragikus kor árnyékában*. Budapest, Tarsoly Kiadó. According to Gyula Muraközy, Bereczky acknowledged in his student years that he was Apponyi's son: ÁBTL O-9047 388–396. 22 June 1956; István Kardos, in his biography of his father, János Kardos, refers to the fact that when his father and Bereczky were classmates at the Reformed Grammar School in Kunszentmiklós, Bereczky was even making a boast of his supposed noble origins. KARDOS, István (1989): *Apám*. London (manuscript found in the Ráday Manuscript Collection of the Danubian Reformed Church District 272/2015). 7. On 7 June 2019, on one of the occasions of the “Universal Lectures” series of the Budapest–Pasarét Reformed Congregation, one of Bereczky's grandchildren publicly claimed that he accepted his descent from the Apponyi family, while another grandchild denied it on the same occasion.

<sup>4</sup> Albert Bereczky was baptized in the Catholic parish church of St Francis of Assisi in Bakáts Square in Budapest, close to which Endre Bereczky and Mária Pongrácz lived. His godfather is listed as Albert Apponyi in the parish church register. Also, in the register of births, the term “törv.” was used for children born in wedlock, and the abbreviation “ttelen.” for children

was not true, it is clear that Bereczky was a descendant of a declassified noble family. Her mother, Baroness Mária Pongrácz, came from an impoverished Catholic aristocratic family from Felvidék (Upper Hungary, currently Slovakia), who, after serving as a housekeeper to Albert Apponyi, married the then elderly Endre Bereczky, a Reformed landowner. After the early death of Endre Bereczky, Pongrácz had to get a job in Dunabogdány: she became a postmaster<sup>5</sup> and married Géza Kovács, the local Reformed minister. Although his foster-father's personal life example and his approach to vocation were decisive factors in Albert Bereczky's choice of the pastoral vocation,<sup>6</sup> in the views of the time, for her mother, who hailed from a noble family, it must have meant declassing. Leaving the Apponyi household, where she had resided, and relocating to Ferencváros with Endre Bereczky contributed to this perception. Ultimately, her social standing diminished further, as she became a minister's wife in Dunabogdány, relying on gainful employment. Bereczky's personality may have been shaped and defined throughout his life by his mother's loss of status, which may have given rise to the feeling that he deserved a better fate and a desire for validation and recognition. This may be related to the fact that Bereczky was repeatedly portrayed by his close acquaintances as a vain and ambitious man,<sup>7</sup> traits which his serious connection with revivalism could not extinguish in him and which can also be found in the church in the case of pastors with exceptional preaching and congregational leadership skills, such as Bereczky.

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born out of wedlock. We can read only by Bereczky's name the remark "legitimate by state laws". According to the current (2017) parish priest of the church and other archivist colleagues, the specific term was intended as a concealing indication by the parish priest who christened him that Bereczky's origin was ecclesiastically illegitimate.

<sup>5</sup> PÁLYI, Vilmos (1966): *Nehéz esztendőök és az első országos kezdeményezés Dunabogdányban*. In: *Református Egyház*. 18, 7–8. 148; ÁBTL O-9047 388.

<sup>6</sup> ZSINDELYNÉ TÜDŐS, Klára (1978): *Arcképek*. Budapest, Református Zsinati Iroda Sajtóosztálya. 14.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example: ÁBTL – 3.1.5. – O – 9047 /388-396; 22.06.1956. Characterization of the informant codenamed Zsigmond Kemény (Gyula Muraközy) about Albert Bereczky.



### ***1.2. Feeling Marginalized***

In addition to his impoverished noble self-consciousness, Bereczky's personality may have been defined by a feeling of marginalization, and that he often encountered obstacles in his efforts to self-assert; or at least that he may have felt that his environment and circumstances prevented him from gaining recognition for his ambitions, but also for his abilities. This may also have contributed to the fact that once he had the opportunity, he sought to gain access to power and to stay in it.

His sense of marginalization may have been linked to his theological views, his closer church connections, his friendships and family ties, and his political orientation. More specifically, between the two world wars, neither Bereczky's revival-evangelical theological orientation, nor his more finely tuned social sensitivity, nor his rather left-wing political orientation acquired through his friend Zoltán Tildy<sup>8</sup> were supported by the dominant ecclesiastical and political culture of the time. All this may have given Bereczky a sense of being marginalized and that the ecclesiastical, the secular political and social structure between the two world wars was holding him back. We shall examine this in more detail.

Bereczky spent his secondary school years in Reformed Grammar Schools at Kunszentmiklós, Kecskemét, and Pápa, the latter becoming the scene of his most significant spiritual and human encounters in his later life. In Pápa, he established lifelong friendships with Zoltán Tildy and Imre Szabó, with whom he became an opponent in church politics by the end of the 1940s.<sup>9</sup> There he also met János Victor, only five years older than him, who became a kind of spiritual father and theological mentor (and later a relative). He gained his first personal impulses in revival theology through one of Victor's sermons delivered in Pápa.<sup>10</sup> According to his own account, Bereczky enrolled at the Pápa

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<sup>8</sup> Tildy's person and career will be described in more detail later in this article.

<sup>9</sup> SZABÓ IMRÉNÉ SZABÓ, Éva (ed.) (2001): *“Ég de meg nem emésztetik”. Szabó Imre a Budapesti Református Egyházmegye Első Esperese. Naplók 1914–1954.* Budapest, Budahegyvidéki Református Egyházközség. 220–221; KISS, Réka (2006a): Bereczky Albert lelkipásztori, püspöki működése. In: Kósa, László (ed.): *Reformátusok Budapesten.* Vol. 1. Budapest, Argumentum. 601.

<sup>10</sup> “For the first time in my life, I was struck like lightning by the power of the person of Jesus Christ. The young theology student secretary spoke about Jesus Christ, and I said afterwards, ‘we have never heard of the person this young man was talking about’.” [The translations of all,

Reformed Seminary under the influence of the aforementioned friends, even though his mother – another important link to Albert Apponyi – would have preferred to have her son educated as a diplomat. Under the influence of his friends and some of his teachers – especially József Pongrácz and Sándor Czeglédy –, he came even closer to the understanding of revival theology. He had a conversion experience at the MEKDSZ (Hungarian Christian Student Organization) summer conference in Felsőszeli,<sup>11</sup> making him more and more critical of the spiritual, social, and ecclesiastical processes of the Reformed Church of the era.<sup>12</sup> After a short period of studying abroad (in Basel, Switzerland), passing his pastoral examinations and getting married,<sup>13</sup> he was commissioned as an assistant pastor in Balassagyarmat to found a new congregation in Salgótarján, in the northern industrial area of Hungary (1916–1919).<sup>14</sup> Through his ministry, Bereczky gained his first pastoral experience in congregations mainly consisting of factory workers and miners, facing the realities of their life, the difficulties and the frequent indifference associated with the working class of the time.

During the chaos of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, being already a father of two,<sup>15</sup> Bereczky fled first to Kisoroszi and then took over his foster-father's former ministry in Dunabogdány. He became an active participant in the various movements of the Reformed spiritual and social pathfinding after World War I. He took part in the

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originally non-English quotations belong to Augusta Szász.] BERECKZY, Albert (1961b): Victor János temetése. In: Bereczky, Albert (ed.): *Hitben való engedelmesség*. Budapest, Református Egyetemes Konvent Sajtóosztálya. 67; BERECKZY, Albert (1961a): Két nagy misszionáriusunk: Emlékezés Victor Jánosról és Mott Jánosról. In: Bereczky, Albert (ed.): *Hitben való engedelmesség*. Budapest, Református Egyetemes Konvent Sajtóosztálya. 309.

<sup>11</sup> HAJDÚ, Péter (1986): Bereczky Albert hagyatéka. *Theológiai Szemle*. 39, 5. 305; See more in: LÁNYI, J. Gábor (2021b): Bishop Albert Bereczky (1893–1966) and the Revival Movement: Albert Bereczky's Conversion. In: *Perichoresis*. 19, 1. 91–100.

<sup>12</sup> SZABÓ IMRÉNÉ SZABÓ 2001, 198.

<sup>13</sup> On 26 September 1916, he married Piroska Bencsik, a teacher born in Mezőtúr. His friendship with Tildy is exemplified by the fact that Tildy asked God's blessing on the newlyweds in his church in Szenna. LADÁNYI, Sándor (1994): Bereczky Albert centenáriuma. In: *Reformáció*. 2, 2–3. 32.

<sup>14</sup> Officially, his ministry in Salgótarján lasted between 20 September 1916 and 15 October 1919.

<sup>15</sup> Piroska, 1917; Mária, 1919.

foundation of the so-called Pécel Circle, founded by Gyula Forgács, the minister of Pécel, who was succeeded by Bereczky in 1924. In 1922, Bereczky started a newspaper called *Igehirdető* [Preacher] and took on the organization of a mission to distribute tracts, pamphlets, revivalist literature in the Danubian Reformed Church District region.<sup>16</sup> After the Pécel Circle, he became the general secretary and travelling minister of Hit és Szolgálat Mozgalom [Faith and Service Movement], and then director of the Magyar Traktátus Társaság és Sylvester Nyomda Printing House founded by his closest friend Zoltán Tildy. Bereczky's evangelization tours earned him a national reputation. In 1927, together with Tildy, he organized the first Reformed Great Assembly in Budapest,<sup>17</sup> and then in 1930 they relocated Sylvester Printing House to Budapest, moving into the newly built press building with their families. After the bankruptcy of Sylvester Printing House,<sup>18</sup> László Ravasz, Bishop of the Danubian Reformed Church District, entrusted Bereczky with the development of the new congregation in Külső-Lipót-Terézváros, more commonly known as the "Tutaj Street", into a mother congregation. On 6 December 1931, the congregation becoming a mother church elected him pastor. Bereczky has done an exemplary congregation-building work in the mission area, which includes the working-class neighbourhoods of Angyalföld and is home to some 8,000 Reformed Christians.<sup>19</sup> In addition to his evocative sermons and awakening the social sensitivity of the congregation, he organized small circles for almost every societal levels of the congregation. In keeping with his interest in journalism, the congregation launched a newspaper in 1936 titled *Hálaadás* [Giving Thanks], but in addition to editing *Igehirdető*, launched in 1922, he was also member of the Editorial Board of *Református Figyelő* [Reformed Observer] between 1928 and 1933 and co-editor of *Keresztényen Család* [Christian Family], *Református Élet* [Reformed Life], and *Magyar Református Ébredés* [Hungarian

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<sup>16</sup> PÁLYI 1966, 148.

<sup>17</sup> See more in: SZÁSZ, Lajos (2019): Országos Református Nagygyűlések a Horthy-korszakban. In: Kiss, Réka – Lányi, Gábor (eds.): *HIT2018. Hagyomány, Identitás, Történelem*. Budapest, Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem – L'Harmattan Kiadó. 375–390.

<sup>18</sup> An informant codenamed Zsigmond Kemény cited the sloppiness and frivolity of Bereczky and Tildy in financial matters as the cause of the bankruptcy. He also notes that Tildy was taken to court over the false balance of their accountant, where Bereczky's efforts succeeded in clearing his good faith and innocence. ÁBTL – 3.1.5. – O – 9047/389.

<sup>19</sup> LADÁNYI 1994, 32.

Reformed Awakening].<sup>20</sup> Bereczky's frankness, suggestive power, and "prophetic" character won him many admirers among the members of the workers' congregation as well as among the well-known figures of the Budapest public life. The popular writer of the era, Rózsa Ignác described him as "the priest, whose voice is heard by the people of Pest and Buda from afar..."<sup>21</sup> "Every single man felt that he was speaking to him, addressing him."<sup>22</sup> – characterized him the fashion designer Klára Zsindelyné Tüdős; "Myself and we, who were children and young people at that time, were indeed Uncle Berci's children."<sup>23</sup> – confessed about Bereczky's pastoral character his later emigré critic Gyula Gombos.

Bereczky, as a leading representative of the revivalist home mission movement, and especially as the close friend and son-in-law of the leading light of interbellum Hungarian interconfessional revivalism, János Victor, was inevitably confronted by its critics, especially Jenő Sebestyén, a major representative of the confessionalist renewal movement, called Historical Calvinism.<sup>24</sup> *Református Figyelő* (1928–1933), the journal of the home mission trend – of which Bereczky was also editor – and *Kálvinista Szemle* [Calvinist Review] led by Sebestyén were used for veiled disputes, but not infrequently open and sharp theological exchanges. Ravasz's church governance did not vote for either direction openly but tried to channel the spiritual resources of both directions into the inner revival of the Reformed Church.<sup>25</sup> Due to the financial hardships caused by the Great Depression, the *Szemle* and the *Figyelő* both ceased publication, and their editors were forced to work together in Ravasz's newly founded newspaper, *Református*

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<sup>20</sup> REVICZKY, Béla (ed.) (2001): *Hálaadás. A Pozsonyi Úti Református Egyházközség története 1921–2001*. Budapest.

<sup>21</sup> IGNÁCZ, Rózsa (1943): *Templomban*. In: *Magyarország*. 27 April.

<sup>22</sup> ZSINDELYNÉ TÜDŐS 1978, 37.

<sup>23</sup> Qtd in: REVICZKY 2001, 52. For Bereczky's pastoral character, see also: KECSKÉS, József (1966): *Pozsonyi úti évek és emlékek*. In: *Református Egyház*. 18, 7–8. 151.

<sup>24</sup> See more in: LÁNYI, Gábor (2021a): *Sebestyén Jenő (1884–1950) és a történelmi kálvinizmus*. In: Petrás, Éva (ed.): *A 20. századi magyar protestáns közéletiség arcképcsarnoka*. Budapest, Barankovics István Alapítvány – Gondolat Kiadó. 13–32.

<sup>25</sup> "Integral Calvinism" – see László Ravasz's inaugural address in: KISS, Réka – LÁNYI, Gábor (eds.) (2023): *Ravasz100. Püspöki jelentések*, Budapest, KRE HTK Egyháztörténeti Kutatóintézet – Dunamelléki Református Egyházkerület – Kálvin Kiadó. 65.

*Élet* (1934–1944).<sup>26</sup> It was also noticeable that Ravasz felt himself closer to the opinions and representatives of the former *Figyelő* and the home mission trend.<sup>27</sup> It was a big fallback for the home mission trend when in 1932 Victor had to leave the Faculty of the Budapest Reformed Theological Academy because of its Director, Sebestyén. Despite his hidden sympathy, Ravasz's balancing church policy, aimed at peace within the church, did not put the representatives of the home mission wing in the forefront against the Historical Calvinists, which must have been a constant frustration for Bereczky, who considered the cause of the home mission movement a top priority. Bereczky must have felt that although he was not completely marginalized, he could not play the role he deserved, and certainly not in terms of church government, for instance.

It can be briefly mentioned that Bereczky was not part of the Reformed mainstream of the time, either in his theological or in his political and social views. While it is true that the Reformed Church's public thinking between the two world wars, and even its political expressions, was more permissive and open to social sensitivity than the secular political establishment of the time, Bereczky's friendship with Zoltán Tildy<sup>28</sup> placed his views on politics and society on the left wing of church society. This also created a sense of distance and separateness from the Reformed church elite between the two world wars, a feeling of being misunderstood and ignored.

This incomprehension on behalf of Ravasz's church governance and the gradual spiritual distancing from them (personally from Ravasz, but already at this point from his friend Imre Szabó) may have been catalysed by the events of the German occupation

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<sup>26</sup> See more in ABLONCZY, Balázs (2006): *A Református Élet* hetilap és a budapesti reformátusság (1934–1944). In: Kósa, László (ed.): *Reformátusok Budapesten*. Vol. 2. Budapest, Argumentum. 1211–1229.

<sup>27</sup> RAVASZ, László (1992): *Emlékezéseim*. Budapest. 188; See also: KISS, Réka (2014): Identitásépítés a magyar református sajtóban a XX. század első felében. A *Református Figyelő* példája. In: Paál, Vince (ed.): *A sajtó kultúráközvetítő szerepe 1867–1945*. Budapest. 85; KISS, Réka (2006b): Társadalmi kérdések – egyházi válaszok. Muraközy Gyula lelkipásztori tevékenysége. In: Kósa, László (ed.): *Reformátusok Budapesten*. Vol. 1. Budapest, Argumentum. 591–600.

<sup>28</sup> Zoltán Tildy's role was emphasized in GOMBOS, Gyula (1992): Szűk esztendőök. In: Gombos, Gyula (ed.): *A történelem balján II*. Budapest, Püski. 19; According to Gyula Muraközy on Tildy, "Bereczky always, perhaps to this day, has always had an almost discipleship-like respect for him." ÁBTL – 3.1.5. – O – 9047/391.

of Hungary from March 1944. It was also through Tildy that Bereczky came into contact with Magyar Front, which had been established as the central organization of the anti-German resistance and became a dominant figure in its ecclesiastical line.<sup>29</sup> Although the Ravasz church governance also tried to alleviate the fate of its church members suffering from the consequences of the Antisemitic laws and tried to speak out against the deportations before the Hungarian government, with the limited political pressure and quasi-illegal activity at its disposal, few church officials of similar rank were in as much danger as Bereczky. Unlike Ravasz, Imre Szabó, or Gyula Muraközy, Bereczky later became acquainted with important figures of the Hungarian left wing in the world of resistance, with whom he was drawn into a community of fate by persecution and serious danger for his life. Bereczky saw that he could rely less on his own church leaders in his efforts to save people, and rather relied on the left wing of the resistance. This community of fate could gradually become a partial community of ideas: the positive human experience gained with the left-wing resistance could lead to understanding and even trust in their political views.<sup>30</sup>

Bereczky's revivalist theological views and the shift to the left in his political affiliations and outlook meant that he entered the post-World War II period defined by a sense of marginalization, exclusion, and incomprehension, marginalized by the ecclesiastical and secular system in power.

## **2. External factors**

### *2.1. Saving the Church?*

We cannot omit from the range of possible motivations the fact that Albert Bereczky's cooperation with the communist party – even at the cost of certain collateral losses – was intended to preserve and spare the church and its members. Bereczky also refers to this in his bishop's report delivered at the first meeting of the General Assembly of the Danubian Reformed Church District on 11 November 1957, held after the events of 1956.

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<sup>29</sup> KISS 2006a, 605.

<sup>30</sup> The seed to this idea in: MAJSAI, Tamás (1994): *Karl Barth és Bereczky Albert levélváltása 1951* (candidate's dissertation). Budapest MTA Kézirattára D/18296. 123.

According to him, the “administrative measures”, like arbitrary pastoral retirements, transfers, and disciplinary cases,<sup>31</sup> were all meant to “protect some from much more serious harm”,<sup>32</sup> by which he meant possible prosecution by the party-state. After the 1989 regime change, Endre Nagy, Bereczky’s son-in-law and longstanding synod official, responded to the renewed criticisms against his father-in-law with the same argument, according to which the serving of the party-state interest, the abolition of missionary organizations, the “administrative measures” saved many churchmen from “going headlong into the wall” under the political conditions of the time and attracted the attention and wrath of the state power.<sup>33</sup> Nagy also pointed out that the Church of the time, and Bereczky as well, were under strong political pressure.<sup>34</sup> Even if Bereczky had resigned, he could only have succeeded in “giving way to a more willing partner in the state’s expectations”.<sup>35</sup> Although he had had the same fate as the dishonestly convicted Catholic Cardinal József Mindszenty and the Lutheran Bishop Lajos Ordass, it was precisely their example that proved to him that he could not have prevented the party-state from imposing its will.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> For the history of pastors who suffered undeserved suppression in the Danubian Church District region during the period, see: LÁNYI, Gábor (2020): *Méltatlanul. Háttérbe szorított dunamelléki református lelkészek az 1950-es években*. Budapest, Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Egyház és Társadalom Kutatóintézetének Reformáció Öröksége Műhelye – Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Hittudományi Kar Egyháztörténeti Kutatóintézet. Another example: Lányi Gábor (2020): “Ecclesiastical Authority Terror”: The Downgrading of the Szigetszentmiklós Reformed Parish to Mission Parish in 1956, In: *Studia Universitatis Babeş–Bolyai, Theologia Reformata Transylvania*. 2020/2. 53–78. DOI:10.24193/subbtref.65.2

<sup>32</sup> BERECKZY, Albert (1957): Mérlegretételünk. Püspöki jelentés. In: *Református Egyház*. 9, 16. 355.

<sup>33</sup> NAGY, Endre (1994): A Budapest-Pozsonyi úti „Hálaadás” templomának lelkésze Bereczky Albert mint egyházkormányzó. In: *Confessio*. 15, 4. 108.

<sup>34</sup> Bereczky himself made reference to his limited options: “Nobody claims that this path was flawless. Nor does anyone claim that it was easy. But it is true that there was only one path open to the Church here and now: the narrow road of obedience in faith.” BERECKZY, Albert (1980): *Teológiai gondolkodásunk útjáról*. In: Bereczky, Albert: *Hálaadás. Igehirdetések, előadások, cikkek, tanulmányok*. Budapest, Református Zsinat Iroda Sajtóosztálya. 146.

<sup>35</sup> Here Nagy presumably refers to Dean Sándor Fekete or Bishop János Péter: NAGY 1994, 109.

<sup>36</sup> Let us not forget that László Ravasz was rather “clever than strong”, as he did not take on an open confrontation with the party-state but apparently retired voluntarily. See more in: Lányi, Gábor (2023): „Inkább okos voltam, mint erős”. Ravasz László lemondásának körülményei (1948).

The most critical actions of Bereczky's activities as a church leader seem to contradict his hidden, church-saving motivation, namely that he often went the extra mile to meet the demands of the single-party state. Such was the case, for example, when in July 1951 he approved the dissolution of the theological academies of Sárospatak and Pápa by merging them with the academies in Budapest and Debrecen for financial reasons<sup>37</sup> or when, in the summer of 1952, he passed on three of the four high schools left by the 1948 Agreement to the state, keeping only the high school in Debrecen in church ownership. The closure of the two ancient theological academies led Karl Barth, who had supported Bereczky's election in 1948, to protest. In a letter dated 16 September 1951, published in the West despite his intentions, the renowned Basel-based theologian, who by then had already earned worldwide respect, drew a parallel between the Deutsche Christen movement in Nazi Germany and the church policy of the Bereczky leadership: "And then I ask myself: is there no other way for the Hungarian Reformed than to be in one hundred percent concordance with the ruling regime every time?"<sup>38</sup>

A noteworthy motivation in connection with the analysis of this "church-saving" action is a notation by Bereczky, dated 19 July 1953, which was not made public, in which he saw his church policy as justified also after the appointment of Imre Nagy as Prime Minister that led to political thaw:

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In: Lányi, Gábor – Kiss, Réka (eds.): *Ravasz100. Püspöki jelentések*. Budapest, Dunamelléki Református Egyházkerület – Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Hittudományi Kar Egyháztörténeti Kutatóintézet – Kálvin Kiadó. 49–52.

<sup>37</sup> LADÁNYI, Sándor (1999): Vázlatos történelmi áttekintés a Magyarországi Református Egyház közelebbi múltjának alakulásáról. In Barcza, József – Dienes, Dénes (eds.): *A Magyarországi Református Egyház története 1918–1990. Tanulmányok*. Sárospatak. 131.

<sup>38</sup> „Und dann frage mich: Geht es denn im reformierten Ungarn gar nicht anders als jedesmal in so hundertprozentiger Konkordanz mit dem jeweils herrschenden Regime?” For the circumstances under which the letter and the reply were written, see: ÁBTL – 3.1.5. – O – 9047/261–278, 16.09.1951. Barth's letter, the German original, and the Hungarian translation; ÁBTL – 3.1.5. – O – 9047/299–313: Bereczky's reply draft; ÁBTL – 3.1.5. – O – 9047/314–318: Imre Kádár's draft letter; ÁBTL – 3.1.5. – O – 9047/319: Report on Barth's letter and the two reply drafts out of which Kádár's was sent; ÁBTL – 3.1.5. – O – 9047/335–337: 16.10.1951. Report: the General Convention convened to tackle Barth's letter; ÁBTL – 3.1.5. – O – 9047/344–357: 10.11.1951. Report: Bereczky apparently accepted Imre Kádár's draft and wrote a third one.



“The ‘way of our Church’ – as I have tried to describe it several times in articles and lectures (see the book *A keskeny út* [The Narrow Path]) – I considered it essentially a good and obedient way. *I still think so today. We are not going down this road out of ‘need’ /.../, and not out of ‘church rescue’ opportunism.* Nor is it cowardice – I say this with fear and trembling, for Jeremiah has long and often taught us that the heart is deceitful above all things...” I do believe that the path of “obedience to the faith” is and has been the path of the Hungarian Reformed Church.<sup>39</sup>

## ***2.2. Susceptibility to Blackmail***

In addition to the intrinsic and extrinsic motivational possibilities already examined above, I believe that Bereczky’s network of Smallholders’ Party (*Kisgazdapárt*) contacts, his close friendship with and family ties to the convicted members of the Hungarian Brotherhood (Magyar Testvéri Közösség), his deep friendship and close kinship with Zoltán Tildy made him susceptible to blackmail and thus controllable for the communists. The statement by László Pap, Dean of the Budapest Reformed Theological Academy and Deputy Bishop of the Danubian Reformed Church District, is significant in this sense: “I knew what Bereczky, as member of the Smallholders’ Party, thought of the communists, and what I knew I had no doubt that the communists knew, too. /.../ That is why I did not consider Bereczky a suitable person because I was afraid that he would have to make concessions for this political burden in the church.”<sup>40</sup>

In the first post-war parliamentary election the Smallholders’ Party won a decisive victory with 57% of the votes, while the Hungarian Communist Party led by Mátyás Rákosi got only 17%. Even so, the Soviet occupiers pressured the Smallholders to form a coalition with the communists. Zoltán Tildy, member of the Smallholders’ Party, was

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<sup>39</sup> [emphasis mine] BERECKZY, Albert (1984): *Önvizsgálatunk – főleg hiányai és hibái* (published by: Victorné Bereczky Piroska). In: *Ráday Gyűjtemény évkönyve III*. Budapest. 307.

<sup>40</sup> An evocative scene in many ways was the case when Bereczky was in Miskolc at the end of 1952, staying at Korona Hotel, and the drunken János Péter and Roland Kiss came banging on his door at night, shouting, “This is the ÁVO, open the door!” (ÁVO – *Államvédelmi Hatóság* [State Protection Authority]) in order to play a trick on him. Bereczky’s frightened reaction shows that he lived in constant fear that the authorities might come for him. PAP, László (1992): *Tíz év és ami utána következett 1945–1963*. Bern, EPMSZ. 90.

the Prime Minister (from 15 November 1945), and then, following the transition from kingdom to republic (1 February 1946), he became President, but the ministries of strategic importance, such as the ministries of the interior and finance, were given to the communists under pressure by Moscow. The communists worked together ingeniously with the Soviet occupiers to liquidate the Smallholders' Party.

Through Tildy, Bereczky engaged in a more open and active secular political activity than before. In early 1945, he joined the Smallholders' Party; from April 1945, he became member of the National Assembly. From May 1945 to June 1946, he was State Secretary in the Ministry of Religion and Public Education.<sup>41</sup> In 1946, he became chairman of the National Assembly's Committee for Foreign Affairs and repeatedly spoke out in defence of Hungarians in Upper Hungary (*Felvidék*) and Transylvania.<sup>42</sup> From the autumn of 1947, he was elected member of the top leadership of the Smallholders' Party and from 12 September 1947 to 17 April 1948 member of its political committee.<sup>43</sup> László Ravasz recalled this period of Bereczky's life as follows: "Bereczky's blessed charisma as a preacher, his extraordinary pastoral skills, his synthetic and balancing power, and the very good relationship with Tildy placed him at the forefront after the war, gave him great influence and gave him exceptional importance in the Hungarian public life."<sup>44</sup>

While Bereczky's political career was on the rise within the Smallholders' Party the Hungarian communists divided and destroyed their coalition partner. Their goal was achieved by a series of manipulated show-trials among which the so-called Hungarian Brotherhood lawsuit became the most significant. The secret society called the Hungarian Brotherhood was already operating in Hungary after the Treaty of Trianon that ended World War I, and its aim was to assert Hungarian national sovereignty and to uplift the marginalized. It is interesting that they did it with surprising openness for a secret society

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<sup>41</sup> BEREZKY, Albert (1977): Why Did I Become Secretary of State? Circular Letter to Reformed and Lutheran Pastors. 27 September 1945. In: Bereczky, Albert *Két ítélet között II*. Budapest. 232; Kiss 2006a, 606; SZABÓ IMRÉNÉ SZABÓ 2001, 126.

<sup>42</sup> LADÁNYI 1994, 28.

<sup>43</sup> He was also member of the board of the Hungarian–Soviet Cultural Society in 1945–46, member of the presidential council of the Hungarian–Yugoslav Society, and in 1946 Chairman of the Social Reconciliation Council for Hungarian–Jewish Reconciliation. KISS 2006a, 606.

<sup>44</sup> RAVASZ 1992, 320.

of the time: they did not advocate any exclusivity either socially or from a religious point of view (they had Israelite members, which also disproves the anti-Semitic accusation levelled against them by the communists) and did not even consistently enforce the condition of Hungarian origin. Their members represented the whole political spectrum, from the far right to communism. However, only men were allowed to become members. There were around 3,000, mostly from the intellectuals of Budapest, many of them working in public administration, public offices or banks. After the German invasion of Hungary (19 March 1944), the organization “went into hibernation”<sup>45</sup> and ceased its official activities, but many of its members, using the network of contacts they had built up in the organization, were involved in the resistance and in the rescue of the politically persecuted and the Jews. After the war, although its revival was not announced, a new “Steering Committee” was set up.<sup>46</sup> The Hungarian Brotherhood had many Smallholders’ Party members, and many of them held leading positions in the party.

In January 1947, the communists arrested eight Smallholders’ Party politicians on charges that, as members of the Hungarian Brotherhood, they were preparing an armed conspiracy to overthrow the Hungarian Republic and restore the Horthy regime. In the following months, 260 people were imprisoned and 2,450 people were registered by the state security as participants in the conspiracy. Many were compelled to testify against others by forced confession, while others fled to escape possible false prosecution. In all, seven trials were held against 229 defendants, resulting in death by hanging for three of the alleged leaders, and one year to life imprisonment for the others. After the trial of the Hungarian Brotherhood, the communists used blackmail, intimidation, new trumped-up charges and show trials to have Smallholders’ Party members imprisoned, forced them to emigrate or convert, and significantly weakened the political power of the party, dividing their mass base and paving the way for their takeover in 1948.<sup>47</sup>

These so-called “salami tactics” of Rákosi got to Tildy in July 1948. Tildy’s son-in-law, Viktor Csornoky, the Hungarian ambassador to Cairo, was arrested on trumped-up

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<sup>45</sup> SZEKÉR, Nóra (2009): *A Magyar Közösség története*. Doctoral thesis. Budapest, PPKE. 90. <https://mek.oszk.hu/08400/08480/08480.pdf> (accessed on: 30 September 2023).

<sup>46</sup> Op. cit. 142.

<sup>47</sup> KÖBEL, Szilvia (2015): *„Oszd meg és uralkodj!” A pártállam és az egyházak*. Budapest, Rejtjel Kiadó.

charges of treason and espionage and executed after a show trial. Thus compromised, Tildy was forced to resign from state presidency, being later put under house arrest from August 1948 until May 1956, his political weight having been done away with completely.

Obviously, Bereczky was also compromised by the annihilation of his relative, confidant, and political sponsor, Tildy. In Bereczky's case, however, the state seems to have used this not to cast him aside but to use and control him: "This is why I did not consider Bereczky to be a suitable person, as I feared that he would have to make concessions in the church for this political burden"<sup>48</sup> – we can recall László Pap's situational awareness.

State security also considered Albert Bereczky a member of the Hungarian Brotherhood. The state security documents on Bereczky also clearly reflect the reservations and distrust of the state authorities regarding him. The state security services opened a personal file on Bereczky rather late, on 12 June 1950 because of his activities as a bishop, which also contained previously dated documents on him.<sup>49</sup> He first came to the attention of state security as a state secretary in the Ministry of Culture, which at the time regarded him as an "anti-democratic" reactionary.<sup>50</sup>

Reports written by several of his senior staff members, but also by his driver, revealed his extensive right-wing connections with emigrants<sup>51</sup> and his relations with the sentenced members of the Hungarian Brotherhood,<sup>52</sup> his interventions for the political prisoners<sup>53</sup> as well as for the displaced.<sup>54</sup> According to a report written in the

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<sup>48</sup> PAP 1992, 90.

<sup>49</sup> ÁBTL – 3.1.5. – O – 9047, 1. 12 June 1950.

<sup>50</sup> ÁBTL – 3.1.5. – O – 9047, 61. 22 March 1946.

<sup>51</sup> ÁBTL – 3.1.5. – O – 9047, 236–250. Report "Bereczky and the emigrants".

<sup>52</sup> ÁBTL – 3.1.5. – O – 9047/1. 79. 22 January 1952. Report on Bereczky's relations with the former "Hungarian Community" member István Tóth, a former general; Bereczky is a "participant and supporter of undermining actions".

<sup>53</sup> See ÁBTL – 3.1.5. – O – 9047. 59–60. 22 September 1949. Letter from Pastor Béla Gönczy Nagy to Bereczky, thanking him for his intercession in freeing him; ÁBTL O-9047 164. 26 January 1951. Report in which János Horváth, a former member of the Smallholders' Party, says he owes his release to Bereczky; ÁBTL – 3.1.5. – O – 9047/1, 332. 27 September 1952. Béla Elek's thank-you letter to Bereczky, who, according to him, had intervened to have him released; according to László Pap, in May 1956, Bereczky also arranged for Zoltán Tildy's release from police custody. PAP 1992, 139.

<sup>54</sup> For example, Count László Teleki, Ferenc Zsindely and his family, Sándor Makkai Jr.

summer of 1951, “his actions are the opposite of what he claims”, and “he is trying to place some people of the former regime in positions within the church.”<sup>55</sup> In 1952, he is described as “he is a participant and supporter of the undermining actions”<sup>56</sup> or, in principle, as someone who does not identify with the reactionaries but offers them help.<sup>57</sup> The reports by Roland Kiss, the chief elder of the Danubian Reformed Church District and lay president of the synod also contributed to the construction of this suspicious image. Although Kiss was not among the most committed supporters of Bereczky’s main rival for the supreme control of the church, Bishop János Péter of Debrecen, he was nevertheless fond of stirring up distrust towards Bereczky.<sup>58</sup>

In my opinion, Bereczky’s alignment with state policy, his willingness to follow state intentions and demands, may be primarily due to this political blackmail. Because of his involvement in the Smallholders’ Party and his many personal connections with the members of the Hungarian Brotherhood and his ties to Tildy, he could have understood without any serious indication that if he had not wanted to end up under house arrest in the best-case scenario or even be subject to a show trial with more serious consequences, he had to develop a kind of cooperative *modus vivendi* with the communist regime.

### 3. Summary

Analysing Bereczky’s possible motivations, we can state that – apart from many other elements that obviously remain hidden from research – all the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations listed above may have influenced Bereczky to give way to the party-state policy that weakened the Church<sup>59</sup> precisely through the Church itself, during his office. In my opinion, his alignment with the single-party state’s intentions was mainly

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<sup>55</sup> ÁBTL – 3.1.5. – O – 9047. 232–233. 13 June 1951.

<sup>56</sup> ÁBTL – 3.1.5. – O – 9047/1. 79. 22 January 1952.

<sup>57</sup> ÁBTL – 3.1.5. – O – 9047/1. 81. 5 February 1952.

<sup>58</sup> ÁBTL – 3.1.5. – O – 9047/1. 128. 22 June 1952. Roland Kiss reports that Bereczky “always comes to the defence of such reactionaries”; ÁBTL – 3.1.5. – O – 9047/1. 118. 5 May 1952. Roland Kiss reports that Bereczky is using the charitable institutions to support the displaced, with the help of István P. Tóth, head of the institutions; ÁBTL – 3.1.5. – O – 9047/1. 155. 24 September 1952. Roland Kiss reports that Bereczky likes to talk to foreign guests in private.

<sup>59</sup> RAVASZ 1992, 107.

due to his susceptibility to blackmail and compromising nature. But there is also the indisputable role of internal factors, his ambition and desire to assert himself, stemming from his origins and the deprivation of his mother's family, which, because of his theological and political line, could not be fulfilled during the two world wars, but which led him to take the necessary steps to gain power<sup>60</sup> and make the necessary compromises to maintain his position. Gyula Gombos's assertion about Bereczky's church policy measures can perhaps also be applied to the episcopal phase of Bereczky's life: he "sacrificed the important for the unimportant, the inner mission for the outer appearance, the wine for the wineskin, and the heritage for a bowl of lentils."<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> See: KISS 2006a, 607–611; LÁNYI 2023, 50–51.

<sup>61</sup> GOMBOS 1992, 38.

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Szabolcs SZETÉY:<sup>1</sup> 

## “We Must Participate with the Fruits of Our Faith in Building Socialism”. The Preaching Committee in the Danubian Reformed Church District in the Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century<sup>2</sup>

### *Abstract.*

As a result of the communist takeover in 1948, the Bishop of the Danubian Reformed Church District, László Ravasz was deposed, and Albert Bereczky took his place. In the end of 1951, Bereczky wrote a report to the general meeting of the Reformed Church in which he requested the authorization to set up a “preaching committee” with the aim of supervising sermons. He believed it was important for the pastors to talk about issues of their time in sermons because “we don’t preach in a vacuum space but to real people”. In reality, the committee’s function was the full control over pastors and the search for the ideological/theological content (which is called “narrow-road” theology) in preachings. That is why every pastor was asked to

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send in one sermon that was to be delivered between 1/01/1952 and 25/02/1952. József Bodonhelyi, head teacher of practical theology at the Faculty of Theology of the Reformed Church, who was also member of this preaching committee, wrote notes about these received texts and sermons where he probably appeared in person. We could find certain qualifications in his notes that seriously affected the careers of the pastors (for example, "he doesn't address the issues of our time"; "his teaching is dangerous"; "he must urgently retire").

