

Hungarian martyrs of the Church of the Faith III.

Edited by:

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RAJMUND FEKETE¹

IN THE GRIP OF UTOPIAS

“*We must dream!*”

Lenin

Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union of the Bolsheviks were pagan, atheistic, totalitarian dictatorships. Their ruling denied the Christian teaching that all men are made in the image of God. Karl Marx saw the Church and Christianity as the opium of the people,² and Adolf Hitler saw Christianity as the greatest scourge of mankind.³ Both of these inhuman dictatorships persecuted and murdered millions of their fellow human beings according to collective—i.e. racial or class—criteria. Slavery was reintroduced in twentieth-century Europe with the institution of camps and forced labour. Both modern totalitarian regimes sought to make people complicit in their crimes, while striving for their total annihilation. This is what became of the promise of an earthly paradise.

Fortunately, both of these God-denying, atheistic regimes had been destroyed by the end of the twentieth century. We put an end to both Nazism and communism. However, by the time the Soviet Union collapsed, the atheistic Marxism that underpinned communist ideology had found fertile ground in the Western world, and, as Rudi Dutschke called it, the long

1 Rajmund Fekete (born in Hatvan, Hungary, 1987) historian, PhD, Director of the Institute for Research of Communism, research fellow at the John Lukacs Institute at the Ludovika University of Public Service, and editor of the *Látószög* blog. Email: feketek.rajmund@kommunizmuskutato.hu

2 Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (Introduction), trans. by Annette Jolin and Joseph O'Malley (Cambridge University Press, 1970). Available online at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm> Accessed on 17 November 2024

3 László Karsai: “*Hitler és a kereszténység*”[“*Hitler and Christianity*”], in *Hetek*, 28 October 2001

march through the institutions⁴ had begun, conquering universities, the media, the intelligentsia, the public square, and—last but not least—much of the political sphere. This Western intellectual elite embraced Marxism’s materialist philosophy and its social and cultural agenda. However, Western Marxists no longer see the end point of historical progress as coming from a proletarian revolution, but from the Americanisation of the world. Thus, the world is no longer divided into the oppressed and the oppressors, locked in an irreconcilable struggle, but into winners and losers. And the faith of this neo-Marxist elite in the idea of inexorable historical progress—also known as historical necessity—remains unbroken. Nor is it abandoning its revolutionary commitment, as demonstrated by its relentless, incessant fight for the rights of fragmented identities, sexual and gender minorities and equality.⁵

The Western vanguard remains committed to the messianic promise of socialism. It has adopted the latter’s radical atheism and emptied Heaven. Today, the Western man wants to believe in everything: that a man can become a woman and vice versa, in the importance of lifestyle changes, in plastic surgery and diets. But he does not want to believe in God. And by doing so, such people are excluding hope from their lives. While in the United States of America, in 1973, the proportion of the adult population identifying as Christians was 87%, fifty years later this figure was “only” 68%. Perhaps more worryingly, only 45% of the adult population considers religion

4 During the Chinese Civil War of 1934–35, the Chinese Red Army under Mao Zedong carried out a strategic retreat with heavy losses, known as the “Long March”, from the south and center of the country to the north, with their headquarters being set up in the city of Yan’an. The Chinese partisans then fought a guerrilla war against the invading Japanese forces before resuming the civil war against the national forces after 1945, achieving a final victory in 1949. The Chinese example had a major influence on the New Left movements in Western Europe during the 1960s. It provided Rudi Dutschke (1940–79), the leader of the West German student movement, with the inspiration for his strategy. The initial stage of this was not the conquest of institutions and their transformation from within, as would later be successfully achieved, but instead the focus was on a political breakthrough through social institutions (mainly universities, colleges, high schools and vocational schools). For more on this, see: Márton Békés, *Kulturális hadviselés. A kulturális hatalom elmélete és gyakorlata [Cultural Warfare. The Theory and Practice of Cultural Power]*, (Budapest: Közép- és Kelet-európai Történelem és Társadalom Kutatásáért Alapítvány, 2020); and Roger Kimball, *The Long March: How the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s Changed America* (New York: Encounter Books, 2001)

5 Mária Schmidt: *Világrendetlenség [World Disorder]* (Budapest: Kelet-európai Történelem és Társadalom Kutatásáért Alapítvány, 2024), pp. 26–27

important at all.⁶ Thus, they are excluding hope from their lives. Meanwhile, this post-Marxist elite is pushing for the extension of rights to fragmented identities in order to dismantle communities with traditional values. How did Marx put it in *The Communist Manifesto*? “*The communists... openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions*”⁷ The Western elite, which has become atheist and Marxist, is in solidarity with gender, sexual and identity minorities, but judges that all other social solidarity should be abolished. This is generating a serious identity crisis, which in the long term, aims to dismantle existing structures and build new ones that are favourable to them. And those who build them are able to maintain their rule over them.

This post-Marxist Western elite has nothing to offer the majority. It wants to break their sense of cohesion because it sees them as the enemy. It has taken from them everything that once bound them together: their faith and religion, their traditional identity, their sense of rootedness. All that remains is a culture of consumption. It has plunged modern man, uncoupled from his traditional bonds, into total alienation and perplexity.

IN THE FERVOUR OF REVOLUTION

“Can you make a revolution without executions?”

Lenin

According to revolutionaries, a revolution also marks the beginning of a new era. Adherents of this belief are therefore under the illusion that after every revolution they have the right to reorganise the state and the moral order—including family and property ties—in line with the principles they profess, and to remove the elements they do not like, because they have the authority and the ability to chart a new course for history. They do not take into account the fact that forces outside and above us, independent of our decisions, have a say in this. Like the Marxist elites of old, today’s Marxist elites do not comprehend that Providence will have the final word.⁸ Sooner or later, therefore, they too will be forced to get off their high horse and ac-

⁶ “*How Religious Are Americans?*”, in *Gallup*, 29 March, 2024. Available online at: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/358364/religious-americans.aspx> Accessed on 11 November 2024

⁷ Konrad Löw: *Das Rotbuch der kommunistischen Ideologie. Marx und Engels. Die Väter des Terrors [The Red Book of Communist Ideology. Marx & Engels—Fathers of Terror]* (Munich: Langen/Müller, 1999)

⁸ Mária Schmidt, *op.cit.* p. 28

knowledge what the Hungarian rock band *Tankcsapda* (“Tank Trap”) sang back in 1995: “*Man proposes, God disposes.*”

They regard the Great Revolutions as their origin myths: the great French Revolution; the Great October Socialist Revolution—which was neither great, nor in October, nor a revolution—; and the Revolution of the 68ers. The latter, that of ‘68, was the great cause and great pride of their lives. For them, it was zero hour: a blank page to be written on as they saw fit. However, their attempted revolution in 1968 was stillborn; they were rejected by the very oppressed class that they sought to represent. Western workers wanted the good life, consumption and middle-class lifestyles, and had no intention of revolution—however much they were subjected to the agitation of a procession of pampered young intellectuals driven by a youthful fervour for something truly exciting, lasting and romantic. This is the source of the profound disdain—and even contempt—still felt to this day by that vanguard of the 1968s for the lower classes it affects to represent. They are responsible for leaving these hungry-for-rebellion 68ers without a base that could be mobilised for revolution. In any case, they saw existing socialism as non-existent and, instead of confronting it, they turned to other horizons in search of distant, unknown targets for their admiration and enthusiasm. Kampuchea, China and Cuba became their Holy Trinity. Pol Pot was educated by the French, as were Ho Chi Minh, Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping. The 68er elite, otherwise so sensitive, had not a word to say about the genocide in Kampuchea, or the mass murders in Vietnam and China. To this day, these events are considered to be trivial and unworthy of mention. While turning to the Third World, they have been forced to confine their combat-ready troops to the occupation of universities, the media, and academia. But they soon realised the importance of culture, or soft power politics, and using the positions they occupied they gained supremacy in messaging and a monopoly on interpreting events. This has helped to obscure their true nature, which is in complete alignment with consumer society, based as it is on the naive cult of the moment and the desire for “everything now”. This has been accompanied by a rejection of procreation, which has led to an indifference towards the future and has plunged Europe into a demographic deficit and its accompanying insecurity. Thus, the 1960s have made the culture of pleasure the sole purpose of life, while, in compensation, allowing increasing scope for the spread of feelings of guilt.

A study in the United States of America has shown that, of all the groups studied, white liberals are the only ones who value other races more highly

than their own.⁹ Another study found that, over the past decade or so, white liberals have shifted so far to the Left on issues of race and racism that they are now more Left-wing than the average black voter.¹⁰ Since 2012, this trend has been accompanied by a rise in negative attitudes towards Jews, and an increasingly strong affiliation with the Palestinians in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. All of this came to a head after Hamas attacked Israel on 7 October 2023: according to research by Harvard University, more than 3,700 days of pro-Palestinian protests were organised in 525 different educational institutions across 317 US cities between 7 October and 30 May.¹¹ The American-based Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has identified a 200% increase in anti-Semitic incidents in the United States of America.¹² Although this aforementioned white liberal group represents around a quarter of the total population, its political and cultural power is many times greater. They see themselves as political activists and are very active on social media, exerting great influence—not least because their members are among the most prosperous and highly educated in society.

9 Zach Goldberg: “America’s White Saviors”, in *Tablet*, 6 June 2019. Available online at: <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/americas-white-saviors> Accessed on 11 November, 2024

10 Matthew Yglesias: “The Great Awakening”, in *Vox*, April 1, 2019. Digital publication, Available online at: <https://www.vox.com/2019/3/22/18259865/great-awakening-white-liberals-race-polling-trump-2020> Accessed on 11 November, 2024

11 Jay Ulfelder: “Crowd Counting Consortium: An Empirical Overview of Recent Pro-Palestine Protests at U.S. Schools”, in *Harvard Kennedy School Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation*, 30 May 2024. Available online at: <https://ash.harvard.edu/articles/crowd-counting-blog-an-empirical-overview-of-recent-pro-palestine-protests-at-u-s-schools/> Accessed on 11 November 2024

12 Holly Honderich: “Antisemitic incidents in US surge to record high—report”, *BBC*, 7 October 2024. Available online at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c9gwkv9d99vo> Accessed on 11 November 2024

DIFFERING HISTORICAL EXPERIENCES

“In the East Stalinism was a practical reality; in the West it was a religion.”

François Furet

The revolution—and hence atheism and Marxism—were experienced differently in the second half of the twentieth century by the two halves of Europe. While we in Hungary suffered for forty-six years, Russia had to endure seventy-five years under totalitarian dictatorship and the atrocities of inhuman terror. For a long time, we had to live within a revolutionary system that was dysfunctional and deceived us with false promises. We had to celebrate false heroes, the revolutionary youth days, the Great October Socialist Revolution, and to jubilantly proclaim the actions of the revolutionary workers’ and peasants’ government.

*“For a long time, we were deceived into thinking that the opposition between the two halves of the bipolar world, from its inception until the end of the seventies, was entirely due to the clash of values between Christianity and Marxism. This misconception was compounded by the fight between fascism and anti-fascism, and later between democracy and totalitarianism. It took us a long time to realise that it was not only revolutionary Marxist-socialist regimes that had become unmoored from traditional societies by abandoning faith and Christian morality to become secular and materialist; the same was true of the generation of the 68ers”.*¹³

We resisted the pressure and remained steadfast in our Christian faith and belief in God. The communists tried everything to make us waver: negative press campaigns, intimidation, ostracism, show trials, imprisonment, executions and labour camps. When it came to destroying their opponents, the communists had an inexhaustible arsenal at their disposal. While we resisted the Sovietisation imposed on us—thanks in part to our faith—the Western elites surrendered much of their identity and values.