**Keywords:** Albert Bereczky, Reformed homiletics, history of preaching, preaching, Church history

After the end of the Second World War, the bishops of the Hungarian Reformed Church (László Ravasz, Imre Révész, Elemér Győry, Andor Enyedy) tried to provide some guidance to the pastors on how to conduct their ministry of preaching in the midst of the reconstruction taking place after the great global crisis. For this very reason, a circular letter was issued to all preachers of the Reformed Church in Hungary about the guidelines for preaching in congregations, dated 7 January 1947. It reads as follows:

It is with profound repentance that we must confess that the ministry of the Church as preacher has lately eroded in many places and in many ways.<sup>3</sup> [...] But this shows all the more the neglect of overall standards, and in many places their slow depreciation.<sup>4</sup> [...] Balak won<sup>5</sup> because he either cut the prophet short or he altered the word on his lips.<sup>6</sup> [...] We should give a series of sermons, either explaining a whole book from beginning to end or arranging a group of pericopes thematically. Stop preaching from specific, selected texts altogether, or limit it to cases where it is the only possible solution (e.g. at funerals).<sup>7</sup> [...]

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<sup>3</sup> RÉVÉSZ, Imre – RAVASZ, László – GYŐRY, Elemér – ENYEDY, Andor (1947): *Körlevél a magyarországi református egyház valamennyi igehirdetőjéhez a gyülekezeti igehirdetés irányelveiről*. Budapest. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. 4Moses 22–25.

<sup>6</sup> RÉVÉSZ – RAVASZ – GYŐRY – ENYEDY 1947, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit. 2.

It must be openly said that the present form of the relationship between church and state will change, at the most, not in a sudden explosion but with a certain transition, which is unlikely to be long. The leadership of the Church does not itself initiate this change, nor does it fear it, nor does it even consider it desirable in principle to bring about a change which does not set the Church and the State against each other as enemies, but which would eliminate the situation in which the Church is entirely dependent on the State for its maintenance. The leadership of the Church wants a Hungarian state whose supreme law is the Ten Commandments and its Christian core [...].<sup>8</sup> Let us not only not make them feel, but let us not even suggest to ourselves that the Marxist approach is, without exception, in every single case, accompanied by an impious materialism because it is possible for one to apply Marxist dialectics merely as a method of economic life, and at the same time he would recognize the separate world of the spirit and the eternal laws of this special world. Let us not see hypocrisy and tactics in every sympathetic gesture towards the matters of the church and the soul.<sup>9</sup>

In 1948, the Communist takeover took place, and among the first measures taken by Mátyás Rákosi, László Ravasz was requested to resign, but being aware of the situation, he gave in to pressure<sup>10</sup> and was replaced by Albert Bereczky.<sup>11</sup> Following the “theology of the narrow way”<sup>12</sup> in the current political situation, Bereczky tried to create an image

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<sup>8</sup> Op. cit. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Op. cit. 5.

<sup>10</sup> For details of the resignation, see more in: LÁNYI, Gábor (2023): „Inkább okos voltam, mint erős”. *Ravasz László lemondásának körülményei (1948)*. In: Kiss, Réka – Lányi, Gábor (eds.): *Ravasz 100 püspöki jelentések. Előadások Ravasz László püspöki beiktatásának 100 éves évfordulója alkalmából. Ravasz László püspöki jelentései 1922–1948*. Budapest, Dunamelléki Református Egyházkerület – Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Hittudományi Kar Egyháztörténeti Kutatóintézet – Kálvin Kiadó. 49–52.

<sup>11</sup> 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. 123–140.; KÖBEL, Szilvia (2015): „Oszd meg és uralkodj!” *A pártállam és az egyházak*. Budapest, Rejtjel Kiadó.

<sup>12</sup> See more in: BEREZKY, Albert (1953): *Keskeny út. Igehirdetések, előadások, cikkek*. Budapest, Református Egyetemes Konvent Sajtóosztálya. 321–329.; LÁNYI, Gábor (2024): The Impacts of Ideologies in the History of the Reformed Church in Hungary. In: Kovács, Ábrahám –

of the Reformed Church as the community of God's people who were called to serve with obedient and grateful hearts in the socialist society. In order to do this, they tried to control everything in the Church, to monitor and observe the pastors and, through them, the members of the congregation. In 1951, Bereczky reached the decision that a Preaching Committee should be set up to monitor and supervise what pastors preached from the pulpits. In his 4<sup>th</sup> report as bishop, delivered in Budapest on 15 November 1951, we read the following:

I have left to the end the most intimate question of our universal ecclesial life: the matter of our *preaching* and our *preachers*. Studying the decrees of former synods, I was struck anew by the serious sense of responsibility with which they honoured the core ministry of the Church, i.e. preaching. What is happening today, at the pulpits of the churches that have survived the war and have been rebuilt by the hundreds? I was pleased to see the initiative of the Dean of the Pest Church County, who requested pastors to report annually on their preaching, and there have been similar ones recently around the district. Only in the Church can it still happen today that 20 of the 41 pastors of the mother parishes did not send in a report, and three of the five curates did not either. The Dean took great care in presenting the most important lessons learned before the diocesan assembly by presenting the submitted sermons. It is interesting and it is no coincidence that in the sermons of the pastors who are the most serious in their preaching, "the matters of our times" are also mentioned. Because we are not preaching in a void bubble but to real people. I consider such a regular theological evaluation and criticism of sermons and teaching to be so important that I ask the district assembly to order the dean of each church county to form smaller, 2-3-member committees and to request each pastor to send in sermons according to the method described before bearing consequences in all directions. We will ensure that our church district sets up an appropriate body to ensure single control over the whole issue. I request therefore the district presidency to be authorized in this sense.<sup>13</sup>

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Jaeshik, Shin (eds.): Church and Society: Biblical, Theological and Missiological Approaches by Korean and Hungarian Protestants. Debrecen–Gwangju (Debreceni Református Hittudományi Egyetem – Honam Theological University and Seminary. 243–257.

<sup>13</sup> BEREZKY, Albert (1951): *IV. püspöki jelentés. Előterjesztette 1951 november 15-én.* Budapest. 16.

After the appointment of the members of the Commission, Bishop Albert Bereczky sent out the following letter to all the pastors:

I am glad to inform you that, in accordance with the Decision of the General Assembly of our Church District of 1951, the committee formed to assist in the preaching has begun its work. The members of the committee are President János Victor, József Bodonhelyi, József Farkas, Pál Patay, Géza Pap.

Let me emphasize that this work is primarily rooted in affectionate assistance, responsibility, although it will also have a strong monitoring character.

The first step in the Committee's work is to assess the current state of our sermons. In order to make it possible, I command to all pastors, religion teachers, and curates of our church district to send the written sermons they have preached at the Sunday services since 1 January 1952 to the Bishop's Office. Deadline for submission: 25 February 1952.

Let us take gratefully this God-given opportunity to help one another, as brothers and sisters, to make preaching, the core of the missionary life of our Church, truly the preaching of the Word, encouraging and guiding the members of our congregations to a grateful and obedient attitude today.<sup>14</sup>

Regarding the members of the Preaching Committee, it is worth noting that the chairman, János Victor, was reinstated as a professor at the Reformed Theological Academy on 1 September 1949 (he had previously been a lecturer at the Academy between 1925 and 1932) in the regular theological department. His task was the correct theological assessment of the new social situation that had arisen.<sup>15</sup> The rest of the members were as follows: József Bodonhelyi, also a teacher and Head of the Department of Practical Theology at the Reformed Theological Academy;<sup>16</sup> József Farkas, pastor of the Budapest-Klauzál Square (Gyulai Pál Street) congregation, later a lecturer on the subject of *the contemporary life of the Hungarian Reformed Church* at the Theological

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<sup>14</sup> Letter of Albert Bereczky to the pastors on the issue of the Preaching Committee, Budapest, 8 February 1952. Archives of the Danubian Reformed Church District (hereinafter referred to as: RL), A/1b Church governance documents 339/1952.

<sup>15</sup> PAP, László – BUCSAY, Mihály (1955): *A Budapesti Református Teológiai Akadémia története 1855–1955*. Budapest, A Református Egyetemes Konvent Sajtóosztálya. 159–160.

<sup>16</sup> Op. cit. 166.

Academy from September 1954;<sup>17</sup> Géza Pap, pastor in Szabadszállás, Dean<sup>18</sup> of the Bács-Kiskunság Reformed Church County of between 1952 and 1959;<sup>19</sup> Pál Patay, pastor of the congregation of the Külső-Ferencváros-Tisztviselőtelep (now Nagyvárad tér) in Budapest.<sup>20</sup>

Among the archival material entitled *Church Administrative Documents*, there are several unnumbered notebooks and a bundle of notes. On the stack of paper, we can read the following: *Notes by Dr József Bodonhelyi, Prof. of Theol., on the sermons of the pastors of the Danubian Church District 1952.*<sup>21</sup> In the notebooks, we find, among other things, short summaries about the sermons of the pastors of the Délpest Reformed Church County.

Table 1.

Délpest Church County	
József Balogh	Targeting the payment of church tax.
Sándor Balogh, Tószeg	Worth dealing with.
Bertalan Sándor	Illustration issues.
Andor Békési, PhD	It would be worth a lot of effort.
György Bódi	Christian utopia.
Nándor Borza	Allegorization.

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<sup>17</sup> Op. cit. 168.

<sup>18</sup> For more on the activities of the Preaching Committee, see: RIGÓ, Róbert (2019): *Kettős szorításban. A Bácskiskunsági Református Egyházmegye szerepe a kollektívizálásban (1952–1960)*. In: Kiss, Réka – Lányi, Gábor (eds.): *HIT 2018. Hagyomány, identitás, történelem. L’Harmattan – Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Egyház és Társadalom Kutatóintézetének Reformáció Öröksége Műhelye – Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Hittudományi Kar Egyháztörténeti Kutatóintézet*. 295–297.

<sup>19</sup> PAP, László (1992): *Tíz év és ami utána következett 1945–1963. Adalékok a Magyarországi Református Egyház XX. századi történetéhez*. Bern – Budapest, Az Európai Protestáns Magyar Szabadegyetem kiadása. 399.

<sup>20</sup> ZAKAR, Albert (1937): *Emlékezet temploma. A Budapest Tisztviselőtelep-Külsőferencvárosi Református Egyházközség gyülekezetének története. Rövid visszapillantással a Budapesti Református Egyház történeti multjára*. Budapest, Bethlen Gábor Irodalmi és Nyomdai RT.

<sup>21</sup> A/1b Church governance documents 1952.

<b>Délpest Church County</b>	
Zsigmond Bükki	Serious theological blunder.
István Demjén	Poet; holy lyre. Outrageous style.
Dezső Fónyad	Formal preaching. “The wise keep silent in times like these.”
László Gaál	Fear for the Church, pessimism.
Lajos Gombos	Propaganda instead of testimony.
Lajos Göde	Extended advertisement for the religious education.
Miklós Halasy	Allegorization: David = Christ, Goliath = Satan.
Gábor Jakus, Szigethalom	Not a malicious pietist.
Gábor Kovács	Peace and serenity.
István Kovács, PhD, Szentmártonkáta	Outstanding preaching. Solving a core issue.
Sándor Kovács, PhD, Albertirsa	Earnest, instructive preaching.
Kuthy Béla	It’s time to retire! As soon as possible!
Lénárt László	Symbolization.
István Mészáros	Harmful timeliness.
György Paczolay	Outstanding preaching.
László Páll	Serious, outstanding preaching.
Gusztáv Pinkóczy	Horrible.
Ferenc Soós	Timely, just not Word-like.
Vilmos Tasnádi	Not Word-like, still timely.
István Szabó	Wailing pietism.
Zoltán Tánzos	Chaotic.
János Tóth	Hopeful pietist.
Tóth Pál	In case of breach in discipline, he cannot preach any longer.
Sándor Balla	Horrible!
László Főző	Non-Christian preaching.
Lajos Kiss	Outstanding preaching.
László Kovács	Lexicon. Unqualified.
Benő Vörös	Nice style, timely, he can evolve.
József Papp	One of the best sermons. <sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

From the comments on the sermons we can conclude that there were some pastors who did not live up to the preaching style and message expected by the church leaders at all (e.g. Béla Kuthy, Pál Tóth, László Kovács). For those who were noted as having the potential for development or were worthy of attention, it meant that after some careful consideration there was hope that they could become excellent preachers adapted to the social situation (e.g. Sándor Balogh, Dr Andor Békési, Benő Vörös). However, there were also some who were perfectly capable of delivering the expected message (for instance, Lajos Kiss, Dr István Kovács, Dr Sándor Kovács, György Paczolay, László Páll, József Papp).

The other pages of the notebook contain more detailed analyses of the sermons, presumably also written by József Bodonhelyi. It is not clear from the descriptions whether he based his analyses on the sermons submitted or he personally attended the services. In the following, I will present a more detailed evaluation of some of the sermons without, however, being comprehensive.

*László Ágai, Belső-Csepel, 01/10/1952*

The Only Deliverer, *Reading: Isaiah 45:15–25; Text: 2Moses 20:1–3*

“The introduction is vivid and rich in experience – unfortunately, despite the specifics, it is still general and formal. The concept of the world can be misunderstood. It does not address today’s problems in an unambiguous way. Nor does he assess well the ‘alien god’ of the faithful in Csepel, the building of houses. His guiding service is almost null.”<sup>23</sup>

Two very important sentences from the description should be highlighted: “It does not address today’s problems in an unambiguous way” and “Its service as an educator is basically nil.” Bereczky also points out in his bishop’s report that the “questions of our time” are also “frequently mentioned” in the sermons of pastors who “take preaching most seriously in faith”. We must conclude that only those are truly faithful pastors who address the issues of their day in their sermons, but not in the way they think or understand from the Word but in the way they are told from above. László Ágai did not comply, and so his guidance was qualified as next to nothing. We must conclude that

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.



this evaluation shows that it was not the pure preaching that was expected of the pastors but the ministry of guidance.

*Lajos Madarász, Fót, 02/10/1952*

In the Hands of a Merciful God. (Joseph's Life, Part 2), *Reading: 1Thes 5:1–24;*

*Text: 1Moses 37:12–30*

“The use of concrete examples exudes pietistic subjectivism. It tries to give guidance, but with little success. Judging our past only reveals that God has worked out ~~our circumstances, the people around us, the world~~ for the good of our heavenly lives as believers in God through judgment, but it is not revealed in the joy of merciful judgment that we are to share the fruits of our faith in building socialism.”<sup>24</sup>

From the evaluation of the sermon, the theological vision of the evaluator Bodonhelyi and, through him, of the members of the Preaching Committee, becomes increasingly clear. Alongside the guidance, a very important task in the Reformed Church in 1952 was to build socialism with the fruits of faith.

*Sándor Juhász curate, Veresegyháza, No title, Acts 1:6–8*

“He begins with a ‘poetic image’, which can be used as an introduction to any text: here’s just as bad as anywhere else. The sermon expounds on the text. It moves on a contemporary historical plane, and only in the final paragraph does it attempt to apply it generally, formally, to the people today. There is no guidance whatsoever.”<sup>25</sup>

The criticism of Sándor Juhász is the same as that of László Ágai: the lack of instruction and service.

*Béla Papp, Isaszeg, New Life, New Light, Not dated, Reading: John 9:1–12;*

*Text: John 9:5–7*

“A brief summary, a few pious sayings, full of allegory, which doesn’t make clear at all what the people of the Church should do in obedience in 1952 (the sermon was probably delivered on New Year’s Day).”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

It is clear from the evaluation of Béla Papp's sermon that Bodonhelyi did not attend this service personally. The sermon's greatest flaw is that it does not speak about what the people of the church are to obey. Logically, this obedience is not directed towards God but to the church leadership appointed by the state.

*László Rápolti, Martonvásár, 1952. I. 1. Scripture reading: Ef. 4:22–24; 1952. I. 13. Scripture reading: Mt. 2:16; 1952. I. 20. Scripture reading: Mt. 2:22; 1952. I. 27. Scripture reading: 1Pt 4:15–16; 1952. II. 3. Scripture reading: 1Pt 2:12–13a; 1952. II. 10. Scripture reading: Mt. 5:13.16*

“The error does not rest in the intent of the guidance but rather in the interpretation of the Word that is the basis for the guidance message. For example, he speaks of Herod's infanticide and persecution of Christ in order to conclude by stating: ‘the life of a Christian is smooth today, the greater gratitude and obedience we owe for that!’ A good example: ‘Obedience is our duty... for the Lord. Not out of pressure, nor for appearances, nor out of opportunism, nor out of deceit, but for the Lord.’ ... ‘Don't let it be known that you are not a Christian, but behind the cloak of religiosity you are rather a reactionary, rebellious, restless individual!’”<sup>27</sup>

The first good example is found in László Rápolti, an excellent illustration of the kind of thinking that characterized the church leadership serving the state power. If you are not obedient, then you are just the contrary: a rebellious, restless reactionary.

*József Lukáts, Kölked, 1951. I. 1. More! Reading: Lucas 15:21–24; Text: Filem. 20–21*

“His sermon is suitable to teach the love of God and to point out the obedience of the believer. His biblical teaching is clear, his exposition convincing and sincere. Doing more in the service of peace: in prayer as in action... Try for once to believe that it is possible to earn peace and to maintain it, if many will. Have faith and a great desire that the great disputes can be settled at the negotiating table by those into whose hands God has placed the destiny of peoples and that it can be so settled without necessarily requiring blood and suffering on the battlefields. Look, our world, the country in the making, the people who live and work in the plan start the new year with the promise that they will produce more, build more, produce better, so hear ye that your Lord is teaching you, as a member of the Church, the same thing, and He's giving you a greater responsibility.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

We have got two highly positive points in the evaluation of József Lukáts' sermon: he points out the obedience of the believer, and his exposition is convincing and sincere. It is worth noticing that in the fragment of the sermon, presented as a good example, he equates the propaganda of the socialist state – i.e. to produce more, to build, to produce better – with the word of God, as the preacher says: “Your Lord teaches you the same and places even greater responsibility onto you.”

*Jenő Rákossy, Bálványos, 02/10/1952, Are You a Living Member of a Church? Reading: Mt. 5:18–48; Text: Mt. 5:47*

“Time has taught us that we must learn, albeit slowly, that we must also work for the progress and peace of our whole nation. Because the sound of the rumbling chariot of history (?) urges us to learn, to work, but also to take off, because it is not good to lag behind and not to understand the signs of the time.’ An honest speech by a preacher of the so-called ‘revival line’, who wants to guide us in our daily, worldly lives. It is a pity that he is not very specific, that he does not show the implications of the individual readings.”<sup>29</sup>

The biggest flaw of Jenő Rákossy's sermon is that the guidance is insufficiently supported by examples.

*Béla Gáspár, curate<sup>30</sup> Budapest-Óbuda, 02/17/1952, Work, Text: 1Thes. 4:11*

“Without taking the gospel into account at all, it tries to discuss the work according to today's understanding. The name of Jesus Christ hasn't even been mentioned in the sermon. In spite of his modernist zeal, he makes major errors in his ‘social’ interpretation of *work*, which is also – and this is the interesting thing about it – a theologically false doctrine. I consider his church ministry to be dangerous.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> On the case of Béla Gáspár's marginalization, see: LÁNYI, Gábor (2020b): *Méltatlanul. Háttérbe szorított dunamelléki református lelkészek az 1950-es években*. Budapest, Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Egyház és Társadalom Kutatóintézetének Reformáció Öröksége Műhelye – Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Hittudományi Kar Egyháztörténeti Kutatóintézet. 72. For its summary in English see: LÁNYI, Gábor (2023): Church Disciplinary Procedures in the Early 1950s as Tools of Political Sidelineing. In: Bárh, Dániel (ed.): *Lower Clergy and Local Religion in 16<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup>-Century Europe*. Budapest, MTA – ELTE Lendület Történeti Folklorisztikai Kutatócsoport. 345–366

<sup>31</sup> A/1b Church governance documents 1952.

Béla Gáspár's sermon, although it tries to comply with the contemporary understanding, does not mention Jesus Christ on the one hand and gives theologically false teaching despite being modern on the other. The combination of the two is a danger to today's church.

The situation is similar with László Széles, whose ministry is also considered dangerous, as his teaching is "insidiously spiced with the acid of his reactionary personality".

*Minister László Széles, Bp. Máv-telepi préd. áll., Not dated, Care for Your Salvation!*

*Text: Jews 2:3a*

"The sheer gospel that he seems to preach is insidiously spiced with the acid of his reactionary personality. It's dangerous for the ministry of the church today."<sup>32</sup>

*Miklós Katona, curate, Szedres, 02/17/1952, Follow Me! Reading: Mt. 16:13–28;*

*Text: Mt. 16:24*

"The author is pietistic at heart and combines it with modernity in this sermon. (1. Following Jesus Christ, 2. Self-denial – sacrificing, 3. Only the committed should follow Him.) He discloses the theological basis of evil drop by drop. In Part I, he says: 'Let's not think that Christ leads only in the Western world order. Nay, he leads in the Eastern world order, in our world order, too.' In Part 2, he wants to make the congregation love communists by emphasizing self-denial: 'Christ quite definitely wants us to love our brethren in this world order, to love this people who is building socialism, to love socialists and communists.' As if the Church were an outsider and not part of the community of the people building socialism!"<sup>33</sup>

The preacher went too far: he was so eager to conform to the ideology that he urged everyone to love not only the socialists but also the communists. One might legitimately ask how he got from the Gospel according to Matthew to this. Nevertheless, it is precisely this exaggerated message of love for one another that makes the Church an outsider in the existing socialist society, which is, according to Bodonhelyi, a wrong conception since the Church is also a social segment of socialist society.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

*Gábor Mező, Tamási, 02/24/1952, No title, Reading: Col. 3:16–24; Text: 1Thes. 4:10/b–12*

“The sermon is about the value, the way, and the purpose of man’s work. It goes beyond the limits of the scripture reading. One gets the feeling that he wants to say all he can about work. Otherwise, his statements are correct and point exactly to Christians’ duties today. The social explanation of work is instructive: how did the work ethic, rightly understood at the time of the Reformation, degenerate in the course of the capitalist order? It is one of those sermons whose writers seek in faith to find the relevance of God’s word today.”<sup>34</sup>

According to the analyser, Gábor Mező’s preaching should be held up as an example because he belongs to those ministers who “seek in faith the actual message of God today”, i.e. he obeys the theological guidance that the church leadership expects from its pastors.

*Endre Sik, Mórág, 02/03/1952, Christ Brings You to Life, Text: John 5:21/b*

“He uses the above verse as a basis for his timely reflections on community life and is not bothered by the fact that the sermon has nothing to do with the reading. The mixed metaphors in the various illustrations make him look ridiculous from start to end. At one time, he turns his listeners into gears of machinery, at another into instruments in an orchestra. In his pursuit of timeliness, he goes so far as to say that the pioneers of Mórág were led by the Word to start community farming. Two quotes: ‘There is no rusty plane iron that cannot gain new light, new edge in the hands of the Master, and therefore a new life.’ ‘The most characteristic feature of time is its transience. It is also the time of grace! One word has already been uttered. Jesus said He would undertake you. But the phone rings in vain, the telephone exchange staff rings in vain if the caller doesn’t pick up and can’t hear it. Pick up the phone, brother!’”<sup>35</sup>

Endre Sik’s sermon was the same kind of exaggeration as Miklós Katona’s, with a primitive example, and it is no coincidence that it did not win the sympathy of the member of the Preaching Committee.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

József Adorján, Sztálinváros (Dunaiújváros), 02/10/1952, No title, Text: John 8:29–32

"The text of the sermon is actually only verse 29; there is no reference to verses 30–31 at all, and a very vague reference to verse 32 at the end of the sermon. In the introduction, he speaks of those who fear of being abandoned by God, and hence he gets to the text. He explains the meaning of the text clearly and logically, reaching down to the real life of today's man.<sup>36</sup> It stands out far above the other sermons.<sup>37</sup>

I saved the review of the sermon by József Adorján for last, as this is the only sermon other than József Lukáts's that received an entirely positive review. Its main positivity lies in the following: "reaching down to the real life of today's man". It is not surprising that Adorján later became pastor in several congregations in Budapest and later the Dean of the Dél-Pest Reformed Church County (1959–1968) and then of the Budapest-Észak Reformed Church County (1968–1990).<sup>38</sup>

Finally, I left a review of the sermons of some well-known figures of the time and in church history:

László Ravasz: "Even if the author were not marked, one could guess that it was written by L[ászló] R[avasz]. With his usual classicism, he expresses the message of the Word. The reader feels as if he is being given a precious stone. There is no guidance or concrete message.<sup>39</sup>

Gyula Muraközy: "A beautifully coloured, sterile, enjoyable gospel, which has nothing to do with real life. It is objective bourgeois thinking."<sup>40</sup>

Imre Szabó: "He annoyingly ignores everything that G[od] does in our life on earth. Pietist-quietist, sterile speech."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> The words "real life" are underlined in pencil, as if highlighted in the text.

<sup>37</sup> A/1b Church governance documents 1952.

<sup>38</sup> LÁNYI, Gábor (2020a): „Az utolsó meghódítandó” – Társadalmi változások hatásai a Szigetszentmiklósi Református Egyházközösségre az 1950-es években. In: Kolumbán, Vilmos József (ed.): *Egyház, iskola, művelődés. Egyháztörténeti tanulmányok*. Cluj-Napoca, Kolozsvári Protestáns Teológiai Intézet. 432.; LÁNYI, Gábor (2020c): "Ecclesiastical Authority Terror". The Downgrading of the Szigetszentmiklós Reformed Parish to Mission Parish in 1956. In: *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Theologia Reformata Transylvanica*. 14, 2. 53–78. 74.

<sup>39</sup> A/1b Church governance documents 1952.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

József Farkas:<sup>42</sup> “Today’s concrete guidance is totally missing from his sermon, which would be much needed by the people building socialism.”<sup>43</sup>

Endre Gyökössy: “A bit of a prima donna, the absolute favourite of the congregation.”<sup>44</sup>

The Preaching Committee, in addition to reviewing the sermons, later tried to prepare preaching drafts, especially for the most important celebrations of the church year, which all church pastors had to follow. These outlines were accompanied by prepared sermons to be read from the pulpits. These sermons were, understandably enough, sufficiently instructive for the churchgoers of the time: they conveyed what an individual of God’ nation should do gratefully and obediently for the Lord, recognizing in judgment the grace of being a member of the community of the people building socialism. The story of the Preaching Committee is a good example of what happens when state power wants total control of the church, the ministers who serve in it, and, through them, the laymen. But let us not forget the words of the Word: “But the word of God is not chained” (2Tim. 2:9).

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<sup>42</sup> One could wonder why a pastor whose sermons were not sufficiently instructive for the people of the time was member of the Preaching Committee.

<sup>43</sup> A/1b Church governance documents 1952.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

- LÁNYI, Gábor (2020a): „Az utolsó meghódítandó” – Társadalmi változások hatásai a Szigetszentmiklósi Református Egyházközösgyre az 1950-es években. In: Kolumbán, Vilmos József (ed.): *Egyház, iskola, művelődés. Egyháztörténeti tanulmányok*. Cluj-Napoca, Kolozsvári Protestáns Teológiai Intézet.
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András CSÜRÖS:<sup>1</sup> 

## The “Hungarian Barmen”. The Impact and Reception of the Declaration of Confession and the Barmen Declaration in Hungary<sup>2</sup>

### *Abstract.*

Finding a way out by confession. In 1955, the Declaration of Confession, inspired by the Barmen Declaration, was drawn up in great secrecy and became one of the necessary documents of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Hungarian Reformed Christianity. In this study, we examine its reception and impact in Hungary. We will look at how the Barmen Confession appeared in Hungary and what influence it had on the 1955 Declaration of Confession.

**Keywords:** Declaration of Confession, Synod of Barmen, Confessing Church, Martin Niemöller, totalitarianism

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## Introduction

“Man is by nature historical. [...] Each man also lives in an interconnected series of events, which involves both his own decisions and also the things that happen to him. Together these things constitute his history which is entirely particular and unique.”<sup>3</sup> – says Wolfhart Pannenberg. The Declaration of Confession (*Hitvalló Nyilatkozat*, hereinafter: DoC) of 1955 is not a mere event in history or within the narrowly defined history of the Hungarian Reformed Church but a defining part of a series of interrelated events. It had to be preceded by the theological discernment of Barna Nagy, Martin Niemöller’s visit in 1953, the confessional courage of Péter Fekete<sup>4</sup> and Tibor Kovács in 1954, and the awakening that unfolded after World War II. The sequence of events does not stop with the DoC, as it becomes a decisive document that has an impact on the inner spiritual state of the Reformed Church, and we can rightly assume that without it the “Reformed ‘56” would not have been so catastrophic.

Our sources indicate that the 1955 DoC is related to the 1934 Barmen Declaration in Germany. To what extent did the Barmen Declaration appear in the theological practice criticizing communism, and how was it linked to the DoC? For both, we must first examine whether or not the participants even read the text of the Barmen Declaration. My study is historical, and I do not intend to examine the ideological implications of the two documents in detail but rather their reception and impact.

I hope that by the end of the essay it will be clear that the title of the article is provocative since there was no Barmen Declaration in Hungary. The circumstances, the insights, the structure, and the aftermath of the DoC were different. And the status, prominence, and age of the authors were very different from those of the Barmen theologians. One could say that the authors and the translator of the 1955 declaration became influential church-public figures not before but rather after the declaration.<sup>5</sup> The

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<sup>3</sup> PANNENBERG, Wolfhart (1970): *What Is Man?* Philadelphia USA. Fortress Press. 139. <https://archive.org/details/whatismancontemp0000pann/page/n7/mode/2up> (accessed on: 28 June 2024).

<sup>4</sup> Historical Archives of the State Security Services 3.1.5. O-13818. Péter Fekete, personal file.

<sup>5</sup> Gyula Bárczay, István Debreczeni, Lóránt Hegedűs, Miklós Molnár, Géza Németh, Tivadar Pánczél, János Pásztor, Zoltán Szabó, Sándor Dizsery. CSÜRÖS, András (2014): *A Declaration of Confession, 1955*. In: Sepsi, Enikő – Balla, Péter – Csanády, Márton (eds.): *Confessionality*

two declarations are so different from each other that, in my research and opinion, we cannot speak about “the Barmen Creed of the Hungarian Reformed Church” at all, and it is questionable whether it can be called a confession of faith at all. This issue has also been raised in connection with the Barmen Declaration.<sup>6</sup> I mean here its title proper: DoC.

## The Barmen Declaration

The assessment and analysis of the Barmen Declaration from a Hungarian theological perspective was completed in 2009 by Károly Fekete.<sup>7</sup> Béla Árvavölgyi<sup>8</sup> carried out the theological exploration of its reception in Hungary after its publication in 1934. Therefore, we have got the following task: to describe the historical part of its publication, as well as to present the reception of the Barmen Declaration, while keeping the focus on the 1955 DoC.

The Hungarian ecclesiastical and secular press continuously reported on the church struggles in Germany from 1933 onwards.<sup>9</sup> Among others, the great struggles of the Bekennende Kirche (“German Confessing Church”) were reported on by Sándor Tavaszly<sup>10</sup>

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*and University in the Modern World – 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of „Károli” University. 2013. Yearbook of Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary.* Budapest, Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary – L’Harmattan. 240.

<sup>6</sup> Gerhard Sauter writes on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary that the Barmen Declaration had by then become a creed, “die Barmer Erklärung sei inzwischen als Bekenntnis etabliert”. SAUTER, Gerhard (1984): “Zu diesem Heft”. In: *Evangelische Theologie*. 44, 1. 1–2. <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.14315/evth-1984-0102/> (accessed on: 1 March 2024).

<sup>7</sup> FEKETE, Károly (2009): *A Barmeni Teológiai Nyilatkozat*. Budapest, Magyarországi Református Egyház Kálvin János Kiadója.

<sup>8</sup> ÁRVAVÖLGYI, Béla (2021): *Kereszténység–Egyház–Közélet. Karl Barth személyének és ekleziológiai gondolatainak hatása a XX. századi magyarországi református teológiára. Tézisfüzet*. Debrecen. <https://derep-di.drhe.hu/39/2/Arvavolgyi-Bela-Phd-Tezisfuzet-arch.pdf> (accessed on: 4 May 2023).

<sup>9</sup> FEKETE, Károly (2009): *Adalékok a Barmeni Teológiai Nyilatkozat magyarországi recepciójához*. In: *A Barmeni Teológiai Nyilatkozat*. Budapest, Magyarországi Református Egyház Kálvin János Kiadója. 128.

<sup>10</sup> TAVASZLY, Sándor (1936): A teológiai egzisztencia ma! In: *Protestáns Szemle*. 42, 12. 469–470; CZEGLÉDY, Sándor (1936): A Hitvalló Egyház harca. In: *Református Élet*. 3, 34–35. 323–324. CZEGLÉDY, Sándor (1937): Mások helyett is harcolunk! Dr. Niemöller nyilatkozik a Református Életnek. In: *Református Élet*. 4, 1. 3.

and László Pákozdy. The latter's detailed article reporting on several documents makes no specific mention of the confessional synod (if it can be called a synod at all) that convened between 29 and 31 May 1934 or of the Barmen Confession read on the last day.<sup>11</sup>

An article about Barmen was first published in Hungarian in Cluj/Kolozsvár as early as June 1934.<sup>12</sup> And the first publication of the Barmen Declaration in Hungary was not in a church newspaper, but in *Az Est*. It published a full-page report on the state of German Lutheranism and then mentioned the Barmen Synod and the Confession of Faith in the same article.<sup>13</sup> After the report in *Az Est*, news from Wuppertal – although incomplete – arrived.<sup>14</sup> The first detailed analysis was published in the daily newspaper *Ujság* in September 1934.<sup>15</sup> The article also interviewed Lutheran Bishop Sándor Raffay,

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<sup>11</sup> PÁKOZDY, László (1933–1934): Barth, Karl: Theologische Existenz heute. Heft 1–6. Barth Károly és a német egyház belső küzdelme. In: *Theológiai Szemle*. 9–10, 5–6. 233. [https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/TheologiaiSzemle\\_1933-1934/?pg=240&layout=s](https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/TheologiaiSzemle_1933-1934/?pg=240&layout=s) (accessed on: 4 May 2023).

<sup>12</sup> 34 theology professors and the confessional synod of 18 regional churches in Germany sharply confronted the official church. [no author] (1934): *Ellenzék*. 55, 132(15 June). 2. [https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/Ellenzek\\_1934\\_06/?query=n%C3%A9met%20hitvall%C3%B3&pg=105&layout=s](https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/Ellenzek_1934_06/?query=n%C3%A9met%20hitvall%C3%B3&pg=105&layout=s) (accessed on: 4 May 2023).

<sup>13</sup> Concerning the same oath to which all the pastors of Germany are nowadays required to swear – the confessional synod, which opposed the movement of German Christians, passed the following resolution at its meeting in Barmen: “On the matter of the oath, the confessional synod of Barmen has not yet taken a final decision. If such an issue is settled as quickly as the Reich Church, it shows that they are not aware of the sanctity of the oath. With this understanding, the carelessness with which the Reich church wades through the constitution and the law is understandable. Moreover, in a wide variety of cases, the Reich church has spread false news.” [no author] (1934): A papoknak Hitlerre és a nemzeti szocializmusra kell felesküdniük [Priests Must Swear Allegiance to Hitler and National Socialism]. In: *Az Est*. 25, 215(23 September). 3. [https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/AzEst\\_1934\\_09/?query=barmeni&pg=224&layout=s](https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/AzEst_1934_09/?query=barmeni&pg=224&layout=s) (accessed on: 4 May 2023).

<sup>14</sup> *Külgügyi Szemle – a Magyar Külgügyi Társaság közlönye*. 11(1934/4), 1934. 10. 01. 397. [https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/KulugyiSzemle\\_1934/?query=barmeni&pg=398&layout=s](https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/KulugyiSzemle_1934/?query=barmeni&pg=398&layout=s) (accessed on: 4 May 2023).

<sup>15</sup> *Ujság* 10(1934/221), 30 September 1934. 29. [https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/Ujsag\\_1934\\_09/?query=n%C3%A9met%20hitvall%C3%B3&pg=484&layout=s](https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/Ujsag_1934_09/?query=n%C3%A9met%20hitvall%C3%B3&pg=484&layout=s) (accessed on: 4 May 2023).

who tried to remain basically objective and did not take a clear stand in favour of the Bekennende Kirche.<sup>16</sup> The first article that tries to quote from the synodal text (the exact wording) was published in the communist newspaper *Magyar Nap* in Czechoslovakia.<sup>17</sup>

On the Lutheran side, Lajos Szimonidesz tried to systematize the events in Germany in his book published in 1936, with special reference to the Barmen Declaration.<sup>18</sup> A progressive call was made in 1938 in an article by István Török, in connection with our topic: “When God’s call to confession of faith is heard, let us not flee from it into our traditions, but rather open our ears and receive it. The rest is up to Him.”<sup>19</sup>

The German situation was not depicted in the church county or district minutes, except for a brief reference in the 1934 report of the Chief Elder of the Reformed Church District of Pápa, Miklós Jókay-Ihász.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> “It has been a fatal tactical error to use the political methods of the highly organized national socialism to persuade the church bodies to accept the common organization when the transformation started. However, the church is not only a legal organization but also a spiritual community, whose unity is not a straitjacket but a unity of heart. The Evangelical Church of the German Reich still lacks this solidarity and cannot be called united until it achieves it.” [The translations of all, originally non-English quotations belong to Augusta Szász.] Evangelical Bishop Sándor Raffay on the split of the German Protestant Church. *Ujság* 10(1934/221), 30 September 1934. 29. [https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/Ujsag\\_1934\\_09/?query=n%C3%A9met%20hitvall%C3%B3&pg=484&layout=s](https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/Ujsag_1934_09/?query=n%C3%A9met%20hitvall%C3%B3&pg=484&layout=s) (accessed on: 4 May 2023).

<sup>17</sup> HUSZÁR, Emil (1937): A Führeerek nem fognak az egyháznak parancsolni! A német Hitvalló Egyház protestantizmusa. In: *Magyar Nap*. 2, 233(October 8). 5. [https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/MagyarNapOstrava\\_1937\\_10/?query=barmeni&pg=44&layout=s](https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/MagyarNapOstrava_1937_10/?query=barmeni&pg=44&layout=s). (accessed on: 4 May 2023).

<sup>18</sup> SZIMONIDESZ, Lajos (1936): *Napjaink vallási forradalmi*. Budapest, Viktória Könyvkiadóvállalat.