The West has not learned from the fall of communism. Its elites still delude themselves that communism had good intentions but that a small mistake slipped into its implementation. Dinesh D’Souza, an Indian-American writer and political commentator, has written that *“Yet another go at socialism now feels like Elizabeth Taylor’s eighth marriage,*

¹³ Mária Schmidt, *op.cit.* p. 29

a triumph of hope over experience".¹⁴

Since the 1970s, the intellectuals of Western Europe and the United States have been thoroughly captivated by Marxism. As the Hungarian-born Paul Hollander recalled, *"I encountered a wide variety of attitudes, from stunning ignorance, through mixed emotions and wishful rhetoric, to unconcealed sympathy..."*¹⁵ All the while they were abandoning their Christian roots, losing their faith, and descending into hopelessness. The West betrayed its cultural identity, its shared Judeo-Christian roots.¹⁶ The post-imperial utopia of the United States has now absorbed the internationalism of pagan Marxism. It has replaced the class struggle with a struggle of identities, and its aim is clear: to make Western civilisation materialistic and rob it of its past. But one can draw hope from the fact that in the presidential election on 5 November 2024, the American people clearly rejected the identity politics represented by the Democratic Party.¹⁷

It is no coincidence that today's woke, cancel culture representatives copy the policies of the Nazis and communists by banishing God, religion and faith. As under earlier communist regimes, the Church is considered part of the private sphere and excluded from public life. In line with the practices of totalitarian regimes, the state has forced the Church out of its role as guardian of morality and the common good. Around the world—including in parts of Western Europe—Christianity has become a persecuted religion. *"Today Christians are murdered, tortured, imprisoned and slaughtered, because they refuse to deny Jesus Christ. [...] Christians who suffer today – whether it be in prison or by death or torture – in refusing to deny Jesus Christ, they indeed show the cruelty of this persecution. This cruelty that demands apostasy is – let us say the word – Satanic"*.¹⁸ These were the words of Pope Francis on 14 September 2016, during the Holy Mass, said for the repose

14 Dinesh D'Souza: *United States of Socialism* (New York: St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2020), p. 18

15 Paul Hollander: *Marx és a Korán [Marx and the Koran]* (Budapest, Közép- és Kelet-európai Történelem és Társadalom Kutatásáért Alapítvány, 2024), p. 39

16 Mária Schmidt, *op.cit.* p. 31

17 The Republican candidate, Donald Trump, received 312 electoral votes, while the Democrat candidate, Kamala Harris, received 226. Trump also won nearly three million more votes than Harris.

18 *"Egy éve gyilkolták meg Jacques Hamel atyát"* [*"One year after the murder of Father Jacques Hamel"*], in *Magyar Kurír*, July 26, 2017. Available online (in Hungarian) at: <https://mek.oszk.hu/00500/00583/html/ady55.htm> Accessed on 11 November 2024

of the soul of the French priest Father Jacques Hamel, who was beheaded by Islamist terrorists. Päivi Räsänen, a Christian Democrat member of the Finnish parliament, faced years of legal proceedings just for daring to quote the words of Paul the Apostle. And today, professing faith and wearing a cross can easily cost someone their job.¹⁹

Christianity still has some vitality in the eastern half of Europe because people remember the persecution of the Church and the heathen, anti-Christian world of the Nazis and the communists. In Eastern Europe during the persecutions, the concept of the nation became intertwined with the Christian religion and the Church. It offered hope even when the world had been turned upside down. The Church provided heroes, national saints and role models, shaping and keeping alive national and historical identity. In the West, on the other hand, churches are increasingly adapting to God-denying secular trends and the service of them.

Today, it is not only the Church and the Christian faith that are under attack in the West, but also the institutions that integrate society: families, churches and schools are being targeted. Once their authority has been destroyed and their functions have been hollowed out, the final bastion – the nation state – will be next. The aim is to break people’s attachment to the nation, and to replace it with loyalty and allegiance to the supranational, internationalist European Union and the transatlantic world. The Western elites believe that, because the EU is a peace project, it has a duty not only to contain, but also to abolish the “guilty” nation states that allegedly caused the world wars. This allegation is an outright lie: the world wars were caused by empires and nation states alike, and to absolve the former of blame is a ridiculous and futile exercise.²⁰ The main justification for the frontal assault on nation states is that only the nation and the nation state is predicated on a community of shared destiny bound to a geographical area, rooted in a common past, and possesses a collective memory. It protects the unity of the state,

19 In the United Kingdom, several employees and employers have been taken to court as a result of bans on the wearing of the cross in the workplace. In 2021, a woman was dismissed from her job at a hospital for wearing a cross, and in 2013, Nadia Eweida reported British Airways for requiring her to hide the cross-shaped pendant she wore around her neck at work. The European Court of Human Rights ruled in her favour.

20 Mária Schmidt: “Tíz év múlva: Gondolatok Európa jövőjéről” [“Ten years from now: reflections on the future of Europe”], in *Látószög blog*, 31 October 2020. Available online (in Hungarian) at: <https://latoszogblog.hu/aktualis/tiz-ev-mulva-gondolatok-europa-jovojerol/> Accessed on 11 November 2024

guarantees its security, and guards its borders. The nation state is an area of civic responsibility, with collective loyalty providing a counterweight against political and economic intrusion by global economic and political forces. This is why they want to abolish nation states. Because a Europe of nation states is the last chance for the survival of a Europe based on Christian principles and traditions.²¹

Today's woke movement is peddling the illusion of supremacy over nations in the same way that communist activists once propagated their internationalism, campaigning for the world proletariat to unite. This was what they offered in opposition to Christian universalism. Their goal was to eliminate organically formed communities. For decades, both East and West lied about the Soviet Union's success in transcending the national question. After his return from Soviet Russia, the American investigative journalist Lincoln Steffens proclaimed, "*I have seen the future and it works!*"²² For more than a hundred and fifty years Marxists have argued that "the national question" belongs to the past, and that the age of nation states is over. For more than seven decades of the Soviet Union's existence, it was claimed that the Soviet Union had had solved the national question. Therefore, when it became clear that the nation was alive and well, and had indeed destroyed the mighty Soviet Union, this came as a shock to the communist functionaries and Sovietologists in the West who were under the spell of internationalism. Yet they had experienced the same thing not long before that. The national awakening of their colonies had brought an end to their colonial empires. But they had not learned from this either.

The neo-Marxist Western European elite failed to grasp the key lesson of the twentieth century: that the nation is more important than class.

Unfortunately, however, the retreat of Christianity also includes the churches, which are now suffering from an ongoing loss of credibility. To make matters worse, they are no longer providing intellectual and emotional reassurance. The representatives of the churches lack self-confidence, they constantly show doubt in their mission, and their faith is precarious. They are making ever more concessions to the spirit of the age. Public scandals, misunderstandings about their role, and their failure to respond in a manner that protects and reassures the faithful demonstrate that Christian churches have adopted a submissive attitude. "*With their*

²¹ Mária Schmidt, *op.cit.* pp. 33-34

²² Kevin Baker: *Lincoln Steffens: Muckraker's Progress*, in *The New York Times*, 13 May 2011

heads bowed and their backs stooped, they delight in being tolerated and behave accordingly, as they once did under communism”.²³ Warriors like József Mindszenty cannot be found.

THERE IS HOPE

“I am still here / I still want to live”

Tisztán a Cél Felé (Hungarian krishnacore band)

Meanwhile, the Western elite are not reconciled to the world God created, being convinced that they can make it better and more perfect. Driven by their hubris, they demand ever more rights for themselves, leading to the rule of egos and the disintegration of communities. They have eliminated morality from their laws, separating law from justice.²⁴ In the West, God has now been driven out of the scientific sphere, and our world is now subordinated to scientific and technical considerations, as well as to sexuality. The progressives of the Western mainstream, in tandem with feminists, LGBTQ+ and trans activists, are moving heaven and earth—as communists once did—to make issues related to sexuality into political matters of public interest.²⁵ Meanwhile, we have been entrusted with scientific and technological progress that could easily prove to be devastatingly destructive. The recklessness of man, wallowing in relativism, is limitless.

Western sophisticates have now gone so far as to deny fetuses, with

²³ Mária Schmidt, *op.cit.* p. 35

²⁴ Every possible means was used in an attempt to sabotage the 2024 US presidential campaign of Republican candidate Donald Trump. Efforts were made to confiscate his previously acquired assets, he was indicted several times, and there were even attempts in some states to remove him from the ballot. In addition to all this, assassination attempts were made against him during the 2024 election campaign. Even in the United States of America, assassination attempts against presidential candidates are almost unprecedented: the previous such attempt was against George Wallace (in 1972), and before that, Robert Kennedy was assassinated (in 1968). See: Rajmund Fekete: *“Megölni az elnököt”* [“To Kill the President”], in *Látószög blog*, 3 October 2024. Available online (in Hungarian) at: <https://latoszogblog.hu/aktualis/megolni-az-elnokot/> Accessed on 11 November 2024

²⁵ This includes the #MeToo movement, which initially aimed to deter those who abused their power in the workplace but soon degenerated into a failed attempt by ageing women to extort money, resulting in seemingly endless revenge campaigns. Increasingly, influential and successful men have been smeared and blacklisted on the basis of unprovable, often invented “crimes” alleged to have been committed decades earlier. As in a one-party state, so in the MeToo cases the presumption of innocence is rejected out of hand.

some places even declaring abortion to be a human right and downgrading it to a health issue, as Democratic vice-presidential candidate Tim Walz did. According to them, the fetus, the new life, is therefore not something of value, not a “gift from God”, and has no human rights.²⁶ The issue of abortion has not been settled in the last half century, and is still the subject of fierce political battles and electoral contests.²⁷ Today, in a West under the progressives—and even in Poland—there are moves to legitimise killing the child in the ninth month of pregnancy, or immediately after birth. More recently, euthanasia has also been promoted as a human right.²⁸ For the *Übermensch* of the developed West, it is a human right to have the freedom to decide over life and death: including the lives and deaths of others. But we already know that. We have moved beyond that.

Our aspirations for emancipation have been strengthened by Hungary’s 1,100-year heritage of state and nation preservation, and by more than three decades of successful nation-building since the fall of communism. During this period, over our heads, empires have risen and fallen. We have been ruled by the Tatars, the Ottomans, the Habsburgs, the Nazis and the communists. We have outlasted them all. We are still here, and they are nowhere because we resisted and remained true to ourselves and to our sovereignty, the content of which is the same today as it has always been: freedom and independence. The poet Endre Ady saw it thus: “...in this are your lives and our people, Hungarians. You stood still and faced your hard skulls straight ahead, not to embrace illusory, gaudy ideals, but—to shed blood”²⁹

Our past, then, obliges us to insist on living as its worthy inheritors. We

26 Mária Schmidt: “*Ne szeretkezz, háborúzz!*” [“*Make war, not love*”], in *Látósög blog*, September 23, 2024. Available online (in Hungarian) at: <https://latoszogblog.hu/aktualis/ne-szeretkezz-haboruzz/> Accessed on 11 November 2024

27 In the 2024 US presidential election, abortion was the Democrats’ main election platform and issue.

28 In Europe, euthanasia is currently legal under certain circumstances in Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Spain. Assisted suicide is permitted in Portugal and Switzerland. In France, President Emmanuel Macron’s bill on “health and end-of-life care” includes provisions to make assisted suicide possible for people in the final stage of a terminal illness. On 27 January 2025, the National Assembly is expected to resume debate on the bill, which was interrupted following the dissolution of the body on 9 June 2024 for a snap election.