<sup>19</sup> TÖRÖK, István (1938): Protestáns hitvallás. In: *Protestáns Szemle*. 47, 7–8. 359.

<sup>20</sup> “Today the great German nation is in a serious crisis and, unfortunately, so is German Protestantism, one of the strongest and most valuable, and by its very mass, one of the most serious branches of world Protestantism. May God grant that this serious crisis and ordeal may soon be over and that the great nation and the German Protestantism which is bound up with it may soon find the right path for its future development in the direction which the Reformation, initiated by Luther, has marked out for it.” Speech held by Dr Miklós Jókay-Ihász, Church County Elder in: VÉGH, János (ed.) (1934): *A pápai református egyházmegye közgyűlésének jegyzőkönyve*. Pápa, 13 July 1934. 9.

In 1940, in Sárospatak, the theology students studied the text of the Barmen Declaration in a German class held by Barna Nagy.<sup>21</sup> And it is no wonder, as Barna Nagy was a student of Karl Barth and studied in Bonn in the academic year 1933–1934.<sup>22</sup> However, as far as we know, a full, published translation was not completed until after the war.

Barmen, however, may have had an influence not only through the German text or the Hungarian translation but also through its spirit, including Barth's visit to Hungary in 1936.<sup>23</sup> During this visit, Barth also touched upon the situation in Germany in his lecture on the relationship between state and church, which, even if not in the exact wording of the Barmen Declaration, certainly brought its spirit to the country. The life and fate of the Barmen Declaration and the Bekennende Kirche were well known to the local Reformed public.

### Barmen after 1945

After the war, a detailed book was published in 1946 on the relationship between Nazi Germany and Christianity.<sup>24</sup> After 1945, Barmen became interesting not for his confessionalism but for his responses to changing social effects.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> [https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/Sarospatok\\_30036\\_30118\\_1940/?query=barmeni&pg=95&layout=s](https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/Sarospatok_30036_30118_1940/?query=barmeni&pg=95&layout=s) (accessed on: 4 May 2023).

<sup>22</sup> Barna Nagy reporting on the period: NAGY, Barna (1997): *Mit tanultam Barth Károlytól?* In: Németh, Pál (ed.): *Magyar református önismereti olvasókönyv. Válogatás a XX. század első felének református teológiai irodalmából.* Budapest, Magyarországi Református Egyház Kálvin János Kiadója. 477–485; FAZAKAS, Sándor (2018): *Isten szuverenitása és az ember szabadsága: Karl Barth teológiájának innovatív ereje a mai magyar református egyház és teológia számára,* In: *Collegium Doctorum.* 14, 2. 111. [http://real.mtak.hu/136377/1/CD\\_2018\\_2\\_beliv\\_FazakasS.pdf](http://real.mtak.hu/136377/1/CD_2018_2_beliv_FazakasS.pdf) (accessed on: 3 May 2023).

<sup>23</sup> DIENES, Dénes (2023): Az állam és az egyház viszonya. Karl Barth 1936-ban Sárospatakon tartott előadása. In: *Egyháztörténeti Szemle.* 2023/4. 22–28.

<sup>24</sup> P. KIRÁLY (Köni), Kelemen O.F.M. (1946): *Hitlerizmus és keresztyénség. A németországi evangélikus hitvalló egyház harca a nemzeti szocializmussal.* Budapest, Ferences Missziók Országos Központja kiadása.

<sup>25</sup> See the study by Sándor Jakab, especially p. 412. JAKAB, Sándor (2006): Az igaz hit megvallása. A Barmeni Hitvallás egyházépítő szerepe a posztmodern korban. In: *Református Szemle.* 99, 4. 410–430.

It was first published in translation in 1948 in the journal *Evangelikus Theologia*, translated by László Benczúr.<sup>26</sup>

István Török, a professor in Debrecen, prepared a translation of the confession in 1954, but its publication was refused. The manuscript is dated 13 May 1954.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the chances that this version was known to the authors of the DoC are extremely small.<sup>28</sup>

The analogy of Karl Barth and the *Bekennende Kirche* appears in Ervin Vályi-Nagy *God or History?* written in 1955, which was also conspiratorially sent abroad at the centenary celebrations as the DoC.<sup>29</sup>

Martin Niemöller’s<sup>30</sup> visit to Hungary in 1953 was an important occasion for learning about the Barmen Declaration. This was confirmed by Tivadar Pánczél and Gyula Bárczay in their recollections.<sup>31</sup> As they received the Barmen Declaration during Niemöller’s visit, they were reminded of the status confessionis analogy between the two totalitarian regimes. This is how Gyula Bárczay reported about it:

In 1953, Martin Niemöller (1892–1984), a famous German (anti-fascist) theologian and pastor, President of the Church of Hesse-Nassau, a well-known “peace fighter”, founder of the anti-Hitler German Confessing Church, and one of the authors of the so-called Barmen Declaration (later known as the Barmen Confession), adopted at the 1934 Barmen Synod, visited our seminary. This declaration firmly rejected, among other things, the interference of the fascist state power in the life and internal affairs of the Church. Naturally, he met the young theologians, accompanied by Bishop Albert Bereczky, in a solemn

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<sup>26</sup> BENCZÚR, László (1948): A Barmeni Teológiai Nyilatkozat. In: *Evangelikus Theologia*. 2, 1. 46–51. [https://www.epa.hu/02300/02359/00008/pdf/EPA02359\\_Evangelikus\\_Theologia\\_1948\\_01\\_46-52.pdf](https://www.epa.hu/02300/02359/00008/pdf/EPA02359_Evangelikus_Theologia_1948_01_46-52.pdf) (accessed on: 4 May 2023).

<sup>27</sup> FEKETE 2009, 25. The last translation was done in 2009 by Tamás Juhász. See: JUHÁSZ, Tamás (2009): 75 éves a Barmeni Teológiai Nyilatkozat. In: *Református Szemle*. 102, 3. 336–339.

<sup>28</sup> A textual comparison of the original texts and translations of the Declaration of Faith and the Barmen Confession is part of a forthcoming study.

<sup>29</sup> VÁLYI-NAGY, Ervin (1993): *Isten vagy történelem?* In: Vályi-Nagy, Ervin: *Minden idők peremén*. Budapest, Európai Protestáns Szabadegyetem. 43–57.

<sup>30</sup> KARASSZON, István (1984): Martin Niemöller emlékezete. In: *Theológiai Szemle*. 27[new vol.], 3. 147–148.

<sup>31</sup> LADÁNYI, Sándor (2006): Református teológiai hallgatók a forradalomban. A Budapesti Református Teológiai Akadémia teológus ifjúsága az 1955–1956-os esztendőben. In: *Szabolcs-Szatmár-Beregi Szemle*. 41, 4. 429.



atmosphere. During the conversation with the theologians, he asked them if they were familiar with the struggles of the German Confessing Church and the “Barmen Declaration”. The students spontaneously, honestly, and clearly said no. Niemöller was astonished. Bereczky was extremely uncomfortable with this situation, became very angry, and immediately ordered the already very startled Professor Sándor Csekey to urgently make up for the “serious omission”, “shortcoming!” [...] Thus, this very important and significant document of the German Confessing Church became known to the young Reformed seminary students of Budapest.<sup>32</sup>

The implementation of the Barmen Declaration under the communist regime was taken for granted not only by the clergy in Budapest. It was sometimes even feared by the totalitarian state itself. Thus, in 1980, Wilhelm Niesel’s textbook *The Gospel and the Churches* was omitted from the translation made in Cluj/Kolozsvár, with the powerful support on behalf of state censorship.<sup>33</sup> In 1959, Gyula Groó also referred to the use of the Barmen Declaration against socialism, trying to deny it in an interesting manner: “After 1945, many people tried and still try to turn the theses of the Barmen confession against the behaviour of churches living under socialism and seeking the narrow path of service, or those already on the path. B. 1, 5, and 6 in particular apply here.”<sup>34</sup> Point 1 is that there is no other leader besides Jesus Christ. And points 5 and 6 speak of the denial of totalitarianism and that the Church cannot be in the service of a single system or ideology that “puts Christology in the shade”.<sup>35</sup> Gyula Groó continued his reflections as follows:

Care must be taken, however, that Barmen does not become the instrument of forces and factors that pull the church back from the path of courageous service. [...] The use or rather the misuse of Barmen in this way stems from the fundamental error of making an analogy between the state system and ideology of so-called National Socialism and socialism. This parallelism, this identification of situations and problems, is primitive and malicious.

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<sup>32</sup> Op. cit. 428.

<sup>33</sup> JUHÁSZ 2009, 336–339. NIESEL, Wilhelm (1979): A Barmeni Nyilatkozat. In: *Református Szemle*. 72, 2. 83–89.

<sup>34</sup> GROÓ, Gyula (1959): Barmen 1934–1959. In: *Lelkipásztor*. 34, 7. 419.

<sup>35</sup> BOGÁRDI SZABÓ, István (1994): A magyar reformátusság helyzete 1945–1989 között. In: *Protestáns Szemle*. 56, 1. 32.

Without attempting to evaluate socialism in this sketchy study, which is not its objective, it must be said that the so-called National Socialism was only an episode, an incident in the history of mankind. Socialism is a historical factor, undoubtedly the most significant historical fact of our time, which must be taken into account by everyone, wherever they live in the world. It is typical, moreover, that it is usually those who are in no hurry to join Barmen, and who, on the contrary, have sharply attacked it, who would like to use Barmen as a weapon against the churches living and serving under socialism.<sup>36</sup>

Briefly and objectively, we can only add that it would have been better to skip this discussion. The analogy cannot be denied, despite the length of the text, but only along a premise. The difference is that the Nazi regime was short-lived, whereas the Communist regime was longer and much more extensive in time and space. This has certainly no theological relevance. In fact, it seeks to prove its truth along the lines of the thesis, denied by Barmen and the DoC, that history is an important means of God’s revelation. But the quote shows that the parallel may have occurred to the authors and readers of the illegal document as early as 1955.

Much later, in his 1980 article criticizing the Theology of Ministry, István Török combatted Gyula Groó’s ideas by saying: “In 1957, however, the consequences of the cult of personality were a fresh reminder that what had happened in Barmen was not just an occasional resolution tailored to a particular historical situation but a universal setting of boundaries.”<sup>37</sup>

In 1974, Imre Jánossy tried to draw lessons from the life of the Bekennende Kirche. In his opinion, Barmen was not acting primarily against Hitler’s authority but against the National Socialist ideology within the church.<sup>38</sup> Imre Jánossy published an article on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Barmen.<sup>39</sup> In the same year, Sándor Szathmáry gave a detailed account of his lectures delivered at a conference in *Theológiai Szemle*.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> GROÓ 1959, 419–420.

<sup>37</sup> TÖRÖK, István (1990): *A szolgálat teológiája és a keskeny út*. In: Török, István: *Határkérdések szolgálatunkban. (1972–1989)*. Budapest, Református Zsinati Iroda Sajtóosztálya. 98.

<sup>38</sup> JÁNOSSY, Imre (1979): A Német Hitvalló Egyház története és az egyházi harc dokumentumai. In: *Theológiai Szemle*. 22(new vol.), 6. 376–379.

<sup>39</sup> JÁNOSSY, Imre (1984): Barmen. In: *Confessio*. 1984/3. 102–106.

<sup>40</sup> SZATHMÁRY, Sándor: A Hitvalló Egyháztól a hitvalló egyházakig. A barmeni hitvallás 50. évfordulójának ünnepegei Wuppertalban. In: *Theológiai Szemle*. 27(new vol.), 3. 175–177.

## The Declaration of Confession

The DoC written in 1955 is a much more detailed theological treatise than Barmen.<sup>41</sup> It had a major influence on the revolutionary events of 1956 and the 160 pastoral petitions that preceded.<sup>42</sup> In 1956, Gyula Bárczay's article was published in *Reformáció*, in which he disclosed for the first time the circumstances of the Declaration's creation.<sup>43</sup> Géza Németh was interned after 1956. According to him, one of the reasons for this was that he had written the DoC. During his cross-examination, he mentioned that he did not name either the place or the people involved.<sup>44</sup>

The Church leadership also responded to the DoC. I have brought forward a shorter comment published later. In his 1958 Chief Elder's address, Tamás Esze referred to the DoC, stating that "A pamphlet distributed in the summer of 1956 claimed that the Hungarian Reformed Church cohabited with the Hungarian Communist State. This statement, even in this wording, contains a misstatement. [...] We are therefore far from cohabiting with the socialist state, nor do we harbour hostile feelings towards it."<sup>45</sup> Tamás Esze seems to imply that the authors of the DoC are harbouring hostile feelings towards the socialist state. But that was not the primary purpose of the confession, so his interpretation is highly subjective. Tamás Esze tried to hide his criticism of the state–church relationship behind a philosophical concept by György Lukács, aimed at wrapping up his harsh criticism in an impenetrable phrase. Imre Kádár also commemorated the

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<sup>41</sup> The theological evaluation and the circumstances of the origins of the Declaration of Confession will be the subject of another study.

<sup>42</sup> "Among the initiatives calling for the renewal of the Church, the petition submitted to the Universal Convention on 8 October 1956 under the spiritual leadership of Andor Békési, Jenő Czakó, Aladár Ecsedy, Endre Gyökössy, Sándor Joó, signed by 160 pastors and curates, gained national significance." Kiss, Réka (2007): Bevezetés. In: Kiss, Réka (ed.): *Kelt mint fent. Iratok a Református Megújulási Mozgalom történetéből. (1956–1957)*. Budapest, Dunamelléki Református Egyházkerület. 18.

<sup>43</sup> BÁRCZAY, Gyula (1956): Így kezdődött a teológián. In: *Reformáció*. 1, 1(4–10 November). 2.

<sup>44</sup> NÉMETH, Géza (1993): Megtorlások a reformátusoknál. Egyház az 1956-os forradalom után. In: *Pesti Hírlap*. 2, 155(6 July). 11.

<sup>45</sup> ESZE, Tamás (1958): *Élő nép, élő egyház. Esze Tamás egyházkerületi főgondnok székfoglaló beszéde a Dunamelléki Református Egyházkerület rendkívüli közgyűlésén Budapesten 1958. február 20-án*. Budapest, Református Egyetemes Konvent Sajtóosztálya. 18–20.

DoC in his famous book,<sup>46</sup> *Egyház az idők viharában* (Church in the Tempests of Time), tendentiously linking its origins and its relationship to László Ravasz and Western church leaders. The most important and most famous document of the official church reaction was János Péter’s article entitled *Újrakezdések idején* (Times for New Beginnings)<sup>47</sup> published in October 1956. In his article, he referred to the declaration several times, as follows:

From consultations with church district leaders, from statements made at summer pastors’ conferences, from official and private written documents, from legal and illegal documents, from extensive discussions with pastors and presbyters, and then from the convention presidency council’s deliberations, I have gained a comprehensive picture of the symptoms in and around the church, which we must partly nurture, partly heal, partly weed.<sup>48</sup> [emphasis mine]

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<sup>46</sup> “People opposed to the church government, and objecting to the positive social service of the church began their open attack on the higher church authority when it was almost completely busy with the preparation of the visit of the World Council of Churches to Hungary. As a signal rocket [!], a manuscript version of a statement entitled *The Confessing Church in Hungary* appeared in the foreign press, which, in addition to ‘confessing’ a few theological generalities, essentially slandered the Church government and repeated the gambit that had been going on for years: it tried to discover – or rather to stir up – a conflict between the ‘renewed congregations’ and the ‘opportunistic leaders’. There were some statements in the Declaration that were claimed to be original, but these were mere repetitions of the theological tenets of the church authority. (This feature is in many ways characteristic of the ‘renewal’ movement and of László Ravasz’s circulars.) It was a strange document: a ‘confessional’ declaration – anonymous: only afterwards, ‘on the day of victory’, was it boastfully admitted to have been born in the Reformed theology of Budapest, which had been the centre of resistant Reformed youth throughout the repression.” The purpose of the statement was to cast suspicion on the bishops in the eyes of the two hundred foreign guests who were about to visit Hungary and to try to turn the attention of the foreigners to “the teachers gathered according to their own desires” (2 Tim 4:3). The visit of the World Council of Churches to Hungary was well used to intensify and widen the attack. KÁDÁR, Imre (1957): *Egyház az idők viharában. A Magyarországi Református Egyház a két világháború, a forradalmak és ellenforradalmak idején*. Budapest, Bibliotheca Kiadó. 219–220.

<sup>47</sup> PÉTER, János (1956): *Újrakezdések idején*. In: *Az Út*. 9, 41 (7–13 October). 1. [https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/AzUt\\_1956\\_07-12/?pg=56&layout=s](https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/AzUt_1956_07-12/?pg=56&layout=s) (accessed on: 4 May 2023).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

This is a subtle indication that the Bishop of Tiszavidék had received the secretly circulated writings and was aware of them. On the other hand, he did not send a good message to the authors and distributors by calling them illegal and something to be weeded out of the church. In any case, the supposedly penitential and self-critical article began with a veiled threat from Bishop János Péter. His assessment of the statement was twofold. On the one hand, he neutralized it by saying that it contained wording that he believed others had said. On the other hand, it was ambiguous and hostile.

For months now, there have been discussions both at home and abroad, in various forms, about a so-called ‘creed’ in connection with the Hungarian Reformed Church, as a manifestation of a confessing church movement that is supposedly being organized. This document, circulated under the said title, contains partly testimonial sentences that are alive and well in the congregations, among the leaders and theologians of the Hungarian Reformed Church, and partly ambiguous references. The document itself is anonymous. But not only is it anonymous, it can also be said to have no owner (i.e. author) in the Hungarian Reformed Church.<sup>49</sup> Pastors of the most diverse theological tendencies, sometimes together, sometimes separately, without any questioning, voluntarily say and write that they have nothing to do with this document.

In his article, Bishop Péter built his argument around the idea that the DoC was written by an invisible, hostile, unchurched, uninformed, yet organized group.

After 1956, the Declaration was not allowed to be published. Besides Imre Kádár, we can read about the DoC in the book by József Poór: “The anti-socialist forces in the Reformed Church expressed their views in the publication *A magyar református egyház útja* [The Path of the Hungarian Reformed Church]. This publication denounces the actually progressive and realistic church-theological decisions that were made in the church after the liberation and describes the new theological teaching as a ‘fatal and intolerable error’.”<sup>50</sup> The words “fatal and intolerable error” are not used in the 1955 document.

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<sup>49</sup> János Péter may have referred to this Word, although it is not referenced in the text, “and makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them” Habakkuk 1:14 (KJV).

<sup>50</sup> POÓR, József (1986): *A protestáns teológia Magyarországon 1945–1985. Fejezetek a magyarországi református és evangélikus teológia 1945 utáni történetéből*. Budapest, Kossuth Könyvkiadó. 73.

Poór describes the church policy of the 1950s as a series of “realistic” decisions, while some of them had already been condemned by János Péter in his Pharisaical manner. Poór forgot about de-Stalinization.<sup>51</sup>

## The Declaration of Confession after 1989

The text of the DoC was first published in Hungary in 1989 by *Confessio*.<sup>52</sup> The brief introduction correctly dates its creation to the spring of 1955, but the location is still not accurate.<sup>53</sup> The text suggests that the document was drafted in one meeting, in the spring of 1955. Ferenc Szűcs spoke about the creed in detail for the first time in his interview with *Magyar Nemzet* in 1990.<sup>54</sup>

It is also worth mentioning that many people call it the Hungarian Barmen, the Hungarian Barmen confession, as if the two documents were closely related. The correlation is there probably only in terms of inspiration, but it goes no further.<sup>55</sup> Have they drawn parallels between the Barmen Confession and the DoC in the official papers? As mentioned earlier, the analogy is logical. István Bán tried to create tension between

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<sup>51</sup> “The defining phenomenon of the post-Stalin era was the process of de-Stalinization, affecting and changing almost every aspect of life. Methods of political practice, economic and social priorities, cultural life and the relationship between power and citizens all underwent changes.” MITROVITS, Miklós (2014): Együtt vagy külön utakon a szocializmushoz? A desztalinizáció első szakasza Kelet-Közép-Európában. In: *Századok*. 148, 1. 91. See also: FÖLDES, György (2012): Kádár János és a magyar desztalinizáció. In: *Múltunk – politikatörténeti folyóirat*. 57, 2. 192–214.

<sup>52</sup> Hitvalló Nyilatkozat. (1955–1956). In: *Confessio*. 13(1989/2). 118–121.

<sup>53</sup> “The Declaration of Confession was written in the spring of 1955 in a parish near Budapest with the participation of young Reformed pastors.” Op. cit. 118. According to Tivadar Pánczél, they met several times and in several locations, but the opinion is widespread that the document as a whole was drafted in the parish of Szentendre. BOLYKI, János (2007): Megemlékezés Pásztor Jánosról. In: *Confessio*. 1. 101–103.

<sup>54</sup> BOROS, István (1990): 1955-ös Hitvalló Nyilatkozat. Az Ige elleni lázadás? Interjú Szűcs Ferencsel. In: *Magyar Nemzet*. 20 October. 6.

<sup>55</sup> Thus, we feel the inaccuracy of Béla Árvavölgyi’s following wording: “The so-called Declaration of Confession of 1955, which is also the subject of study, was a specific domestic refinement of the Barmen Theological Declaration.” ÁRVAVÖLGYI 2021, 2. <https://derep-di.drhe.hu/39/2/Arvavolgyi-Bela-Phd-Teziszfuzet-arch.pdf> (accessed on: 4 May 2023).

Debrecen and Budapest along these lines when he compared the two creeds in a harsh remark in 1989. “The authority of this Confession was given, sealed, by the suffering or death of thousands. Here in Debrecen, we did not smuggle a hastily prepared translation of the Confession into the pocket of General Secretary Visser ‘t Hooft, but in 1956 Professor István Török proclaimed the contemporary Confession of the non-politicizing Church as a pastoral examination paper for the Second Pastoral Examination in the Department of Systematic Theology.”<sup>56</sup>

According to my research, Sándor Ladányi was the first who described the DoC in 1991 as “the Barmen Confession of the Hungarian Reformed Church”.<sup>57</sup> Apart from Ladányi, all other publications are more cautious about the connection between the two documents and rather try to show that the 1934 creed influenced the 1955 declaration. That is why, they use the following phrases: “in the manner of Barmen” (Botond Péter Koppándi<sup>58</sup> and Réka Kiss<sup>59</sup>), “written in the spirit of the Barmen confession”<sup>60</sup> (Ferenc

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<sup>56</sup> BÁN, István (1989): Csak álmokat üzünk? A REMM debreceni konferenciáján elhangzott hozzászólás. In: *Reformátusok Lapja*. 33, 46(12 November). 7.

<sup>57</sup> “The desire for expansion, for freedom, was growing everywhere. By 1955-1956, partly as a reaction to the growing tensions, a declaration was made under the title of *Confessing Reformed Church in Hungary* or *Barmen’s Confession* of the Hungarian Reformed Church, which was completed at the Academy of Theology in Budapest and was also sent abroad.” LADÁNYI, Sándor (1991): A református egyház a II. világháború után. Vázlatos áttekintés. In: *Új Forrás*. 23, 5(23 May). 33.

<sup>58</sup> “In the afterlife of the Declaration, some students of the Reformed Academy of Theology in Budapest, pastors and curates, drafted a 4-point ‘Declaration of Confession’ in 1955, modelled on Barmen, in which they called for the renewal of the church, criticized the loss of mission and the fact that the church was forgetting about the prophetic approach without which it would become a mere ‘servant church’.” KOPPÁNDI, Botond Péter (2011): Recenzió: FEKETE Károly: *A Barmeni Teológiai Nyilatkozat. Vezérfonal a dokumentum tanulmányozásához*. In: *Keresztény Magvető*. 117, 1. 97.

<sup>59</sup> KISS, Réka (2006): 1956 és a magyarországi egyház. *Református Szemle*. 99, 5(September–October). 566.

<sup>60</sup> “It is obvious that Barna Nagy’s clear theological thinking is also reflected in the aforementioned Declaration of Confession, which was largely edited by his disciples and was written in the spirit of the Barmen Confession and revealed the miseries of our Church and theology at that time with a similar theological grounding.” SZÜCS, Ferenc (2007): Dr. Nagy Barna és a Budapesti Református Teológia. In: *Confessio*. 37, 1. 36.

Szűcs), inspiration (Károly Fekete),<sup>61</sup> “it was born on the grounds and by the methods of [...]”<sup>62</sup> (Béla Árvavölgyi), while Géza Németh uses the phrase “it objected on the grounds of the Reformed biblical perspective as well as based on the Barmen principles of the German Confessing Church”.<sup>63</sup> The term “Hungarian Barmen” is incorrect, and the term *model* in the comparison of texts is also inaccurate. The most accurate way of connecting the two documents is to use the phrase “Declaration of Confession designed in the spirit of the Barmen Declaration of Confession”.

The analogy between the two documents is the *kairos* of resistance to a dictatorial, totalitarian regime and the *status confessionis*. Both declarations came in different forms, with different antecedents and different implications, but both came from within the Church. As István Török wrote in 1947:

The Church is the mother of the confession; its birth is a remarkable church event for generations. There is a time for such an event. There are times when it would be a futile human effort and times when the Church cannot escape it. The time for the confession of faith comes when pressing questions arise, when a flood of misapprehensions besieges the faith. In this crisis, the Church has only the Scripture to turn to. But confessions of faith only appear when it is not the Church that seizes the truth but the truth that seizes the Church.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> In his book on the Barmen Declaration, Károly Fekete makes a connection between the two documents: “The Barmen Theological Declaration became one of the most important guiding and teaching documents of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and it had a great influence on other later Protestant declarations and confessional documents. It also had an impact in Hungary, where the authors of the ‘Declaration of Confession’ of October 1955 were inspired by the text of the Barmen Declaration.” FEKETE 2009, 22.

<sup>62</sup> ÁRVAVÖLGYI, Béla (2021): *Kereszténység – Egyház – Közélet. Karl Barth személyének és ekleziológiai gondolatainak hatása a XX. századi magyarországi református teológiára. Doktori értekezés.* Debrecen, Debreceni Református Hittudományi Egyetem Hittudományi Doktori Iskola. 67. <https://derep-di.drhe.hu/39/1/Arvavolgyi-Bela-Phd-dissz-arch.pdf> (accessed on: 4 May 2023).

<sup>63</sup> “The Declaration of Confession objected to the intrusion of communist ideology and practice into theological thought and practice of the church based on the grounds of the Reformed-Biblical and Barmen Principles of the German Confessing Church.” NÉMETH 1993, 11.

<sup>64</sup> TÖRÖK, István (1947): A tanbeli reform kérdése. In: *Theologiai Szemle Nyári körlevél.* 1947. 34. [https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/TheologiaiSzemle\\_1947/?query=barmeni&pg=36&layout=t=s](https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/TheologiaiSzemle_1947/?query=barmeni&pg=36&layout=t=s) (accessed on: 4 May 2023).



In his 1980 article criticizing the theology of ministry, István Török equally mentioned the Barmen Confession. Although “there is no room for identification and matching”, he nevertheless compares the two situations along the lines of the cult of personality. In 1957, however, the consequences of the cult of personality were still a fresh reminder that in the Barmen Declaration there had been not just an occasional resolution designed to a particular historical situation but a universal setting of boundaries.<sup>65</sup>

János Bolyki considered it stewardship and prophetic service that Pásztor János and his colleagues designed the DoC.<sup>66</sup>

But can we even call the DoC a creed?<sup>67</sup> I will answer the questions raised at the beginning of the paper in the words of Ferenc Szűcs at the end.

Obviously the Barmen Confession also inspired the Hungarian Declaration of Confession, which was written in 1955 in a parish near Pest (probably in Szentendre) and was handed over in a somewhat adventurous way to foreign guests arriving for the centenary of the Theology in Budapest. Although it formally follows the pattern of the creeds, which consists of a parallel between a biblical statement and a delimitation from false teaching, there are several problems with the credal character of the writing. The perception of the status confessionis is obvious although the ‘we cannot remain silent’ is primarily intended to make it clear to our sister churches abroad that not everyone in Hungary agrees with the historical-theological errors and dictatorial clique rule<sup>68</sup> of the church leadership of the time. Indeed, it is certain that it was the voice of a hidden majority, with which many would have agreed had they been able to do so. But it is precisely this lack of publicity resulting from dictatorship that makes it questionable whether it can really be called a church confession in terms of its origin. In fact, it was the events of the following year that raised it to that status, when hundreds of congregations in the Renewal Movement joined, if not to the text of the Declaration, at least to the spirit of renewal.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> TÖRÖK 1990, 98.

<sup>66</sup> “He considered preaching a prophetic ministry, and as a watchman he did not remain silent when he saw danger in the thinking and behaviour of the Church. It is no coincidence that the basic text of the Declaration was written in the parish of Szentendre in 1955.” BOLYKI 2007, 102.

<sup>67</sup> István Juhász on the relationship between faith and confession: JUHÁSZ, István (1969): A hitvallás és a hit. In: *Református Szemle*. 62, 3–4. 196–201.

<sup>68</sup> The phrase “dictatorial clique rule” is quoted from the last paragraph of the Declaration. See: <https://www.parokia.hu/v/hitvallo-nyilatkozat-1955-56/> 2024-02-08 (accessed on: 4 May 2023).

<sup>69</sup> SZÜCS, Ferenc (2013): A Heidelbergi Káté legújabb magyar nyelvű magyarázatai. In: *Theológiai Szemle*. 56, 4. 226.

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Réka KISS:<sup>1</sup> 

## Pathfinding and Connections in the Life of Small Reformed Communities in Budapest. The Contexts of the 1967 YMCA Trial<sup>2</sup>

### *Abstract.*

In July 1967, the communist political police arrested five members of *Keresztyén Ifjúsági Egyesület* (the Hungarian equivalent of the YMCA), which had been dissolved in 1950, on charges of conspiracy against the state. Among those arrested were pastors, elders, and a former deacon. The trial is considered to be the last politically motivated trial against the Reformed Church and the most significant of all state security actions against the Reformed in Hungary. In order to understand the background of the trial and the changing considerations of church policy and state security surrounding it, it is necessary to look at how the image and political approach of the decisive actors of church policy had evolved by the 1960s. On the other hand, the documents produced by the party-state can be examined not only from the perspective of power but also from that of communities in action: what were the individual and collective strategies for active

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<sup>2</sup> The study was carried out within the framework of the *Challenges and Wayfinding in the History of the Hungarian Reformed Church in the 20th Century* research project (No. 66001R800) of the Church History Research Institute of the Faculty of Theology at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary.



Christianity in the first decades of the Kádár regime? What were the individual and collective aspirations, adaptation techniques, and patterns of value transmission that can be discerned among different groups, congregations, youth communities, and their leaders in Reformed Christianity? Which forms of church or religious behaviours were considered dangerous by the party-state, and how did it set forth for the church policy enforcement bodies the activities it considered to be within the category of church or religious resistance and opposition?

**Keywords:** communist church policy, Hungarian Reformed Church, political trial, religious resistance, YMCA

In July 1967, the Communist political police arrested five members of *Keresztyén Ifjúsági Egyesület* (the Hungarian equivalent of the YMCA), which had been dissolved in 1950, on charges of conspiracy against the state. Among those arrested were pastors, elders, and a former deacon.<sup>3</sup> The trial is considered to be the last politically motivated trial against the Reformed Church and the most significant of all state security actions against the Reformed in Hungary. The preparation of the so-called second YMCA trial was preceded by a secret state intelligence investigation lasting half a year and involved a wide range of operational tools on behalf of the political police. The people concerned had their home phones tapped, their homes secretly searched, their letters opened and were monitored by thirteen agents. Eighty-eight people were involved in the two-day operation planned to complete the case: twenty-four investigators, forty-four operations officers, and twenty drivers. The conspiracy arrests took place over two days, along with some 25 simultaneous house searches and 30 witness interviews. The arrested churchmen were tried on charges of initiating prohibited youth work, organizing unauthorized

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<sup>3</sup> Among the defendants were Dénes Batiz, a retired doctor, formerly elder of the Budapest-Baross Square Reformed Congregation, formerly YMCA leader, Rev. Bálint Kovács, former pastor of Budapest-Salétrom Street Reformed Congregation, formerly YMCA secretary, Rev. Károly Dobos, a former youth pastor, YMCA secretary, pastor in Pesthidegkút, Mátyás Bugárszky, formerly elder of the Budapest–Buda Reformed Congregation, former warehouse keeper, and Imre Tisza, a former deacon.

meetings and ultimately the preparation of a conspiracy against the people's democratic state order.<sup>4</sup> As one state security report summarized it:

Over the time, we have established that a YMCA movement has been developing under the direction of the Swiss headquarters, which differs from the pre-1950 movement in that *it gives a religious nature to its activities and wants to carry out its plans covertly, under the auspices of the Church (...)* Their tactic is to *use state-approved youth Bible study groups within the church* for spiritual-excursions (sic!) to train according to the spiritual-physical and religious-ethical YMCA programme, to contrast it with Marxism.<sup>5</sup>

State intelligence kept the case files under the code name *The Campers*. The proceedings are relatively well documented: not only the State Security files but also the correspondence between the State Office for Church Affairs (ÁEH) and the church leadership and other documents on the case are still available.<sup>6</sup>

In many respects, the twists and turns of “The Campers” case can provide important lessons for understanding the post-1956 Hungarian communist regime's techniques of domination under János Kádár as well as the church policy of the 1960s

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<sup>4</sup> Despite the large-scale state security preparations, the current political intentions to exploit the churches' expanding international diplomatic room for manoeuvre in church diplomacy did not make the party-state interested in conducting a trial against the Reformed that would also make waves abroad, so the Supreme Court of Appeal changed the previous classification of the facts and reclassified the YMCA case as an abuse of the right of association instead of preparation for a conspiracy against the state. This is also referred to in the passages of the 1968 Church Policy Decision referring to the YMCA case, which was the subject of the church-policy-related stocktaking report of the late 1960s. MNL OL 288. f. 5/488, archived units, 4 March 1968.

<sup>5</sup> Summary report on “The Campers” case – fn /KIE/ July 20, 1966 Historical Archives of the State Security Services (hereafter referred to as ÁBTL) 3.1.5. O-13142/1 21–24.

<sup>6</sup> On the subject, see: KISS, Réka (2019): *Legális–illegális–féllegális*. In: Kiss, Réka – Lányi, Gábor (eds.): *HIT 2018: Hagyomány, Identitás, Történelem*. Budapest. 239–271. KISS, Réka (2023): *Útkeresések és kapcsolódások a budapesti református kisközösségek életében. Az 1968-es KIE-per kontextusai*. In: Tabajdi, Gábor – Szuly, Rita – Erdős, Kristóf – Wirthné Diera, Bernadett (eds.): *Küzdelem a lelkekért. Pártállam és egyházak a hosszú hatvanas években*. Budapest: Nemzeti Emlékezet Bizottságának Hivatala. 309–360.



within. In my article, I will outline the broader church policy and church community contexts in addition to the more narrowly defined state security vs. church policy combinations. I seek to answer the question about the processes that led to the 1967 YMCA trial and how these five men ended up being accused. In order to understand the background of the trial and the changing considerations of church policy and state intelligence surrounding it, it is necessary to look at how the image and political approach of the party-state about the Reformed Church evolved by the 1960s. How did the decisive actors of church policy, the party leadership, the State Office for Church Affairs, and the staff of the Ministry of Interior apparatus responsible for Protestant affairs describe the situation and internal relations of the Reformed Church? In other words, what kind of a “problem map” could have been drawn in the eyes of the party-state church policy’s leaders and executives in the 1960s with regard to the Reformed Church?

The reports produced almost routinely by the political police can, of course, be read as an imprint of the state security logic of compulsive enemy seeking. On the one hand, they are good examples of the perpetuation of the 1950s habits, of a body socialized to constantly devise criminal proceedings and expose conspiracies, and of the self-justification of the indispensability of state intelligence work. On the other hand, they also adapted to the political shift, which, after the repression following the 1956 revolution and the campaign of forced collectivization, aimed at dismantling the autonomous peasant society and identified new circles of enemies in the revival of religious communities and patriotic affiliations, which were generally labelled as nationalism. It would be a mistake, however, to interpret these reports merely in terms of the logic of state security. For, despite the extremely uneven sources (sometimes disturbingly short or incomplete, sometimes unexpectedly abundant) in the party-state documents that have come down to us, there are some tangible nodes that can open the door to hitherto little-known levels of social action. While it is true that the tendentious interpretations and disproportionate exaggerations of the political police have left us with a highly distorted picture, the party-state apparatus does, after all, preserve the growing activity of Christian communities – both large and small – and the autonomous efforts to expand the scope of religious practice and thus the traces of real social action. For this reason, the resources produced by the party-state can be examined not only from the perspective of power but also from that of communities in action: what were the individual and collective strategies for active

Christianity in the first decades of the Kádár regime? What means, possibilities, and freedom were there available for the Christian communities to perpetuate their own system of values and norms? What are the individual and collective aspirations, adaptation techniques, and patterns of value transmission that can be discerned among different groups, congregations, youth communities, and their leaders in Reformed Christianity?

In particular, I would like to draw attention to a special aspect of the everyday practice of chess games in church politics, the problem of “legality”. Indeed, the state security report quoted in the introduction, which is a summary of meetings of former YMCA members, written in the peculiar wording of the political police, reflected the recurring dilemma of Janus-faced party-state church politics in the 1960s: What is considered hostile church activity, church resistance from the point of view of the regime and whether and by what means can religious activities that are permitted (i.e. legal) but still labelled hostile by the power players be countered? The same dilemma had been summed up succinctly in a report on a Reformed theological self-study group two years earlier, which the intelligence service for church affairs had described as an anti-state crime: the participants had “used the legal possibilities of the church for illegal hostile activities”.<sup>7</sup> Finally, from the perspective of power: how did the holders of power react to the various forms of religious activity – to use the party jargon of the time –, to individual and communal manifestations of the “religious worldview”, and to religious activity categorized in the coordinate system of “illegal” vs. “legal”, “hostile” vs. “loyal”? In order to answer the question of what counted as risk taking that stretched the limits of tolerance in the changing conditions of the system’s exercise of power, we need to understand the logic of power. In other words, which forms of church or religious behaviours were considered dangerous by the party-state, and how did it set forth for the church policy enforcement bodies the activities it considered to be within the category of church or religious resistance and opposition?