29 Endre Ady: *Ismeretlen Korvin-kódex margójára* [In the Margin of an Unknown Corvin Codex], 1905. Available online (in Hungarian) at: <https://mek.oszk.hu/00500/00583/html/ady55.htm> Accessed on 11 November 2024

need our roots, however, not only to survive, but also to ensure that our dignity as human beings is not disregarded. Denying Europe's roots would result in a fatal loss of direction. For without our Christian civilisational heritage, there would be no European culture and no European way of life. This is why we must not lose sight of God. *"If God is with us, who is against us?"*

ADAM SOMORJAI, OSB

THE FATE OF THE HUNGARIAN BENEDICTINES IN SLOVAKIA

When we think of the Benedictine monasteries in present-day Slovakia, we think of *Mount Zobor*, *Hronský Beňadik*, *Opátska* and *Krásna nad Hornádom* near Košice, *Skalka nad Váhom* which is eight centuries old this year, and other Benedictine foundations. They are of medieval origin and have barely survived the Middle Ages, generally because of the Turks, confessional struggles with Protestants, and the efforts of landlords to secularise. However, the Benedictine parishes of Pannonhalma, such as the churches of *Diakovce* and *Trávník*, did survive.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there was a Benedictine parish priest in *Modra* who belonged to Pannonhalma and had a civil schoolmaster. This situation remained unchanged for over a hundred years, until 1786.³⁰ In *Komárno*, following the suppression of the Jesuits, the Benedictines of Pannonhalma were active for a period of ten years from 1776 until 1786, when Joseph II dissolved the order.³¹

30 For the archival heritage, see the Archives of Pannonhalma Archabbey (PFL), which also functions as the central archive of the Benedictine past in Hungary and the respective volumes of *A Pannonhalmi Szent Benedek-Rend Története*. Ed. by László Erdélyi and Pongrácz Sörös, Stephaneum, Budapest 1902–1916. 14 volumes (PRT).

31 As it is known, monastery of *Zalavár-Zalaapáti* survived, because it belonged to Göttweig in Austria and Göttweig was not a secularised monastery. – Similarly, the Schottenstift in Vienna was saved, so that the Abbey of *Telki* near Budapest, which the Vienna convent had bought back, with its administrator's building in *Budajenő* (now a primary school), was preserved. See: Eugen Bonomi: *Die ungarische Abtei Telki unter den Wiener Schotten: 1702–1881: deutsche und ungarische Bauern bei Benediktinern*. Verlag des Südostdeutschen Kulturwerkes, München 1977. See again: Somorjai, A.: *Pannonhalmi és magyarországi dokumentumok a bécsi skót bencés apátság levéltárában. Kutatási beszámoló, 2018. augusztus 28. – szeptember 6.* [Documents about Pannonhalma and Hungary in the archives of the “Schottenstift” Benedictine Abbey in Vienna. Research report, 28 August–6 September 2018.] In: *Collectanea S. Martini. A Pannonhalmi Főapátság Gyűjteményeinek Értesítője* VI., 2018. pp. 257–270. – These abbeys in Austria became involved in pastoral life in Austria and took on a number of parishes, which they still run today.

Two Benedictine monasteries disappeared in the nineteenth century:
Bratislava Academy, Grammar School³²
Trnava High School, the old and present Jesuit building³³

Benedictine parishes until 1977

In *Diakovce* - from the middle eue period (the Árpád-era) until 1977.³⁴

In *Trávník* - from the middle eue period (the Árpád-era) until 1977.³⁵

In *Jánošíková*, the parish priest was a diocesan, but the Archabbot of Pannonhalma was the Patron who proposed the candidate for appointment by the Archbishop of Esztergom.³⁶

32 See Volume VI B of the PRT, pages 98–102, and our recent review of the following work: Keresztes, Veronika: *A Pozsonyi Jogakadémia története* [History of the Academy of Law in Bratislava] (1777–1914), Fórum Kisebbségkutató Intézet, Somorja 2022, in: *Fórum Társadalomtudományi Szemle* XXVI (2024), No. 2. pp. 187–189.

33 See Volume VI B of the PRT, pages 95–98, and the Benedictine Schematisms of Pannonhalma. For bibliographical details of the latter, see our paper Somorjai, A.: *A komáromi/komárnói bencés rendház 1919 után* [The Benedictine monastery of Komárom/Komárno after 1919], in: *A cseh-szlovákiai magyarság megpróbáltatásai vallási, politikai, kulturális téren* [The trials of the Hungarians in Czechoslovakia in the religious, political and cultural spheres] 1938–2018. Proceedings of the International Conference held in Szeged on 26 February 2019. Ed. by István Zombori. METEM, Budapest 2020. p. 93.

34 For the newer history see Csaba Keresztes: A deáki római katolikus plébánia iratanyaga [Archival records of the Roman Catholic Parish of Diakovce], in: *Collectanea Sancti Martini. A Pannonhalmi Főapátság Gyűjteményeinek értesítője* 8., ed. by Tamás Dénesi, Pannonhalma 2020. pp. 25–36.

35 In 1923, the Holy See elevated the former General Vicariate of Trnava to the status of an Apostolic Administration for the administration of the Slovakian territories of the Archdiocese of Esztergom. The two parishes of Diakovce and Trávník, which belonged to the Archabbey of Pannonhalma, remained part of Pannonhalma, albeit on paper, until 1977, when the Archdiocese of Trnava was erected. The Parish priests were, as far as possible, Benedictine throughout. Cf. Somorjai, A.: *Katolikus egyházkormányzati egységek Szlovákiában a II. világháború után. Különös tekintettel Trnava (Nagyszombat) esetére* [Catholic Church territorial units in Slovakia after World War II. With special reference to the case of Trnava] 1922–1937–1977–1995–2008, in print.

36 See our overview of the situation after Trianon, Somorjai, A.: *A Pannonhalmi Szent Benedek-rend és Trianon* [The Order of St Benedict of Pannonhalma and Trianon], in: *Trianon és az egyházak* [Trianon and the churches]. Ed. by István Zombori. METEM, Budapest 2023. p. 561–589:566s.

The Benedictine Fathers in Komárno

Following the re-establishment of the Order of Saint Benedict at Pannonhalma in 1802, the Benedictines returned to the Komárno monastery in 1812, contributing significantly to the Grammar school of the town,³⁷ until end of June 1945,³⁸ when the Czechoslovak authorities, not even waiting for the baccalaureate,³⁹ secularised it. In 1945, the Archbishop of Esztergom remained in office until October, when the previous situation, which had begun in 1923, was restored.⁴⁰ Afterwards, the Benedictines worked in the town of Komárno and substituted for the Parish priests in the surrounding villages, helping out and holding missions for the people in those villages⁴¹

37 During this period there was intensive correspondence with the Prague nunciature and the Apostolic See: Somorjai, A.: *Visitatio apostolica Institutorum Vitae consecratae in Hungaria, 1927–1935*. (Rendtörténeti Füzetek 13.), Pannonhalma 2008. p. 451–535. (Based on Vatican documents). See again idem: A bencés birtokok nemzetközi jogi helyzete a Dunától északra fekvő területeken [The international legal status of Benedictine estates north of the Danube], 1919–1939. In: *Episcopus, Archiabbas Benedictinus, Historicus Ecclesiae. Tanulmányok Várszegi Asztrik 70. születésnapjára* [Studies for the 70th birthday of Asztrik Várszegi]. Ed. by Somorjai, A., OSB and István Zombori, Budapest 2016. p. 109–123; See again Somorjai, A.: *Újabb iratok a Komáromi (Komárnói) Bencés Rendház helyzetére* [Newer documents on the situation of the Benedictine monastery in Komárno], 1919–1938, in: *Magyar Egyháztörténeti Vázlatok/ Essays in Church History in Hungary* 29 (2017), No. 3–4, p. 42–109.

38 “Our Grammar School was declared as suppressed by the ‘Poverenictvo pre školstvo’ on 28 June 1945, with effect from 6 September 1944, so that we could no longer issue school certificates to our pupils who had been at school until then.” Letter of Vicarius, Superior and Headmaster Ft. Lucián Bíró, No. K 122/1945, of November 11, 1945. to Vicar General Msgr. Dr. Ambróz Lazík, PFL, Komárom Benedictine monastery archives 1945.

39 Some of them had the baccalaureate exams in the Győr (Hungary) Benedictine Grammar School, see Pius Horváth, OSB: Fél napig győri diákok is voltunk... Emlékezés, kegyelet, hála [We were also students from Győr for half a day... Remembrance, respect, gratitude], in: *Collectanea Santi Martini IV. A Pannonhalmi Főapátság Gyűjteményeinek Értesítője*, Pannonhalma 2016. pp. 172–174.

40 See Somorjai, A.: Az egyházi joghatóság változása a Dunától északra fekvő, ismét csehszlovák államterületen, [The change of ecclesiastical jurisdiction in the territory north of the Danube, which was once again Czechoslovak territory] 1945–1949. Vatikáni iratok alapján [Based on Vatican Sources] In: *Levéltári Közlemények* 90 (2019) 2021. pp. 213–239.

41 There is regular correspondence about this in the PFL, Komárom Benedictine monastery archives between 1945–1950.

and taught at the “Marianum” College.⁴²

On the evening of 27 May 1949, during dinner, the Benedictines were attacked, forced into a truck and transported to *Kláštor pod Znievom*.

After 1989, the Benedictines attempted to repopulate the Monastery, but without success. This issue has not yet been discussed from a historical perspective.

In this paper, we will focus on the fate of the Benedictines of Komárno who lived in Czechoslovakia, with particular attention to the memories of János Aldemar Tóth,⁴³ a Benedictine who was a local vocation, having completed his university studies just as the state took away the Grammar School, and who worked at the “Marianum” in Komárno⁴⁴ until he was allowed to leave, after which he visited the most important priestly prisons in Czechoslovakia. In 1977, László Szilveszter Sólomos recited his memories on tape for the Benedictine monks of Pannonhalma. We have recently been able to publish this oral history material.⁴⁵

This Benedictine destiny in Slovakia can be called – in accordance with the title of our conference – *the Hungarian martyr destiny of the confessing Church*.

42 “Since 30 October, we also teach theology at the Marianum according to the schedule.”

Letter Ft. Lucián Bíró, No. K 122/1945, of November 11, 1945. to Vicar General Msgr. Dr. Ambróz Lazík, op. cit. – See Somorjai, A.: *A Komáromi Bencés Monostor önállósítására való törekvések 1945 után és a monostor feloszlatása* [The efforts for the independence of the Benedictine Monastery of Komárno after 1945 and the suppression of the monastery], in: *Collectanea S. Martini. A Pannonhalmi Főapátság Gyűjteményeinek Értesítője IV.*, 2016. 163–175.– The archives of the “Marianum” were found in the church tower in *Kameničná*, later it was moved to the Marianum Church School Centre. Its material is still unprocessed.

43 Ft. János Aldemar Tóth (Diakovce 1921–Pannonhalma/Győr May 19, 1986), Benedictine 1940, student of theology in Bratislava 1945–46, ordained Cath. priest 1946, teacher and Pastor in Komárno 1946–49, Pastor in Vrckó 1949–50, in labor camp 1950–55, Parish vicar 1955–67, retired 1967–82, Pastor in Diakovce 1982–January 86.

44 The archives of the Marianum, that is, what has been recovered, unfortunately closes with the year 1944. The sequel may still be in abeyance.

45 Tóth, János Aldemar, OSB: *Ilyennek láttam bencés rendtársaimat. A szlovákiai magyar bencések* [This is how I saw my fellow Benedictines. The Hungarian Benedictines in Slovakia] 1977. Ed. by Somorjai, A. OSB. METEM, Budapest 2024. 100. (Series “Jeles bencés tanáraink” 3.)

Attempts to save the Benedictine Monastery

In the new situation created by the change of the state borders, the representatives of the Czechoslovak state power sought to detach them from the Order's centre, Pannonhalma, in Hungary. The agricultural estate in Pannonhalma was administered from the newly established central government office, and transferred little to meet the needs of the Benedictine monks of Komárno and the Benedictine Grammar School. In this situation, the convent of the Benedictine Monastery in Komárno and its Superiors were in intensive correspondence with the state and ecclesiastical authorities, including the Prague nunciature and the Holy See,⁴⁶ seeking a way towards forced autonomy. The Convent of Pannonhalma and the Archabbot, as well as the Hungarian Foreign Ministry, made several attempts to resolve the situation. However, the legal and political environment was unfavourable, simply because the ecclesiastical situation of the Czechoslovak state was unsettled during this period, until the conclusion of the *modus vivendi*⁴⁷ at the end of 1927, and its ratification by the Prague parliament on 2 February 1928.⁴⁸ In the case of the Benedictine Monastery of Komárno, the State authorities sought to establish it as a separate Monastery in a Congregation with the other Benedictine monasteries.

We discuss the existing understandings, the synthesis of which can be summarised as follows: "As for our legal position, they [the Czechoslovak State - Red.] recognized that we were members of the Hungarian Order of St. Benedict, but when in 1928 the *modus vivendi* agreement between the Holy See and the Czechoslovak government stipulated that the supreme authority of a foreign nation could not take action over persons and citizens living on Czechoslovak territory. This meant that we had to start negotiations in Rome leading to independence".⁴⁹ In this respect, the enforcement,

46 Somorjai, A.: *Visitatio apostolica Institutorum Vitae consecratae in Hungaria, 1927–1935*. op. cit. pp. 451–535. – See idem: A bencés birtokok nemzetközi jogi helyzeté a Dunától északra fekvő területeken, 1919–1939, op. cit. pp. 109–123. See again, idem: Újabb iratok a Komáromi (Komárnói) Bencés Rendház helyzetére, 1919–1938, op. cit.

47 In such situations, the Holy See concludes a concordat, but in the case of Czechoslovakia only an inferior version of it was reached, called *modus vivendi*, after many years of negotiation.

48 See Somorjai, A.: *Visitatio apostolica Institutorum Vitae consecratae in Hungaria*, op. cit. 525

49 Tóth, János Aldemar: *Ilyennek láttam bencés rendtársaimat*, op. cit. p. 21. The author, Fr. Aldemar, was a doctor in history.

i.e. the incorporation into Czechoslovak and later Slovak law, of the fact that the Archabbot of Pannonhalma who was the Superior major of the monks of the Benedictine monastery of Komárno, and as *nullius* (since 1983, *territorial* - Red.) abbot of the two Benedictine parishes of Slovakia (Szlovenszkó), has not yet been enforced with any significant force. This would have conferred on him the rights of a bishop of a diocese, i. e. an ordinariate, not only a foreign provincial, but also the supreme superior of an independent order of monks – the Benedictine Order of Pannonhalma – and thus, in terms of *modus vivendi*, he was in the same category as the generals of Rome (and different places of residence). The main reason for this is that the Benedictine Confederation has a special legal status because, similar to that of the Swiss cantons, which are independent states united in a confederation. This happened by the will of the founder of the Benedictine Confederation, Pope Leo XIII, in 1893. This united the various independent Benedictine orders, known as Congregations, into a Confederation.⁵⁰ This is radically different from the concepts commonly used in the law of the regulars inside the Canon Law and is the result of the development of the Canon law over the last 1500 years – 1000 years in national terms, which was fixed only in the twentieth century. Each Benedictine Congregation is headed by a general, usually an *abbot praeses*. Czechoslovak law and Slovak law did not take this into account, nor was it noticed by the chronicler who interpreted the public perception in 1977.⁵¹

On 18 May 1938, the Benedictines reached the point at which the relevant office of the Apostolic See, the Congregation for Religious, approved the unification of the Hungarian Benedictines in Czechoslovakia to form an independent Benedictine Congregation,⁵² however, this remained on paper⁵³ and after the (First) Vienna Award (1938) the situation prior to the Treaty of Trianon (1920) was restored.

One of the most important events for us in the new situation in 1945 was

50 See Eschlböck, Laurentius OSB: *Ius proprium Confoederationis Benedictinae. Darstellung der gegenwärtigen Rechtslage und Untersuchung der Jurisdiktionsgewalt des Abtprimas*, Doctoral Thesis at the Pontifical Lateran University, Rome 2003.

51 See Somorjai, A.: *Visitatio apostolica Institutorum Vitae consecratae in Hungaria*, op. cit. 455. note 3.

52 Somorjai, A.: Op. cit., 451.

53 Facsimile in: Somorjai, A.: Op. cit., 528.

the establishment of the Slavic Benedictine Congregation,⁵⁴ whose abbot was Maurus Verzich,⁵⁵ abbot of the Emauzy monastery in Prague.⁵⁶ The Benedictines of Komárno, with the intention of saving them from secularisation, were elevated by a Roman decree to an independent (*sui iuris*) Priory, separated from the Hungarian Benedictine Congregation, and attached to the Slavonic Congregation, with the remark that they could retain their own monastic customs.⁵⁷

The fact that Abbot Verzich did not understand the Roman decree is an indication of the complexity of the situation. On 17 and 20 October 1947,⁵⁸ he travelled to Komárno, demanding full obedience from the fathers one by one, but left without success. In Bratislava, he looked into the Benedictine properties in Komárno.

54 Somorjai, A.: *A Szláv Bencés Kongregáció rövid története* [A brief history of the Slavic Benedictine Congregation], in: *Collectanea S. Martini. A Pannonhalmi Főapátság Gyűjteményeinek Értesítője V.*, 2017. p. 153–168. In Slovak language see idem: *Stručné dejiny Slovenskej benedikínskej kongregácie*, in: *Acta Facultatis Theologicae Universitatis Comenianae Bratislaviensis, XX* [sic!] (2023), 2. No., 78–92.

55 Maurus Alois Verzich (1911–92), Abbot of Emauzy 1949–69, emigrated to Italy in 1948, first to revitalise the former Benedictine Abbey of Sassovivo, and then to live with the Czech monks in Norcia, the birthplace of St Benedict, from 1965–69. From 1969 onwards, he worked at the Benedictine Abbey of St Paul Outside the Walls, and towards the end of his life he lived and died in the San Miniato Monastery in Florence. His personal archives have yet to be found.

56 Founded by the Czech king, Charles IV, the Benedictine Abbey of Prague became the centre of the Glagolitic rite in Bohemia, where among others, the young Jan Hus studied. It later became a Hussite centre, then a centre for Benedictine monks from Montserrat (Catalonia, Spain), and finally for German Benedictines from Beuron, who had fled to Prague because of the *Kulturkampf*. After 1945, the German convent was expelled from Czechoslovakia and the Czech members of the convent continued Benedictine life with fewer monks. The work of the Slavic Benedictines in Prague is of great cultural and historical importance. See Somorjai, A.: *Inkulturáció Kelet–Közép–Európában* [Inculturation in East–Central Europe], in: *Vigilia* 89 (2024), No. 5. 414–422.

57 Somorjai, A.: *Visitatio apostolica Institutorem Vitae consecratae in Hungaria*, op. cit. p. 453. Facsimile of the decree see op. cit. 492.

58 Description of the events see Somorjai, A.: *A Komáromi Bencés Monostor önállósítására való törekvések 1945 után és a monostor feloszlatása*, op. cit. 169.

Marius, Luke and Kálmán left for Hungary in 1947

Fr. Marius Boldoghy was born in Tát (Hungary), and his family was from Komárno. Between 1930 and 1933, he was a teacher and econom of the monastery in Komárno. He was a secondary school teacher again between 1939 and 1945, after which he was appointed deacon of the Benedictine parishes by Fr. Lucian Bíró. He was the parish priest of Trávník and also taught philosophy at the Marianum.⁵⁹ From 1947, he was a teacher at the Benedictine Grammar School in Pápa, then deputy headmaster,⁶⁰ from 1948 he was the Benedictine Sisters' pastor in Tiszaug (Hungary), and from 1950 he was a teacher at the Grammar School in Bicske (Hungary).

Fr. Luke Hajdu, who was born in Komárno and had been working there since 1921, was sued for operating against the state,⁶¹ a case he lost. He left Czechoslovakia without permission, and in his absence he was sentenced to four years' imprisonment, twenty years' deprivation of rights, and confiscation of property.⁶² He became headmaster of Pannonhalma in 1947, but only for one school year as the nationalisation of the schools of various confessions in Hungary took place in 1948.⁶³

59 József Máriusz Boldoghy (1895–1957), Benedictine 1913, Priest 1920, high school teacher in Pápa 1920–28, college teacher in Pannonhalma 1928–29, Grammar school teacher in Komárom 1929–30, then his teaching license was withdrawn, econom of the monastery, 1930–31, then Grammar school teacher in Pápa 1931–33, in Budapest 1933–39, in Komárno 1939–47, in Pápa 1947–48, chapelain of the Benedictine Sisters in Tiszaug 1948–50, grammar high school teacher in Bicske 1950–57.

60 It was published in the regular annual work schedule issued on 9 July 1947 under file no. 1028/1947, with the note that the request of the Komárom confreres: the placement of Ft. Lukács and Máriusz should not appear in the papers for the time being.

61 The reason for this was the historical summary of the twenty years spent in the first republic, published in the Benedictine gymnasium's *Annuaire*, see Lukács Hajdu: *Emlékezünk! [Remember!]*, in: *A Komáromi SzentBenedek-rendi Katolikus Gimnázium Évkönyve az 1938–1939. iskolai évről. (290. év.)* [Yearbook of the Catholic Grammar School of St. Benedict of Komárno for the school year 1938–1939. Year 290] Ed. by the Headmaster Bonifác Gidró. Komárom, 1939. p. 3–19. – This article faithfully reflects the joy after the arrival of the Hungarian troops, calling it liberation and describing the past as a captivity.

62 Letter of reply dated 7 October 1947 from Géza Lucian Bíró, Vicar of the Archabbot and Superior to Dr. Ottokar Jamnicky, Attorney General, Bratislava. PFL, Komárom Benedictine monastery archives 1947.

63 István Lukács Hajdu (1898–1960), Benedictine 1914 Cath. priest 1921, doctor in philosophy, Grammar school teacher in Komárno 1921–47, headmaster in Pannonhalma 1947–48, high school professor 1948–50, grammar teacher Pannonhalma 1950–60. – See note at Máriusz Boldoghy.

Fr. Kálmán Thurzó, born in Bratislava, lived in Komárno from January 1945,⁶⁴ when the nationalisation of the Grammar School took place there, and from 1947 he was a teacher in Kőszeg, where he was again caught up by nationalisation, but now in Hungary. After that he worked as a parish priest.⁶⁵

Fr. Benignus and Fr. Christopher left Slovakia on 8 May 1949 and emigrated to the United States (Canada)

The two young Benedictines, *Fr. Benignus Baráth (Rissdorfer)*,⁶⁶ born in Komárno, and *Fr. Christopher Hites (Hrotkó)*⁶⁷ born in Čičov, left Slovakia together on 8 May 1949, with passports, and after a European tour arrived in New York by ship.⁶⁸ They carried out pastoral ministry in Canada and then in the United States. Christopher was among the founding fathers of Woodside, Canada, from 11 November 1957, and Benignus arrived in 1958. He lived and worked there until his death on 29 June 1990, aged 74. Christopher passed away on 26 June 1999, aged 86, in Pannonhalma, where he had moved to in 1994.

64 Tóth, János Aldemar: *Ilyennek láttam bencés rendtársaimat*, op. cit. 14.

65 Árpád Kálmán Thurzó (1920–96), Benedictine 1939, Cath. priest 1944, Grammar school teacher in Komárno January 1945–47, Grammar school teacher in Kőszeg 1947–48, parish priest in Kőszegpatyon 1948, in Veszprémvarsány 1948–59, in Győrszentiván 1959–66, imprisonment 1966–67, parish priest in Bársonyos 1967–85, retired 1985.