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<sup>7</sup> ÁBTL 3.1.5. O13586/1 86. For more details on the state security operation against the group under the pseudonym *The Fighters*, see more in the case study by László Kósa. KÓSA, László (2010): Református ifjúsági körök bomlasztása Budapesten az 1960-as évek első felében, Egyházüldözés és egyházüldözők a Kádár-korszakban. In: Soós, Viktor Attila – Szabó, Csaba – Szigeti, László (eds.): *Egyházüldözők és egyházüldözés a Kádár-korszakban*. Budapest, Szent István-Társulat. 270–288.

## The Framework of Power: The Beginnings of the Kádár Era's Church and Religion Policy

Research on the development of illegal and legal religious practice after '56, as well as on the forms of resistance that can be grasped among Christian communities, can be based on an understanding of the perspective of power. How did the church and religious policy of the new Kádár regime evolve? What were the risky and illegal activities that stretched the tolerance of the church policy enforcers in terms of religious practice and the living and transmission of Christian values?

The basic principles of the communist church policy towards the historical Protestant denominations, and more narrowly towards the Reformed Church, were essentially established by the first years of the Sovietization of Hungary, between 1945 and 1948.<sup>8</sup> The party leadership led by Mátyás Rákosi, recognizing and exploiting the historical fault lines that actually existed among the churches, adopted different tactics towards the Catholic and Protestant churches from the very beginning, consciously seeking to deepen the antagonism and distrust between the denominations, applying the principle of *divide et impera*. While in the discursive space surrounding church politics the Catholic Church and its leader, Cardinal József Mindszenty, were identified with church reactionism, the Reformed Church, which was more dominant in terms of numbers and social weight among all the Protestant denominations, was assigned the role of the exemplary cooperating “progressive” church. For this division of roles, it was first necessary to find new church leaders with whom to demonstrate that the Communist Party was ready to cooperate with the churches, provided that they supported progress and the agenda of socialist change. As the Protestant churches feature national organization and the church leaders are elected, it became much easier for the Communist Party to force the necessary

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<sup>8</sup> See also: KISS, Réka (2021): “I Was Allowed to Say No”: The Lessons of One “Dropped” and One “Actual” Court Case Involving the Reformed Church during the Sovietization of Hungary. In: Fejérdy, András – Wirthné, Diera Bernadett (eds.): *The Trial of Cardinal József Mindszenty from the Perspective of Seventy Years: The Fate of Church Leaders in Central and Eastern Europe*. Vatican, Libreria Editrice Vaticana. 461–480; LÁNYI, Gábor (2024): The Impacts of Ideologies in the History of the Reformed Church in Hungary. In: Kovács, Ábrahám – Jaeshik, Shin (eds.): *Church and Society: Biblical, Theological and Missiological Approaches by Korean and Hungarian Protestants*. Debrecen– Gwangju (Debreceni Református Hittudományi Egyetem – Honam Theological University and Seminary. 243–257.

changes in the leadership. The tools used ranged from political blackmail and intimidation to outright fraud in church elections and to the organization of show trials. By 1948/1949, the forced replacements in the top church leadership positions had taken place in both the Reformed and Lutheran churches: László Ravasz, Bishop of the Danubian Reformed Church District and Pastoral President of the Synod, was forced to resign through open political blackmail; Andor Lázár, the lay leader of the Danubian church district, was abducted by the communist political police and held for a short time – for intimidation purposes – in the dreaded state security centre at 60 Andrásy út; János Kardos, who was his appointed successor, was prevented from taking office by obvious electoral fraud; Bishop Lajos Ordass and Albert Radvánszky, the universal supervisor of the Lutheran Church, were sentenced to prison in a show trial on apparently false charges of financial abuse, among others. By the end of 1948, both the new Bishop of the Danubian district (Budapest), Albert Bereczky, and the new Bishop of the Tibiscan Reformed Church District (Debrecen), János Péter, were placed at the head of the church by the will of the Communist Party leadership, and personally of the party leader, Mátyás Rákosi. Nevertheless, the approach to the situation from the internal perspective of the church public was not unanimous. The party not only tried to take advantage of the distrust among the denominations but also carefully mapped the political and social fault lines within the churches. After all, the social composition of the churches was far from homogeneous: political fault lines, the relationship with the Christian conservative political system and its elites between the two world wars and after 1945, the relationship with the Communist Party, social and generational tensions within the church, conflicts within the hierarchy and differences among theological and religious trends, all made the internal structure of the democratically organized churches many times more layered and fragile. In any case, the Communist Party, by sharpening and exploiting the existing internal divisions, easily found a dynamic, critical, and politically impressionable generation of young pastors who, either through their goodwill and naivety or through their careerism, or even their susceptibility to blackmail, could be seen as compatible with Communist church politics and willing to cooperate. Several consequences arose from this church-related strategy: 1.) In Rákosi's policy of the 1950s, which embodied Hungarian Stalinism, the new Reformed Church leadership, ready to cooperate with the communist power, was given the role of the "battering ram". The first task of the new church leadership was to separate church and state according to the communist model and to nationalize church schools.

This became the basis for the forced agreement between the Reformed Church and the state, signed on 7 October 1948, which, in addition to serving as a model for the Agreement forced on the other Protestant churches and the Jewish denomination, regulated the life of the church with minor amendments until 1990. Contrary to its declared principles, the Agreement, severely restricting the church's activities, did not lead to the separation of church and state but rather to the loss of church self-determination, the extension of party-state control, and the complete financial dependence of the church, thus keeping its dependence on the state. In addition, the real church policy practice did not even allow the missionary and pastoral room for manoeuvre left free in the Agreement to be filled. Yet the Agreement was hailed by the new church leadership as the fruit of cooperation between church and state.<sup>9</sup> 2.) The party-state sought to use not only the new leadership of the churches but also church teaching for its own political and propaganda purposes. As a result, a new theological construct was developed to justify the socialist system, known as the theology of the "narrow way" or the theology of the "serving church".<sup>10</sup> This was accompanied by a new ecclesiastical language: on the one hand, the official ecclesiastical discourse tried to support current political goals and aspirations by using religious language, and, on the other hand, it tried to introduce political concepts and power discourse borrowed from the Communist Party into the public discourse of the church. 3.) As a result of this process, the internal theological and organizational issues of the churches became politicized. Key topical issues such as critical confrontation with the past and "repentance", church renewal, as well as current theological, organizational, and personal issues were placed in a political context and thus in the service of the Communist Party's ambitions. By the 1950s, the narratives that sought to theologically justify the Communist

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<sup>9</sup> See: BOGÁRDI SZABÓ, István (1995): *Egyházvezetés és teológia a Magyarországi Református Egyházban 1948 és 1989 között*. In: *Societas et ecclesia*. 3. Debrecen.

<sup>10</sup> See Károly Zsolt Nagy's latest articles: NAGY, Károly Zsolt (2017): „Amit az evangelium ígér, azt váltsa valóra a demokrácia.” A társadalmi változások teológiai reflexiói és a belső nyilvánosság nyelvének átalakulása a Magyarországi Református Egyházban 1945 és 1948 között. In: Csikós, Gábor – Kiss, Réka – O. Kovacs, József (eds.): *Váltóállítás. Diktatúrák a vidéki Magyarországon 1945-ben*. Budapest, MTA BTK – Nemzeti Emlékezet Bizottsága. Nagy, Károly Zsolt (2021): „Valami félelem szorongat...” A „szocialista lelkésztípus” kialakítása 2. A kulturális ellenállás formálódása egy református lelkészi csoportban az 1960-as években. In: Csikós, Gábor – Horváth, Gergely Krisztián (eds.): *Lefojtva. Uralom, alávetettség és autonómia a pártállamban (1957–1980)*. Budapest, Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont – Nemzeti Emlékezet Bizottsága. 457–495.

Party's socially damaging measures (e.g. collectivization, kulakization) and sometimes even the daily political changes had become almost exclusive in official church discourse. In the critical words of László Ravasz, the former bishop, who was forced to resign, noted in his memoirs, "The church has become a paid employee of the state to fulfil its own state-political objectives. The state has discovered in it the best propaganda tool, as the Church has got credit from the past and has reached into parts of the soul that the state could not reach."<sup>11</sup> 4.) By contrast to the practice of Catholic church politics in the 1950s, in the case of Protestants, the party leadership primarily entrusted church leadership with the control of church life and thus the suppression of potential critical voices, the sidelining of charismatic leaders, and the prevention of autonomous religious activity.<sup>12</sup> Although the repressive apparatus of the party-state controlled the Reformed Church in the same way and during the persecution of the church many pastors and lay church members suffered severe retaliation and imprisonment for political reasons, the church policy against Protestants did not entail numerous arrests and mass trials as was the case of the anti-Catholic campaigns. The tactic against the Protestants was based on the principle of "ruining the church from within",<sup>13</sup> the application of *divide et impera* within the church. This led to the establishment of a rather complex system of internal church relations, as the mechanisms of dictatorship were ultimately incorporated into the internal functioning of the church. A typical form of this was the forced relocation of pastors (often elderly or with young children) to congregations in small villages without public transport, schools, or doctors, to congregations in poor condition, accompanied by official administrative measures such as rendering the pastors' families financially unable to support themselves, the withdrawal of the state salary supplement, the so-called *congrua*, or the discriminatory prevention of ministers' children from continuing their education. Although in more than one case the political police and the State Office for Church Affairs were documented to have been involved in the background of personnel-related decisions, formally the church

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<sup>11</sup> KISS, Réka (ed., introd.) (2007): *Kelt mint fent. Iratok a református Megújulási Mozgalom történetéből. (1956–1957)*. Budapest, Dunamelléki Református Egyházkerület. 425.

<sup>12</sup> LÁNYI, Gábor (2023): Church Disciplinary Procedures in the Early 1950s as Tools of Political Sidelining. In: Bárth, Dániel (ed.): *Lower Clergy and Local Religion in 16<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup>-Century Europe*. Budapest, MTA – ELTE Lendület Történeti Folklorisztikai Kutatócsoport. 345–366.

<sup>13</sup> See László Ravasz's famous statement in BOGÁRDI SZABÓ 1995, 25; RAVASZ, László (1992): *Emlékezéseim*. Budapest. 372.

bodies made the decisions. All of these processes have clearly reinforced distrust within the church and weakened the solidarity among the pastors within the bodies, forcing the church into an operating mechanism that inevitably pitted the church leadership against the pastors and the faithful. On the other hand, however, by actively involving the church leadership in the implementation of the party-state's church-related policy, they ultimately left them with a certain, rather limited margin of manoeuvre that could have had both negative and positive effects and could have resulted in different individual leadership strategies, as the church leadership was far from homogeneous in its approach to party-state expectations. There are examples that show that some church leaders not only served the party-state church policy but also took the initiative according to their own interests, for example towards the political police to crush their internal opposition and rivals. At the same time, in other cases, church leaders sought to provide protection, to facilitate camouflage, while in some cases forced measures and forced relocations were an alternative to open physical violence or imprisonment.<sup>14</sup>

In any case, the Protestant church policy model of the early 1950s, whereby the party-state enforced its repressive church policy through the church leadership as a rule, proved successful for the system – with minor corrections –, as János Horváth, President of the State Office for Church Affairs, worded it in his 1953 synthesis: “The leaders of the Reformed Church are complying with the wishes of the Office, whether this concerns internal church life or activity in international church politics.” And although “the position of a large part of the clergy in the Protestant churches does not coincide with the attitude of their top leaders (...) upon the request of the Office, both churches [Lutheran and Reformed] have taken action against reactionary priests, and several priests have been disciplined”. The most serious task on the “problem map” of the State Office for Church Affairs in the 1950s, apart from the “reactionary clergy”, was the

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<sup>14</sup> See the contradictions in the assessment of Albert Bereczky's episcopate and, as an example, Imre Szabó's own reflections on the circumstances of his forced relocation in 1951. SZABÓ, Imre (2001): *Ég, de még nem emésztetik. Naplók 1914–1954*. Budapest. See also: 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. 123–140.; in more detail: LÁNYI, Gábor (2020): *Méltatlanul. Háttérbe szorított dunamelléki református lelkészek az 1950-es években*. Budapest, Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem.

smallholders' class, which was the social basis of the Reformed Church, namely that "the sessions of the Protestant churches were packed with reactionary kulaks", who "should be gradually expelled from the sessions".<sup>15</sup>

After the suppression of the 1956 Revolution and War of Independence, the newly established power under János Kádár obviously referred back to Rákosi's legacy on church matters. As Gyula Kállai, the Ideological Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party [MSZMP] and Minister of Education, put it at a meeting of the MSZMP's Interim Institutional Committee in March 1957:

I think the time has come to take action against the reaction of the churches. (...) Another thing is that not all churches have to be dealt with in the same way, on the same basis, under the same circumstances. We remember that when the situation with the churches escalated in 1947-48, we made a distinction and did not tackle them with the same means. First, we tried to reach an agreement with one and then used the agreement against the other. We must follow the same method now as well. (...) The Catholic Church used to be the most crucial as well as the strongest nest of ecclesiastical reaction in Hungary. So, this is what we must fight against first and foremost, and with the other churches [sic!] we must try to come to an agreement on the former grounds and use them against the Catholic Church.<sup>16</sup>

The consequence of this was that no concerted, large-scale show trials were organized against the Protestant churches. This did not, of course, exclude mass but rather unorganized actions against both clergy and laity. The most tragic chapter of the reprisals against the Reformed after '56 was the show trial of Rev. Lajos Gulyás, a Reformed pastor in Levél, sentenced to death and then executed as a third co-defendant.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> MNL OL 276. f. 89/276, archived units. 16 May 1953, 320. l. Report on the activity of the State Office for Church Affairs.

<sup>16</sup> MNL OL M-KS 288. f. 5. cs. 17 archived unit 13. The minutes of the meeting of the MSZMP Administrative Committee held on 5 March 1957. Comment by Gyula Kállai. At the same time, he added that action must be taken against the reactionary priests.

<sup>17</sup> The most shocking chapter for the Reformed Church was the execution of Rev. Lajos Gulyás, the pastor of Levél. See ERDŐS, Kristóf (2018): The „Clerical Reaction” in Court: The Only Convicted Clerical Victim of Kádár Reprisals. In: Kiss, Réka – Horváth, Zsolt (eds.): NEB Yearbook 2016–2017. Budapest, Nemzeti Emlékezet Bizottsága (NEB) – Országház Könyvkiadó. 253–273.



Kádár's church policy, established after the intensive church retaliation that accompanied the suppression of the revolution, continued to operate the framework related to the policy of the Reformed Church essentially without any major changes, building on the collective social experience of the resistance and intimidation that had been forcibly suppressed after '56, as well as on the policy of temporary concessions and relaxations given to Protestants.

Two of the most influential church leaders of the 1950s, Bishop Albert Bereczky of the Danubian and Bishop János Péter of the Tibiscan districts, were succeeded in the episcopate by István Szamosközi and Tibor Bartha respectively. While Szamosközi, also acting as an agent of state security under the codename "Szatmári", had a recurring problem being considered a "double agent", "wanting to be on good terms with progressive priests and with the so-called Bethanists, who were considered oppositionists",<sup>18</sup> Tibor Bartha, who also held the position of Pastoral President of the Synod and played a key role in international church politics, was considered an absolute pillar of the system. According to the description made about the latter, "in his church activity he strives with all his strength to support the building of socialism in our country through his service in the church". His authoritarian leadership style was euphemistically described by an official of the State Office for Church Affairs as follows: "He strives with excessive energy to bring the entire Reformed Church under his leadership, to achieve democratic unity excluding reaction."<sup>19</sup> In the 1960s, the Reformed Church was managed by a necessarily counter-selected leadership chosen by the State Office for Church Affairs and the Ministry of Interior. An almost schematically recurring motif in church policy reports was "that the leaders of the Protestant churches were the most successful in gaining political support for our system."<sup>20</sup>

Historical research tends to regard the two party resolutions on church policy adopted by the MSZMP leaders in the summer of 1958 as the basic documents defining the cornerstones of church policy in the Kádár era. By 1958, the post-revolutionary reprisals had reached all strata of society, the crackdown culminated in the execution of

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<sup>18</sup> MNL OL XIX-A-21-d, 10.d, 007-03/1961. The quarterly report of Istvan Turai, Rapporteur-General for Church Affairs in Budapest, 19 April 1961. 6.

<sup>19</sup> MNL OL XIX-A-21-d, 11. d., 0018/1961. Károly Olt's note on the leaders of the Reformed Church to Gyula Kállai, 18 January 1961.

<sup>20</sup> ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-13586/5. 198.

Imre Nagy, the prime minister during the revolution, in June 1958, and the party centre felt that the time had come to settle the strategic and tactical issues of policy towards religion and the churches comprehensively. The essence of the Kádár church policy lay in the simultaneous enforcement of two competing considerations. On the one hand, the authorities defined religion as a rival ideology to be defeated and a source of danger to the party's ideological monopoly and the churches as the only institutions that were legally active, alien to the system and hostile to it. As János Horváth, President of the State Office for Church Affairs put it in May 1958: "Under the present conditions of socialist construction, the churches are the greatest *legal opponent* of our people's democratic system."<sup>21</sup> At the same time, the real political recognition of the churches' fading but still existing social embeddedness – which in the language of party directives was "in the era of building socialism, the churches will survive for a long time" – forced the established Kádár system to change its previous church policy tactics. While in essence restoring the most important church policy institutions of the Rákosi age, the party leadership was not interested in frontal attacks but sought to outline a policy in which it could use the churches for its own purposes while preserving the long-term goal of their slow erosion. The institutional framework of persecution thus remained, but the practice was partially modified. To use Gábor Tabajdi's pertinent synthesis: "The cooperation of the church policy institutions (the State Office for Church Affairs, the Party apparatus, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Interior, the Patriotic Front, etc.) after 1956 was aimed at camouflaging the discriminatory policy affecting the churches and the delayed, sophisticated, and targeted persecution of the churches."<sup>22</sup>

Kádár described the pragmatic relationship with the churches in the dialectic of cooperation and struggle: "Our relationship with the church implies cooperation with it (...), but at the same time there is a struggle between us for social influence. Here there is cooperation, and there is struggle." Against the "clerical reaction", which the party leader defined simply as "political reaction in a religious robe", following the patterns of

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<sup>21</sup> Report on the state of church policy and proposals for improving the situation. 5 May 1958. MNL OL XIX-A-21-d-002-4/1958. 8.

<sup>22</sup> TABAJDI, Gábor (2018): Újratervezett egyháztörténetek. A fővárosi keresztény ifjúsági közösségek és a kádárizmus. In: Keller, Márkus – Tabajdi, Gábor (eds.): Évkönyv XXIII. Újrakezdés. Budapest, OSZK – 1956-os Intézet. 132.

the 1950s, he considered it permissible to use “all means of political and administrative struggle”. From this, he distinguished the fight against the religious worldview, which he argued that “it must be achieved by enlightening and educating the religious masses”.<sup>23</sup>

Like the doctrines of cultural policy, the “three T’s of church policy”, which could be interpreted as a specific church version of the famous three T’s of the Kádár-era cultural policy, were based on the lessons learned from the oppressive experience of the ‘56 Revolution – above all, the realization that the prerequisite for the long-term retention of power is the abandonment of the permanent state of war against society, the narrowing of the circle of groups defined as enemies, and the simultaneous internal division of certain social groups, the “disruption”, in the parlance of state intelligence. As part of this, a refined tactic of playing off the different church circles against each other was formulated, which now not only interpreted the relationship between the churches and the party-state in the dichotomous opposition of a narrow circle of “loyal” church groups supporting the regime and the masses of religious “reaction” but also attempted to delimit the primary targets of the struggle against the “greatest legal opponent” by opposing the religious groups tagged as so-called “clerical reactionaries” with the “religious masses.” But, obviously, it still depended on the judgment of the various actors of power as to which category a specific church activity fell into, i.e. who was considered an enemy of the system, against whom it was possible to act not only by indirect methods but also by “all the means of political and administrative struggle”. In the shadow of the declarative proclamation of religious freedom and the spectacular proclamation of the so-called new type of federal policy, the party resolutions continued to leave a rather wide ideological loophole for the use of indirect and direct methods of religious persecution. The Church Policy Programme of ‘58 spoke not only of the differential treatment of believers but also of “the clerical reaction” trying to bring believers under reactionary political influence through their religious worldview and “using both legal and illegal means”. According to the party decision, any legal church work within the

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<sup>23</sup> Az MSZMP PB 1958. július 22-én hozott határozata. Közli: VASS, Henrik (1973): *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt határozatai és dokumentumai 1956–1962*. Budapest, Kossuth Kiadó. 237; [no author] (1997): *Jegyzőkönyv az MSZMP KB 1958. július 25-i üléséről*. In: Némethné Vágyi, Karola et al. (ed.): *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt Központi Bizottságának 1957–1958. évi jegyzőkönyvei*. Budapest, MNL. 424.

narrow margin of the churches could be considered as clerical reactionary activity. Thus, the central party directive, which set the direction for local church policy practices, essentially offered an unlimited opportunity to take administrative action against any religious activity if the interests of the powers dictated so. There were therefore no clearly defined boundaries and rules, which rendered the daily life of the church policy of the Kádár regime both situational and unpredictable.

An important contribution to understanding where the boundaries between “tolerated” and “forbidden” forms of religious practice actually lay from the regime’s point of view is a state security elaboration of the mid-1960s, which provides a categorization and characterization of Protestant clergy by state security. The document titled *The Struggle, Direction, Influence, and Further Tasks of the Illegal Forces within the Protestant Church* (sic!) is about 15 pages long and classifies the clergy into four categories based on their political attitude towards the party-state: 1.) loyal, progressive powers; 2.) unsteady, passive forces; 3.) opposition forces; 4.) hostile forces. According to the summary, the number of opposition or hostile forces is very high, about 200 in the Reformed Church and about 75 in the Lutheran Church.

These individuals are not an organized opposition force but represent various hostile oppositional and political views and maintain *an organization-like life of faith*. They have a harmful influence on the work of the church leadership and the struggle of progressive forces. The reactionary church figures abroad rely mainly on them and see in them the base which must be broadened in order to achieve their aims and with their help to maintain the oppositional strength of the Protestant church in a people’s democratic Hungary. (...) *An assessment of the operational situation shows that the main activity of the church reaction is currently concentrated on winning over young people and intellectuals.*<sup>24</sup>

One noteworthy finding of the synthesis is that the political police, according to their own definition, considered those who were church opponents to be *church builders* or “engaged in maintaining an organized life of faith”, i.e. they included in the “church opposition” not only possible oppositional political behaviour but also active organizers of religious and church community life. Thus, while the Kádár regime was fond of

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<sup>24</sup> Synthesis. *The Struggle, Direction, Impact, and Further Tasks of the Illegal Forces within the Protestant Church*. [n. d.]. ÁBTL 3.1.5 O-13586/1.

presenting itself in its messages to the public as the proclaimer of a popular front policy offering a new *modus vivendi*, offering cooperation to “religiously inclined” citizens, in practice the highly active pastoral existence did not fit into the framework of cooperation dictated by the party-state.

This unpredictability of church politics also meant that what a community of believers experienced as a permitted religious activity could be classified as illegal, semi-legal, or even oppositional activity and ultimately criminalized by the enforcers of church politics. “Quite independently of the intentions and viewpoints of the community concerned, any church-religious activity that served to preserve an autonomous way of life that was not in line with the logic of the system could become a fictitious resistance activity, sometimes merely a means of enabling the authorities to act.”<sup>25</sup> But this was far from being automatic. The deliberate blurring of clear boundaries between tolerated and prohibited forms of religious practice was also facilitated by the opacity of the legislation and jurisprudence governing the operation of churches. There was little real legislation, no public instructions, decisions, or measures, however narrow, which could have provided a clear legal framework for the local activities of the churches.<sup>26</sup>

This is the situational technique of the exercise of power, which also characterized the entire Kádár regime<sup>27</sup> prevailing during the 1960s, particularly in the restricting activating religious activities targeted at young people. It is no coincidence that the conflicts over the boundaries between tolerated and prohibited religious practice have culminated precisely in the area of youth and elite education. For both sides clearly perceived that the most important “battles” in the ideological struggle were being fought for the young generations by those in power and by church communities confronted with radical changes in mentality and lifestyle.

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<sup>25</sup> FEJÉRDY, András (2018): Vallási ellenállás Magyarországon a kommunista rendszerrel szemben. Források és gyűjtemények. In: Apor, Péter – Bódi, Lóránt – Horváth, Sándor – Huhák, Heléna – Scheibner, Tamás (eds.): *Kulturális ellenállás a Kádár-korszakban*. Gyűjtemények története. Budapest, MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont Történettudományi Intézet. 143–150.

<sup>26</sup> KÖBEL, Szilvia (2015): *„Oszd meg és uralkodj!” A pártállam és az egyházak*. Budapest, Rejtjel Kiadó.

<sup>27</sup> For the concept and characteristics of the Kádár regime, see: RAINER M., János (2011): *Bevezetés a kádárizmusba*. Budapest, L'Harmattan – 1956-os Intézet.

The concerted struggle to win the younger generations over was understood from the perspective of the established Kádár regime, primarily from the perspective of the revolution of 1956. After all, one of the most shocking experiences of the revolution was the overwhelming activism of these very strata. In particular, the broad participation of students, who formed the base of the intellectuals' offspring, in the revolution forced those in power to radically rethink youth policy since, due to the strict class-based and ideological contrast selection that had been in place, university students were already recruited from among the beneficiaries of the new political system. The young generation that rebelled against the system in the largest numbers was therefore the generation that the system saw as its most reliable pillar. This was accompanied by a sharp increase in the number of enrolments to religion classes in 1956–1957, which not only indicated the continuing social demand for religious socialization but could also be interpreted as one of the last phenomena of the desire for freedom and social resistance that had exploded with elemental force in the revolution and at the same time as a striking manifestation of the social reserves of the churches.

But the 1960s also brought unprecedented challenges for church actors. The general processes of modernization, the accelerating secularization, the spread of mass culture, and the spectacular changes in lifestyle that accompanied it would have required a radical rethinking of the social role of the churches and the invention of new forms of religious activities, while the violent anti-church measures of the Rákosi age had succeeded in practically completely excluding the churches from the public arena of social life. Their role of initiative towards society faded, and a rigid church structure was preserved, which became more and more outdated and vulnerable to the system, and the maintenance and support of which was now one of the tactical goals of the party-state church policy. Moreover, the challenges facing the churches were exacerbated by the fact that, continuing the momentum of the repression of the Revolution of 1956, the party successfully forced the last autonomous large social group, the landowning peasantry, into cooperatives by violent means. The forced collectivization of the Hungarian society during peacetime, which social scientists consider to be the greatest wave of violence in time of peace, orchestrated by the state but also using civil actors, simultaneously disrupted the two remaining “counter-political bases”, the individual agricultural farms and the congregations

that had interwoven the rural milieus,<sup>28</sup> sometimes pitting the concerned strata against each other.<sup>29</sup> The liquidation of independent peasant existences based on private property not only shattered the social (and economic) foundations of peasant-based congregations but also expanded the tools of religious persecution through the direct, everyday intrusion of the party-state into traditional peasant life. A series of church reports noted a sudden and dramatic drop in Sunday worship attendance, a spectacular weakening of the traditional folk church framework due to a combination of radical lifestyle changes, the impact of modern mass media, the introduction of television into households, and the “Sunday community work and Sunday cultivation of the backyard”. But beyond this, coded or less coded references to intimidation and administrative action to render the practice of public religion impossible can also be read in contemporary church reports reflecting on the new situation.

Further complicating the tasks facing the churches was the fact that the disintegration of traditional rural communities was accompanied by mass emigration from the countryside. And reaching out to the uprooted urban population, especially in newly built housing estates, was an unknown and hitherto forbidden, or at least tightly controlled, area for the churches. The effects of the accelerating loss of tradition as a result of forced urbanization and the obstacles to the church’s search for a new way forward were also consciously anticipated by the church policy planners of the party-state. As a report of the State Office for Religious Affairs at the time clearly summarized: “The large housing developments brought a new reorganization of the churches. In new housing estates, contact with the churches is rarely sought. The reactivation of disaffected believers is a problem.”<sup>30</sup> Power was thus in a much more favourable position than before to set itself the programme of

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<sup>28</sup> Ö. KOVÁCS, József – CSIKÓS, Gábor – HORVÁTH, Gergely Krisztián (eds.) (2023): *The Sovietization of Rural Hungary, 1945–1980: Subjugation in the Name of Equality*. London, Routledge.

<sup>29</sup> On the different patterns of church involvement, the coercion of pastors into the role of agitators and its consequences, see: RIGÓ, Róbert (2024): Egyházak a kényszerkollektívizálás után. Példák Bács-Kiskun megyéből egy 1962-es pártvizsgálat tükrében. In: Tabajdi, Gábor – Szuly, Rita – Erdős, Kristóf – Wirthné Diera, Bernadett (eds.): *Küzdelem a lelkekért. Pártállam és egyházak a hosszú hatvanas években*. 417–444.

<sup>30</sup> GRNÁK, Károly (1972): *Feljegyzés a nem katolikus egyházak budapesti helyzetéről, működéséről*. 12 January 1972. 12. MNL- OL XIX-A-21-d-0032-3-1972 70. db.

bringing up a new generation, the majority of whom had not received any religious socialization.

The relationship between the church and youth was treated as a fundamental issue both in the internal forums of the church public and in the internal communication of the church policy leaders of the party-state, as the parallel assessments of the situation, formulated for different media and with opposite goals, clearly show. “The experience of recent years has shown that churches increasingly see the problem of attracting young people as a vital issue... Priests, in most cases, commit acts in violation of state laws conducting illegal activities with youth.”<sup>31</sup> – summarized István Turai his experiences and most important tasks concerning the church life in Budapest.

From his own perspective, the Head of the State Office for Church Affairs in Budapest perceived the “vital question” of the churches, their focus on youth, and their efforts to broaden the scope of their activities as accurately as many of the pastors working among the Reformed in Budapest. At the same time, the series of church reports emphasizing the growing role of Sunday schools, children’s missionary work, and youth Bible classes can be read as a forced adaptation to the church-political situation that was developing by the 1960s, as a search for a way forward that calculated on the practical elimination of all forms of religious education in schools, as a cautious formulation of new church strategies (outlined in forums within the church but under party-state control).

### **The “Vital Issue of the Churches”: Youth Education. Religious Education and Alternatives**

It is no coincidence, therefore, that after 1956, the established Kádár regime treated the control and further restriction of legal forms of religious socialization, above all the impossibility of religious education in schools, as a top strategic task – to such an extent that the party leadership not only dealt with the suppression of religious education and the regulation of forbidden and tolerated forms of religious involvement

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<sup>31</sup> Report on the church policy in Budapest, 16 April 1965. Budapest Archives [hereinafter referred to as: BFL]. XXXV. 1.c. 128, archived units, 6 March.



with young people at the highest level but also gave the apparatus a handbook-like, itemized internal list of prohibitions.

Following the nationalization of schools (1948) and the elimination of compulsory religious education (1949), a new series of concerted administrative measures against the remaining form of religious education in the state system, the optional religious education in schools, was launched in the spring of 1957. As part of this, a government decree, or ministerial order, was issued, which legally regulated the framework of optional religious education in schools until the fall of the communist regime. The specific Kádár double discourse enshrined the principle of free exercise of religion and that parents “must ensure that their underage children in primary schools and general secondary schools may or may not participate in religious education (!)”; on the other hand, following tactical gestures promising religious freedom, he made a thinly veiled threat of a strict law against all those who use religious education for political purposes against the “state, social, or economic order of the Hungarian People’s Republic or who influence citizens to participate in religious education by violence, threats, or fallacy”. The decree, which listed a whole series of technical obstacles, declared, among other things, that religious education could only take place in the school building. Outside the school building (i.e. in churches, places of worship, or other church premises), religious education could be held only in special cases and with special permission. The control of such religious instruction in a religious setting was left to the school principals.<sup>32</sup>

The party, council, school, and workplace actions aimed at making enrolment and education impossible – documents recording various forms of pressure – not only provide a local example of the planned impossibility of religious education, but – by collecting different types of sources – we can gain a richer picture of the everyday life of the diverse techniques of the Kádár regime’s domination of dictatorship. The various obstacles to faith education, smear campaigns, and intimidation of clergy and parents had made religious education in schools virtually impossible in most places by the

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<sup>32</sup> Gyula Gyombolai gives a good overview of the changes in regulations on religious education: GYOMBOLAI, Gyula (2017): A magyar katolikus egyház ifjúságnevelési és hitoktatási lehetőségei 1957 és 1978 között az ÁEH titkosan kezelt iratainak tükrében. In: Ballabás, Dániel (ed.): *Mozaikok a 18–20. századi magyar és egyetemes történelemből. PhD-hallgatók V. konferenciája*. 2016. május 6. Eger, Eszterházy Károly Egyetem – Líceum Kiadó. 143–155.

1960s. However, far from putting an end to the unequal struggle for the education of young people, this was a change in the terrain, as it was pointed out by the leaders of the State Office for Church Affairs in Budapest: “I need to point out that the influence of the churches on young people is not reliably reflected in the evolution of our figures regarding the teaching of religion in schools.”<sup>33</sup>

While the authorities tried to stifle faith education in schools through a concerted series of actions and Christian communities sought alternatives, the party made illegal any form of church contact with young people, and faith education that did not fit strictly within the authorized framework. The task to be carried out by the church policy bodies was emphasized by the party at the highest level in the June 1958 Resolution of the Politburo of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP PB) on faith education, when it listed in detail the forbidden forms of church work with youth: “Churches may only reach out to young people in the context of religious education in schools, as provided for in the relevant Council of Ministers’ decision and in the context of first communion, Catholic and Protestant confirmation. All other activities (sports, movies, choirs, extracurricular religious education, etc.) are prohibited.”<sup>34</sup>

### **Tightrope Walking on the Edge between the Tolerated and the Forbidden**

“There is also a great deal of youth activity in the Reformed Church. This is facilitated by the possibilities they have as a result of the convention /to hold services in churches or in other suitable public buildings, family homes and open-air places, to hold Bible studies in family homes/” [underlined in the original].<sup>35</sup>

In his annual report, the Head of the Budapest State Office for Church Affairs touched again on important points in his analysis on the path seeking of the Reformed Church. The 1948 forced Agreement, which was in fact an ultimatum for the Church, forced it to make serious compromises, including a declaration that the Church accepted

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<sup>33</sup> Report on the church policy in Budapest. 16 April 1965. 12. BFL XXXV. 1.c. 128, archived units.

<sup>34</sup> Information on the decision of the MSZMP PB of 10 June 1958 on the relations between the state and the churches. MNL OL XIX-A-21-d-002-11/1958. 10.

<sup>35</sup> Report on the church policy in Budapest, 10 September 1964. BFL XXXV 1.c. 114, archived units.

the new socialist order and acknowledged the nationalization of schools. At the same time, however, in order to facilitate the acceptance of the Agreement by the religious public at the time, the text listed certain permitted religious activities. Among other things, in addition to the provision of compulsory religious education in schools, the state continued to regard the holding of religious services as “within the free exercise of church life (... ) in family homes and open spaces, Bible classes in churches, schools, family homes, congregation houses; Bible and scripture distribution, congregational and national church conferences and evangelistic meetings, compulsory religious education and charity work in schools.”<sup>36</sup>

The Stalinist terror and open persecution of the Church in the 1950s did not allow any room for local Reformed communities or pastors to legally use the forms of worship allowed by the Agreement. In the early 1960s, however, the most important area for efforts to broaden the scope of religious practice seemed to be the strengthening of congregational life and the utilizing of the possibilities granted by the Agreement. The seemingly defensive programme of retreat into the congregations and the declarative recognition of the Agreement in many cases actually promoted a hidden strategy of community rebuilding, a programme targeted at maximizing the Church’s potential within the legal framework, which could not be expressed in public church discourse.

Thus, paradoxically, the reference to the Agreement concluded between the socialist state and the Church could also become a tool for attempts to widen the Church’s playing field. One of the directions taken by Reformed pastors in the ’60s was to revive and strengthen the forms of faith guaranteed by the Agreement, to expand the framework of legality and thus to move everyday religious practice from the forbidden to the tolerated zone.

Meanwhile, by the early 1960s, the number of attendees of Reformed Bible classes had fallen dramatically in Budapest. While in 1956/57, the year of the revolution, more than 4,500 students formally enrolled in Reformed faith education in the capital, this number had almost completely faded by the early 1960s. According to the available

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<sup>36</sup> Agreement between the Republic of Hungary and the Hungarian Reformed Church, 7 October 1948. Text published by LADÁNYI, Sándor – KERESZTES, Dániel – HAMARKAY, Ede (2006): [sic!] *Válogatott kövek a református egyház és az állam kapcsolatának medréből*. Budapest, Exodus. 313–314.

reports, 61 students in the Budapest-North Reformed Church County attended Bible classes regularly in 1963, this number being as low as 31 in 1965, while in Budapest-South only 12 out of the 42 students fell into this category in the year 1966.<sup>37</sup> In addition to rendering religious education completely impossible, the legal framework for dealing with youth was further narrowed by the radical limitation of the duration of confirmation preparation, which from 1962 onwards restricted the duration of preparation at three months instead of the previous several semesters. In a typical example of the subversive technique of manipulative persecution of the Church,<sup>38</sup> the State Office for Church Affairs even ordered that the restriction, which was seriously damaging to the interests of the Church, should be imposed on pastors not by decree of the State Office for Church Affairs but by a decision of the Church leadership in a “bishop’s circular”.<sup>39</sup> The provision, while causing a great uproar, prompted church communities to look for new alternative ways.

“The youth activity of the Reformed Church is also noteworthy. Here we should think in particular of the Bible classes that are allowed and of the pre-confirmation education. In this area, the work is being carried out with much greater vigour than in the Roman Catholic Church.”<sup>40</sup> A well-prepared agent wrote a similar report about the youth organization methods of Rev. Károly Dobos, a pastor in the Budapest area, one of the defendants in the later YMCA trial: “today, a process of revival has begun in the Reformed Church (...) now they want to serve the revival in a partisan way, by holing up in congregations. They want to do this, for example, by addressing primarily the youth (...) They are using every means that seems legal to win the youth over to the revival.”