66 Ferenc Benignus Barát (former Rissdorfer) (1916–90) Benedictine 1934, Cath. priest 1939, teacher of religion in Győrszentmárton, 1940 in Pannonhalma, from 1942 in Komárno, camp pastor 1942–44, from 1949 in Canada, from 1958 in Woodside Priory (CA).

67 Imre Christopher Hites (former Hrotkó) (1913–99), Benedictine 1934, Cath. priest 1938, Grammar school teacher in Sopron 1942, in Komárno, 1943, from 1949 in Canada, from 1957 in Woodside Priory (CA), headmaster of the Grammar school 1960–71, Vice-president and then President of the National Committee of the Hungarians of Czechoslovakia, from 1994 in Pannonhalma.

68 Christopher Hites recorded the details of the trip in a diary. The original is in the “Benedictina” collection of the Library of the Archabbey Pannonhalma, marked: BK 903, Box VI.

Interlude in the spring of 1949: the idea of the Argentinean founding: “We will not abandon our faithful”

On 23 March 1949, Fr. Gerard Bekes,⁶⁹ Roman Procurator of the Hungarian Benedictines gave a detailed report to the coadjutor of the Archabbot of Pannonhalma, Pál Sárközy,⁷⁰ about the invitation to the University of La Plata in Argentina and the idea of a possible Benedictine foundation, where he thought that the Hungarian Benedictines from Slovakia would be sent. Several attempts were made through the Prague nunciature to obtain passports so that the interned friars could continue their Benedictine life in Argentina. Following the advice of Archabbot Chrysostom Kelemen,⁷¹ who was in Pittsburgh (USA), and Fr. Emil Jordán,⁷² the superior of the Benedictine mission in Brazil and the Archabbot's secretary in the USA, in addition to the message from the superior of the monastery, Fr. Lucián Bíró, who decided to stay on behalf of the confreres (“we will not abandon our faithful”), the plan was in fact short-lived.

69 Somorjai, A.: Békés Gellért OSB, a nyugati magyar bencések előjárója [Gerard Bekes OSB, Superior of the Hungarian Benedictines in the West], in: *Litterarum radices amarae, fructus dulces sunt. Tanulmányok Adriányi Gábor 80. születésnapjára* [Studies on the honor of the 80th Anniversary of Gabriel Adriányi], Ed. by Tibor Klestenitz and István Zombori, Budapest 2015. 373–386. – See the Miscellanea: *Unum omnes in Christo. In unitatis servitio. Miscellanea Gerardo J. Békés OSB octogenario dedicata*. Ed. by Somorjai, A. – Andreas Szennay, Pannonhalma 1995. 582.

70 Endre Pál Sárközy (1884–1957), Benedictine 1902, Cath. priest 1909, Grammar school teacher in Győr 1909–10. high school professor in Pannonhalma 1910–17, Prior 1929–38, headmaster of the Pannonhalma high school 1931–38, Abbot of the Abbey of Bakonybél 1938–52, Abbot administrator in Pannonhalma 1947–52, Archabbot of Pannonhalma 1952–57.

71 Ferenc Chrysostom Kelemen (1884–1950), Benedictine 1903, Cath. priest 1910, Grammar school teacher in Pápa 1910–16, Parish priest in Nyalka 1916–26, Grammar school teacher in Budapest 1926–28, Superior and Headmaster of the Grammar School in Győr 1928–29, coadjutor to the Archabbot of Pannonhalma 1929–33 Archabbot 1933–50, from Spring 1947 onwards in São Paulo, Brazil, then from Spring 1948 in Pittsburgh (USA).

72 Sándor Emil Jordán (1912–99) Benedictine 1931, Cath. priest 1935, Chaplain, Doctor in Philosophy in Budapest. From 1939 onwards in São Paulo, Brazil, Chaplain of the Hungarian Immigrés, 1947–49 in Pittsburgh (USA), as interpreter and secretary fo Archabbot Crisostom. From 1949 again in São Paulo, as the Superior of the growing Hungarian Benedictine community as they arrived from Hungary. 1951–58 founder headmaster of the Grammar school of the Hungarian Benedictins in São Paulo, 1953–68 Prior, 1958–82 Grammar school teacher, 1967–87 founder and manager of the “Instituto Social”.

The forced deportation/resettlement of Benedictines in Komárno, Friday, 27 May 1949

In Czechoslovakia, all three forced deportations took place during the year 1950.⁷³ In the case of the Hungarian Benedictines, the forced resettlement of the Benedictines of Komárno took place a calendar year earlier, in May. We see the reason for this in the fact that the Hungarian Benedictines living in the Hungarian town near the border were responsible for pastoral work in the city and beyond, in Žitný ostrov and elsewhere, wherever their former students, who had become parish priests, invited them. János Tóth Aldemar OSB recalls this fact: “At least two-thirds of the 150 Hungarian parishes from Bratislava to Levice, Šahy (i.e. in the territory of the present Apostolic Administration of Trnava), were parish priests who were former students of Benedictine grammar schools. The younger ones were all students of the Komárno school, during the first Republic of Czechoslovakia, the older ones were still Benedictine students from Esztergom, Hungary. You could say that we had a somewhat friendly relationship with some of them. The former Benedictine students’ readiness to help was very beautiful.”⁷⁴

That the year 1949 is not a mistake can be verified from the date of the one-line telegram received by the Benedictine Procurator Gellért Bekes in Rome on 29 May 1949, which states that “we are all in the orphanage in Kláštor pod Znievom”.⁷⁵ On 4 June, the Procurator informed the Vatican Secretariat of State and gave the names of the following eight Benedictine Fathers: the

73 “Operation K”: men’s monasteries were attacked on the night of 13-14 April 1950, 56 monasteries of six religious congregations. Then, on the night of 3-4 May 1950, 281 religious figures were deported to concentration camps. In total, 1,037 religious figures were deported from 75 monasteries. Among them were 405 priests; the rest were brothers, novices, theology students, but also other lay students and employees. 171 priests were sentenced, five of them to life imprisonment. – The goal of the so-called “Operation R” was to round up and deport the religious sisters. The forced round-up of the sisters took place on 29/30 August 1950: 1,962 sisters from 137 convents were deported, with 16 convents being used as assembly camps. After two and a half years of pressure, 1.6% of the sisters left the order, while the rest found employment in industry or as nurses in institutions for the mentally ill or incurable. See: Olexák, Peter: *La Chiesa romano-cattolica in Slovacchia*, in: *La Chiesa cattolica e il comunismo in Europa centro-orientale e in Unione Sovietica*, ed. by Jan Mikrut, Gabrielli editori, San Pietro in Cariano (Verona) 2016. 157-192.

74 Tóth, János Aldemar OSB: *Ilyennek láttam bencés rendtársaimat*, op. cit. 28.

75 The original text of the telegram is in Italian. See: PFL, Prokurátori Levéltár, Békés Gellért prokurátor iratai.

Superior Géza Lúcián Bíró,⁷⁶ Pál Maurus Pataki, Ferenc Damascene Hinn,⁷⁷ Károly Valter Szepesy, Antal Casimir Zsilinszky,⁷⁸ Miklós George Serédi,⁷⁹ János Damasus Fehér,⁸⁰ and János Aldemar Tóth.⁸¹ The Procurator in Rome did not mention here that two of them, Fr. Valter Szepesy⁸² and Fr. Maurus

76 Géza Lúcián Bíró (Boncsek) (Nová Ves nad Žitavou 1898–Komárno, 1990. május 15.), Benedictine 1915, Cath. priest 1922, Grammar school teacher in Komárno 1922–39, Superior and headmaster in Pápa 1939–45, Superior and headmaster, and Vicar general of the Archabbot of Pannonhalma in Czechoslovakia January 1945–1949, deported to Kláštor pod Znievom 1949–54, Parish priest in Malinova, Prievidza 1954–61, in Baloň, *Medved'ovand* Ňárad. After 1961 retired in Komárno.

77 Ferenc Damascene Hinn (1900–73) Benedictine 1920, Cath. priest 1928, Parish vicar in Celldömölk 1928–29, Chaplain and in econom of Abbey Tihany 1929–30, Grammar school teacher in Kőszeg 1930–32, administration in Pannonhalma 1932–33, deputy secretary 1933–34, Grammar school teacher in Győr 1934–41, in Kőszeg 1941–43, in Komárom 1943–49, Parish priest in Čalovo (today Veľký Meder) 1949–63, retired in Komárom 1963.

78 Antal Casimir Zsilinszky (Nové Zámky 1910–†Nové Zámky June 22, 1985), Benedictine 1929, Cath. priest 1934, Grammar school teacher in Komárno 1934–38, student in Budapest 1938–39, Parish priest in Veszprémvarsány 1939–40, student Budapest 1940–43, Grammar school teacher in Komárno 1943–49, Parish vicar in Kláštor pod Znievom 1949–54, Parish priest in Janova Lehota 1954–57, in Matúškovo 1957–66, in Váhovce 1966–67, in Baka 1967–77, retired and Parish vicar in Nové Zámky 1977–85.

79 Miklós György Serédi (Diakovce 1911–†Diakovce, June 4, 1983), Benedictine 1930, Cath. priest 1935, student in Prague 1935–41, in Budapest 1941–42, Parish vicar in Celldömölk 1942–45, Grammar school teacher in Esztergom 1945–49, Parish priest in the Diocese Banská Bystrica: in Bacuch, Trnie, Nedožery, Vígľašská Huta–Kalinka 1960–80, later on in the apostolic administration (after 1977 Archdiocese) of Trnava in Lehnice, Kost. Kračany, Baka. after 1980–83, retired in Diakovce.

80 János Damasus Fehér (Komárno, 1913–†Pannonhalma, August 23, 1998), Benedictine 1931, Cath. priest 1936, Grammar school teacher in Komárno 1936–39, teacher of religion in Zalaapáti 1939–41, student of theology in Budapest, doctor *utriusque iuris*, Parish priest in Celldömölk 1941–43, Grammar school teacher in Komárno 1943–46, Parish vicar in Trávník 1946–47, in mission in Komárno 1947–49, Parish priest in Pribovce 1949–51, in Slovenské Pravno 1951–58, in Hrušov 1958–59, in Dlhá nad Váhom 1959–71, in Kráľov Brod 1971–72, Parish vicar in Diakovce 1972–83, Parish priest in Neded 1983–87, in Iža 1987–90. Superior of the Benedictines in Komárno until 1994.

81 The original text is in Italian, see: PFL, Prokurátori Levéltár, Békés Gellért prokurátor iratai.

82 Károly Valter Szepesy (Nemcsik) (Gelnica 1907–Martin, December 31 1949), Benedictine 1925, Cath. priest 1931, Grammar school teacher in Komárno 1931 (his teaching licence was then withdrawn), econom of the Monastery 1931–36, 1934–35, Parish priest in Trávník 1936–41, in Bakonybél 1941–42, manager of the Spa in Balatonfüred 1942–45, Grammar school teacher in Komárno 1945–49, 1949 Parish priest in Kláštor pod Znievom.

Pataki,⁸³ both of Slovak origin, stayed behind for some time to take inventory and hand over the Monastery. Three of the fathers were not interned because they were in the Parish: Fathers Ferenc Menyhért Czuczor,⁸⁴ János Romuáld Németh,⁸⁵ and Rezső Frederick Herczegh.⁸⁶

On 19 June 1949, in Kláštor pod Znievom, the Superior Lucián Bíró addressed a circular letter to his confreres, the first words of which were: “Do-

83 Pál Maurus Pataki (Pataki 1893-†Bratislava, November 30, 1965), Benedictine 1911, Cath. priest 1916, Grammar school teacher in Pápa 1916-21, in Komárno 1921-49, Parish Vicar in Kláštor pod Znievom 1949-54, in Prievidza 1954-59, retired in Pezinok.

84 Ferenc Menyhért Czuczor (Nové Zámky 1913-Nové Zámky, November 4 1982), Benedictine 1932, Cath. priest 1937, Student in Prague 1933-37, Parish priest in Bakonybél 1938-41, student of theology in Budapest 1941-42, doctor in theology and Grammar school teacher Budapest 1942-45, Grammar school teacher in Komárno 1945-46, Parish priest in Košúty 1946-48, in Čalovo (today Veľký Meder) 1948-50, in labour camp 1950, imprisonment 1950-51, again in labour camp 1951-55, Parish priest in Zemné 1955-56, in Nová Bašta 1956-58, in Čoltovo, in Plešivec, in Trávník 1958-78, retired and Parish Vicar in Nové Zámky 1978-82.

85 János Romuáld Németh (Felsőszergény, county Sopron 1899-Budapest, June 3, 1975), Benedictine 1916, Cath. priest 1923, Grammar school teacher and Parish Vicar Pannonhalma 1923-24, in Esztergom 1924-26, in Sopron 1926-28, Parish priest in Zalaapáti 1928-30, in Kajár 1930-41, in Trávník 1941-65, retired in Helemba 1965-71, then in Komárno 1971-75.

86 Rezső Frederick Herczegh (until 1914 Princz) (Komárno 1903-Diakovce, May 13, 1987) Benedictine 1921, Cath. priest 1928, doctor in philosophy, teacher of religion in Celldömölk 1928-29, Parish priest in Diakovce 1929-76.

mus nostra Comaromiensis illegitime suppressa est”.⁸⁷ At the end of his circular letter, he wrote: “Let Maurus and Valter receive by Casimir, Menyhért and Romuald by Valter, and Frederick and Aldemar by George. Received locally in Kláštor: Damascene, Casimir and Damasus”.⁸⁸

Deportation or resettlement?

The word “deportation” is used by the Benedictine Superior, but in official correspondence it is “resettlement”,⁸⁹ and the Superior himself had to pay the transport costs.⁹⁰

This deportation was different from that of all the religious fathers, brothers, sisters and nuns in the entire territory of Czechoslovakia a calendar year

87 In English translation: “Our House in Komárno is suppressed in an unlawful way”. This is followed by: “The execution was carried out by force, the well-known ‘Vymer’ deprived the members of the Komárno house of their “residence permit” in Komárno, and with exception of the two confreres needed for the inventory, and the other six, were brought here to Kláštor pod Znievom by a gendarme escort. Dr. Straka, the head of the culture department of the Pov. for Education, considers ‘Vymer’ unchangeable and advises us to settle in Kláštor pod Znievom, which, he says, will solve our current pending issues (citizenship, livelihood, etc.). Here we have enough ready-made facts and before we take any action on the Nunciature under point 12 of the Statutes, we must quickly decide the following question: for those members of the Order who are already here in Kláštor pod Znievom, should I ask the local Ordinariate for application, yes or no, locally or only in the nearby area, and for those who may be deported here, should I also ask for application when they are already here, yes or no. I note that the Bishop of Banská Bystrica has already declared that he is willing to employ us in his diocese, and even locally and in the immediate vicinity. Since there is no occasion for a formal meeting or vote at this time, each one should declare in his letter to me; post it no later than the evening of the 23rd of this month. Yours sincerely, Vic. Gen., Superior”. – Circular letter of Superior Lucián Bíró from Kláštor pod Znievom, June 19, 1949, No. 134/1949 to the confreres. See PFL, Komárom Benedictine monastery archives, 1949.

88 Ibidem. – According to this, on 19 June 1949, Casimir, Maurus and Valter were still in Komárno, Valter was able to reach the two parish priests, George was in a position to reach the two named priests and the four of them remained in Kláštor pod Znievom.

89 So e. g. in the official certificate of the town Komárno No. 301/1949. prez. August 8, 1949: “Rad Sv. Benedikta v Komárne bol Povereníctvom školstva, vied a umenia preložený z Komárna...” PFL, Komárom Benedictine monastery archives, 1950.

90 See the correspondence with “Ceskoslovenská Automobilová Doprava, Dopravný Podnik 1502 Nové Zámky: payment notice of Korona 4.743,-, no. 232-2-50, date April 14, 1950. the letter without date to the lawyer Dr. Géza Skaliczky in Komárno, and to the relative of a confrere, Mr. Minarovits (April 17, 1950), hit answer of April 22, and the official letter of Lucián Bíró of April 25, 1950: PFL, Komárom Benedictine monastery archives, 1950.

later. In this case, the Superior was free to travel and correspond in his new location, and he was able to make arrangements and maintain official contact with parish priests, both Benedictine and other parish priests, and through the bishops, especially the competent bishop of Banská Bystrica, he was able to place his fellow monks and receive teaching appointments. The new, communal Benedictine way of life came to an end when individual Benedictines were given external parochial roles in Slovak-speaking parishes.⁹¹

The Superior, Géza Lucian Bíró

Among them, the fate of the Superior, *Fr. Géza Lucian Bíró* deserves particular attention, whose person and oeuvre are yet to be the subject of monographic research. He taught Hungarian, Latin, Music, Religious Studies and Slovak language, and as a scout leader, he was one of the driving forces behind the Hungarian Scout movement in Czechoslovakia and was one of the founding editors⁹² of the most important Hungarian youth magazine of Christian spirituality in Slovakia, *Tábortűz* (1929–1939), as well as editor of the Scout Handbook,⁹³ publisher of the Liturgical Lexicon in Komárno,⁹⁴ initiator and collaborator in the publication of the new Liturgical Lexicon,⁹⁵ editor and publisher of several religious booklets, and editor of several religious booklets.

Between 1939 and 1945, he was the headmaster of the Benedictine Grammar School in Pápa, from 1945, he returned to Komárno, where he was the headmaster of the Grammar School and also the vicar-general of the Archabbot in Slovakia – in other words, the ordinary of the Hungarian Benedictine parishes in Slovakia. The Czechoslovak authorities offered him the opportunity to continue running the Catholic Grammar school if he would convert it into a Slovak language school, but he refused the offer. Between 1945 and 1949, the school continued to function as a Slovak-language state institution, but when the ban on teaching in Hungarian was lifted, it was possible to bring back Hungarian-language education at the Grammar school, thus saving it for the Hungarian community in Slovakia.

91 PFL, Komárom Benedictine monastery archives, 1949, 1950.

92 The other editor was József Mrena, headmaster of the Grammar school in Nové Zámky.

93 *Cserkész-kézikönyv* (Scout Handbook), Edition of “Tábortűz”, Komárom, Spitzer Nyomda 1934. 64.

94 *Liturgikus lexikon*. Ed. by Flóris Kühár OSB and Polikárp Radó OSB. Komárom, 1933.

95 *Liturgikus lexikon*. Ed. by István Verbényi and Miklós Orbán Arató. Ecclesia, Budapest 1989. Second and enlarged edition Szent István Társulat – Kairosz 2001.

During the four years when the Hungarian-language press was banned by the authorities, Fr. Lucián Bíró published two Hungarian-language publications, which he did illegally but with permission and recommendation of his ecclesiastical superior.⁹⁶ One is the Lord's Prayer Book,⁹⁷ and the other is the Calendar for 1948, printed in 1947. These could be obtained secretly in parishes, but they could also be found on the market, sold from under the eggs.⁹⁸ In 1968, he was a member of the Synodal Renewal (Koncilná Obnová) movement started by Bishop Tomášek of Prague, Apostolic Administrator, and a participant in the Velehrad priests' meeting. In his speech, he called for pastoral work and a Hungarian-language Catholic press. For this, he was the subject of police harassment in 1969. After 1970, he lived in Komárno, but in active retirement.

Two Benedictines have visited prisons and labour camps

The above-cited memoirs of János Tóth Aldemar are instructive on the life of each of the order's members. From those, we can reconstruct how two of the order members entered prisons and labour camps.

One of them, Fr. *Menyhért Czuczor*, was sent to the labour camp in Nováky from 8 June 1950, and then received a one-year prison sentence from 28 November. He spent the last month of the year in the Bratislava prison, and Tóth Aldemar recalled this as follows: "I saw the reason for his conviction on the charge sheet, I remember one reason: he didn't bury anyone, the other, in his Good Friday sermon, was this statement: 'There are enemies of the cross of Christ today.'⁹⁹ From 29 November 1951, he was in the kitchen of the priests' camp in Močenok, and then the fathers were deported to Hejnice, a labour camp in the north of the Czech Republic. He worked in a textile factory. After three months, he was taken to Osek, a labour camp formerly established in a large Cistercian Abbey, where he worked in a brewery from late February 1952 to late April 1953, tapping beer into bottles. Here he had a minor accident: the carbonic acid broke the glass and injured his left hand. He was sent with Aldemar to

96 See his correspondence with the Ordinaries (Bishop) of Slovakia, with the ecclesiastical censor, for permission and about the distribution: PFL, Komárom Benedictine monastery archives, 1947.

97 PFL, Komárom Benedictine monastery archives, 1947.

98 Virt, László: *Bíró Lucián (1898-1990)*, manuscript. László Virt interviewed the elderly Lucián.

99 Tóth János Aldemar OSB: *Ilyennek láttam bencés rendtársaimat*, op. cit. 55.

Králíky, near the Moravian-Slovak-Polish border. He was released on 18 January 1955. Afterwards, he went to his brother, who was the parish priest in Zemné, where he cooked. On 11 May 1956, he was appointed parish priest in Nová Bašta.¹⁰⁰

The other person is the memorialist himself, Fr. *Aldemar Tóth*, who was at this time back at home in Diakovce on 18 July 1950, then three days later he was sent to the prison in Nitra, and then to the priest camp in Močenok, where he was held until 29 November 1951. He had an easy time here, helping out in the kitchen, cleaning and doing odd jobs, reading and studying with the others. On 29 November 1951 they were taken to Hejnice in the Czech Republic. He spent three months here with Menyhért, working in the wood yard and loading wagons of logs that were metres long. Inside the camp, the camp guards did not worry about what the priests and monks were doing. Usually, there were four people in a room and they were well fed. In each of the camps, monks and lay brothers cooked from what the leadership had allocated for them. They were paid a salary, and after deductions, the rest was spent on food. They were able to go to mass daily. They did not work on Saturday afternoons and Sundays. On 26 May he was transferred to Osek, where he stayed for eleven months, until 26 April 1953. Here he worked in a sawmill, where the sawdust and draughts hurt his eyes. On 26 April, he was transferred to Králíky, where he worked on a farm, picking silage pits, building a stable for the producer's cooperative, and eventually working in the agricultural part of the state estate. They enjoyed the fresh mountain air. He could read in Czech regularly. The chief doctor in Nitra, Fodor, sent him twice to the Eye Sanatorium in Nový Smokovec in the Tatras: once for two months and once for four. He was discharged on 26 January 1955.¹⁰¹

The fate of the remaining Benedictines in Slovakia

Further research will be needed into the lives of individual Benedictine fathers in Slovakia. One may see that the other Benedictine Fathers were not free from hardships, and were allowed to return from the Slovak-inhabited areas to the Hungarian areas in the South of Slovakia only after 1960, when Bishop Ambróz Lazík, the Apostolic Administrator of

100 Ibid.

101 This summary is based on the pages 63 to 65. op. cit.

Nagyszombat, successfully lobbied for the interned Benedictines to be granted access to the territory of the Apostolic Administration of Trnava, citing the need for bilingual priests.¹⁰²

Summary

After the change in state, the Hungarian Benedictine Fathers in Slovakia did their best to educate the Hungarian youth while continuing to reside in their place. In the face of incomprehension and hostility preceding the dissolution of the monastery in 1949, months before its dissolution throughout the Czechoslovak State, they had to work continuously on the organisational framework for this. This was certainly a reflection of their Hungarian identity and their effective work in preserving Hungarianness, as well as the fact that their position in ecclesiastical law had become contestable. Three of the Benedictines were already in Hungary in 1947, the two youngest Benedictines first went to Canada and then to the United States, where they worked effectively and from where they later supported the cause of the Hungarian community in Slovakia.¹⁰³

We can observe several processes through their fate: the ecclesiastical policy of the Czechoslovak state; the policy towards the Hungarian minority; relations with the Vatican; the inability to reach a concordat; and the development of Benedictine monastic law. The Benedictines of Komárno resided at the crossroads of all this, often not realising what was happening: we have pointed out that they did not fight for the recognition of the state rights of their supreme monastic superior living abroad (in Hungary), because neither they nor others realised that there was a ball that had been thrown up by the *modus vivendi* between the Holy See and the Czechoslovak Republic, but had not yet been struck.