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<sup>37</sup> KISS, Réka (2006): Fejezetek a budapesti reformátusság 1945 utáni történetéből. In: Kósa, László (ed.): *Reformátusok Budapesten. Tanulmányok a magyar főváros reformátusságáról*. Budapest, ELTE BTK Művelődéstörténeti Tanszék. 1393.

<sup>38</sup> For techniques of manipulative persecution and disruption, see: TABAJDI, Gábor (2018): Újratervezett egyháztörténetek. A fővárosi keresztény ifjúsági közösségek és a kádárizmus. In: Keller, Márkus – Tabajdi, Gábor (eds.): *Évkönyv XXIII. Újrakezdés*. Budapest, OSZK – 1956-os Intézet. 132; TABAJDI, Gábor (2019): *Bomlasztás. Kádár János és a III/III*. Jaffa Kiadó.

<sup>39</sup> Proposal for the organization of pre-confirmation classes. Spt. 3, 1962. Deputy Head of Department Károly Grnák. MOL ÁEH XIX-A-21-a-R-10-17/1962.

<sup>40</sup> 1963 Evaluation Report 9. BFL XXXV. 1.c. 114, archived units.

This attitude was in fact a typical form of self-protective adaptation to the conditions of Kádár's ecclesiastical policy,<sup>41</sup> the essence of which was to avoid confrontation with power as far as possible in order to carefully expand the framework of legality and thus the points of contact with society. However, this boundary was extremely fluid and depended on the sometimes changing perception of power. The documents of the time present many other creative and unique ways of alternative Bible teaching and reaching out to young people. The local examples also draw attention to the pastors and careers of those who were outside the scope of ecclesiastical historiography, who “represented the interests of the Church in the quiet work of everyday life”.<sup>42</sup>

In metropolitan areas in particular, the role of family visits has become increasingly important as the most effective, legal way of maintaining a network of contacts around the church. Church sources of the time provide a number of examples where considerable energy was devoted to this form of direct contact. To indicate the order of magnitude, a 1961 mission report noted, “There is a congregation with a higher number of family visits now than at any other time in the entire church county.”<sup>43</sup> The effective church-organizing potential of family visits was also noticed by the State Office for Church Affairs, and, as a denominational specificity, it was considered a particular Reformed pastoral technique: “As in previous years, home visits have had a very important place in the activities of the Reformed Church. In my experience, the home visits of Reformed pastors in Budapest are much more intensive than that of Catholic priests. The constant home visits result in a very lively relationship between the Reformed pastors and their

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<sup>41</sup> For the concept of self-protective adaptation and resilience, see: BÖGRE, Zsuzsanna (2023): Hétköznapi ellenállástól a vallási rezilienciáig. Egy szerzetesrend túlélési stratégiájának erőforrásai az 1960-as években. In: Tabajdi, Gábor – Szuly, Rita – Erdős, Kristóf – Wirthné Diera, Bernadett (eds.): *Küzdelem a lelkekért. Pártállam és egyházak a hosszú hatvanas években*. Budapest, Nemzeti Emlékezet Bizottságának Hivatala. 902–936.; Majtényi, György (2015): „*De elmehet a Kádár Jani a piczába!*” *Reziliencia az államszocializmusban*. Replika. 95–112.

<sup>42</sup> HORVÁTH, Gergely Krisztián (2018): *Szovjetizálás és ellenállás a Veszprémi Egyházmegyében. Dr. Kögl Lénárd pályája az 1940–1960-as években*. Budapest, MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont Történettudományi Intézet. 182.

<sup>43</sup> 1961 and 1965 Mission Report on Budapest-South Church County. RL Missziói jelentések 1502/1961. 2; 480/1965. 4.

faithful. In addition, as in the past year, some congregations involve members of their sessions in visits.”<sup>44</sup>

This time, too, the experienced official supervisor over the churches was to the point when he highlighted the role of lay church officials, the elders, in addition to home visits, which provided direct contact as a source of danger for the party-state. Internal church bodies also regularly mentioned the old-new possibilities resting in activating lay officials as a positive method of effective church community organization.<sup>45</sup> A church report on a congregation in Buda says, “youth work is a significant factor in the life of the congregation, and many of the presbyters are involved in it. The good relationship between the older and younger generations explains the practice of occasional gatherings of brethren who were involved in youth work 30-40 years ago.”<sup>46</sup> In the still tolerable, veiled wording, this was essentially an attempt to have the efforts of Mátyás Bugárszky, a well-known elder of the Budapest-Buda Reformed Congregation at the Szilágyi Dezső Square, a former member of the Christian Youth Association, to activate and transfer intergenerational community organizing skills comply with the accepted church activities. However, this was beyond the tolerance of the authorities. Soon the state security would also notice that the former members of the youth association were using “the state-authorized youth Bible groups within the church” to spread the spirit of the Christian Youth Association and that their groups – mainly youth and intellectuals – “continued to organize themselves under the aegis of legitimacy. In these, alongside devotional work, the former mass church organizational framework is increasingly asserted.”<sup>47</sup> As a result, Bugárszky, who later became the fourth defendant in the YMCA trial, spent six months in pre-trial detention.

The authorities were particularly sensitive to the activation of lay leaders and elders, who could be considered the local elite of the Reformed Church, and to the building of generational bridges. For it saw in them the danger of accumulating a network of contacts

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<sup>44</sup> 1963 Evaluation Report, 15 January 1964. 8–9. BFL XXV. 1.c. 114, archived units.

<sup>45</sup> Report of Péter Hajdú, Dean of the Reformed Church County of Southern Budapest, at the General Assembly of the Reformed Church County of Southern Budapest, 21 June 1964, RL Dean’s Reports 891/1964. 28.

<sup>46</sup> Op. cit. 22.

<sup>47</sup> ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-13142/1 21–24. O-13586/5 307–309.

and knowledge that could also form the basis for the organization of autonomous social forms potentially opposed to the system. Thus, in fact, it followed from the logic of the system itself that when Dean Gyula Mády submitted a request to the State Office for Church Affairs for the elders of the congregations of Budapest to organize a joint conference, the communist power apparatus reflexively recommended the rejection of the request, stating, “It is a well-known fact that not only the sessions in Budapest but also those in the provinces contain many elements which oppose our system.”<sup>48</sup>

The intensive church- and community-organizing activity – the risk-taking autonomous personalities actively involved with youth, intellectuals, and elite education – was always kept under close control by the bodies enforcing church policy. A power structure contemplating a homogeneous, easily controllable, more hierarchical church structure had an elementary interest in countering the emergence of a more diverse, more inclusive, more stratified congregational operational model that would offer more contact points. It is no coincidence that the most important conclusion of the report on the activities of Protestant churches and sects in the youth field, prepared by the State Office for Church Affairs Head Vilmos Lóránt, was that “it is imperative to make bishops and deans aware that only priests can deal with young people. Elders, deaconesses, and seniors should be excluded from youth work.” “They can only deal with matters of faith, within the allowed limits. The personal interests of young people should be separated from their religious life. Controls should be tightened, including preventing the organization of excursions, movies (...) organized holidays.”<sup>49</sup>

The party-state documents, like the church reports, reflected ambivalent processes. On the one hand, they registered a radical change in the social milieu, the combined effects of the discriminatory world of the socialist regime and the double squeeze of modernization, and the rapid weakening of the churches’ social presence; on the other hand, from the mid-1960s onwards, they reported an increasing number of church-community initiatives that tried to break out of their confinement in the congregation, adapting to the changed environment and opportunities. The channels for this could be both legal and illegal.

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<sup>48</sup> Report on the evaluation of the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 1964, 30 December 1964. 13. BFL XXXV. 1. c. 128, archived units.

<sup>49</sup> MNL OL XIX-A-21-d-0049-8/1962 17. db. 13.

A further attempt to widen the scope of the movement was the search for former members of the youth associations that had been disrupted in the 1950s and attempts to recall the memory of the associations under the guise of congregational fellowships, family outings, and memorial evenings. The direct cause of the second YMCA trial can be found in this process. At the same time, one of the remarkable features of the 1967 proceedings is that none of the five persons on trial were actually the focus of interest of either the state security services or the State Office for Church Affairs in the 1960s in the sense that they were neither on the list of the “highly reactionary” Reformed faithful in Budapest nor in the reports on the most active religious organizing “pastors”. What did attract the attention of the church authorities, however, was that they were all active members of the former Christian Youth Association.<sup>50</sup>

Leafing through the personal documents seized during the searches, it is striking how the arrested former members of YMCA, especially Dénes Batiz, a retired doctor, and Mátyás Bugárszky, had extensive and intensive correspondence with former YMCA members, participants of events, personally accounting for the commitment of the invited individuals. An important dimension of the communication and information flow between the participants was the distribution of documents on Christian themes through private channels. There were many typed sermons, longer and shorter brochures, religious documents, Western theological works translated into Hungarian and distributed as manuscripts, church samizdats as well as other documents that were caught up in the sieve of the officials dealing with church matters. Among the items found during the raid were the famous Memorandum of the retired Bishop László Ravasz – written in the summer of 1956 and secretly distributed – on the state of the church and the copied sermons of the most popular community-organizing pastors in Budapest such as Sándor Joó, Endre Gyökössi, and József Farkas, lectures, the manuscript of the book *Fear and Concealment* by Theodor Bovet, a significant author of contemporary Christian spiritual literature after World War II, already translated into Hungarian, or the German-language manuscript by Ernst Sartorius, former international secretary of YMCA, which is still waiting to be

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<sup>50</sup> State security sources directly related to the YMCA trial: ÁBTL 3. 1. 5. O–12.049/1–10. “The Confessors”, ÁBTL 3. 1. 5. O–13142/1. “The Campers”, ÁBTL 3. 1. 9. V–73196/fund, 1–2. Ferenc Végh and others, ÁBTL 3. 1. 9. V–167042. Dénes Batiz and others, ÁBTL 4. 1. A–1328. Documents acquired in the case of Dr Dénes Batiz and others.



translated. Perhaps the most remarkable, however, is that Bugárszky (although not a university graduate) himself wrote 2-3-page-long essays and discussion papers on current church and religious issues, which he distributed among the members and speakers of the so-called Elders' Prayer Group, which he had established semi-legally.

The private letters seized not only confirmed his leadership role but also provided evidence that the relationship of trust between former YMCA members had continued after the dissolution of the association and the 1951 lawsuit against the former leaders. The young generation of leaders who had socialized in the dynamic youth association life before 1948 were able to continue their activities after the dissolution of the associations, in good cases by joining local congregations and essentially transforming the community-organizing skills and activities they had acquired in YMCA. Paradoxically, this provided a new reserve of strength for local communities, and in many places a skilled, active middle generation, proficient in leadership training and youth work, became the religious organizers of local churches. Their extensive correspondence provides an insight not only into their network of contacts but also into the manner in which a religious community tried to preserve its alternative values to the discourses of power to maintain its own language and cultural codes. For example, one of the features of religious identity was that Dénes Batiz typed the reference of the biblical verse of the day instead of the date on each letter. The letters touched on many areas of everyday and family life, community building in the spirit of YMCA and religious references, but not on political issues. The only exceptions were reflections on the 1956 revolution. In the latter letters, there is a latent but conscious reflection on the counterpoint to the official counter-revolutionary narrative, an awareness of an alternative memory and narrative based on personal experience.

In addition to regular correspondence, they, along with another YMCA senior, made pre-arranged "tours" from family to family in the countryside, lasting up to more than a week, to visit their most important rural contacts. It seems they managed to preserve a significant part of the informal network of contacts surrounding the former association. Thus, Bálint Kovács, a former member of YMCA and pastor in Budapest, described a real process in his interrogation when he said, "YMCA lived on not in the old associational framework but in certain social forms and relationships". "Living on" meant contacts, community-organizing methods, and the desire to pass on the spirit of YMCA.

It was clearly not possible to formally reach out to the younger generations for youth training. The most obvious and safest form of informal channels for generational knowledge transfer was to involve the children of former YMCA members who had since raised a family. Dénes Batiz, together with another former YMCA leader, regularly organized family gatherings, trips with a pre-set agenda, Bible studies and religious discussions. In one of his letters, he wrote, “Eighty people attended, and nearly half of them were our children (...) Even though there was a big age difference, we had separate Bible classes for boys and girls, as well as for men and women. What a joy it was to testify in front of a small group from YMCA.”<sup>51</sup>

Amidst the malleable, situational power relations of the 60s, the possibility of further widening the scope of action, based on a more flexible interpretation of the association framework, also arose: former members of youth organizations that had been forcibly disbanded in the 50s were reconvened in the parish framework, as so-called senior meetings. The occasion was the commemoration of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Béla Megyericsy, the legendary founding pastor of the first Budapest scout troop and YMCA. Dénes Batiz praised the novelty of the occasion, its community-building power and religious weight in contrast to formal church occasions in a long letter to Bálint Kovács. “My heart is still filled with joy and happiness over [the event]. Blessed be God for having inspired us all with His Holy Spirit to organize this event, for having made it possible to carry it out and for having surrounded us in that joyful communion with such a thick cloud of testimonies. We were all enriched that evening with so much value that it will be abundantly shared not only by our families but also by our Church and our people.”<sup>52</sup> The success of the event was confirmed by the many letters received by the host. The meetings and the high number of participants (over a hundred) made the event significant in itself. At the same time, as Dénes Batiz and Bálint Kovács have repeatedly and variously reflected on it, the real psychological crossing of boundaries was the fact of public, communal remembrance. In fact, the commemorative evening was intended to open the door to the retelling of the falsified and silenced history of YMCA, which was stigmatized as a so-called “reactionary-fascist” association after 1945.

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<sup>51</sup> ABTL 3.1.9. V-155460. 75. Denes Batiz’s interrogation interview, 29 August 1967.

<sup>52</sup> ABTL 4.1. A-1328/50. Letter of Dénes Batiz to Bálint Kovács, 20 December 1967.

They tried to create their own alternative culture of memory. In a materialized manner, too. In preparation for the evening, Bálint Kovács and his family announced the creation of a small YMCA museum, a collection of memorabilia, photos, prints, and publications. In addition to YMCA and scout relics, the call also included the collection of memorabilia related to former association leaders criminalized in the 1951 show trial, including István Pógyor, who died in prison. At stake was essentially a symbolic struggle over history and memory, a symbolic reclaiming of the past. As the note on Dénes Batiz's speech, drafted and distributed in shorthand, put it: "The features of YMCA, what it meant, what its impact was, what it was that we should not be ashamed of being YMCA members, it was a great gain for our people and for us." The motivation of getting rid of shame was also brought up in Bálint Kovács's interrogation:

We didn't want to be ashamed before our children and each other of the decades we has spent working in YMCA, so we and others could see there were many good and useful things in our work. We were aware that YMCA was closed in 1949 as an undesirable association, but it would have been nice to hear from somewhere that we had received in YMCA the kind of encouragement that prepared us to accept and integrate into the democratic order. This is what we expected from both secular and church leaders.<sup>53</sup>

The circumvention of party-state control over memory and the moral rehabilitation of an organization condemned as reactionary, less than ten years after the suppression of the '56 revolution, was a line that the authorities could not afford to cross.

Despite the extensive preparation, the proceedings against the former leaders of YMCA ended in failure from the point of view of state security, as the Supreme Court – changing the previous classification of the facts – classified the case as an abuse of the right of association instead of preparation for a conspiracy against the state. Dénes Batiz's sentence was reduced to 6-month imprisonment, Bálint Kovács's to 5 months, and Imre Tisza's to 3 months; Károly Dobos was given a warning, and Mátyás Bugárszky was acquitted. According to the report, the investigation department had serious problems with the lack of legally valid evidence of illegal activity. The main obstacle, however, was that the 1967 trial, causing protests from abroad, annoyingly affected both the

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<sup>53</sup> ABTL 3.1.9. V-155460. 223. Bálint Kovács's interrogation, 6 September 1967.

Reformed Church leadership, as it was gradually widening its diplomatic space in the international church, and the Kádár regime's church policy, which was building a tolerant and cooperative state image.<sup>54</sup> Thus, Bishop Tibor Bartha himself (changing his initial opinion) eventually interceded with the leaders of the State Office for Church Affairs in favour of a more moderate sentence for the defendants.

The case of Bálint Kovács and his peers cast an obvious shadow over the church leadership celebrating the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Reformed Church in Hungary in the presence of a large international attendance. However, this did not prevent the church leaders from adopting new Bylaws, essentially codifying the practices of the 1950s, in a symbolic appropriation of history, on the occasion of the jubilee of the first constitutional Council of Debrecen, completely overturning the principle of congregational autonomy, allowing bishops to transfer pastors from one place of ministry to another at any time in the "public interest of the church" without consulting the parish and the sessions. This opens a new chapter in the administrative repression of church life and in the search for a path for communities struggling to live their faith actively.

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<sup>54</sup> Used archival sources: ÁBTL 3. 1. 5. O–12.049/1–10. "The Confessors", ÁBTL 3. 1. 5. O–13586/1–8. Repelling hostile individuals in the Reformed Church reaction, ÁBTL 3. 1. 5. O–13142/1. "The Campers", ÁBTL 3. 1. 9. V–73196/fund, 1–2. Ferenc Végh and others, ÁBTL 3. 1. 9. V–167042. Dénes Batiz and others, ÁBTL 4. 1. A–1328. Documents acquired in the case of Dr Dénes Batiz and others, BFL XXV. 4. f. B001277/1951.

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Szilvia KÖBEL:<sup>1</sup> 

## The Significance of Relations between Hungarian and Dutch Reformed Congregations under the Single-Party State – With a Special Emphasis on the Dutch Connections of Dezső Szabó, Pastor in Káloz, in the Focus of the State Security Services<sup>2</sup>

### *Abstract.*

The study provides a glimpse into the ministry of Dezső Szabó, the Reformed pastor in Káloz (Hungary) in the 1960s, when he rebuilt informal church relations

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<sup>2</sup> The study was carried out within the framework of the *Challenges and Wayfinding in the History of the Hungarian Reformed Church in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* research project (No. 66001R800) of the Church History Research Institute of the Faculty of Theology at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary. Studies conducted in the KRE academic research project: *Református identitás a 20. századában* [Reformed Identity in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century]; *Kihívások, útkeresések a 20. századi magyar református egyház történetében* [Challenges, Wayfinding in the History of the Hungarian Reformed Church in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century]. The lectures on which the study is based were presented at the workshop conferences entitled *Challenges, Wayfinding in the History of the Hungarian Reformed Church in the 20th Century*: 1. *The Significance of Relations between Hungarian and Dutch Reformed Congregations under the Party-State*. Date: 23 May 2023, venue: Budapest, KRE Károlyi-Csekonics Palota, Szivarszoba (1088 Budapest, 17 Múzeum St); 2. *Reformed Pastor Dezső Szabó's Contacts with the Netherlands – In the Focus of the State Security Services*. Presentation delivered during the conference *Hagyomány, Identitás, Történelem* [Tradition, Identity, History], KRE/HTK, 25–26 October 2023. Verbi Divini Ministri – Servants of God's Word (Year of the Pastoral Vocation, 2023). I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dezső Szabó's family, Dezső Szabó Jr and his wife, Erzsike, Dezső Szabó's son-in-law, Imre Pétervári, and the pastor of the Reformed church of Káloz, Reverend Gyula Nemes for the discussion in the autumn of 2023.





– independent of church leadership – with Dutch congregations. Prior to the war, Dezső Szabó studied in the Netherlands on a scholarship. The party-state authorities, however, did not approve of inter-church relations with Western churches, but in the changed environment of church politics and church law brought on by the 1960s, Dezső Szabó seized the opportunity to rekindle old ties through his former theological acquaintances. Dezső Szabó's activity was monitored by state security, and the records also provide information on the situation of the Dutch Reformed Church. The study draws attention to dilemmas of wayfinding and identity, full of challenges, during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Keywords:** neo-Calvinism, identity, surveillance, single-party state, Káloz

## Introduction

A few years ago, the Dutch historian Maarten J. Aalders's research into the life of Jenő Sebestyén and the Dutch–Hungarian Reformed relations in the interwar period, especially that of the Hungarian theology scholarship holders, made me contemplate the cross-section of Hungarian–Dutch relations that we can find in the years immediately following World War II (e.g. children's trains) and then in the period of the single-party state.

I was particularly interested in the post-World War II careers of former scholarship holders. On the one hand, I wanted to find out what they were able to retain from their Dutch influences and contacts as Reformed congregational pastors in socialist Hungary and whether they were subject to special surveillance by the State Security Services.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, I was also interested in how the theologians and pastors emigrated (one has to differentiate – depending on their individual circumstances, of course – to what extent it was a choice or a necessity, what motivation or life situation was behind it), what kind of service they provided in the Netherlands, how much contact they maintained with Hungarian pastors and congregations, and whether they were also in the sights of the political police. I think that in both approaches we are

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.abtl.hu/english/>.

dealing with an under-explored area. Both dimensions can be found in national state and church archives, congregational archives, and private family archives. This paper focuses on the former approach and within that on a small slice of how the life and ministry of the pre-World War II scholarship theologians panned out, who – due to their age – were in a position to spend active years/decades in socialist Hungary.

The context of the present research project, namely *20<sup>th</sup>-Century Reformed Identity, Challenges, Wayfinding*, the life journeys I have researched and published so far (Lajos Jakos, István Tüski, József Végh<sup>4</sup>), the Dutch–Hungarian Reformed relations during the single-party state, and the differences in the church constitution are all approached from yet another perspective, described above.<sup>5</sup>

In the following, I will try to illustrate through a personal example the particular challenges faced by Reformed pastors, families, and communities, which show a slice of identity and the search for a way forward.

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<sup>4</sup> József Végh's son, Johan Alexander Sándor Végh (Hans Végh), wrote a volume of family history in Dutch. See: VÉGH, Hans (2023): *Van Origine Hongars. Een Familiekroniek*. Boekscout.

<sup>5</sup> My publications on this topic so far include:  
KÖBEL, Szilvia (2020): „A múltban ezer év alatt nem hazudtak annyit, mint most 5 perc alatt”: Magyar református lelkészek hollandiai emigrációban az államszocializmus évtizedeiben. I. rész. In: *Betekintő*. 14, 4. 69–98. [https://betekinto.hu/hu/szamok/2020\\_4](https://betekinto.hu/hu/szamok/2020_4) (accessed on: 13.11.2023).  
Köbel, Szilvia (2021a): „A múltban ezer év alatt nem hazudtak annyit, mint most 5 perc alatt”: Magyar református lelkészek hollandiai emigrációban az államszocializmus évtizedeiben. II. rész. In: *Betekintő*. 15, 1. 55–93. DOI: 10.25834/BET.2021.1.2. [https://betekinto.hu/hu/szamok/2021\\_1](https://betekinto.hu/hu/szamok/2021_1) (accessed on: 13.11.2023).

KÖBEL, Szilvia (2021b): „Rajtuk keresztül oszlatni lehetne az antikommunista propaganda hatását...”: Tüski István és Végh József református lelkészek hollandiai emigrációban a magyar állambiztonsági szervek látókörében. In: Palasik, Mária – Pócs, Nándor (eds.): *Titkos hidak – Az állambiztonság és az emigráció kapcsolatai 1945–1989*. Budapest – Pécs: Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára (ÁBTL) – Kronosz Kiadó. 179–207.

Köbel, Szilvia (2021c): „Külföldi tanulmányútjainak folytatása nagyfontosságú közérdek”: Végh József református lelkész hollandiai emigrációban a magyar politikai rendőrség látókörében. In: Kiss, Réka – Lányi, Gábor (eds.): *Hagyomány, identitás, történelem 2020*. Budapest, Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Hittudományi Kar Egyháztörténeti Kutatóintézet – Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem Egyház és Társadalom Kutatóintézetének Reformáció Öröksége Műhelye. 289–303.

The ministry of Reformed Pastor Dezső Szabó deserves attention from several points of view. I would like to highlight three of them, which are related to the research I undertook in this project:

1. Before World War II, Dezső Szabó was a theology student on a scholarship in the Netherlands. The question arises as to how his identity was influenced by the interwar period and his Dutch connections.

2. To what extent did the ecclesiastical political and legal environment of the 1960s affect the relations of Reformed congregations abroad?

3. How can we document the revival/revitalization of Dutch–Hungarian church relations in the 1960s, especially under the surveillance of the socialist state security services (political police)?

## 1. During the Interwar Period, Dezső Szabó Was a Scholarship Holder in the Netherlands

The above-mentioned Dutch author's volume on the Dutch–Hungarian Protestant relations between the two world wars<sup>6</sup> was published first in Dutch and then in Hungarian in 2023 by Kálvin Publishing House.<sup>7</sup> Maarten J. Aalders explained at the book launch that he had presented the Dutch perspective. In this volume – in an appendix –, the author publishes the names of the Reformed theology students who studied in the Netherlands on scholarship in the interwar period,<sup>8</sup> which had also been partially published by János M. Hermán earlier.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> AALDERS, Maarten J. (2021): *Nederlandse en Hongaarse protestanten gedurende het interbellum*. Vuurbaak, Amersfoort.

<sup>7</sup> AALDERS, Maarten J. (2023): *Holland–magyar protestáns kapcsolatok a két világháború között*. Kálvin Kiadó.

<sup>8</sup> Op. cit. 396–400.

<sup>9</sup> HERMÁN, M. János (2018): *Erőtlenség által (2Kor 12,9a). Hitvallók és mártírok. Száműzöttek, menekültek, befogadók, maradók* (Dokumentumok és dolgozatok a XX. századi magyar reformátusok egyházi életéből). The publication of the book was supported by the István Juhász Foundation

Let us look back at the interwar period for a few brief moments:

During World War I, the daughters of the neo-Calvinist Abraham Kuyper came to Hungary and helped the Dutch Mission, which is how they came into contact with the Reformed pastor and theology teacher Jenő Sebestyén. Sebestyén visited the Netherlands several times, gave lectures, and the idea of neo-Calvinism reached Hungary through him.<sup>10</sup> Sebestyén's influence also led to greater interest towards Hungary in the Netherlands. Jenő Sebestyén worked to help Hungarian theology students to study in the Netherlands, by offering them the opportunity to study at the Free University of Amsterdam (Vrije Universiteit) and the Theological School at Kampen, which were connected to Kuyper and the strict Dutch Reformed Church (Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland). Given the economic situation, this was not affordable for Hungarian students, so Sebestyén strived to create a "gereformeerde study fund". It should be mentioned that Stipendium Bernardinum to the University of Utrecht, which had existed since 1761, allowed a limited number of Hungarian students to study in the Netherlands, but Sebestyén did not consider the education in Utrecht to be theologically acceptable, in line with Kuyper's views. The "gereformeerde fund" was established and operated in parallel with the Stipendium Bernardinum fund. The first student was Sándor Csekey followed by Gyula Antal.<sup>11</sup> The Hungarian students in the Netherlands were encouraged to reform the church.<sup>12</sup> The aim

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in the Netherlands and the Reformed Church District of Királyhágómellék. Oradea/Nagyvárad. <https://hermanmjanos.files.wordpress.com/2018/08/erocc8btlensecc81g-acc811tal-pdf-hj-2018-a4indb.pdf> (accessed on: 13.11.2023).

<sup>10</sup> LÁNYI, Gábor (2021): Sebestyén Jenő (1884–1950) és a történelmi kálvinizmus. In: Petrás, Éva (ed.): *A 20. századi magyar protestáns közéletiség arcképcsarnoka*. Budapest, Barankovics István Alapítvány – Gondolat. 17. See also: LÁNYI, Gábor (2018): Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) és a neokálvinizmus. In: Literáty, Zoltán (ed.): *Quoniam tecum est fons vitae in lumine tuo videbimus lumen. Teológiai témák a 65 éves Kocsev Miklós tiszteletére*. Budapest, L'Harmattan – Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem. 217–230.

<sup>11</sup> AALDERS 2023, 396–400, 251–256.

<sup>12</sup> Here I would like to draw the attention to the fact that the Reformed Pastor Lajos Jakos, who also studied in the Netherlands, published his monograph on the Gereformeerde Kerk in 1942. This work was Lajos Jakos's doctoral thesis, which he defended in Debrecen. Lajos Jakos's

was to be able to host six Hungarian students a year. The first report on Hungarian students was drafted in 1927.<sup>13</sup>

This is how Dezső Szabó got to the Netherlands. Dezső Szabó was born in 1905 and died in 1978. During his years as a theologian, he studied in Kampen in 1926/27 and 1927/28 (junior and senior years), simultaneously studying in Germany while obtaining a degree in theology in Pápa and also studying philosophy (axiology) at the University of Budapest. Dezső Szabó served in Káloz starting from 22 December 1935.<sup>14</sup>

## 2. The Church Policy and Legal Environment of the 1960s

In the autumn of 1967, at the third session of the 7<sup>th</sup> Synod of the Reformed Church in Hungary (RCH) held in Budapest, started on 1 April 1964, six draft laws were presented, marking the completion of the ecclesiastical legislative procedures that had begun in 1959. At that time, the synod was deliberating in the spirit of the Reformation, and at the same time its main task was the “exercise of *jus reformandi*”. In his opening speech, Bishop Tibor Bartha summarized the draft laws by saying that up until that point in the history of the Church “no other legislation has considered the perspectives of the serving Church of the serving Christ to that degree”. According to the President, the draft clearly “progresses” the Church “from the status of a dominant national church to the status of a serving church”.<sup>15</sup>

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book gives a detailed account of the history and structure of the Kerk. See JAKOS, Lajos (1942): *A holland szigorú református egyház gyülekezeti élete és missziói munkája*. Budapest.

<sup>13</sup> AALDERS 2023, 396–400, 324–326.

<sup>14</sup> KRÁNITZ, Zsolt (ed.) (2013): „A késő idők emlékezetében éljenek...” A Dunántúli Református Egyházkerület lelkészi önéletrajzai, 1943 – *A Pápai Református Gyűjtemények Kiadványai, Forrásközlések 13. Jubileumi kötetek 2.* (Pápa). Mezőföldi Egyházmegye. A Pápai Református Gyűjtemények Kiadványai, Forrásközlések 1–13.

[https://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/PRGYK\\_Fk\\_13\\_Jub\\_02/?query=k%C3%A1l%C3%B3z%20szab%C3%B3%20dezs%C5%91&pg=399&layout=s](https://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/PRGYK_Fk_13_Jub_02/?query=k%C3%A1l%C3%B3z%20szab%C3%B3%20dezs%C5%91&pg=399&layout=s) (accessed on: 08.02.2024).

<sup>15</sup> KÖBEL, Szilvia (2019): A „szolgáló egyház” törvénykönyve. Az államszocializmus hatása a református egyházalkotmányra és a református egyházi törvényekre. In: *Glossa Iuridica*. 3–4. 165–185.

The date of a major change in the internal rules of the RCH in the 1960s is linked to several anniversaries. On the one hand, in the introduction to the Reformed Church Code, we read that it was adopted in 1967, on the occasion of the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first constituting synod in Debrecen, by the 7<sup>th</sup> Synod held in Budapest, and the same year marked the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation. On the other hand, 1968 marked the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the agreement between the Hungarian state and the RCH, and the year in which the state subsidies to the church under the original agreement were due to expire. On the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the constituting Synod held in Debrecen, in the summer of 1967, in a sermon titled *Örökségünk és feladatunk: a reformáció* [Our Heritage and Task: The Reformation], the Synod recalled the dilemmas of the post-World War II search for a path forward, which preceded the signing of the 1948 Convention. Firstly, they recalled that the Church offered its “willingness to serve the new Hungarian state and society by its own means” and secondly – and this is the less frequently quoted idiom – that the Church rejected the “temptation, to become an illegal political party”, and distanced itself “from the real danger that political attempts might infiltrate the Church under the guise of a Samaritan service – itself an inevitability of great societal change.”<sup>16</sup>

Despite the basic creed of the Calvinist branch of the Reformation being the same in Reformed (Presbyterian) churches worldwide, there are some more or less significant differences in church order, internal legal order, and relationship to the state. Hungary is unique in terms of the episcopal system because in other countries the presbyteral polity – notably without bishops – is predominant. In addition to the common Calvinist foundations, certain ecclesiological structures and theological trends developed differently in the two countries, and these differences became more pronounced (particular) during the decades of the Cold War. In this respect, the relations of the Reformed Church(es) in the Netherlands with Hungary and the relations of Hungarian Reformed pastors with the Netherlands were closely monitored by the state security, which was not by chance since the Dutch Reformed influence – advocating for and practising greater congregational autonomy in contrast to the Hungarian Reformed Church based on the episcopal system – was not welcome in the eyes of the single-party state. Furthermore, the Dutch also monitored human rights in Hungary during the decades of the Cold War, which exposed the propaganda of the single-party state to the West.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> KÖBEL 2020, 69–98.

It was also relevant for state security that there was a difference between the Hungarian and the Dutch Reformed Church not only in the issue of the episcopal system and congregational autonomy but also that of the organizational-constitutional unity of the church and its uniform ecclesiastical status. Operating within the framework of several separate organizations, the Dutch Reformed churches also had different interpretations of their relationship to the state. The Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (known as the strict Dutch Reformed Church), representing the neo-Calvinist movement associated with Kuyper, professed complete independence from the state and was therefore considered more dangerous by the political police.<sup>18</sup>

In 1966, the State Office for Church Affairs (hereinafter: ÁEH) prepared a note for the Ministry of the Interior on Dutch–Hungarian Reformed relations because the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Second Helvetic Confession was due in 1967. This memo is an important source for us because it contains a summary written from the perspective of the ÁEH, according to which “Dutch–Hungarian church relations from 1945 to 1956 were mostly maintained by Laszlo Pap.”<sup>19</sup>

From the 1960s, however, the “dangerous character” of Dutch–Hungarian Reformed relations gradually diminished in the eyes of state security. The reason for this was, on the one hand, that the old scholarship holders were slowly “aging out” and, on the other hand, the two Reformed churches in the Netherlands were also getting closer. In his monograph on the gereformeerde church, Maarten J. Aalders describes how the “modern theology” emerged in the gereformeerde church in the 1950s.<sup>20</sup> In the autumn of 1966 (13–21 November) a five-member delegation of the RCH paid an official visit to

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> MNL OL XIX-A-21-d-0029-5/c/1966. Memo of the State Office for Church Affairs on Dutch–Hungarian Reformed relations for the Ministry of the Interior on the preparations for the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformed jubilee celebration of the Second Helvetic Confession in 1967. 22 September 1966. Qtd in KÖBEL 2020, 69–98.

<sup>20</sup> AALDERS, Maarten J. (2015): *Gereformeerden onder elkaar. Elf opstellen en een preek*. Uitgeverij De Vuurbaak bv, Barneveld. 273. The author writes about the process in the last chapter of the volume: *Gereformeerden, waarheen?* [The Reformed, Whereto?] (239–246). Qted in KÖBEL 2020, 69–98.

the Netherlands. The informant “Lajos Tolnai”, a Reformed pastor, Head of the Foreign Affairs Department and later bishop of the Reformed Church, prepared a detailed report on the visit for the State Security Services. The report states that the invitation was sent by the synod of the Hervormde Kerk,<sup>21</sup> but “it was later joined by the presidency of the synod of the so-called strict Reformed Church (Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland)”.<sup>22</sup>

### 3. The Revival/Revitalization of Dutch-Hungarian Congregational Relations in the 1960s – Especially under the Surveillance of the State Security Services

Dezső Szabó (“Uncle Dezső”) served in Káloz from 22 December 1935 and was the pastor of the Káloz congregation for 39 years – until 1974. According to the website of the Káloz Reformed Congregation, on the afternoon of 26 June 2005, Szabó was remembered in a thanksgiving service on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth. Dezső Szabó built up the “unofficial” contacts of the RCH with the Netherlands from the 1960s onwards), and there is a memorial plaque in the congregation.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk / Dutch Reformed Church, the oldest Reformed church in the Netherlands, including the majority of the Dutch, formerly the state church. Both hervormd and gereformeerd mean ‘Reformed’. See KOCSEV, Miklós (2002): *Impulzusok a holland református (Gereformeerde/Hervormde) gyakorlati teológiából az ezredforduló körül. (Különös tekintettel hazai református egyházi életünkre)*. Doctoral thesis. <https://dea.lib.unideb.hu/dea/bitstream/handle/2437/127724/Dolgozat-Kocsev.pdf> (accessed on: 09.02.2024); RASKER, Albert J. (1986): *De Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk vanaf 1795*. Haar geschiedenis en theologie in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw. Kampen.

<sup>22</sup> ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-29600/5. Digital page 56. Working file of the informant codenamed “Lajos Tolnai”, vol. 5. The informant’s report dated 25 November 1966. Qtd. in KÖBEL 2020, 69–98. Box 6 fund in the Historical Archives of the State Security Services (ÁBTL) reads that the real name of the informant codenamed “Lajos Tolnai (Aldebröi)” was Károly Tóth (1931–2014). See ÁBTL 2.2.2. Network records.

<sup>23</sup> <https://honlap.parokia.hu/lap/kalozi-reformatus-egyhazi-kozseg/cikk/mutat/emlektabl-szabo-dezso-lelkipasztorrol/> (accessed on: 22.05.2023).



Let us see what we can learn from the state security's documents about how Szabó built up his “unofficial” contacts with the Netherlands, even before the official church contacts described in the previous point had taken place:

We can find related documents in the reports of an informant with the alias János Varga. The informant was a Reformed pastor, Dean of the Church County of Mezőföldre.<sup>24</sup> (I would like to mention here that the informant also reported about Gyula Antal, a Reformed pastor, who was also a scholarship holder in the Netherlands before World War II.)<sup>25</sup> One of the documents that stands out is the report of Dezső Szabó's visit to the Netherlands in the autumn of 1964. According to the memo, the informant shorthand-recorded the “account” given by Szabó to the pastors of the church county. The liaison officer instructed the informant to “prepare a report of Dezső Szabó's text” for the “next time”.<sup>26</sup> Below I would like to present an excerpt from this document as a source.