102 Lazík, Ambróz (1897–1969), Cath. priest 1922, Archivist in Trnava 1925, then secretary, then chancellor of the Office of the Apostolic Administration. Doctor in theology 1933, General Vicar 1936, Rector of the Seminary in Bratislava and Canon 1938, Parish priest in Trnava 1942, again General Vicar 1945. After the death of Bishop Pavol Jantusch, his successor, Apostolic Administrator, tit. Bishop 1949.

103 Fr. Christopher Hites especially excelled in this area by editing and publishing (between 1986–1989) the periodical “*Kettős Járom Alatt*”: *Journal of the National Committee of the Hungarians in Czechoslovakia* (1958–1989, meanwhile “*Rákóczi Hírvivő*” [1968?–1985]), and by maintaining contact with Miklós Duray.

The need for further research

For my topic, I have drawn on my previous research in the following Roman archives: the Archives of the Abbot Primate of the Benedictine Confederation; the Apostolic (before 2019 designated as 'Secret') Archives of the Vatican; the Historical Archives of the Vatican Secretary of State; the Archives of the Congregation (nowadays known as 'Dicastery') of Religious; furthermore, in the Archives of the Pannonhalma Archabbey, with special regard to the Archives of the Procurator Gerard Bekes and the Komárno Benedictine Monastery archives.

Further research is needed in the Komárno Town's Archives, the Štátny archív v Nitre – pracovisko Archív Komárno, the Archives of the Church references' offices in Komárno, Bratislava and Turčianske Teplice, the Slovak National Archive (Slovenský Národný Archív) in Bratislava, and the National Memory Institute (Ústav Pamäti Národa) in Bratislava.

GÁBOR JÁNOS LÁNYI
DISTRUST AS A DISCIPLINARY OFFENCE –
THE DISCIPLINARY CASE OF ANTAL GYÖRGY,
ASSISTANT PASTOR (1954)

Story within a story

Edgar Allan Poe and the Hungarian poet Kosztolányi both wrote poems about a “dream within a dream,” and similarly, the story of Antal György (1913–2013) is a “story within a story” – it cannot be understood without the knowledge of another story: that of a critical letter written by Gábor Pap (a pastor from Külső-Csepel) to Bishop Albert Bereczky. For this purpose, our starting point is 5 March 1953 – the death of Stalin. The rivalry between Malenkov and Khrushchev following the death of the “Generalissimo” resulted in the dismissal of Mátyás Rákosi, the key figure of the 1948 takeover of the Hungarian Communist Party, and the appointment of Imre Nagy as Prime Minister, whose regime correction was perceived by many Hungarians as a source of relief.

Albert Bereczky, Bishop of the Dunamellék Reformed Church District, Pastoral President of the Reformed Synod and Convention, reacted to Imre Nagy’s powerful speech to the Hungarian Parliament on 4 July 1953 in his editorial entitled “Man is the supreme value”, published in the Reformed

Church's official newspaper "The Way" on 12 July 1953.¹⁰⁴ The basic tone of Bereczky's article is one of explanation, since two months earlier,¹⁰⁵ he had praised the achievements of the first five-year plan, including the co-operative movement and the development of heavy industry – precisely the steps that Imre Nagy had described as overstretched and forced on 5 March 1953. The conclusion of Bereczky's article is a warning that the goal has not changed, only the pace at which we are approaching it, and no one should expect revolutionary changes: "But whichever path our church members choose, there is one thing we must take seriously. You can be an individual or a co-operative farmer, but you have to fulfil your obligations to the big community: the state. There is no relaxation of order and discipline, only a slowing down of the pace and a guarding of law and order. [...] He who does not understand and accept this is misreading and mishearing".¹⁰⁶

After reading the editorial, Gábor Papp, the pastor of the Budapest Külső-Csepel (now Csepel-Királyerdő) Reformed congregation, wrote an

104 For a characterization of the Bereczky era (1948–1958), see the author's relevant studies on the subject, Lányi Gábor: Bishop Albert Bereczky (1893–1966). A Life Full of Questions, In: Kovács Ábrahám – Shin, Jaeshik (szerk.): *Nationalism, Communism and Christian Identity: Protestant Theological Reflections from Korea and Hungary*, Debrecen – Gwangju, Debreceni Református Hittudományi Egyetem – Honam Theological University and Seminary, 2019, 123–140.; Lányi Gábor: „Ecclesiastical Authority Terror” : The Downgrading of the Szigetszentmiklós Reformed Parish to Mission Parish in 1956., In: *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Theologia Reformata Transylvanica*. 2020. LXV. évfolyam. 2. sz. 53–78. DOI: 10.24193/subbtref.65.2.03; Lányi Gábor: Bishop Albert Bereczky (1893–1966) and the Revival Movement: Albert Bereczky's Conversion, In: *Perichoresis*. 2021. XIX. évfolyam. 1. sz. 91–100.; Lányi Gábor: Hungarians and Koreans in the „Religious Cold War”. Political Instrumentalization of the Reformed Church in Hungary's Ecumenical Activity in the Early 1950s, In: Park, Gyeong Su – Kovács Ábrahám (szerk.): *Reformed Legacy in Korea and Hungary: Religious, Cultural and Theological Approaches*, Seoul – Debrecen: Debreceni Református Hittudományi Egyetem – Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary Press, 2022, 193–234.; Lányi Gábor: Viable Cooperation or Unscrupulous Service? Motivations for Albert Bereczky's Activity in Church Governance, In: *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Theologia Reformata Transylvanica*. 2020. LXIX. évfolyam. 1. supplement. 101–119. DOI: 10.24193/subbtref.69.suppl.06; Lányi Gábor: *Méltatlanul. Háttérbe szorított dunamelléki református lelkészek az 1950-es években*, Budapest, Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem, 2020.; Lányi Gábor: Church Disciplinary Procedures in the Early 1950s as Tools of Political Sidelining, In: Bárh Dániel (szerk.): *Lower Clergy and Local Religion in 16th–20th Century Europe*, Budapest, MTA-ELTE Lendület Történeti Folklorisztikai Kutatócsoport, 2023, 345–366.

105 Bereczky Albert: Legfőbb érték az ember!, In: *Az Út*, 1953. VI. évfolyam. 19 szám. 1953. május 10–16.

106 Ibid.

eight-page letter¹⁰⁷ to Bishop Bereczky on 16 July 1953, which – after a three months long disciplinary procedure – resulted in his removal from office and permanent deprivation of the right to hold any church offices.¹⁰⁸ Papp made a point-by-point analysis of what he considered the ‘dishonest and shameless’ actions of Bereczky’s church government: “...the faithless politician [Imre Nagy] calmly admits his inefficiencies, as a result of which many things would have to be undone and everything would have to be started all over again. And a bishop, an intellectual man, is deceived by the apparent results of external technical culture and does not (or does not want to?) question the terrible oppression of individual lives and families? [...] It is a lying phrase that everything has been done ‘for man.’ [...] It is a lying phrase that the results have made self-criticism possible. The author of this article must surely know how powerful other causes have been”.¹⁰⁹

According to Papp, communist self-criticism has exposed the Bereczky church government, which had previously covered up the crimes of the Rákosi era: “...the guild of false prophets united under the title of the Hungarian Ref. church and all their false prophecies were exposed by God Himself.¹¹⁰ [...] it turned out that what you have been saying for years in speeches, in sermons and in newspapers is false. What you have denied in front of your brothers and sisters abroad, the Prime Minister’s speech openly admits as errors and omissions. It turned out that the Church had glorified and applauded something which, in method and means, even those who used it were forced to denounce as wrong. You have extolled as law, justice and liberty what you recognise as having shaken the confidence of the people in the rule of law. [...] You have become partakers of the crimes which, by covering up, have brought about the inexcusable fates”.¹¹¹

107 A copy of the complete letter can be found at the Synodal Archives of the Reformed Church in Hungary, Budapest (hereafter MREZSL), fonds 3/a, Konventi Elnökségi Iratok, 22b doboz, Konventi Bíróság, letter from Gábor Papp to Albert Bereczky, 16 July 1953.; The original version of the letter can be found in the estate of László Pap: Ráday Archives of Dunamellék Reformed Church District, Budapest (hereinafter RL). Fond C/57. Pap László’s papers, Letter from Gábor Papp, enclosing his letter to the Bishop and the court documents of his case, 18 July 1953.

108 For a detailed account of the case, see Lányi: *Méltatlanul...*, 77–102.

109 MREZSL Fond 3/a, Konventi Elnökségi Iratok, 22b doboz, Konventi Bíróság, Letter from Gábor Papp to Albert Bereczky, 16 July 1953, 2.

110 Ibid.

111 Ibid, 3–4.

Papp denounces the fact that, even after the Bereczky church leadership was exposed, the bishop is still unable to do what the “faithless prime minister” did, to “cry mea culpa”, and to exercise self-criticism, or rather repentance: “And when, in such a situation, before the revealing light, the Church [...] really has no other task but to weep and weep and repent of her blindness and her terrible unbelief, then comes your article, Reverend Bishop!”¹¹²

In the rest of the letter, Papp criticised the political role of the churches, the excessive interference of the laity in the church, the impossibility of church self-preservation, the theological attempt of the “Narrow Way,” and the church’s participation in the peace movement, the ‘monopolization of preaching and mission’, the promotion of church careerists, and more generally, the church governors’ lack of love for the victims of the post-WWII social transformation: “And false is the charity whose word mourns the sufferings of the Hottentots and Koreans, but has not a single word to cry out for the blatant sufferings of its own blood”.¹¹³

Due to Bereczky’s time abroad over the summer, the letter was only submitted to the bishop in early September 1953, who, after reading it, immediately ordered the dean of the responsible church district, István Benkő, to immediately suspend Gábor Papp and initiate disciplinary proceedings.¹¹⁴ As already mentioned above, the disciplinary proceedings, which took three months, resulted in the removal of Papp from office and the permanent deprivation of his right to hold ecclesiastical office.¹¹⁵

After the indictment, Papp appealed his suspension, arguing that his letter was private and not intended for public dissemination, so it could not have caused the public outcry on which the church government relied to justify the action against him. The episode involving Antal György, Papp’s assistant pastor, who was present at a public reading of the letter in a congregational circle, may have become significant in this respect. György was disciplined

112 Ibid, 4.

113 Ibid, 7.

114 RL. Fond A1e. Gábor Papp’s lawsuit renewal case no. 4-1958, 1883/1953 Letter from Albert Bereczky to István Benkő, 6 September 1953; RL. Fond A/1e. Decision of the Külső-Budapesti Reformed Church County, 6 September 1953.