Dezső Szabó's account about his trip to the Netherlands (given by the informant “János Varga” on 23 October 1964, at 18:00):

Departure: I have often thought over the past year how nice it would be if I could go to the Netherlands one more time. At those times, it was unimaginable. I could only pray that God would help me in some way. The help came in very small ways. In December 1961, I received a Dutch youth magazine,<sup>27</sup> and I read in it the account of a booklet written by Dr Impeta,<sup>28</sup> and it contained the map of the ecclesiastic Netherlands. I knew this

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<sup>24</sup> Among the network records (so-called series of cards marked with number 6) in the Historical Archives of the State Security Services (ÁBTL) reads that the real name of informant “János Varga” was Sándor Szabó. See ÁBTL 2.2.2. Network records.

<sup>25</sup> ÁBTL – 3.1.2. – M – 30092. pl. 10, digital page numbers: 16–22.

<sup>26</sup> ÁBTL – 3.1.2. – M – 30092, digital page number 59. Report of the informant codenamed “János Varga” dated 21 September 1964.

<sup>27</sup> I think it was brave of Dezső Szabó to write this down in 1964, as working with the youth was still very risky at that time.

<sup>28</sup> *Dunántúli Protestáns Lap* wrote about the Dr Impeta mentioned in the archival material in the Miscellanea column in 1928, from which we learn that Károly Dobos also knew Impeta as the friend of the Hungarians: “The secretary of the Reformed branch of the KIE (the Hungarian version of the YMCA), Károly Dobos, visited the Netherlands from 17 December to 23 January, where he studied the organization and life of the youth associations [Jongelings (Meisjes) Vereniging op Gereformeerde Grondslag] of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands.

Dr Impeta well because he was a pastor in Kampen where I studied. I wrote him a letter. It was not easy because I had been in the Netherlands 34 years ago, and I had not written a letter in Dutch since then; I could read, but I did not write. I was sweating over it for a week, and I kept re-reading what I had written and finally sent it. I wrote to tell him that I had read about his published book, and I would very much like to receive it, if he could send it to me. Well, brother Impeta replied right away, “Dear Friend, it is a great pleasure for me to find that this book has brought us together once again. Of course, I would send it to you, and I’ll call on other colleagues to send you books.” He wrote to me that he had published my letter written in proper Dutch in a Dutch newspaper, and he invited other colleagues to send him books, as he who could write in Dutch like that, is most certainly fond of reading. This started a book avalanche onto me. The postman couldn’t even deliver all at once, so I had to go and get them. Of course, I got letters. One of the letter writers, whose name was Kadero and who lived in Breda, sent my thank-you letter to Dr Impeta, a good childhood friend of his, and asked him to invite me over on a summer holiday. Dr Impeta immediately wrote to me asking me if I had accepted. At that time, there was no such thing, you could only go abroad to visit relatives. But I said that if it was possible, I would do it. It was 1962, and I wrote to him that I could only go in 1963. That’s what we agreed on. But as much as I was happy about it, I was also frightened because I was told that I might have to preach there. So, I started to re-learn Dutch. I asked Dr Impeta for books, grammar, newspapers, and I started to learn from them. But I didn’t just

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His lectures, in which, besides depicting our sad state of affairs, he expressed the hope for the development of a new Calvinistic life, held the attention of the audience to a great extent. He visited 12 places, and he was everywhere received with the greatest affection, not without thoughtful and pleasant surprises. In Rotterdam, the Hungarian flag was laid on the table at which he spoke. In Amersfoort, at the youth meeting, he was welcomed with the Hungarian national anthem. Both the ecclesiastical and the political papers promoted it everywhere, and neither moral nor financial success was lost. The largest audience gathered in Kampen, thanks in particular to the time-consuming and laborious intercession of Dr C. N. Impeta, pastor in Kampen, special friend of the Hungarians. From this terminus of his study tour, Professor Dr T. Hoekstra submitted the following three points to his attention: 1. Keep your youth work inside and under the protection of the Church. 2. Hold on to the genuine Reformed doctrine (Gereformeerde leer). 3. Take great care to live a true, clean, and healthy life by the Scriptures. The relationship that existed between the Hungarian and Dutch churches became even closer by Dobos’s trip.” [no author] (1928): *Dunántúli Protestáns Lap*. 39, 1. 53. 1928-02-05/6. [https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/DunantuliProtestansLap\\_1928/?pg=27&layout=s&query=impeta](https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/DunantuliProtestansLap_1928/?pg=27&layout=s&query=impeta) (accessed on: 25.10.2023).

have to learn the language, as I was aware that there would be other things they would want to know. So, I started to learn Jewish [sic., Hebrew – Sz. K.] again so that I could at least read because it would be mostly embarrassing if they found out that a Hungarian priest couldn't read Jewish. Because even the maids know theology there. I also reviewed the 5-year plan. But I didn't get my passport in time for 1963, only in the autumn, so I postponed my trip until 1964. I used the time to study. I left on 25 May and arrived on the 29<sup>th</sup>. I was very curious to see the old Netherlands, which had been so kind to me back then. But I was also curious to see how it had developed. Has it lost its colonies, how much poorer had it become? Do the Dutch grieve it? There was also a great deal of shock in the church after the two world wars.

*Religious relations:* What you need to know about the Netherlands is that religious circumstances over there are different from ours. There are heaps of churches. When I arrived 36 years ago, I was asked what my religion was. I answered with confidence that I was Reformed. But what kind of Reformed? – they asked. Namely, there are two major Reformed churches over there: the Hervormde Kerk and the Gereformeerde Kerk. The former being the original one, which has developed since the Reformation, and from which a large group broke away at the start of the last century, in 1834, because they were not satisfied with the purity of the doctrine. [...] And around the middle of that century yet another group emerged, the Abraham Kuyper group, around 1860.<sup>29</sup> They professed to be a suffering church, suffering for justice. The two groups merged in 1892, and from that came the Gereformeerde Kerk, or strict Reformed Church, as we refer to it in Hungarian. We call the other one the state church. [...]

*Growth of the population:* The Dutch people are very fertile. Even today, a normal family has at least 4 children [...] Recently, there have been talks about modelling families, birth control. There have even been great debates about it, but every church develops its understanding on theological-ethical grounds. [...]

*Living standards:* The living standards of priests are worthy of mention. They are doing well. [...]

*Church attendance:* In a congregation of 800 souls, an average of 5-600 attend Sunday morning worship. But even in the afternoon and evening 4-500 remain. You hear a lot lately that even people in the West don't go to church either. In many places, this is true – for

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<sup>29</sup> The year is wrongly given here; according to sources, the correct year is 1886. See JAKOS 1942, 33; LÁNYI 2018, 223.

example, in West Germany, but in America and the Netherlands people do attend church. And they not only go to church, but they also donate.

[...]

*On agriculture:* [...] This region is famous for being covered by the sea at the time I studied there. [...] In 1952, they started pumping and prepared the soil for farming. [...] It's all built by design, planned almost to the millimetre. [...]

[...]

*Ministry:* [...] It is not the deacon and the bishop who supervise the pastors there but the presbytery – that is the biggest warden. [...]

[...]

The Dutch are so frightened by the situation in Hungary that they dare not come outright for fear of not being allowed back. It was easy for me because I didn't have to lie when I told them that things were much better here today and invited them to come and see it for themselves.<sup>30</sup>

In the cited document, Dezső Szabó also reports on donations within the church, pensions, the financial situation of the Roman Catholic Church, the ecumenical situation, Dutch agricultural cooperatives, the new generation of pastors, Dutch–Hungarian relations, the church organization, and the order of services.<sup>31</sup>

At the end of the report, the document contains a note that the political police has ordered that a copy of the report “be given to the counter-intelligence line officer for further use”.<sup>32</sup>

Following this report, the informant continued to monitor and report on Dezső Szabó and other pastors who had contacts in the Netherlands (for example, on Sándor Pais).<sup>33</sup> Later, the informant (dean) also became proactive (he himself was born in Upper

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<sup>30</sup> ÁBTL – 3.1.2. – M – 30092, digital pages: 61–66. “Report of the informant codenamed ‘János Varga’ dated 23 October 1964.” [Translated by Augusta Szász]

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> ÁBTL – 3.1.2. – M – 30092, digital page 67.

<sup>33</sup> ÁBTL – 3.1.2. – M – 30092. pl. 33–34, digital page 85.

Austria and was in regular correspondence with relatives in Austria, even reporting about himself) after he had seen that the revitalized, grassroots Dutch relations were becoming more and more lively, and invited over the financial officer of the strict Dutch Reformed Church, Mr Larnus, in 1965. At the end of the report, which was marked “Dezső Szabó”, the liaison officer noted, “the report has operational value. It describes the pastors of the Mezőföld church county who have some kind of foreign connection. He also has appropriate intelligence capabilities towards these persons, which will be used later. [...]”<sup>34</sup> And in 1966, the same informant (the dean) wanted to get a car from the strict Dutch Reformed Church and asked permission from Bishop Lajos Bakos. “It is appropriate to use the relationship with the Dutch for such a purpose” – this was told to the informant by his bishop after arguing that the Dean of the Vas-Zala Reformed Church County of had received a promise from the other Dutch Reformed church that the motor bikes he had asked for were to be sent.<sup>35</sup>

## Summary

Dezső Szabó’s revival of his Dutch contacts gives us an episodic glimpse into the everyday life of the 1960s under the Kádár regime. The following interview with Pastor Zita Tóthné-Szakács published in 2022 is a good example of Dezső Szabó’s character:

By the way, thanks to Reverend Dezső Szabó, I don’t script my sermons anymore, rather, I prepare a draft and preach ad libitum, because he took my sermon from me and then told me to write a draft and bring that to the pulpit, because it was inauthentic to preach by reading out your sermon or simply reciting it. And although I saw my father’s generation preach by reciting their sermons word for word, I had to learn how to preach from a draft while at the side of uncle Dezső Szabó. [...] Sándor Juhász, the Dean-of Alsónémedi, wanted

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<sup>34</sup> ÁBTL – 3.1.2. – M – 30092, digital page 85. “Report of the informant codenamed ‘János Varga’ dated 19 March 1965.”

<sup>35</sup> ÁBTL – 3.1.2. – M – 30092, digital page 124. “Report of the informant codenamed ‘János Varga’ dated 6 April 1966.”

me to join him, but Sándor Szabó, the Dean of Mezőföld, said “no, the girl is ours” – and so I ended up in Káloz-Csósz, where the already mentioned pastor of Káloz, Dezső Szabó was a fantastic soul. He had contacts from his time studying in the Netherlands, with whom he corresponded extensively,<sup>36</sup> and he asked for help for the pastor families in Transdanubia that he kept records of, according to their needs, such as winter coats, theological literature, children’s clothes, medicine, but he would never ask for anything for himself. I heard him say that it is merely our job to take care of those whom God entrusts upon us because God also assigns those who take care of us. That mentality was instilled in me. The pastors in Transdanubia were very cohesive, with functioning small societies even though the state disliked it at the time.<sup>37</sup>

For the three questions raised in the introduction, we received answers – although not extensively. It can be concluded that the Dutch experience was part of Dezső Szabó’s identity. The environment of the church’s laws and politics in the 60s particularly defined and allowed for the revival of the Dutch relationship and Dezső Szabó’s ministry in the Netherlands. And the archival documents from the State Security Archives<sup>38</sup> that have been found so far show the duality of the period and the risks and challenges of pastoral ministry. The direction of the research and the processing of additional documents from archives and family collections will provide insight into the search for a way forward in the shadow of official church relations, which have had an impact on the Reformed identity of the families involved and the Dutch and Hungarian congregations to this very day.

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<sup>36</sup> The letters and photos are in the family’s possession according to the kind account of Dezső Szabó’s son, Dezső Szabó Jr, his wife, Erzsébet, and son-in-law, Imre Pétervári.

<sup>37</sup> KUTASINÉ MOLNÁR, Boglárka: *Az egyház az közösség, Krisztus teste, tehát több, mint ami látszik*. Interview with Pastor Zita Tóthné-Szakács conducted on 28 January 2022. <https://megvanirva.hu/az-egyhazi-az-kozosseg-krisztus-teste-tehat-tobb-mint-ami-latszik/> (accessed on: 13.11.2023).

<sup>38</sup> The Historical Archives of the State Security Services (ÁBTL). <https://abtl.hu/english/>.

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Péter NAGY:<sup>1</sup> 

## The Path of the Reformed Church in Elizabeth<sup>2</sup>

### *Abstract.*

The Hungarian Reformed Church in Elizabeth, New Jersey operated for about sixty years. The congregation was established by Hungarian immigrants to the United States of America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. On 21 May 1914, the church became member of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. The close-knit community had an active religious and social life and became an important meeting place for local Hungarians. The congregation, which had become financially independent, organized a number of charity events to finance their own expenses, missionary goals, and fundraising activities. It was also important for the congregation to cultivate its Hungarian roots. In the 1970s, it had to cease independent operation partly due to the assimilation of the second and third generations and partly because of urban planning due to the change in the social composition of the town. Rev. Bertalan Szathmáry, a pastor who had previously served in the Elizabeth congregation for several years, gathered the leaderless Newark congregants and founded a new congregation in Union.

**Keywords:** Hungarian Reformed Church, Elizabeth (New Jersey, USA), Presbyterian Church

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<sup>2</sup> The study was carried out within the framework of the *Challenges and Wayfinding in the History of the Hungarian Reformed Church in the 20th Century* research project (No. 66001R800) of the Church History Research Institute of the Faculty of Theology at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary.



## 1. Introduction

Around the Turn of the Century, masses of people migrated from southern and eastern Europe to the United States.<sup>3</sup> Between 1861 and 1913, almost four million immigrants from different parts of the Austro–Hungarian Empire were registered by the US authorities.<sup>4</sup>

In the East Coast states of the United States of America, the Hungarian-speaking population increased significantly. In the state of New Jersey, by 1920, the Hungarian-speaking population exceeded 1,000 in four of the towns with populations between 25,000 and 100,000 inhabitants: 5,278 Hungarians lived in New Brunswick, 4,399 in Perth Amboy, 4,164 in Passaic, while Elizabeth had a Hungarian community of 1,982.<sup>5</sup>

The Hungarian population, which had grown in a relatively short time, felt the need to practice its religion according to their own denomination, and the development of church organization began in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup>

In 1904, a new church county was established under the name of Hungarian Reformed Church in America, directly under the authority of the Danubian Reformed Church District of the Reformed Church in Hungary (RCH). Despite its successes, the

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<sup>3</sup> BALOGH, Balázs (2015): Vázlat a magyarországi migrációs folyamatokról (Áttekintés a migránshullámmot megelőző száz esztendőről). In: Turai, Tünde (ed.): *Hármas határok néprajzi értelmezésben: An Ethnographic Interpretation of Tri-Border Areas*. Budapest, MTA BTK Néprajztudományi Intézet. 26; PUSKÁS, Julianna (1991): Migráció Kelet-Közép-Európában a 19. és 20. században. In: *Regio – Kisebbségtudományi Szemle*. 2, 4. 23–26.

<sup>4</sup> PUSKÁS 1991. 23–26.

<sup>5</sup> PUSKÁS, Julianna (1982): *Kivándorló magyarok az Egyesült Államokban 1880–1940*. Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó. 497.

<sup>6</sup> KOMJÁTHY Aladár (1984): *A kitántorgott egyház*. Budapest, A Református Zsinati Iroda Sajtóosztálya. 7–38. Several studies have dealt with the pace of immigration, the public response to it and its impact. See: PUSKÁS, Julianna (1982): *Kivándorló magyarok az Egyesült Államokban 1880–1940*. Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó 313–315; FRANK, Tibor (2012): *Kettős kivándorlás*. Budapest – Berlin – New York (1919–1945). Budapest, Gondolat. 145–145; VÁRDY, Béla – VÁRDY HUSZÁR, Ágnes (2005): *Újvilági küzdelmek. Az amerikai magyarság élete és az óhaza*. Budapest, Mundus Magyar Egyetemi Kiadó. 180–194.

Hungarian church was unable to gather all the Hungarian Reformed communities in the US under its jurisdiction. Mainly those congregations that were further along in the integration process distanced themselves from this church. Some of the pastors serving in the US also did not support the initiative for livelihood reasons, especially those who were not trained in Hungary and feared for their jobs under the authority of the church in Hungary. A significant number of these pastors served under the authority of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) or other Protestant churches in the US.<sup>7</sup> This resulted in several Protestant communities operating independently, which did not favour the cohabitation of the Reformed Hungarians. Another factor was that the different denominations competed with each other, which in many cases led to church splits and the organization of so-called “counter-churches”.<sup>8</sup>

This study focuses on the congregation in Elizabeth that operated within the PCUSA, which was dominant in New Jersey in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1920, there were six congregations (Alpha, Elizabeth-Bayonne, Caldwell, Wharton, New Brunswick, Middletown) operating within the framework of this denomination in the state of New Jersey;<sup>9</sup> however, by 1941 this number had increased (Alpha, Bayonne-Jersey City, Caldwell, Elizabeth, Franklin, New Brunswick, Newark, Wharton). This also means that almost all the largest settlements in New Jersey inhabited by Hungarians had a Presbyterian congregation.

Based on the minutes and archives of the Reformed congregation in Elizabeth preserved in the archives of the American Hungarian Foundation<sup>10</sup>, this paper attempts to outline the main crossroads in the history of the community, its legal and social challenges, as well as the responses to them.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> PUSKÁS 1982, 265–268.

<sup>8</sup> Op. cit. 279.

<sup>9</sup> Op. cit. 544. The number continued to increase by 1941. Op. cit. 549.

<sup>10</sup> 300 Somerset St, New Brunswick, NJ 08901, United States.

<sup>11</sup> BALOGH, Balázs (2017): A magyar bevándorlók néprajzi kutatása amerikai archívumokban. In: Jakab, Albert Zsolt – Vajda, András (eds.) *Örökség, archívum és reprezentáció*. Kolozsvár, Kriza János Néprajzi Társaság. 29–40.

## 2. Challenges and Strategies of the Elizabeth Reformed Church

### *2.1. The Birth of the Congregation*

Several attempts were made to organize a Hungarian Reformed congregation in Elizabeth. In 1908, István Csépké, a minister in Woodbridge, held services for the local Hungarian-speaking Reformed population, but the initiative was not successful. In the spring of 1911, Rev. Lajos Nánássy of Perth Amboy began to organize the church, but as he was unable to serve two congregations at the same time, he interrupted his ministry in Elizabeth after five months. For the next two years, no church planting attempt is known.

Finally, Mihály Tóth, a student of theology in Bloomfield, organized the Reformed Hungarians in Elizabeth into a congregation. The first service took place on 28 September 1913 being attended by 32 people (24 men and 8 women). At the following meeting, the congregation was officially founded. In December, the congregation, which had grown to 65 members, petitioned the PCUSA district for admission. By February 1914, the congregation of 153 members had found support not only among the Hungarians but also among the American population.<sup>12</sup>

The church district admitted the congregation to the Presbytery of Elizabeth in a solemn service on 21 May 1914, and the church became a member of the PCUSA.

At the same time, they had to solve the problem that the newly formed congregation did not have its own building for religious and community events. Initially, services were held in the school premises of the German Presbyterian Church, and no rent was charged. When this was discovered, the German congregation dismissed both the German pastor and the Hungarian congregation, and eventually they gave the congregation a smaller building that was meant for educational purposes. The Goodwill Chapel at the corner of New Point Road and Magnolia Avenue was purchased in 1914. Soon after, Sunday school classes began, and the Women's Association was established.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> UJLAKY, János (1914): Magyar Református Egyházak Amerikában. In: *Amerikai Magyar Reformátusok Lapja*. 1914/6. 12; BOGÁR, Károly (1963): *Az Elizabethi Magyar Egyesült Református Egyház Emlék Albuma az 50 éves évforduló alkalmából*. Elizabeth, N. J. 5–7.

<sup>13</sup> UJLAKY 1914, 12.

The most important task of the first decade was to strengthen the community, which proved to be a burdensome task due to the above-mentioned denominational diversity, the restrictions on the pace of immigration imposed by the US legislature, and the financial situation of immigrants. The first real crisis arose in 1917, when Rev. Mihály Tóth resigned in October, and in the time that followed there was even rumour about selling the church building, sealing the fate of the congregation. This idea was eventually dropped a year later, in 1920, and the congregation began to grow slowly.

### ***2.2. Contributions to the Identity of the Reformed Church in Elizabeth***

According to Julianna Puskás, ethnic traditions were first and most quickly set aside by the church communities within the Presbyterian Church. The Presbyterian Church pushed assimilation more vigorously than any other church. From the outset, it was against employing Hungarian-trained ministers, and in its own seminaries, even in quick courses, it sought to train its “missionaries to a mindset in which they could be direct helpers in the faster assimilation. The level of qualification of the ‘Hungarian Reformed pastors’ working in the service was generally below that of the other groups, leading to much criticism and controversy.”<sup>14</sup>

Aladár Komjáthy considered the strong assimilationist tendencies less a specific feature of the Presbyterian Church rather than a general social and church policy approach. According to Komjáthy, by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it had become an important element of church policy that immigrants “must be evangelized” because failure to do so would lead to the ruin of America. “The Americanization = evangelization formula was then a common doctrine in all American Protestant denominations.”<sup>15</sup>

Sunday school started in Elizabeth on 19 April 1914, and a year later 68 children were attending.<sup>16</sup> In addition, a daily Hungarian school was organized for July and August. “59 children studied Hungarian reading and writing as well as the history and

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<sup>14</sup> PUSKÁS 1982, 269; KOMJÁTHY 1984, 247–250; PINTZ, Katalin (2017): Puskás Julianna hagyatéka – Hívás és identitástudat az amerikai magyar közösségek szolgálatában. In: Puskás, Julianna – Kovács, Ábrahám: *Amerikai magyar református lelkészek életútja adattári rendszerben 1891–2000*. Debrecen, Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó. 293. *Regio*. 27 (2019/3), 318.

<sup>15</sup> KOMJÁTHY 1984, 56.

<sup>16</sup> BOGÁR 1963, 9.

geography of Hungary at our school. We began the rescue work in the souls of 59 children who were about to lose their Hungarian nationality, instilling in them the love of the Hungarian race and nationality, so that instead of despising it, they would be proud of the people to which their dear parents belonged.” 50 children passed their exam on 30 August.<sup>17</sup> Over time, the number of children attending Sunday school increased to 40-50, and the total enrolment rose to 82, but “due to traditional Hungarian carelessness, only about half of this number was actually doing their schooling properly”.<sup>18</sup>

From the late 1920s on, second-generation children born in the USA loosened their ties with their Hungarian roots and identity, attending their parents’ institutions, clubs, and churches less and less. One of the disputes between the generations was the change in the language used for church services, as from the second half of the 1930s the emphasis shifted from forcing to maintain Hungarian language to a focus on knowledge of Hungarian culture. It became increasingly accepted that the mother tongue was English.<sup>19</sup>

However, the new regulations drawn up and adopted by the Church in Elizabeth in 1947, to counteract this process, stipulated that the official language of the Church was Hungarian and that English was to be reserved for use only in dealing with the various ecclesiastical and secular authorities, and it was to be used only to the extent necessary and only as a substitute.<sup>20</sup>

The idea of the service in English first arose in 1949, according to the preserved minutes. Then one of the church elders, István Erdődy, proposed to have services held on the last Sunday of every month.<sup>21</sup> Almost at the same time, the language skills of the new generation became a problem. According to the minutes, a member of the congregation

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<sup>17</sup> Op. cit. 11.

<sup>18</sup> Op. cit. 13.

<sup>19</sup> PUSKÁS, Julianna – KOVÁCS, Ábrahám (2017): A magyarországi bevándorlók sajátos társadalmi helyzete és a letelepedés kérdései. In: Puskás, Julianna – Kovács, Ábrahám: *Amerikai magyar református lelkészek életútja adattári rendszerben 1891–2000*. Debrecen, Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó. 20–21.

<sup>20</sup> Archives of the American Hungarian Foundation, III. 5. Presbyterian. Elizabeth NJ Hungarian Presbyterian Church. *The Book of Protocols of the Elizabeth NJ Hungarian Presbyterian Church between 3 April 1932 – 28 January 1951* [hereinafter referred to as: Protocol]. 208.

<sup>21</sup> Op. cit. 256, 278.

said that many Hungarians sent their children to the English church because they no longer spoke Hungarian even though they would have had the opportunity to learn it in the church in Elizabeth. Another member complained that in Hungary, where the practice of religion was restricted, people still attended church regularly, whereas in America, where the practice of religion was free, people did not want to go to church.<sup>22</sup>

With the involvement of the PCUSA, the unity of the Hungarian Reformed Church was broken, and rivalry appeared among the American mission churches.<sup>23</sup>

Members of congregations had little or no understanding of the importance of organizational affiliation. Because of their strong national attachment, it was important to them that church communities maintain the Hungarian church customs and liturgy unaltered. They sought to require it of all pastors of any denomination. To this end, several churches laid down in their rules according to which the pastors were obliged to conduct the service according to the customs in Hungary.<sup>24</sup>

The first tension in the life of the Elizabeth church occurred in the year after its establishment. It is not known exactly what happened, but the following sentence is very meaningful: “It is very unfortunate, but we must mention for posterity that during the past year the follower of the religion of hatred have succeeded in turning some of our church members away, but we trust in Christ and hope that perhaps it won’t last forever.”<sup>25</sup>

In 1952, the 1915 incident was repeated, “the old Turanian curse came upon us again”.<sup>26</sup> Some members of the congregation tried to organize a new church under the authority of the Independent Church<sup>27</sup> nearby.<sup>28</sup>

Further, the attachment to the Presbyterian Church was not a smooth road either. In the recollections of the 1920s, we can see that the Hungarian Reformed community

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<sup>22</sup> Op. cit. 295–296.

<sup>23</sup> PUSKÁS 1982, 260.

<sup>24</sup> Op. cit. 269.

<sup>25</sup> BOGÁR 1963, 13.

<sup>26</sup> Op. cit. 23.

<sup>27</sup> The Independent Hungarian Reformed Church of America was founded on 9 December 1924. The first Constituent Assembly, composed of clergy and lay representatives of the churches of Duquesne, Perth Amboy, McKeesport, Detroit, Donora, and Carteret, proclaimed the formation of the Independent Hungarian Reformed Church in America.

<sup>28</sup> BOGÁR 1963, 23.



in Elizabeth was distancing itself from the mother church, and in 1920 the question arose whether they wanted to remain under the authority of the Presbyterian Church at all. The details of the debate are not known, but the result is clear: the congregation decided to stay.<sup>29</sup>

However, the minutes drafted ten years later suggest that the earlier cultural autonomy had diminished. The Annual General Meeting of the church held on 3 April 1932 decided, “using the rules of the Presbyterian Church, the new church year will begin on the April 1<sup>st</sup> and end on the last day of March”.<sup>30</sup> A very good relationship can be inferred from the record that in 1932 the chief elder and the elder attended the “English Church Assembly” and were highly praised, saying that “the church has not been in such a good situation since it got in the hands of the Hungarians”.<sup>31</sup>

Three years later, it was Rev. Árpád György who announced at the regular monthly meeting of the Elizabeth church on 2 October 1935 that he would change the new order of services to the old way, and this was supported by the attendees.<sup>32</sup> It was still he who suggested a few years later that since the pastor of the Homeland Convention was preaching in Perth Amboy on 30 November 1941, they should reschedule their own service so that they could attend.<sup>33</sup>

### *2.3. The Church Organization from Below*

In 1947, the Elizabeth church drafted a new set of organizational rules, which is helpful in defining the internal organization and the legal layers of the church, as the previous rules are not yet known.<sup>34</sup> “Our church is an integral part of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, and is a constituent part of Elizabeth Presbytery, and is to be governed by its laws, rules and regulations.” The bylaws also detailed church membership. This is significant because such detailed local regulation

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<sup>29</sup> Op. cit. 17.

<sup>30</sup> *Protocol*, 1.

<sup>31</sup> Op. cit. 13.

<sup>32</sup> Op. cit. 59.

<sup>33</sup> Op. cit. 131.

<sup>34</sup> Title in full: Az Elizabethi, N. J. Magyar Presbyteriánus Egyház Szervezeti Szabályzata [Bylaws of the Hungarian Presbyterian Church in Elizabethi, N. J.].

also meant that the Hungarian Reformed Church in Elizabeth had a high autonomy in many respects within the Presbyterian Church. Membership of the church was open to baptized and confirmed individuals aged 16 and above who had signed a declaration of admission, accepted the rules of the church, and led a Christian, blameless, godly life. There was also a minimum donation requirement for members. This was also important because, as I will discuss in detail later, churches basically had to raise the funds for their operations themselves, with members financing renovations, investments, and programmes.

All married couples or earning single men or women had to pay at least one dollar a month, and confirmed members who were not yet employed at least 50 cents a month. Donating was also an important factor in church finances. The call for donations was organized. The bylaws provided that the donations were collected during the monthly or at least quarterly visits by the members. The church bylaws also recognized sponsorship. One could become a sponsor if they were paying at least \$12 a year into the church treasury.<sup>35</sup> Those who had not fulfilled the obligations of membership must have been sponsors.

The main decision-making body was the General Assembly, while the Session was responsible for operational tasks. The Church Council exercised the governing power of the church at the Church Council meetings and the congregation at the annual general assemblies. All ordinary members of the congregation could be full members of the congregational assembly, but each could only exercise his rights in person.

A congregational assembly had to be held at least once a year. A significant restriction of scope was that its agenda could not include anything that had not already been discussed by the Session meeting. Its decisions could be challenged at the Presbytery.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to the pastor, another important position was that of the chief elder elected by the assembly. Other offices included the notary, the treasurer, and the auditor. The chairman of the church council was the elected pastor of the congregation, who was replaced by the elder if he was unable to attend. No meetings could be held in their absence.

The members of the Church Council carried out their daily work in various committees (e.g. the Stewardship Committee, the Education Committee).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Protocol*, 209.

<sup>36</sup> *Op. cit.* 211.

<sup>37</sup> *Op. cit.* 212–213.

The rights and powers of church officials were governed by the relevant parts of the constitution of the general church.<sup>38</sup>

The fate of the Reformed families in Garwood was pending for a long time. In 1935, the pastor of the Elizabeth church began to reorganize the Reformed community,<sup>39</sup> where he held service every second week. Over the years, the church became more solid and grew both financially and member-wise. Therefore, at its meeting held on 29 June 1944, the Church Council decided to propose that the Garwood congregation be formally admitted as a mission congregation of the Elizabeth Church, and this was submitted to the attention of the Presbytery and the Internal Mission Council.<sup>40</sup>

#### ***2.4. Challenges and Quests in the Life of the Church***

When the book of protocols was started, the church was struggling with major problems. It had few members and was in a difficult financial situation.

The size of the congregation cannot be accurately determined, and in the absence of figures and statistics, we can only examine and draw conclusions from scattered data. The rapid growth of the church in the years of its establishment, as mentioned earlier, was often followed by a downturn, the reasons for which are not necessarily to be found within the church. In addition to individual internal or inter-denominational disputes, general social factors such as assimilation, internal migration, and the decline or ethnic change in external migration have also had a significant impact and forced the churches struggling to survive to develop new strategies.

In 1938, it was noted that there was a significant increase, but in the absence of figures, only the minutes of the renewal elections could be used to infer it.<sup>41</sup> And in 1949, a major fundraising campaign was launched, with the number of families in the congregation estimated at around 115.<sup>42</sup> Also, the bylaws adopted two years earlier, especially the numerous committees within the church council, suggest that the backbone of the congregation was made up of several very active families.

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<sup>38</sup> Op. cit. 214.

<sup>39</sup> UJLAKY 1914, 12; BOGÁR 1963, 19.

<sup>40</sup> *Protocol*, 135, 141, 152, 171.

<sup>41</sup> Op. cit. 85, 98.

<sup>42</sup> Op. cit. 276.

The key to the life of the Elizabeth congregation was the various associations and societies, which were essential in keeping the community programmes, the cultural life beyond religious life going, and the financial basis for operation.

In August 1914, the Women's Association was founded, aimed at providing financial and moral support to the Church.<sup>43</sup> The independent operation of the Women's Association could not be consolidated in the first period, and in 1915 a Men's and Women's Social Association was established instead. The first confirmation was held in 1916: 10 children applied, 7 of whom were successfully confirmed. They formed the first Bible class.<sup>44</sup> In the 1920s, several attempts were made to form and maintain different groups. The Women's Association was finally founded in 1927 and played a significant role in the life of the congregation. Membership in the association was not restricted by any denominational rules: "Membership is open to all Hungarian-speaking women, irrespective of religion or age, who agree in principle with the bylaws, and who embrace and abide by them."<sup>45</sup> It has become the church's strongest and most enthusiastic financial supporter. In addition to its strong support for the church, the cultural development of its members was an important part of the rules of the Women's Association, which included an annual trip and several social gatherings every winter.<sup>46</sup>

The various associations supported the church not only in organizational aspects but also financially. On 5 December 1943, at the regular monthly meeting of the church, gratitude was recorded in the minutes to the Women's Association and the Youth Society, which donated \$50 each.<sup>47</sup>

According to a minute, the Women's Association celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1947 had 69 members, most of whom paid monthly fees.<sup>48</sup> Their activities are well described in the following: "On this occasion, our Women's Association had our church

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<sup>43</sup> BOGÁR 1963, 11.

<sup>44</sup> *Op. cit.* 15.

<sup>45</sup> Memorial Album of the Hungarian United Presbyterian Church Women's Association in Elizabeth, N. J. 1920–1962. Elizabeth, N. J. 1962. 1.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Protocol*, 44.

<sup>48</sup> The funeral book of the Hungarian Reformed Women's Association in Elizabeth, N. J. 1–6. Archives of the American Hungarian Foundation, III. 5. Presbyterian. Elizabeth NJ Hungarian Presbyterian Church.

repainted. Our church has rebuilt the pulpit platform, covered the floor with new carpet and made new red velvet tablecloths for the pulpit and the Communion table.”<sup>49</sup> In addition, the Women’s Association introduced death allowances for its members and set them to an amount in dollars equal to the number of members.

At the same festive preparation, the activities of another society were also recorded. The Society of Newlyweds had the classroom as well as the ground-floor room painted, and on other occasions donated individual communion glasses. The Youth Society also did its share of the work, doing the exterior “sprucing up” at its own expense and repainting the iron fence around the church.<sup>50</sup> In the late 1940s, the congregation even established a choir.

The congregation had a lively social life. Even the first Christmas celebration in 1913 was memorable, as the congregation was joined by American supporters and most of the Hungarian societies in Elizabeth were represented, led by the First Hungarian Glee Club.<sup>51</sup>

Each community organized programmes for themselves and the congregation as a whole. Young people attended youth conferences,<sup>52</sup> organized plays,<sup>53</sup> could attend Sunday and summer schools, but there were also performances where the youth orchestra was able to show off its skills and was on the agenda of the summer camp.<sup>54</sup> In 1931, a member of the congregation even built a stage, which allowed for plays to be held.<sup>55</sup>

Picnics, card parties were a typical and very popular joint pastime,<sup>56</sup> as well as bingo nights in wintertime. There was also a movie night, where they could watch some of the worship services locally recorded or the services of the English Presbyterian congregations.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> BOGÁR 1963, 21.

<sup>50</sup> Op. cit. 21.

<sup>51</sup> Op. cit. 7.

<sup>52</sup> *Protocol*, 94.

<sup>53</sup> Op. cit. 42.

<sup>54</sup> Op. cit. 68.

<sup>55</sup> BOGÁR 1963, 19.

<sup>56</sup> *Protocol*, 65.

<sup>57</sup> Op. cit. 107.

Among their celebrations, we can find the American-rooted Mother's Day,<sup>58</sup> and the Women's Association also organized harvest balls, which go back to Hungarian traditions.<sup>59</sup> Commemorations were also held on Hungarian national holidays, celebrating the founding of the state on 20 August,<sup>60</sup> and they also commemorated the 1848 Revolution and War of Independence on 15 March and 6 October.<sup>61</sup> As time went by, however, the protocol also captured the preparations for the American holidays, and the celebration of Thanksgiving became more and more common in the Hungarian Reformed communities.

They also maintained active relations with neighbouring churches, participating in events at the John Calvin Church in Perth Amboy,<sup>62</sup> the Reformed days in Trenton, the Presbyterian conference in Perth Amboy<sup>63</sup> or the Hungarian Reformed Days,<sup>64</sup> and many other programmes organized by the churches around.

In addition to the programmes, there was also an emphasis on the preservation and improvement of existing properties and the purchase of new property.

On 18 August 1940, the poor state of church property was discussed. In the years that followed, the renovation of the church and the buildings was the most financially and manpower-consuming activity.<sup>65</sup>

In October 1940, representatives of the Elizabeth, Perth Amboy, and Woodbridge churches met with the Clover Leaf Memorial Park Cemetery. The idea was to create a section of the cemetery where Hungarians could be buried.<sup>66</sup> A separate letter written by the pastor to the congregants, which is part of the file, reveals that in 1954 the presbytery of the Elizabeth congregation finally agreed to create a separate section of the cemetery for the burial of the congregation members, separated by a hedge from the rest.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *Op. cit.* 68.

<sup>59</sup> *Op. cit.* 42.

<sup>60</sup> *Op. cit.* 70.

<sup>61</sup> *Op. cit.* 116.

<sup>62</sup> *Op. cit.* 29.

<sup>63</sup> *Op. cit.* 87.

<sup>64</sup> *Op. cit.* 67.

<sup>65</sup> *Op. cit.* 115.

<sup>66</sup> *Op. cit.* 118.

<sup>67</sup> Bertalan Szathmáry's letter dated 28 April 1953. Archives of the American Hungarian Foundation, III. 5. Presbyterian. Elizabeth NJ Hungarian Presbyterian Church.

In November 1944, they purchased the long-wanted parsonage. It was a huge event in the life of the congregation when a family home was purchased as a parsonage at 23 Highland Avenue, one of the most beautiful areas in the city. Of the \$8,500 price, \$5,500 were paid immediately, of which the church treasury paid \$1,000, the women's congregation contributed the same, and \$3,500 were raised through a fundraising effort by church sponsors and congregants.<sup>68</sup>

The issue of church funding was key to the survival of the church, as the churches did not receive state support under the principle of separation of church and state.

The Elizabeth congregation also developed a number of ways to cover expenses such as the pastor's salary, the purchase and maintenance of the building, and later the purchase and maintenance of the parsonage, as well as the cost of certain programmes.

The building was often rented out to other congregations. Until 1934, a Portuguese congregation occasionally rented the church,<sup>69</sup> and in 1935 the Pentecostal church signed a contract with the congregation,<sup>70</sup> based on which the church was to be used for Sunday worships for decades.<sup>71</sup>

In 1933, the pastor introduced the envelope system to encourage church members to donate regularly.<sup>72</sup>

Árpád György initiated a new fee scheme, whereby the official fee for non-church members using the ministry for a funeral outside the church is \$15, of which \$5 would be the share of the church. For burial and memorial services in the church, the fee amounted to \$25, of which \$10 belonged to the church. The marriage service fee outside the church cost \$15, while using the church cost \$10, and a baptism cost \$7.50. Then, if they wanted to use the church but did not want collection, they had to pay \$5 to the church treasurer.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> BOGÁR 1963, 19. *Protocol*, 176–177.

<sup>69</sup> *Protocol*, 40.

<sup>70</sup> *Op. cit.* 48–49.

<sup>71</sup> BOGÁR 1963, 19.

<sup>72</sup> *Op. cit.* 19.

<sup>73</sup> This was adopted by the Church Council with minor amendments. Minutes, 68, 76. From 1945, non-church members were required to pay \$20 to the pastor and \$10 to the church for funeral services. *Protocol*, 185.

The 1947 Church Organization Regulations clarified the charges for church services. For church members, baptisms during regular services cost \$5, while baptisms during separate special occasions cost \$10. Marriage ceremonies were charged \$15.<sup>74</sup> Funeral services at the funeral home, church, and cemetery cost \$25;<sup>75</sup> for funeral services held only at the funeral home and cemetery, the fee was \$15. Non-members were charged twice the rate. Etc.<sup>76</sup>

The rules regulated not only fees but also the methods and types of donations.<sup>77</sup>

The church had to borrow money for extraordinary expenses. The congregation and the Women's Association were only able to pay \$5,500 of the \$8,500 purchase price for the parsonage, and a mission mortgage loan was contracted from the Presbyterian Church to raise the remaining \$3,000.<sup>78</sup>

This was not unprecedented; in 1937, as according to the minutes, the congregation decided to repay \$150 to the church's mission that year for a previous debt.<sup>79</sup>

In August 1948, the President of the Board of National Missions expressed his satisfaction with the progress of the congregation and offered to decrease the amount by \$300 if \$1,000 was repaid by 31 December.<sup>80</sup> In order to grasp this opportunity, the pastor proposed to issue securities in denominations of \$10, for a total of \$3,000, redeemable within five years.<sup>81</sup> Not all debts could be paid, so in 1949 a movement was started in the church to settle the financial situation. Finally, in 1950, the debt of \$3,067 was paid, and the certificate of indebtedness was bought by Dr Károly Eisler and burnt in a solemn ceremony in front of the congregation.<sup>82</sup>

We also find examples of women borrowing \$100 from the women's association for small but urgent investments.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> About \$206 at the current exchange rate.

<sup>75</sup> About \$344 at the current exchange rate.

<sup>76</sup> *Protocol*, 210–211.

<sup>77</sup> *Op. cit.* 210.

<sup>78</sup> *Op. cit.* 177.

<sup>79</sup> *Op. cit.* 82.

<sup>80</sup> *Op. cit.* 241.

<sup>81</sup> *Op. cit.* 256.

<sup>82</sup> BOGÁR 1963, 23.

<sup>83</sup> *Protocol*, 271.



In addition to drafting the new regulations, Károly Bogár developed a new method to solve the church's financing problems. He had small "house-church baskets" made and distributed to the faithful, "asking them to remember God's never-ending goodness with their daily donations". And the money collected was used for public church expenses and charitable donations.<sup>84</sup> Various charity and fundraising events continued to play an important role in church funding.

In 1960, the Church reached an important milestone. The missionary aid, which they had been receiving for years, was discontinued by the Presbyterian Church on 1 January, making the Elizabeth congregation a self-supporting church.<sup>85</sup>

### *2.5. The Pastors of the Congregation*

The American Presbyterian Church was reluctant to employ ministers schooled in Hungary, so in its own seminaries, even in quick courses, it tried to train its "missionaries to adopt an approach that would make them direct helpers in accelerating assimilation". As mentioned above "The level of qualification of the 'Hungarian Reformed pastors' working for it was generally below that of the other groups, which became a source of much criticism and controversy."<sup>86</sup> The Bloomfield Seminary was also criticized by László Ravasz, while Aladár Komjáthy, though acknowledging its weaknesses, emphasized the work of theologians of Hungarian origin in the Hungarian community and its importance.<sup>87</sup>

Undoubtedly, pastors and church members also had to operate with a business mindset. Due to the separation of church and state, churches received no state aid, so in order to avoid debts, members had to support churches financially to a significant extent, as the examples above have shown.<sup>88</sup>

It is also clear from the lives of the pastors that, in addition to their religious and church-organizing activities, they also placed a similar emphasis on the preservation of Hungarian identity and language.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> BOGÁR 1963, 21.

<sup>85</sup> Op. cit. 25.

<sup>86</sup> PUSKÁS 1982, 269.

<sup>87</sup> KOMJÁTHY 1984, 247–254.

<sup>88</sup> PINTZ 2017, 318.

<sup>89</sup> Op. cit. 318.

Below is a brief presentation of the pastors who served in the Elizabeth congregation.

Mihály Tóth was born on 14 September 1885 in Hejce, Abaúj-Tolna County. He went to the US at a very young age, in 1901, where he graduated from Bloomfield College in 1916. His ordination took place in 1916 in the church of the Elizabeth congregation that he had founded. He was barely 28 years old when the congregation was founded (1913). A year later, in 1914, he founded the Bayonne church in New Jersey. He served in these two congregations until 1918. He then moved to Alpha and then to Detroit, which, after 18 years of hard work, became the largest church in the States.<sup>90</sup>

The Elizabeth congregation also had its own student of theology, Mátyás Daróczy, who was admitted to Bloomfield Seminary in August 1914,<sup>91</sup> but his career was no longer connected to the church.

Béla Bertók served in the congregation for four years between 1917 and 1921 and died in 1946 as pastor of the Hungarian Reformed Congregation of Pocahontas.<sup>92</sup> In 1921, the problem of the lack of a parsonage arose, causing heated discussions that led to the pastor's resignation. On 1 September 1922, Sándor Dókus was called to fill the position of pastor, but less than three years later, in November 1925, the ministry was again vacant, and Rudolf Pompl took it for a year. No ordained pastor could be found, so Bertalan Szathmáry, a student at Bloomfield Seminary, served the congregation from 1926.<sup>93</sup>

Szathmáry was born on 5 June 1902 in Szikszó, Abaúj-Torna County. In 1914, at the age of 12, he moved to the United States of America. He completed his high school education in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. He received his degree in 1927 after graduating from Bloomfield Seminary. He was ordained a minister in Newark the same year. He served as a pastor in Elizabeth (NJ 1927–1936), Leechburg (PA, 1936–1942), Astabula-Conneaut-Erie (OH–PA, 1943–194), Gary (Ind. 1945–194), and Perth Amboy (NJ, 1947–1955). In 1955, he became pastor of the Dutch Reformed Church of Long Branch, NJ, where he served until his retirement in 1967. From 1968 until his death on 6 July 1972, he led the United Hungarian Presbyterian Church of Newark and Elizabeth. In addition to his pastoral ministry, he served on the board of the Hungarian

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<sup>90</sup> PUSKÁS – KOVÁCS 2017, 259–260.

<sup>91</sup> BOGÁR 1963, 13.

<sup>92</sup> *Bethlen Naptár*. 1947, 164.

<sup>93</sup> BOGÁR 1963, 17.

Reformed Association of America for 8 years. He represented the Dutch-American Reformed Church at the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hungarian Church.<sup>94</sup>

Árpád György “was born in the village of Szalonna in Borsod County, in the part of the country from which most Reformed Hungarians emigrated to America”. He began his schooling in Trenton, NJ, but he continued in Szalonna because his family moved home. He completed public school in Tokaj, and then studied at the teacher-training institute of the college in Sárospatak as a cantor and teacher.<sup>95</sup> After moving back to the US with his two brothers, he studied in Bloomington. In 1935, he graduated with honours in theology. He was ordained a pastor in the Presbytery of Newark, NJ, and served in the Elizabeth Church in September of the same year.

In 1935, his ministry in the Elizabeth Church was one of the best eras of the congregation. His church-building work was decisive. He regulated salaries, set fees for services and made infrastructural improvements. Árpád György also organized the Garwood congregation. This work was discontinued, however, when he was invited to the church in the Bronx in 1942. The respect shown by the Elizabethan congregation towards him is illustrated by the fact that many of his former congregants attended the former pastor’s investiture in the Bronx on 19 April 1942.<sup>96</sup> Dezső Parragh spent barely two years at the head of the congregation, and after his departure in 1944, Árpád György was re-called. The growth continued, and the purchase of the parsonage was also attributed to him. Árpád György did not stay long the second time around, and in 1946 he was invited to the church in Chicago,<sup>97</sup> where he was a minister for 22 years. He also served as secretary, then Vice-President and President of the Western Classis of the Hungarian Reformed Church in America. He also held every office at the church district level. In 1963, he became President of the Church District. In addition to his congregational and church organizational work, he was also active in the Hungarian Reformed Federation of America. In 1968, he resigned his pastorate and served first as secretary of the Federation and then as president from 1976 to 1980. He died in 1987.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> V. F. (1972): Rev. Szathmáry Bertalan 1902–1972. In: *Calvin Synod Herald*. 72, 8–9. 13.

<sup>95</sup> BERTALAN, Imre (1989): Búcsú Ft. György Árpádtól. In: *Bethlen Naptár*. 307–308.

<sup>96</sup> *Protocol*, 139.

<sup>97</sup> BOGÁR 1963, 19.

<sup>98</sup> BERTALAN 1989, 307–308.

Dezső Parragh completed both his secondary school and his theological studies in Budapest, and passed his pastoral examination in 1935. The young talented pastor was offered scholarships for further studies first by the University of Strasbourg and then by the Seminary of Princeton. He received his master's degree from the Columbia University Department of Theology and his doctorate from the University of Chicago Theology Department. He intended to return to Hungary after his studies, but his plans were thwarted by WWII. He served in the Elizabeth church between 1942 and 1944, moving then to Bethlehem (PA). In 1947, he took over the vacancy at West Side Hungarian Reformed Church in Chicago, where he served for 50 years until 1997. From 1979 to 1982, he was elected Bishop of the United Church of Christ, Calvin Synod.<sup>99</sup>

Pastor Károly Bogár was born on 22 September 1898 in Újfehértó, Szabolcs County. His father was noble Sámuel Bogár, a Reformed pastor. He completed his secondary school education in Nagykálló and Budapest. He was conscripted into the army from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade of high school. He went to America in 1922. Here he continued his studies; he attended college in Lancaster, completed two years of theological studies at Bloomfield and a third year at Princeton. After completing his theological studies, he served as an assistant pastor in South Norwalk, then as a pastor in Pocahontas, then in McKeesport, and was elected pastor of the Hungarian Presbyterian Church in Elizabeth, where he served from 1946 to 1969. Bogár completed the reorganization of the church, drafting new bylaws unanimously approved by the General Assembly. In 1972, he was elected pastor in the Independent Hungarian Reformed Church of Staten Island when the pastorate became vacant. He died on 20 July 1973, buried in Clover Leaf Cemetery in Woodbridge.<sup>100</sup>

Dezső Takácsy was born in Windber (PA) at the parsonage. His father moved to Hungary because of homesickness and took his family with him, becoming a pastor in Zádor, in the Transdanubian region. Here he finished the elementary school, and then went to Csurgó Reformed College, where he graduated from high school and was admitted to the Pápa Reformed Theological Academy in September 1929. After taking his pastoral exams, he served as an assistant pastor in Varasd, Somogyhatvan, and then

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<sup>99</sup> *Calvin Synod Herald*. 107(2006), 5–6. 19.

<sup>100</sup> VITÉZ, Ferenc (1973): Bogár Károly (1898–1973). In: *Calvin Synod Herald*. 73, 10. 12.

as a pastor in Barcs. After his return to the US, he was supported by Bishop-superintendent Lajos Nagy. He was appointed pastor in Passaic. After the death of Bertalan Szathmáry, the Hungarian Bethlen Church in Union, made up from the former members of the Elizabeth congregation, invited him to become pastor. He served his congregation for four years, flew to Hungary on 15 June 1976 for a visit, but died before returning.<sup>101</sup>

### **3. The 1960s and the 1970s – The Last Stage of the Independent Congregation**

In 1949, the Methodist Episcopal Zion Church of Newark, NJ, sent a delegation to the Elizabeth congregation because they wanted to rent the church for Sunday afternoon services. In addition to their desire to rent, they indicated that they would be willing to purchase the property.<sup>102</sup> The Elizabeth church decided that a possible sale could be discussed against cash payment, but only if a church suitable for the congregation was found. The Elizabeth congregation began looking for a new church, but the move was eventually shelved for more than a decade.<sup>103</sup>

From the late 1950s, and especially from the 1960s, a third wave of immigration to New Jersey began, but this time it was not from European but rather mainly from Latin American countries. For example, the population of Puerto Rican descent increased from 10,000 to 240,000 between 1950 and 1980, and African Americans moving from the South to the North added about 800,000 to New Jersey's population by the early 1990s.<sup>104</sup> At the same time, the Hungarian population was steadily declining due to both migration and assimilation. From 1960, the local government of Elizabeth designated the area around the Elizabeth Church for the construction of a new housing estate of town houses as part of a comprehensive urban development plan. "At the moment, we do not know when this plan will be implemented, but we must consider

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<sup>101</sup> *Bethlen Naptár*. 1978, 76.

<sup>102</sup> *Protocol*, 281.

<sup>103</sup> *Op. cit.* 283.

<sup>104</sup> V. SHAW, Douglas (1994): *Immigration and Ethnicity in New Jersey History*. Trenton, New Jersey Historical Commission, Department of State. 58–59.

moving our church to a more suitable location in the city if the plan is approved.”<sup>105</sup> Finally, the church and the parsonage were sold in 1968. Bertalan Szathmáry, by then retired and serving in one of the best times of the congregation, gathered the remnants of a discouraged and leaderless congregation and his Newark parishioners and friends to organize a congregation in Union, NJ, and worked for the survival of that community until his death.<sup>106</sup> The congregation could rent the church of the Second Presbyterian Church for its services.<sup>107</sup>

In 1975, the congregation had about 95 members, and the pastoral ministry was carried out by Rev. Dezső E. Takácsy, who succeeded Szathmáry, until his death in 1976.<sup>108</sup>

Árpád György mentioned the Bethlen Hungarian Presbyterian Church in his article *Krízisek és válságok éve* [The Year of Crises and Depression] published in 1974, when it sponsored the construction of the new retirement home of the Bethlen Homes (Ligonier, PA) with a significant amount of money.<sup>109</sup> The annual record reads, “The Bethlen Hungarian Presbyterian Church in Union has few members, but in spirit it is one of the largest congregations. There’s worship every Sunday. Despite the dispersion and great distances, the faithful strive to come to church and meet as members of one big family in love and peace before the heavenly Father. During the Lord’s Supper and on great celebrations, the chants rise to heaven in the church filled to overflowing.”<sup>110</sup>

The 1978 report starts as follows: “The Bethlen Hungarian Presbyterian Church, established by the merger of the Presbyterian churches of Elizabeth and Newark, seeks to carry on the Hungarian Calvinistic tradition.”<sup>111</sup>

The strength and commitment of the congregation is demonstrated by the fact that it supported the studies of six theologians in the 1980s.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> BOGÁR 1963, 27.

<sup>106</sup> NAGY, Lajos (1973): Szathmáry Bertalan 1902–1972. In: *Bethlen Naptár*. 1973. 107.

<sup>107</sup> V. F. 1972, 13.

<sup>108</sup> *Bethlen Naptár*. 1976, 276.

<sup>109</sup> GYÖRGY, Árpád (1975): 1974 a krízisek és válságok éve. In: *Bethlen Naptár*. 1975, 50.

<sup>110</sup> Union, N. J. *Bethlen Naptár*. 1975, 272–273.

<sup>111</sup> Union, N. J. *Bethlen Naptár*. 1978, 196.

<sup>112</sup> Union, N. J. *Bethlen Naptár*. 1988, 212.

I last found mention of them in the Bethlen Almanac published in 2000, when Béla Kendi, the chief elder, passed on his title to his successor. The Almanac also mentions that Béla Kendi worked in the congregation for 40 years, and occasionally, in the absence of a minister, he delivered the sermon himself.<sup>113</sup>

#### 4. Conclusions

The Hungarian Reformed Church of Elizabeth was in operation for about sixty years. The Hungarian immigrants to the US in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries established a congregation within the Presbyterian Church, which was forced to cease independent operation in the 1970s due to the assimilation of the second and third generations and the urban planning of the settlement due to the changes in its social composition. The leaderless congregation founded a new community in Union together with the congregants from Newark.

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<sup>113</sup> BATIZ, Ambrus (2000): Linden, New Jersey. In: *Bethlen Almanac.* 2000. 96.; For the recent missionary endeavours among the Hungarian-American Reformed see: LÁNYI, Gábor (2017): Nyugati-parti amerikai-magyar református gyülekezetek élete és új távlatai. In: *Pro Minoritate.* 1. 171–179.

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Gergely HANULA:<sup>1</sup> 

## Changes in the Language of the Reformed Church in the Second Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: The Convergence of Oral History and Big Data<sup>2</sup>

### *Abstract.*

The author's journey begins with a deep immersion in his traditional Protestant faith, where he was taught to thoroughly know both the Old and the New Testament. As he reflects on his faith, the concept of being a "stranger and sojourner" comes to the forefront, highlighting the feeling of alienation within the secular world.

The narrative takes an interesting turn when the author discusses the impact of changing political language on his perspective. The introduction of new political ideas and discourse challenges the previously straightforward worldview, leading to a sense of uncertainty in decision-making. Believers find themselves in a world with a multiplicity of perspectives that require a re-evaluation of what it means to "deny" or to make choices.

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In a changing social and political context, the narrative continually explores the intricate connection between faith and language. The author's experiences and reflections provide a compelling insight into the complexities of navigating a shifting spiritual landscape while grappling with the ever-evolving meaning of words and beliefs.

The second half of the article presents the results of a computer analysis of the vocabulary of two Bible translations that defined the language usage of the Reformed Church in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the 1908 Károli and the 1975 New Translation. The analysis focuses on words that present difficulties in understanding due to their archaic or religious nature. As a point of comparison, it also showcases the vocabulary of the Gospel of John, where a mere 199 word roots constitute 80% of word occurrences.

**Keywords:** language of the church, Bible translation, vocabulary of the Bible, letter and soul, protestant language use

## Defining the Perspective

*"I have received a traditional Protestant 'initiation' into religion. I had to brush through the Bible frequently from an early age, making no significant distinction between the Old and the New. It was advisable and required to know equally thoroughly, the inter-relationships and the logical-temporal connections. . .*

*It has confirmed and developed my endeavour to always try to understand everything abstract – or even beyond the real – through the filter of earth, man, emotion, and history. To parallel John, let's say, with the Book of Kings or the Book of Judges. The complexity of the context, in other respects too, was and remains more credible to me this way. I.e. if there were so many contradictions in the matching, so much distant strangeness between the elements, that the unity – event, system, whatever – could be made open. That is, alive."*

I have recognized my older self in the lines written in 1977<sup>3</sup> by Miklós Mészöly, one of the remarkable figures of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Hungarian literature. The linguistic – mental – religious world of the 1908 Károli translation became for me as real, or perhaps more certain than the world in which we lived, and which we could only live in with a certain detachment. The remaining movement groups subsisted mostly as caricatures of themselves from the past regime. I was still initiated as a “kisdobos” (drummer-boy) and then a pioneer (in the youth organizations of the communist state, small schoolchildren were compulsorily admitted to these youth organizations), we had leaders and a compulsory tie at school ceremonies, but by then there was no longer any ideology behind it, nor any threatening power behind the organization. Although the Methodist congregation had been present in the country for almost a hundred years, it was only a sect in the eyes of the Hungarians who were suspicious of anything new other than the established churches; the isolated world of this congregation, with its incomprehensible set of biblical concepts, with its rhythm of life, its Sundays, its holidays, the constancy of its people and, ultimately, its self-identity, was more real. Of course, let us add, I had no choice. Evening prayers, whether I wanted them or not, would reach the edge of my bed, my very own den, and family lunches, dinners and celebrations would be interspersed with a world of hymns, Bible readings, and prayer. It became my most personal world.

In the “world” – in the ecclesiastical use of the word –, I always felt like a guest, a stranger. This became for me a peculiar, but perhaps necessary, interpretation of the phrase in Leviticus: “the strangers and sojourners” (Lev 25:23).<sup>4</sup> The knowledge of naming that I have learned in linguistics did not yet tame for me the strangeness encoded in language into sociolectics. I had no friends, no common language at school, the small-talk of classmates and friends did not offer a competitive alternative to the Bible-bound worldview, to the perspective which got deeply rooted in me after reading. It provided a structure in which there was up and down, there was good and evil, there was sin, and

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<sup>3</sup> MÉSZÖLY, Miklós (1977): Biblia – bibliák. In: Mészöly, Miklós: *A pille magánya*. Budapest, Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó. 103.

<sup>4</sup> An instructive and very thorough analysis of this turn of events can be read by the literary historian Peter Dávidházi; see: DÁVIDHÁZI, Péter (2017): “Jövevények és zsellérek”. Egy bibliai fogalompár nyomában. In: Dávidházi, Péter: *“Vagy jöni fog”. Bibliai minták nemzetiségítése a magyar költészetben*. Budapest, Ráció. 15–36.

there was righteousness, backed by the unquestionable authority of the Scripture, and the unattainable yet attainable reality of God, the one name described in so many words.<sup>5</sup>

It was in my adolescence that I became more closely acquainted with the Reformed Church although I was born into it on my mother's side. The church of the late 1980s was for me almost a step out into the world, surrounded by people who spoke my language and the language of the world at the same time; they were amazed to hear my homogeneous worldview emerging from my words, and I was amazed to hear their redundancies. It took me a long time to understand that the two halves were no more than a whole.

This was during the collapse of communism. We could see, think, and speak differently, we just were not able to. At home, we listened to Kálmán Cseri all day long on cassette tapes, the Reformed pastor of Pasarét in Budapest, and the old evangelist József Zimányi. Cseri was almost revered as a saint by many people, and I thought at the time that he called a spade a spade, even if he was too strict. Then I began to realize that he only called certain things by their names and kept quiet about others. A chessboard world featuring prophetic fervour. This was the meaning of unchangeable rules for me. But I did not enjoy Zimányi's evangelizing – it was always the same recipe: he would knock me down and then pull me out. Forgive me for my youthful critical judgement!

At that time, I was still banned from reading Esterházy, a labelled liberal writer, of words and thoughts that a good Christian was not even allowed to read. So, I did not know his precise description of this situation from *Harmonia*:

My father's mother taught him nothing but fine notions. She taught him that in the final analysis people are good and our Heavenly Father is watching over us. We must trust the world, and if someone throws a stone at us, we should repay him with bread. What follows from all this? The fact—and this lay at the heart of my grandmother's teaching—that bad words make no sense. They're empty. The bad that they posit does not exist.

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<sup>5</sup> Much later, I came across the great monograph on ritual by the American anthropologist Roy Rappaport, in which he gives a systematic description of the possible structure of the world interpretation produced by religious ritual (including, of course, the use of Scripture). RAPPAPORT, Roy A. (1999): *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. (Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology 110). Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. 304–312.

When my father learned “bad” words from his village playmates, grandmother dragged him into the bathroom and, with some sadness and anger, would wash his mouth out with soap. My father couldn’t eat for days, and if he did, it came right back up. Then, when my father wasn’t even five yet, Grandmother passed away amid terrible suffering, her intestines got all tangled up and began to putrefy as if a horribly stinking animal were living inside her, like in a horror movie, and she became more and more one with this animal. They even had to move out of the house because of the smell. My grandfather was ashamed of grandmother dying, so they moved to another country, and my father was left high and dry with his torso of a vocabulary. He was incapable of saying anything bad about anyone because he lacked the words, and because he lacked them, he couldn’t think anything bad about them either. As a result, he was helpless. Others played tricks on him and laughed behind his back.<sup>6</sup>

As long as our religiosity also meant being anti-establishment, it was easy to accommodate our biblical worldview. Anything that did not comply with it, whether it was the remaining shreds of party ideology, evolutionism or materialism, was a lie, a fabrication, empty words without substance or meaning. How truly easy it is (on the linguistic representation of the world)<sup>7</sup> to live in such a shadow culture! The simple Protestant life. The most important meaning-making factor was that it was essentially different, contrary to the worldview that was being taught. I well remember the anti-evolutionist lectures of the Adventist János Reisinger in the lobby of the then University of Horticulture: Faith as the negation of atheism.

And we felt it was a “created order” (we just could not name it that – P. S. since our synod adopted the term, we have a word for it), in which we agreed with that external worldview. Puritan sexual ethics was just the same. We did not have to deny it; we said the same things as the socialist propaganda, and somehow nobody was bothered. Likewise about the moral evaluation of work. The job title in the identity document as a proof of someone being a decent person, and the “K. M. K.”, the “notoriously unemployed person”. Like the Arnolfini couple in János Lackfi’s poem, we no longer

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<sup>6</sup> ESTERHÁZY, Péter (2000): *Harmonia Caelestis*. Budapest, Magvető. 69. English translation: ESTERHÁZY, Peter (2004): *Celestial harmonies*. Transl. by Judith Sollosy. New York, Ecco. 74.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. BANCZEROWSKI, Janusz (2008): *A világ nyelvi képe. A világkép mint a valóság metaképe a nyelvben és a nyelvhasználatban*. Budapest, Tinta.

knew “with whom this or that happened”, whose values and meanings the other took on. The meaning of “peace”, for example, was politically defined at the time, but it grew on us well enough.<sup>8</sup>

I knew the verses of the Bible quite well, and I knew the explanation of many of them (at least that is how I thought of it at the time, singular, definite article). It was easy to find words, phrases, stories for my black and white youthful truths. In becoming Reformed, I realized that there were other readings of the Bible than the one I was used to, but because of my age, I did not have to accept that this could be valid at the same time. My parents’ truths were replaced by my own truths. It was only right. The separation of growing up masked, postponed the more difficult confrontation.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The complex relations between the generally available language and the religious language in the political space are dissected by Habermas, of which I will mention only one point of view not touched upon above: “Citizens cannot be expected to translate the political positions that result from their religious convictions into the secular language.” He calls this transposition in everyday contact an “institutional translational proviso”, which he considers a naturally manageable process. Unfortunately, he does not talk about how this translation happens, only treating it as a possibility: “have a special power to articulate moral intuitions, especially with regard to vulnerable forms of communal life. In corresponding political debates, this potential makes religious speech into a serious vehicle for possible truth contents, which can then be translated from the vocabulary of a particular religious community into a generally accessible language.” HABERMAS, Jürgen (2006): Religion in the Public Sphere. In: *European Journal of Philosophy*. 14, 1. 9–10. DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-0378.2006.00241.x. An American example in practice: “In June of 2008, Obama’s campaign actively targeted young evangelicals. The senator gave stump speeches in community halls and church basements and stressed the importance of social justice, *a concept that young evangelicals could identify with biblically*” [emphasis mine]. PIER, Penni M. (2010): Deities, Divisions, and Democrats. The “Political Left” and Religion. In: Weiss, David (ed.): *What Democrats Talk about When They Talk about God. Religious Communication in Democratic Party Politics*. Lanham, Lexington [no pages]. According to Christopher B. Chapp, “Religious rhetoric gains its unique political command because it is well equipped to resonate with individuals’ emotions and identities—two factors that, not coincidentally, are central to political persuasion.” See CHAPP, Ch. B. (2012): *Religious Rhetoric and American Politics: The Endurance of Civil Religion in Electoral Campaigns*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press. 4.

<sup>9</sup> Gadamer words this reconciliation as follows: “Thus, we hold, the fact that our experience of the world is bound to language does not imply an exclusiveness of perspectives. If, by entering foreign language-worlds, we overcome the prejudices and limitations of our previous experience of the world, this does not mean that we leave and negate our own world. Like travelers we

## Bible – Bibles

The title by Mészöly is suggestive. A statement of plurality. And this is a difficult milestone for many in the religion of One. For myself, as well. We also inevitably sense the power of language as a factor of art as soon as we reach its limit.

*Bonum est confidere in Domino, / Bonum sperare in Domino.* I remember what this meant in 1989, on the eve of the collapse of communism, for the crowd gathered in the Pécs Cathedral for the Taizé meeting. It was *Homologia*, a creed, irrespective of denomination; the song rang out like an exhilarating “shared word”. We experienced the simplicity of “we are”, without having to add “many” or “together”. We were there as Christians. I cannot remember to what extent this was a protest. Probably. But most certainly it was not merely that.

The situation was similar to the New Translation of the Bible. The issue was not raised until 1975. One Protestant translation was in use, the Károli translation, last revised in 1908. When the New Translation was published, my father collated it with the revised Károli translation and would point out the differences. His favourite was Isaiah’s verse on God’s way, which in Károli’s version read: “még a bolond se téved el” (Isa 35:8) / “the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein” (Isa 35:8 KJV), but the New Translation reads: “bolondok nem tévednek rá” / “And fools will not wander on it” (Isa 35:8 NAS). He could not decide which one was right, but he was sure that only one could be true. I was also confused by the single-column layout; it did not look like a Bible, so I would not read it, a distrust I still cannot shake off to this day even though the publisher changed it to double-column layout. That was obviously not the only thing that bothered me. I could not rename the Comforter to Advocate. I had already heard about the institution of criminal supervision, and comforting sounded more attractive.

And I remember well the introduction of the ecumenical translation of the Lord’s Prayer. It felt almost as a sacrilege as the tongues of the congregation twisted between the unconscious “ki vagy a mennyekben” and the intended “aki a mennyekben vagy”. (The

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return home with new experiences. Even if we emigrate and never return, we still can never wholly forget.” GADAMER, Hans-Georg (1984): *Igazság és módszer: Egy filozófiai hermeneutika vázlatja*. Budapest, Gondolat Kiadó. 311. (English translation: *Truth and Method*. Translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. London, Continuum. 2004. 445).

difference is similar to the difference between the traditional and the contemporary English versions “Our Father, who art in heaven” and “Our Father in heaven”.) Disrupting the rhythm, the earlier reverence was replaced by a sense of shame at the confusion.

And then everything got accelerated: the Easy-to-read Translation in 2003 and then the Károli translation by Veritas Publisher in 2011; and I am only mentioning two of so many. Suddenly there was a sense of freedom, of being able to do everything. In church use, two was already too many (the New Translation of 1975 was almost imperceptibly replaced by its 1990 revision: two did not turn into three), and it became more than enough. (Most certainly, this was after the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but it is a good indicator of the direction.)<sup>10</sup>

From the “one God”, “*akinél nincs változás, vagy változásnak árnyéka*” (Jas 1:17, Károli 1908) / “with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning (Jas 1:17 KJV)”, following the rules of logic, or at least we may feel so, it would follow that His word, His revelation, is also one. A serious crisis for theological students is the loss of the myth of the “original” in the process of familiarizing themselves with the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. There is no single one. Not everyone can bear this burden.<sup>11</sup>

As long as the Bible was the source of the worldview contrasting the official state order, these issues were not emphasized. From that perspective, it was one. As the number of viewpoints, and thus the number of reference points increased, it was no longer possible to formulate the answer as a protest. (Well, it is possible, but it just does not make sense.)

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<sup>10</sup> The hardest step was, however, when I had to find the words as one of the translators of the Revised New Translation published in 2014. I felt at the time that my language was “worldly” for this, that it could not even express a fraction of the worldview that was emerging in me, in my language, in the meanings of the text.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Dávidházi, who is not a theologian, also raises the question of “why it is awkward to question the differences between textual versions”: “Sooner or later, the transcendent identity of the final authority would be eroded, inevitably raising the question: if the Lord’s message is given to us in so many different formulations and can be understood in so many different ways, how much is this Lord master of his word, and whose is the final word: his or the translators’ and editors’ the transcendent law’s or the tongues’, God’s or man’s?” DÁVIDHÁZI 2017, 17.



## Letter and Soul

I have been tempted to borrow the title *Nyelv és lélek* [Language and Soul] from our great 20<sup>th</sup>-century writer Kosztolányi, and with a reason. (Tempted? A biblical word again. Perhaps I would have done a disservice if I had?<sup>12</sup> At least the word suggests it is better that way. We shall find out.)

The difference for me refers to the distance between the signifier and the signified, word and meaning. Nevertheless, this way the Pauline “kill”<sup>13</sup> is hardly understandable; it would be easier to explain it in the literal sense, yet the spirit does not lead me to it. (But this is no longer literal. Or maybe it is.)

The loss of guidance is perhaps more apparent in the diversity of Bibles, but it is not the rise in the number of words that makes me uncertain but the decline in meanings.

This has a very simple dimension. As the childish worldview that was once given to us is shattered, gone, replaced by nothing. The generation that still has a deep feeling of loss is trying to fill this void, selecting from imported worldviews, on economic, religious, psychological (or psychiatric) grounds. The younger generations can hardly feel the absence. Or they may feel the loss, but they have no idea what is lost. So, all that the denial of which gave meaning and significance to biblical words is lost, and along with it the meanings. No great loss, one might say, but let us not underestimate the sustaining power of the system! And let us not forget how many times our Christian ancestors, our confessing ancestors, have been led down the path of apophatic theology, of not knowing what to affirm!

Another part of this loss, perhaps not unrelated to the first, is the uncertainty of life’s choices. How clear it is what it means to “refuse to deny” as long as one is forced, as long as one is clearly stirred to deny. In freedom, in the many possible paths, it is hard to tell which the path of denial is.

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<sup>12</sup> The very mixing of the members of the *casus mixtus*, the conditional clause, is a biblical audacity, a failure to allow for precise decodability. Or even the presupposition of plural intelligibility. This is also a Reformed feature.

<sup>13</sup> 2Cor 3:6.

And here again I would refer to Esterházy, who in his novel titled *Corrected Edition* recalls Mark (9:40) paraphrased by János Kádár, Secretary General of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party and Minister of State: "On 10 December, at a meeting of the National Council of the Patriotic People's Front, Kádár uttered his famous words: Whoever is not against the Hungarian People's Republic is with it, etc. (On this issue, Christ took Rákosi's position, Matthew 12:30: Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.) This Kádár utterance signalled the beginning of the Kádár era, by the clock."<sup>14</sup> After the collapse of communism, this permissiveness has become pervasive, making the meanings that were previously "easily" (i. e. unambiguously) attached to biblical words, fluid.

I have talked to a great extent about the changing meanings that emerge against the background of a given medium, as if I were forgetting the body of words, but this is far from being the case. "Once again, I am amazed at how important the form of a word is in a language, in all languages, the thousand and thousand unconscious, musical connections that awaken in us at the sound of it, and give it colour, heftiness, perhaps more than the object, the concept it is meant to signify."<sup>15</sup> The diversity of statements encouraged me to accept the diversity of meanings.

I became fond of Károli's cross-references at an early age. I did not need to be taught *sui ipsius interpres* – driven by the joy of discovery or following the logic of the sermons, I followed them involuntarily, as if following a trail of beaten pins. Before, I often considered it a mistake to disagree, accepting logic as the only possible connecting force. It took me many years to begin to feel and appreciate the "hundreds of thousands of unconscious, musical connections" little by little.

And the meaning is not there without the body of the word anyway. But I will talk about that when I shall be talking about vocabulary.

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<sup>14</sup> ESTERHÁZY, Péter (2002): *Javított kiadás*. Budapest, Magvető. 161. (Somewhere Esterházy revised it, too, indicating that both versions are Christian, but I am unable to find it now.)

<sup>15</sup> KOSZTOLÁNYI, Dezső (1999): *Lélek és nyelv*. In: Kosztolányi, Dezső: *Nyelv és lélek*. Budapest, Osiris. 101.

## **Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs**

I should be also writing about the language of our hymns since our congregations use them in the worship, but I can only give you an account of my complete inaptness. Hence, here, I can only point out the hiatus, the shortfall. Having followed hymnal reforms from afar, I am nevertheless grateful to our predecessors for setting the boundaries of the biblical canon and to the fact that the Scripture is somewhat protected by its prohibition of addition and removal (Rev 22:18). It seems that pruning the “apocryphal” shoots of the hymnal treasure and preserving its precious heritage – even if I am only concerned of linguistic aspects – is an equally delicate task. These hymnic lines, with their melodies, could be a defining element of the linguistic image of our faith, yet little attention is paid to the role they play or could play in the articulation and teaching of the contents of faith.

[After reading through the draft, a friend of mine expressed his total incomprehension: how does the second part of the essay follow on from the first? He felt I owed the reader an explanation. Let us see. The condition we tried to describe in the first part, the dwindling of meanings, is expressed in biblical language in the relationship between faith and deeds. (I think of faith here as a reality born out of hearing the Word. The empty church buildings show that although the biblical words, phrases and sentences are there, in reality the corresponding meanings (“actions”) are missing. There are many words, little that can be experienced of this reality (cf. James 2:18)). This is the devaluation of the language, the loss of its utility. Some of the missing meanings can be characterized by the denial of visible reality, but it seems that this kind of exclusion of the gaps of reality has been appropriated by the “world”, by the dominant political rhetoric, so if the Church does not want to identify with it, it is forced to look for other ways. The path I am following is to return to the “ABC”, i.e. to the elementary units of language, the words. By letting go of meaningless sentences, ecclesiastical phrases and by revisiting the ways in which meaning is produced, we can perhaps learn to say what is, whether visible or invisible.]

## Vocabulary

What I have written about so far, strung together on a chain of experience, is largely knowledge determined by feelings, or at least loaded with them.<sup>16</sup> What can be the subject of scholarly investigation? Mostly the word itself and its use.

Since the text of the Bible translations in use is one of the determining factors and norms of church language usage, we have taken the change in this usage as a starting point for examining the changes in vocabulary.

For the Károli translation of 1908, József Baranyi prepared a printed concordance,<sup>17</sup> but in order to ensure the same methodological framework, both the New Translation Bible revised in 1990<sup>18</sup> and the text of the Károli translation of 1908 were processed with the *magyarlanc 3.0* software<sup>19</sup> issued by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Research Group on Artificial Intelligence of the University of Szeged. The research is based on the digitized text provided by the Hungarian Bible Society, and the obtained data were then processed<sup>20</sup> with the *AntConc* concordance builder app.<sup>21</sup>

The procedure was exactly the same in both cases:

First, verse and chapter numbers, section headings, book titles, and cross-references were removed from the biblical text, and the resulting text file was saved without any formatting (.txt format). The second step was to upload the prepared text files in

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<sup>16</sup> Recognizing and admitting our own biases and involvements is a necessary part of scientific work. Among the methodological conditions of my linguistic dissertation, the consideration of arguments warning of the limitations of the scientific study of language was emphasized, and I have written about these in more detail there. See HANULA, Gergely (2016): *Anyaszentnyelvünk. A „szent nyelvek” és a fordítás*. Budapest, Argumentum. 7–8.

<sup>17</sup> BARANYI, József (1995): *Konkordancia a Károli Bibliához*. Budapest, Veritas.

<sup>18</sup> The 1975 edition has not had a digitized version.

<sup>19</sup> ZSIBRITA, János – VINCZE, Veronika – FARKAS, Richárd (2013): *magyarlanc. A Toolkit for Morphological and Dependency Parsing of Hungarian*. In: *Proceedings of RANLP*, Sumen, INCOMA. 763–771.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconcl/> (accessed on: 3 March 2023).

<sup>21</sup> I would like to thank my PhD candidate Dániel Tóth-Gyóllai for his help in performing these operations.

the *magyarlanc* program.<sup>22</sup> In Morphparse mode, the output for each word was rendered in the following layout: word, syllable, word type, grammatical analysis. The resulting word column data was scanned into *AntConc* using the Word list tool to obtain the concordance, with the “Type” and “Freq” columns providing the raw material for manual verification.

The input dataset described above was a corpus of 597,000 words for the 1908 Károli and 585,000 words for the 1990 New Translation.

The result for the 1908 text is a list of 25,207 lines (mostly roots) and for the 1990 text a list of 23,783 lines. During the manual checking, the numerals and proper names were removed from the list,<sup>23</sup> and then we checked the results of the machine identification line by line. The manual checking left 11,431/11,680 (1908/1990) root lines, which shows a variation of approximately 50% compared to the results of the machine analysis.<sup>24</sup>

We need to be cautious when assessing the deviation. It is clear that the machine word definition is not suitable for the recognition of archaic verbal suffixes, archaic nouns phrase suffixes. This was mostly the case with the 1908 Károli translation; however, this represented only 1/5 of the 50% deviation. The other, even more numerous errors were due to the lack of uniform spelling (e.g. the alternating spelling of long and short vowels, the archaic spelling of “cz” instead of “c”, etc.). The most numerous, however, occurred because the software did not recognize the nominal suffixes (for instance: *utadat*, *utadon*, *utadra*, *utai*, *utaid*, *utaidról*, *utaiért*, *utaimat*, *utaimra*, *utaira*, *utait*, *utaitoknál*, *utak*, *utakon*, *útja*, *útjából*, *útjához*, *útjai*, *útjain*, *útjainkat*, *útjaira*, *útjairól*, *útjait*, *útján*, *útjának*, *útjára*, *útját*, *útjától* – the machine processing listed them as individual roots).

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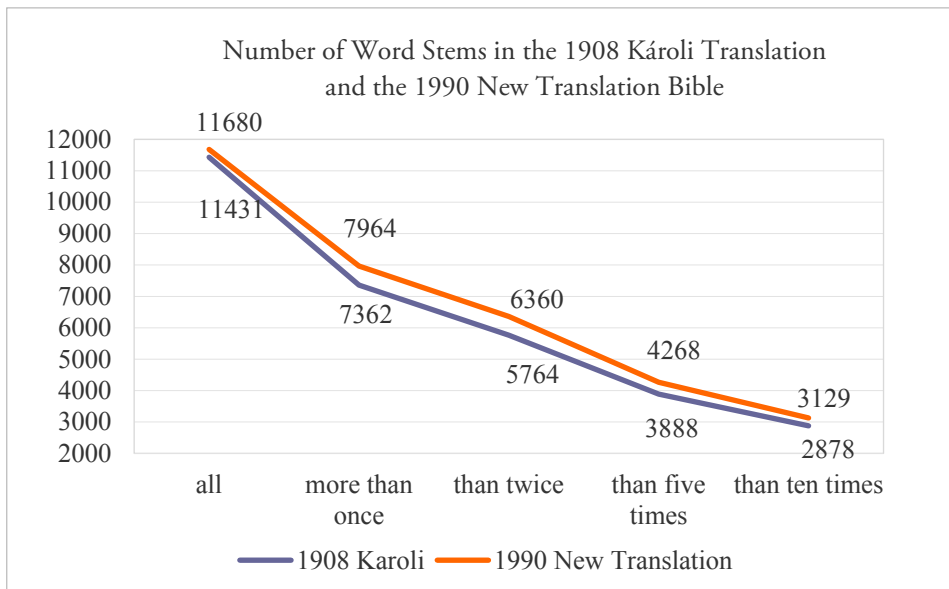
<sup>22</sup> <https://rgai.inf.u-szeged.hu/file/57> using the corpus on magyarlanc 3.0 (accessed on: 3 March 2023).

<sup>23</sup> For 1908, we found about 4,500 lines of proper name roots, for 1990 about 4,000 lines, but in most cases the program did not recognize the suffixes, so the total number of occurrences is more relevant: about 30/27 thousand (1908/1990, I will give the data of the two texts in the following). The numerals (not counting the possible occurrences of the numeral “one”) occur in significantly smaller numbers (4,500/4,100).

<sup>24</sup> The large number of corrections carried out during the manual checking was certainly not always consistent (e.g. adjectives from place names were included in the list as a rule, but in some cases inconsistent classification may have occurred). To ensure traceability of the check, I will also publish in the future the data tables documenting the corrections.

In both texts, there was a significant difference in the count of participles and gerunds in relation to the verb root (these were determined by the program as separate words).

It has become clear that the result can only be used with strong limitations, taking into account both the shortcomings of the machine operations taught in the different language and the possible shortcomings of the verification. However, the 50% deviation in the result indicates that the language of the text differs significantly from the language used in the contemporary Hungarian texts<sup>25</sup> known for the software. A surprising result is that, in the end, machine recognition was no more efficient for the 1990 text than for the 1908 text.



**Figure 1.** *Number of Word Stems in the 1908 Károli Translation and the 1990 New Translation Bible*

<sup>25</sup> “The Szeged Treebank is the largest fully manually annotated treebank of the Hungarian language. It contains 82,000 sentences, 1.2 million words, and 250,000 punctuation marks. Texts were selected from six different domains, ~200,000 words in size from each. The domains are the following: fiction, compositions of pupils between 14 and 16 years of age, newspaper articles (from the newspapers *Népszabadság*, *Népszava*, *Magyar Hírlap*, *HVG*), texts in informatics, legal texts, business and financial news.” (The informative summary is my own translation). <https://rgai.inf.u-szeged.hu/node/113> (accessed on: 1 October 2023).

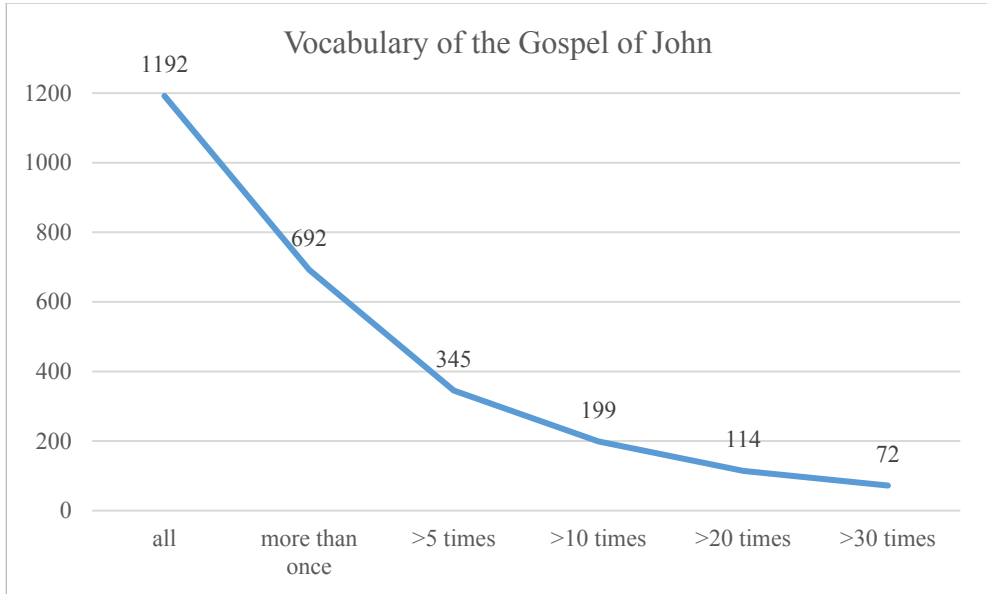
The graph shows that roughly one third (35%/32%) of the nearly 12,000-word vocabulary of these corpora of nearly 600,000 words occurs once in the text. If only those occurring more than twice are counted, the vocabulary is thus reduced to approximately two-thirds. If we examine – by subjective choice, as a sample – the list of words that occur at least ten times (in the 1908 Károli, this is 2,878 word roots), we find that just over a tenth of these (299) are so old that they may be difficult to understand, either because of the way in which they have changed meaning or because they have become obsolete.<sup>26</sup> The same analysis was carried out for the 1990 revision of the New Translation, where 39 of the 3,128 words occurring at least 10 times were found to be archaic.

I have also tried to identify the words that, because of the religious nature of the text, have a particular meaning that may be difficult to understand for those with little or no knowledge of the Bible, but the classification has shown very different results after repeated attempts. Some words do not occur in the common language (different from biblical language), while others – and this is the most numerous category – are used with a special meaning other than in the common language. The result on the above samples was between 100 and 150 words in each case. There is a minimal shift in the range of these words between the two translations, with new terms that are closer to the vernacular being used in some cases.

Compared to the full picture, each book may use a significantly different vocabulary. A typical example is the Gospel of John (1908, according to Károli), which, with its 16,000 words, is a sample worth being studied. In this volume, it uses only 1,192 words, 500 of which are used only once.

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<sup>26</sup> The selection was based on my own judgement – which is why I am publishing a good third of the list in the Hungarian version of the study – to show which words I feel are difficult for today's reader to understand. The detailed Hungarian word lists can be found in the Hungarian version of the article.



**Figure 2.** Vocabulary of the Gospel of John

It appears that John uses 700 words for about 95% of the 16,000-word Gospel and 200 words for about 80%.<sup>27</sup> If we exclude the words that have no meaning in themselves (articles, pronouns, conjunctions, and adverbs), John uses the following 121 words to express 4/5 of what he says (listed by frequency of occurrence): *van, mond, atya, megy, lát, jön, hisz, Isten, ad, tanítvány, felel, világ, tud, egy, zsidó, ember, tesz, úr, szeret, szól, élet, beszéd, ismer, vesz, akar, fiú, küld, vele, cselekedik, hall, bizonyosság, fia, beszél, nap, cselekszik, fog, igazság, marad, név, eszik, kenyér, lélek, nagy, víz, asszony, hal, idő, születik, világosság, áll, elküld, elmegy, juh, keres, Krisztus, óra, sír, sokaság, szolga, bűn, eljön, farizeus, hely, kér, dolog, test, ünnep, igaz, megtart, örök, szem, vak, dicsőség, jó, kéz, jár, király, dicsőít, előtt, hoz, írás, kimegy, meghal, törvény, visz, halál, ír, követ, láb, próféta, templom, főpap, kell, megismer, meglát, száll, él, gyűlöl, hallgat, jel, keresztel, megmarad, menny, mester, szó, tanít, testvér, vet, anya, bizonyágtétel, hajó, köz, szombat, talál, akarat, bemegy, cselekedet, föld, gyümölcs, iszik, nép.*

<sup>27</sup> Not counting a total of 522 occurrences of 41 proper names in the Gospel.



Ágnes Nemes Nagy, the Hungarian poet and literary translator of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, writes in her essay collection *Szó és szótlanság* [Word and Silence]:

They say that the poet is a designator. And it is true. It would follow that the vocabulary and designating are closely connected. The greater the vocabulary, the larger the range of naming options, the greater the poet. Not quite so. Science also designates, and it designates with great precision. It says, for example, aliphatic halogen compounds. Or it says: *Corydalis cava*. Or it says: *parerga* and *paralipomena*. But that is not what poetry is about. Vocabulary is an advisable but not a decisive poetic quality. Poetry, it seems, is not about acquainting but rather revealing.

I do not think that multitude is a decisive factor in religious language usage either, but perhaps by dealing with words we can get closer to answering the question of how words participate in the construction of meaning.

## Beyond Words

The next step is to look at how words are connected: syntax. The much-blamed – and attempted to be weeded out of the vernacular by labelling it as ungrammatical – suffering structure, the *passivum divinum*, and its avoidance, the multiple compound sentences and their fragmentation – many questions arise involuntarily about church language and its variation. In doing so, I will also take the text of the Bible translations as a starting point and hopefully arrive at the specifics of the spoken language used in the church. The working hypothesis is best formulated as a question: is there a specific syntax for spoken/church language? Through an understanding of the specificity of biblical language usage, this work aims at a better understanding of the language use of the church in its biblical language and the cultivation of this language.

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## Útmutató szerzőinknek

A *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai, Theologia Reformata Transylvanica* c. folyóirat szerkesztősége publikálásra elfogad a teológia vagy a vallásoktatáshoz és egyházi segítő foglalkozáshoz kapcsolódó tudományágak tárgykörében írott tudományos dolgozatokat, tanulmányokat. Csak első közlésre szánt kéziratokat fogadunk el (amelyek korábban más nyelven sem jelentek meg).

A szerkesztőségnek jelenleg nem áll módjában szerzői díjat fizetni a beküldött cikkekért, a szerzők tiszteletpéldányt kapnak abból a számból, amelyben írásuk megjelent.

A *Studia* évente kétszer jelenik meg (júniusban és decemberben), leadási határidő nincs, de a február 1. előtt leadott cikkek az első, a szeptember 1. előtt leadottak pedig a második számban jelennek meg.

A cikkeket elektronikus formában (RTF formátumú állományban) kérjük elküldeni a következő email címre: **studiatrt@gmail.com**. Kérjük szerzőinket, hogy a cikkben ne tüntessék fel nevüket, a szövegen végezzenek helyesírás-ellenőrzést, és a következő formai és tartalmi követelmények szerint készítsék el azt:

- a. A szöveghez legalább ezerháromszáz betűs (karakteres) **angol nyelvű kivonatot kell csatolni**, mely tartalmazza a cikk angol címét, és legalább öt kulcsszót. Amennyiben először közöl lapunkban, a kivonat mellé írjon egy egysoros leírást önmagáról (akadémiai cím, munkahely, foglalkozás) és egy email címet.
- b. A szöveg tagolása áttekinthető legyen. A címeket úgy kell feltüntetni, hogy abból logikusan következtetni lehessen azok rangjára (javasoljuk, hogy a címeket arab számokkal lássák el: 1., 1.1., 1.2.1. stb., de a számozás nem fog megjelenni a lapban).
- c. Kerüljék az alapszöveg túlzott formázását (lehetőleg csak a szükséges kiemelések legyenek, dőlt betűvel). A címeket nem kell formázni, rangjukra a számozásból következtetni lehet.

- d. A magyar főszövegben mindig magyar nyelvű idézetek szerepeljenek, az idézet eredeti változatát lábjegyzetben közöljék. Használják a magyar idézőjeleket: „ ”. Az öt sornál hosszabb idézeteket kérjük külön bekezdésben, jobb-és baloldali behúzással kiemelve közölni. Az idézeteken belüli idézetek jelölése » « jelekkel történik.
- e. A cikk végén az irodalomjegyzék csak azokat a műveket tartalmazza, amelyekre a szerző az írásában valóban hivatkozott. A bibliográfiában a művek a szerzők vezetéknevének magyar ábécé szerinti betűrendjében követik egymást. Ugyanannak a szerzőnek a nevét valamennyi írása előtt ki kell írni, az egyes művek a publikálásuk éve sorrendjében követik egymást, és az ugyanabban az évben megjelent műveket az ábécé betűivel jelzik (pl. 2008a, 2008b stb.). Az egyes műveket a következőképpen kell jegyezni:

A szerzők vezetékneve áll az első helyen KISKAPITÁLIS betűkkel<sup>1</sup>, majd a keresztnéve, amelyet nem magyar szerzők esetén vessző választ el egymástól. Több szerző közös publikációja esetén a szerzők nevét nagyköötőjellel kapcsoljuk<sup>2</sup> egymáshoz, amit szóköz előz meg és szóköz követ (pl.: TÖRÖK István – KOCSIS Elemér – SZÚCS Ferenc). Ezt követi a mű első közlésének éve zárójelben.

A név és zárójel után kettőspont áll, majd a mű címe és esetleges alcíme dőlt betűszedéssel, amit pont követ. Jön a kiadás helye, ettől vesszővel elválasztva a kiadó neve. A hivatkozást ponttal zárjuk. Általános mintaként szolgál a következő példa, ahol az írásjelek és egyes szavak szerkesztése pontosan tükrözi a leírtakat: CSALÁDNÉV Keresztnév (évszám): *Cím, Alcím*, Kiadás Helye, Kiadó Neve.

- Önálló kötet esetén CSALÁDNÉV Keresztnév (évszám): *Cím, Alcím*. Kiadás Helye, Kiadó Neve. Oldalszámok. pl.: BARTH, Karl (1924): *Wort Gottes und die Theologie*. München, Kaiser Verlag.
- Önálló kötet esetén, ha reprint kiadvány, akkor a fenti módon tüntetjük fel az eredeti kiadás adatait, és zárójelben a reprint: formula bevezetésével az új kiadás adatait kiemelés nélkül pl.: HALASY-NAGY József (1944): *Filozófia*, Budapest, Pantheon (reprint: Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1991.)

<sup>1</sup> Formátum – Betűtípus – KISKAPITÁLIS, tehát NEM csupa nagybetű!

<sup>2</sup> Alkalmazás módja: Ctrl + a Mínusz jel a billentyűkészlet számai között, illetve Beszúrás – Szimbólumok – Különleges karakterek – Gondolatjel.

- Önálló kötet esetén, ha nem első kiadás, a használt kiadás számát a megjelenés éve előtt kisebb, megemelt arab számmal kell jelezni. Az első kiadás évszámát nem kell feltüntetni pl.: NAGY Barna (<sup>2</sup>1999): *A teológiai módszer problémája az úgynevezett dialektika teológiában*. Budapest, Kálvin Kiadó.
- Önálló kötet esetén, ha az fordítás, a szerző után a megjelenés évét, és lehetőleg azt is feltüntetjük az előzőek szerint, hogy hányadik kiadás, a cím után zárójelben az eredeti címet, maj a fordító nevét és az új kiadás adatait tüntetjük fel, pl.: SOGGIN, J. Alberto (<sup>4</sup>1987): *Bevezetés az Ószövetségbe* (Eredeti címe: *Introduzione all’Antico Testamento*). Fordította: Hoffmann Béla – Víg István, Budapest, Kálvin János Kiadó, 1999.
- Folyóiratban megjelent tanulmányból való idézés esetén nem az idézett közlemény, hanem a folyóirat címét írjuk dőlt betűkkel, amelyet az „In” szóval vezetünk fel, és közöljük a folyóirat fontosabb adatait (évfolyam, kötet), valamint az idézett közlemény teljes terjedelmének pontos oldalszámát. Pl.: MOLNÁR János (2008): *A Tízparancsolat*, In: *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai, Theologia Reformata Transylvanica*. 54. 1–2.
- Tanulmánykötetben szereplő írás esetén, vagy közös kötetben megjelent fejezet esetén a folyóiratban megjelent közleményhez hasonlóan jegyezzük, ezúttal a szerkesztő/k feltüntetésével. A szerzők vezetéknevét kiskapitálissal írjuk, a szerkesztőkét viszont nem. pl.: PÜSÖK Sarolta (2019): *Interplay of Tradition and Innovation in the Transylvanian Reformed Church after 1989*, In: Lukács Olga – Nagy Alpár – Péter István (szerk.): *From Movement to Inheritance – Hidden Assets from the Treasury of Hungarian Reformation*, (Refo500 Academic Studies, Volume 59, Edited by Herman J. Selderhuis). Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 185–192.
- Lexikonban szereplő szócikk esetén: PÉTER Katalin (1999): *Francisc David (szócikk)*, In: Owen Chadwick (szerk.): *Oxford Encyclopedia of Reformation*. New York – London, Oxford University Press, I., 148.

- Levéltári forrásokra való hivatkozás esetén az idézett dokumentum azonosításához szükséges adatokat az illető lelőhely (levéltár és irattár) saját hivatkozási módja szerint kell feltüntetni. Egy levéltári hivatkozásnak mindenképp tartalmaznia kell a hivatkozott irat szerzőjét, címét vagy legalább rövid leírását (pl. XY jelentése), a levéltár nevét, a levéltári fond számát, azon belül a tétel és a doboz vagy köteg számát, illetve a kötegen belüli oldalszámot. Pl.: NAGY Ferenc: *Helyzetkép a Dél-Erdélyben maradt Református Anyaszentegyház életéről a II. bécsi döntéstől 1943. május 5-ig*. Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (MNL OL), K 610 (Sajtó levéltár), 91. cs. (Dél-Erdélyi Adattár), VI/11. 11.
- Elektronikus forrásokra való hivatkozás esetén a kiadványra vonatkozó előzőekben megadott összes elérhető adatot követően fel kell tüntetni a honlap adatait és az utolsó letöltés időpontját: BENKŐ Levente: Magyar nemzetiségpolitika Észak-Erdélyben, 1940–1944, [http://www.xxszazadintezet.hu/rendezvenyek/korraajz\\_2002\\_konyv-bemutato/benko\\_levente\\_eloadasa.html](http://www.xxszazadintezet.hu/rendezvenyek/korraajz_2002_konyv-bemutato/benko_levente_eloadasa.html) (utolsó megtekintés dátuma: 2009. július 31.).

Az esetleges hiányzó, az adott publikációban fel nem tüntetett bibliográfiai adatot a megfelelő helyen [szögletes] zárójelben kell jelölni teljes kiírással vagy rövidítve, pl. [hely nélkül/ h.n.], [kiadó nélkül/ k.n.], [évszám nélkül/ é.n.].

f. A lábjegyzetek a következő minták szerint készüljenek:

10 pont betűméret, normál sortávolság, sorkizárt. Minden lábjegyzetet egy mondatvégi írásjel zár le.

A *lábjegyzet-szám* és az utána következő szöveg közé egy nem törhető szóköz kerül.<sup>3</sup>

Az első hivatkozás alkalmával közöljük az irodalomjegyzékben szereplő teljes adatot, végül az idézet, hivatkozás pontos oldalszáma következik. Ha az idézet szövege a forrásmunkának nem egyetlen oldalán olvasható, akkor az

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<sup>3</sup> Alkalmazás módja: Shift + Ctrl + szóköz, vagy: Beszúrás – Szimbólumok – Különleges Karakterek – Nonbreaking Space

idézet kezdő és záró oldalszámát is meg kell adni, mindig teljesen kiírva, a két oldalszám között szóközök nélkül nagyköötjel áll. (pl. 237–238.)

A második és következő hivatkozás alkalmával elég vesszővel elválasztva jegyezni a szerző vezetéknevét kiskapitálissal, zárójelben az első közlés évét, majd az oldalszámot.

Egymást követő lábjegyzetekben ugyanannak a szerzőnek ugyanazon munkája esetében megengedett az i.m. (idézett mű) rövidítés és oldalszám, amennyiben az oldalszám is azonos, egyszerűen uo. (ugyanott) jegyezhető.

- g. A bibliai idézetek helyét nem lábjegyzetben, hanem a főszövegben, egyszerű zárójelben kell jelölni. A bibliai könyveket a protestáns új fordítású Biblia függelékében (első kiadás: 1975, legfrissebb kiadás: 2014) felsoroltak szerint rövidítjük.

A számozott bibliai könyvek esetében az arab könyvszám és a rövidítés között nincs szóköz, a bibliai könyv nevének rövidítése után nem áll pont (2Móz). A fejezet- és versszámok arab számok, a kettő között szóköz nélkül vessző áll, a versszám mögött nincsen pont (Ézs 1,9). Több, nem ugyanabból a fejezetből származó igehelyet pontosvessző és mögötte szóköz választ el (Lk 3,12; 12,11). Egy fejezeten belül több vers számát szóköz nélküli pont választja el, a fejezetszámot ekkor csak egyszer írjuk ki (Lk 2,2.4.11; ApCsel 2,3.8). Hosszabb szakaszok kezdő és záró versszáma között nagyköötjel áll, sem a nagyköötjel előtt, sem mögötte nem áll szóköz (Róma 8,1–12; Jel 2,2–14).

- h. A közölni kívánt cikkek legkevesebb 10, legtöbb 20 oldalasak lehetnek (1 oldalt A4-es papírmérettel, mindenütt 2,5 cm margóval, 12 pontos betűmérettel és másfeles sorközzel kell számítani).

- i. Amennyiben a szöveg héber és görög betűs szöveget is tartalmaz, csatolják a betűtípusokat is. Ha a szövegben képek, ábrák szerepelnek, azokat külön, nagy felbontású (javasolt érték 600 dpi, de legalább 150 dpi) JPEG képként csatolják.

j. Ha a szövegben táblázatot vagy ábrát szeretnének közölni, ezeket szerkeszthető formában, külön is szíveskedjenek csatolni. A táblázatokhoz és / vagy ábrákhoz leírást kell csatolni a következő minták szerint:

- 1. táblázat:** *A táblázat adataira vonatkozó rövid elnevezés.*
- 1. ábra:** *Az ábra megnevezése.*

k. A folyóiratban recenziók is publikálhatók, ezek terjedelme nem haladhatja meg az öt oldalt. Köszönettel fogadjuk az új, nem ismert, a teológia, vallásoktatás vagy lelkigondozás terén áttörő eredményeket ismertető munkák bemutatását. A recenzió elején közölni kell a méltatott könyv összes adatait (szerzők, szerkesztők, cím, kiadó, helység, évszám, oldalszám), és mellékelni kell a könyv borítóképét.

A szerkesztőségbe való beérkezésük után a cikkeket az egyetemünk kiadványaira vonatkozó belső szabályozás értelmében előbb megvizsgáljuk plágiumteszten, és a megfelelő kéziratokat elküldjük a szaklektoroknak. (Ezek listáját lásd a borító második oldalán.) A lektorálás névtelenül történik (blind review), egy cikket két szaklektor lektorál. Előfordulhat, hogy a lektorok bizonyos jobbításokhoz kössék egy-egy cikk megjelenését, javaslataikat a szerkesztőség megküldi a szerzőknek, a javított változatnak 14 napon belül kell visszaérkeznie. Amennyiben a szerző túllépi a megengedett határidőt, a cikk már csak a következő számban jelenhet meg.

A lektorálás után a cikkeket betördeljük és korrektúrázzuk, a nyomtatás előtt a szerzők PDF formátumban kefelenyomatot kapnak írásaikról, majd 48 órán belül emailen közölniük kell, hogy az a megadott formában megjelenhet. A szerző jóváhagyása nélkül a cikk nem jelenhet meg a folyóiratban.

A folyóirat megjelenése után a szerzők postán kapják meg, vagy személyesen vehetik át tiszteletpéldányaikat. A lap online változatban is megjelenik, ez már nyomtatás előtt elérhető a [http://studia.ubbcluj.ro/arhiva/arhiva\\_en.php](http://studia.ubbcluj.ro/arhiva/arhiva_en.php) címen.



## Instructions for Authors

The editorial board of the *Theologia Reformata Transylvanica* series of the *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai* journal accepts for publishing scientific papers pertaining to the fields of theology, religious education or pastoral care. We only accept manuscripts for first publication (not previously published in any other language).

The financial status of the journal does not allow for payments to the authors for their contributions, but every contributor receives a free copy of the issue in which his/her article was published. *Studia* is issued twice a year, namely in June and in December. There is no fixed deadline for the submission of the articles, but please be advised that every contribution sent to the board before February 1 will be published in the first issue, and articles sent until September 1 will appear in the second one.

Articles should be sent electronically, via email (in Rich Text Format) to the following address: **studiatrt@gmail.com**. We kindly request our authors not to mention their names in the article. Please do a proofreading of the text sent in for review, and adhere to the following format and content parameters:

- a. The language of the article should be English (United Kingdom). Most common issues of using this language are: -ise v. -ize: Use the ending -ize, -ization, -izing (not -ise, -isation, -ising) as in the so-called Oxford (English Dictionary) spelling. (Note that the use of -ize instead of -ise does not include the spelling of words in British English that end in -yse such as analyse or paralyse, which come from Greek.)
- b. Submitted text should have an at least one thousand three hundred characters English abstract, the English title of the publication and at least five keywords. The editorial board welcomes a Hungarian translation of the title and the keywords, yet this is discretionary. First-time authors should provide a one-line presentation that includes their profession, occupation, workplace and contact email.
- c. The division of the text should be logical and consequent. Headings should be marked by the author in a way that the editors may differentiate them easily (numbering with Arabic numerals like 1., 1.1 etc. is an option, but will not appear in the journal).

- d. The initials of the main words (except prepositions, articles, and coordinating conjunctions) in (sub)titles used/mentioned in the article as well as in the reference list should be capitalized.
- e. Authors should avoid exceeded formatting of the text (only the important highlights should be formatted with italics). Titles should not be formatted, since their heading level can be deduced from the numbering or other type of marking.
- f. The submitted text should only contain citations that have been translated into English. Provide the original reference in the source language in the footnotes. Citations exceeding 5 lines in length should be written in a separate paragraph and indented from left and right. Use typographers' quotes: “ ” for every citation.
- g. References to books and articles have to be placed in the footnotes. Please add a bibliography at the end of the article, which includes only the references you have actually cited in your paper. These should be arranged in alphabetical order according to the main authors' last name. Should you cite several works of the same author, the sorting is done by the year of publication. The year of publication should be mentioned right after the name of the author. If your article references works from the same author published in the same year, please arrange them in alphabetical order with a small letter after the year (for instance: 2008a, 2008b, 2008c etc.)

References should be provided by applying the following guidelines:

Start with the last name of the first author, which should be written in SMALL CAPS<sup>1</sup>. Add a comma after the last name, then add the first author's first name followed by the year of publication in parentheses, and a colon.

If an article has multiple authors, the full names of the authors (LAST NAME written in small caps followed by a comma and the First Name in regular formatting having each word capitalised) are separated by an en dash preceded and followed by a blank, i.e.: ANDREWS, Dale – HEITINK, Gerben – JENNINGS, Theodore Wesley (2006): .

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that writing everything in UPPERCASE is not equivalent to using SMALL CAPS.

The name(s) of the author(s) is followed by the year of publication in parentheses and a colon, then all subsequent elements should be written as it can be seen in the examples below:

### Referencing books

- Referencing an individual volume, that has one author:  
BARTH, Karl (1924): *Wort Gottes und die Theologie*. München, Kaiser Verlag. 75–79
- Referencing a reprint edition of a volume requires citing the original edition as presented above, followed by the data of the reprint in parentheses:  
LAST NAME, First Name (publishing year A): *Title*. Place of publishing A, publisher A (reprint: place of Publishing B, publisher B, 2010). page range.
- Referencing a later edition of a volume requires noting the number of the edition in superscript formatting right before the year of publishing. There is no need for mentioning the publishing year of the first edition. I.e.:  
LAST NAME, First Name (<sup>number if edition</sup> year of publication): *Title*. Place of publishing, publisher. Page numbers.
- Referencing a translation of an individual volume requires indicating the following citation data of the original work in parentheses: original title and the number of the edition (if applicable)  
LAST NAME, First Name (<sup>number if edition</sup> year of publication): *Title* (Original Title: Title in the Original Language). Transl. by: name of translator. Place of publishing, publisher, year of publication of the translation. Page range.

### Referencing a journal or conference proceedings

- Upon citing a journal article, the title of the article is not italicised. This is followed by the “In” preposition, then a colon, and the name of the journal formatted in italics, which in turn is followed by the most important citation data pertaining to the journal (volume, issue) as well as the exact page range of the article cited:  
LAST NAME, First Name (year of publishing): Title of Article. In: *Journal Name*. Volume number, issue number. Page range.
- Upon citing conference proceedings, the pattern is similar to that of citing scientific journals, but in this case the editors of the volume have to be noted. The

last name of the author is written in small caps, whereas the last name of the editors has regular formatting.

LAST NAME A, First Name A (year of publication): Title of Proceeding. In: Last Name B, First Name B–Last Name C, First Name C (eds.): *Name of Conference Proceedings*. Place of publishing, publisher. Page range.

- Upon citing an entry from an encyclopaedia, dictionary, lexicon, or concordance: LASTNAME A, Firstname A (year of publication): *The Topic* (entry). In: Last Name B, First Name B (ed.): *Name of Encyclopaedia*. Place of Publishing, Publisher, Volume. Page range.

### **Referencing a primary source from an archive**

LAST NAME, First Name: *Specific Item Title*. Name of Archive (ABBREVIATION), Box, Folder, Collection, Folio or page number. Please note that authors shall use the specific referencing system of the particular archive in order to identify the source of their work. The personnel of the specific archives is always the most competent to mark the exact way of referring to the archives.

### **Referencing an online source**

LAST NAME, First Name: Title of the article published online. [http:// correct link to the source](http://correct link to the source) (last accessed: date in DD.Month.YEAR format).

**In case of missing citation data, these pieces of information should be substituted by square brackets in their respective places and they should include the category of the missing data. I.e.: [Publisher Missing], [Place of Publishing Missing], [Year Missing]**

#### h. Footnotes

Use 10 pt font size, normal line spacing, justified formatting. Each footnote ends with a full stop.

The number of the footnote and the subsequent text providing the reference are separated by a nonbreaking space, which is a special character that can be inserted via the Insert–Symbol–Special Characters–Nonbreaking Space command, or the Shift + Ctrl + Space bar keyboard shortcut sequence.

When citing a source for the first time in the footnotes, you have to add the complete citation data of that specific reference followed by the exact page number of the cited excerpt. If you reference several parts of a work that has multiple pages, note the first and the last page of the work's range joined by an en dash (i.e.: 237–238.).

When citing a source for the second time, it is enough to note the last name of the author in small caps followed by the year of publication, a comma and the page number, ending in a full stop. (i.e. LAST NAME year of publication, 55.) If your article refers to several works by the same author from the same year, the last name of the author in small caps and the year of publication is followed by a small letter (i.e. 2008a), by a comma, the page number, and ended with a full stop. (i.e.: LAST NAME 2008a, 55.)

In the case of consecutive footnotes referencing the same work of the same author, you may use the Op. cit.<sup>2</sup> standing in for repetition of the full title of the work, followed by the page number, ending with a full stop. (i.e.: Op. cit. 22.)

In the case of consecutive footnotes referencing the same work of the same author, and the very same place in that specific work, you may use Ibid.<sup>3</sup> This footnote also ends with a full stop. (i.e.: Ibid.)

i. When citing a passage of scripture, include the abbreviated name of the book, the chapter number, and the verse number in round parentheses in the body of the text, and not in the footnotes. Books that have numbers preceding their name are noted with Arabic numbers, and the numbers are followed directly by the abbreviation of the name of the book without any interceding blank spaces. The abbreviation of the name of the books is not followed by a full stop within the parentheses such as in this example: (2Sam). Arabic chapter and verse numbers are separated by colons without blank spaces, and no full stop at the end of the citation within the parentheses: (Isa 1:9). The correct form of citing several verses from different chapters is by using a semicolon followed by a blank space for separating the chapters: (Luke 3:12; 12:11). Several verses cited from one chapter are delimited by full stops; in this case the chapter number is noted only once: (i.e.: Lk 2:2.4.11; Acts 2:3.8). Texts spanning over several verses are noted by using the starting and the ending verse number connected by an en dash, which is not preceded nor followed by a blank space: (i.e.: Rom 8:1–12; Rev 2:2–14).

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<sup>2</sup> It is an abbreviation of the Latin phrase *opus citatum*, meaning the work cited.

<sup>3</sup> It is an abbreviation of the Latin adverb *ibidem*, meaning in the same place.

- j. Submitted papers should have the length at least 10, at most 20 pages (pages should be formatted with A4 paper size, 2,5 cm wide margins on every side, font Times New Roman with size of 12 pt and line spacing of 1,5).
- k. If your text contains Hebrew or Greek characters, please attach the fonts to your email.
- l. If the text contains images, please attach them separately in high resolution (preferably 600 dpi, but at least 150 dpi) JPEG format.
- m. Tables and figures should be attached also separately and provided with a description following these patterns:

**Table 1.** *The environmental and relational characteristics and institutional network*

**Figure 6.** *Diagram of local characteristics regarding outsourcing companies*

The journal also accepts book reviews for publication, which should not be longer than 5 pages. Book reviews regarding new publications, which present recent results in the field of theology, religious education or pastoral care. The book review should start with the details of the presented publication (author(s), editor(s), title, publisher, place, year, number of pages) and the scanned image of the cover should be attached.

After we receive the submitted papers, we send them to the reviewers (see their list on the inside cover page). The board uses blind reviewing, one article is reviewed by 2 reviewers. It is possible that reviewers would request the author to improve the article, their suggestions will be sent to the author, and the revised version of the article should arrive back to the editors in 14 days. If the author misses this deadline and does not send the revised version back, the article will not be published in the upcoming issue, yet it may be published in a future one.

After reviewing the texts in accordance with our university's internal policy on publications, we will first carry out a plagiarism test and identify the appropriate manuscripts, and only thereafter will they be edited and proofread, following which the final version of the text is sent in PDF format to the authors. This copy should be approved in 48 hours by the author. Without this approval, the article will not be published.

After the publication of the issue, contributors will receive a copy by regular mail or personally. The journal is also published in online version, which is available before printing at the link: [http://studia.ubbcluj.ro/arhiva/arhiva\\_en.php](http://studia.ubbcluj.ro/arhiva/arhiva_en.php).