115 Papp was found guilty of the following counts: “Breach of the duties imposed on him by ecclesiastical laws or regulations or violation of prohibitions.” E. T. VI. tc. 46§ A/3. “an act or omission which offends against religious feeling, piety or good morals, degrades the authority of the Church, undermines the confidence required for the office, or offends against the dignity of the ecclesiastical office held.” E. T. VI. tc. 46§ A/7. “committing offences, misdemeanours and disciplinary offences contrary to the national law” Laws of the Reformed Church of Hungary, Bethlen Printing House, Budapest, 1933, 166.

for failing to authorise the public publication of the letter or to notify the higher church authorities of it.

The life of Antal György

Antal György was born into a family of Szekler farmers in Zabola, Háromszék County, on 3 January 1913. He had no personal memories of his father, who died in the First World War, or of fleeing to his aunt's house in Kispest with his mother to escape the Romanian invasion of 1916. After the war, they returned home and he was brought up in Zabola until the age of seven, when his mother remarried to a landowner in Kovászna. György attended the Reformed elementary school in Kovászna, as the land he had inherited from his father would not have been sufficient for independent farming, therefore "they wanted to raise me as an educated man, according to the Szekler custom".¹¹⁶ After attending the Reformed elementary school, he went on to the "Romanian" middle school, where "we were beaten more than taught".¹¹⁷ His aunt in Kispest, fearing that he would not be raised properly as a Hungarian, invited him to Budapest at the age of 12, where he enrolled at Miklós Zrínyi High School, and graduated with good results in 1932. It is admitted by him that he had a lot of catching up to do during his high school years, and in addition to reading youth books, scouting also made him love reading the Holy Scriptures. He does not provide any further details about his pastoral vocation, but he does mention that: "After graduation, I wanted to be a soldier – I became a soldier of Christ. – The seminary has brought me much joy, but also disappointment. I expected something different from what I got. But one thing I will never forget is that, with their help, they made it possible for me, despite my poverty, – to get my degree. Seminary was indeed our mother, where not only our spiritual needs but also our physical needs were taken care of".¹¹⁸

His favourite subject in theology was church history,¹¹⁹ and Professor Sándor Csekey was remembered by the half-orphaned György as a father who was both respected and loved. After graduating, he completed a pas-

116 Pastoral Biographies 1943, Antal György, manuscript.

117 Ibid.

118 Ibid.

119 György's name may be familiar from the fact that his church history reading book "The Cloud of Testimonies" was a popular aid to confirmation education in the 1990s. György Antal: *A bizonyságok fellege. Egyháztörténeti olvasókönyv*, Budapest, Ráday Kollégium Nyomdája, 1990.

tor-teacher course in Nagykőrös, and was then appointed assistant pastor, first to Gyula Okos in Ókéscke (1 July 1937), then to György Paczolay in Nagykőrös (22 September 1937), and finally to Béla Pap, on 30 June 1938, who was then serving in Vác.¹²⁰ “I owe a lot to all three of them, but in the formation of my pastoral personality, Pastor Béla Pap had a great influence”.¹²¹ On 26 February 1940, he became the chaplain of the Vác Penitentiary.¹²² In the same year, he got married for the first time. “I became independent, I couldn’t look to anyone for advice or guidance, I had to stand on my own feet. [...] During the first two years of our marriage we struggled with financial difficulties, although we received support from home. [...] We lived very modestly, but we lived”.¹²³

During this period, he also completed three semesters at the Pázmány Péter University in Budapest, majoring in history and geography, while also serving as a reserve military chaplain following Hungary’s entry into World War II in 1941. His first marriage resulted in two children.¹²⁴

During the war, as a military chaplain he was eventually taken prisoner of war, although we do not have any details about when this happened, what the circumstances were or where he was held, except for a later remark that he was held “for years”.¹²⁵ What is hinted at is that, unsurprisingly, he was severely tested by captivity and that he returned home on 21 September 1947.¹²⁶

With the abolition of prison chaplaincy services by the Communist state in 1950, he was transferred to the pastoral reserve, after which he became an assistant chaplain at the Reformed parish of Újpest-Belsőváros.¹²⁷ On 5 April 1951, György divorced,¹²⁸ and in the autumn of 1952 he married Mária Patus, the administrator of the pastoral office of his congregation.¹²⁹

120 Bishop’s Office of the Dunamellék Reformed Church District, pastoral records, Antal György (1913–2013).

121 Pastoral Biographies 1943, Antal György, manuscript.

122 With Eszter Bodocsi, see Bishop’s Office of the Dunamellék Reformed Church District, pastoral records, Antal György (1913–2013)

123 Pastoral Biographies 1943, Antal György, manuscript.

124 Ibid.

125 RL. Fond A1b. 905/1953 Letter of Dr. Gyula Mády to the Bishop’s Office, 10 April 1953.

126 RL. Fond A1b. 1396/1950 Declaration of Antal György, 29 April 1950.

127 Bishop’s Office of the Dunamellék Reformed Church District, pastoral records, Antal György (1913–2013)

128 RL. Fond A1b. 1231/1951 Letter from Antal György to István Benkő, 20 April 1951; Letter from István Benkő to the Bishop’s Office, 25 April 1951.

129 For this see RL. Fond A1b. 2262/1952; Description of Mária Patus by Gyula Mády, parental declaration and bishop’s permission for the marriage.

Judging the character of Antal György

The fact that his senior pastor, Dr Gyula Mády, considered György to be the “most useful, zealous”¹³⁰ assistant pastor and suitable for independent pastoral ministry is evidenced by the correspondence between him and the bishop’s office in support of his possible appointment as an independent pastor: “If Budakeszi is not already busy, please be so kind as to recommend him to the attention of the Bishop. He is a very zealous pastor, and would be very well suited for Budakeszi, which is part of the Pest’s surroundings. He had no connection with any former church association or federation¹³¹, but he is a pastor with a living evangelical faith”.¹³²

During this period, the following handwritten entry can be found on his pastor’s record sheet kept in the files of the Budapest State Office for Church Affairs (ÁEH): “He was a prison chaplain in the Vác prison until 1947. Assistant pastor. Neutral, but rather cynical”.¹³³ Unaware of this remark, Dr Mády must have written the following about György in his testimonial, in accordance with official tastes: “His work was impeccable. He endeavours to discharge his duties with the utmost fidelity in the service of the cause of Peace. He has had and has no connection with any kind of association. He follows the path of obedience and carries out his duties in the guiding spirit of the Word. Dean István Benkő and Dean László Deme, Rev. József Farkas and Rev. Pál Kara, with whom he is in spiritual contact, can testify to this”.¹³⁴ In his biography, György mentions that his pastoral formation was most influenced by Béla Pap, who was first pastor of Vác and later pastor of Karcag.¹³⁵ Béla Pap was one of the main representatives of the opposition to

130 RL. Fond A1b. 655/1953 Letter of Dr. Gyula Mády to the Bishop’s Office, 22 March 1953.

131 This is surely a reference to the CE Bethania Association. Following the official dissolution of the Bethania Home Mission Association, the official church leadership did not support the meetings and contact between former members, nor the autonomous evangelical “Bethanist spirit” in general.

132 RL. Fond A1b. 905/1953 Letter of Dr. Gyula Mády to the Bishop’s Office, Budapest, 10 April 1953.

133 Budapest City Archives (hereafter BFL). Fond XXIII 134. Administrative documents of the Budapest State Office for Church Affairs, Box 1, data collection sheet: 4.

134 RL. Fond A1b. 905/1953 Letter of Dr. Gyula Mády to the Bishop’s Office, Budapest, 10 April 1953.

135 Pastoral Biographies 1943, Antal György, manuscript

the Bereczky-led church government in the early 1950s.¹³⁶ It is not known whether Béla Pap continued to be associated with Antal György in the 1950s. However, it may be assumed that György's attitude towards official church and state policy, while perhaps not widely expressed, may have been more than cynicism. He may also have been known in church government circles for his aloof and critical stance towards the existing system. Indeed, his characterisation of the ÁEH may well have been based on information from church circles – probably from Dean Sándor Fekete.¹³⁷

There is no reference to it in the later disciplinary case, but György's official church image may have been influenced by an incident that resulted in his swift transfer from Újpest to Külső-Csepel between 22 July and 7 September 1953.¹³⁸ The irony of fate or the finger of God? – without this earlier incident, György would hardly have become involved in the dispute over Gábor Papp's letter.

On the morning of 17 July 1953, György, his newlywed wife and a church elder got into a slight argument with the drunken cleaning lady of the congregation in the pastoral office in Újpest, concerning a dispute over the purchase of cleaning detergents. The police were also called to the scene, and an official report and even a medical expert's opinion were issued.¹³⁹ Al-

136 On Béla Pap, see Németh Erzsébet: *Pap Béla élete 1907–1957* (manuscript), Budapest, 1985; Bárczay Gyula: *Sorsok a református egyházban 1948–1988. Európai Protestáns Magyar Szabadegyetem*, Bern, 1989. 12–16.; Balogh Margit: *Ember és hatalom. Pap Béla református lelkész büntetőpere*, In: *Protestáns Szemle*. 1996. 2. sz. 132–144.; Kovács Bálint: *Arcok, Kálvin*, Budapest, 2002; Csűrös András: *Pap Béla zsinati tevékenysége, különös tekintettel az 1951. október 24-i ülésre*, In: *Confessio*. 2017. XXXI. évfolyam. 4. sz. 109–126.; Csűrös András: *Pap Béla karcagi lelkész börtönévei és rejtélyes halála*. In: *Halálra ítélve. Papi sorsok '56 után*. Budapest, NEB – Országház Könyvkiadó, 2018, 102–110.; Balogh Margit: *Igével, tollal és tettel*, In: *Petrás Éva (szerk.): A 20. századi magyar protestáns közéletiség arcképcsarnoka*, Budapest, Barankovics István Alapítvány – Gondolat Kiadó, 2021, 157–192.; Balogh Margit: *Igével, tollal és tettel. Pap Béla református lelkész életpályája (1907–1957)*, In: *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai Theologia Reformata Transylvanica*. 2022. LXVII. évfolyam. 1. sz. 187–205. DOI: 10.24193/subbtref.67.1.10

137 On Dean Fekete's close relationship with the ÁEH, see Lányi: *Méltatlanul*, 141–151.

138 RL. Fond A1b. 1583, 1684/1953 Letter of Dezső Hörömpő to the presidency of the Reformed Universal Convention, 22 July 1953; RL. Fond A1b. 1583/1953 Letter of Antal György to the Bishop's Office of the Dunamellék Reformed Church District, 25 July 1953.

139 BFL. Fond XXIII. 134, Administrative documents of the Budapest State Office for Church Affairs, Box 5, Minutes taken in Budapest on 17 July 1953 at the Administrative Department of the Executive Committee of the Council of District IV.

though this and witness statements taken during the church investigation¹⁴⁰ describe the incident as a case of a drunkard being subdued, the church authority in charge of the case “swapped” György with another assistant pastor, Béla Tóth from Külső-Csepel, in accordance with the usual procedure. Meanwhile, the cleaner, who was officially employed as a bell ringer, was dismissed by the parish presidency with immediate effect. It is a telling detail of the state of affairs at the time that Dr Gyula Mády, who had a doctorate in law, considered it important to investigate and document the case as thoroughly as possible because it was rumoured that the dismissed bell-ringer would report it to the local Communist Party and the local council wanted to take the matter to the ÁEH.¹⁴¹ In the end, the bell-ringer did not press any charges and the case ended in a mutual apology and reconciliation, as evidenced by the statement made by the bell-ringer and György before the Executive Committee of the District IV Council on 20 July 1953.¹⁴² It was only in September that the reconciliation was brought to the bishop’s attention¹⁴³ who immediately requested that Dr Mády reinstate György in Újpest,¹⁴⁴ which was fulfilled by 11 September 1953.¹⁴⁵

The course of Antal György’s disciplinary case

Therefore, it could be said that Antal György was in the wrong place at the wrong time. In the light of the later recorded testimonies of the witnesses,¹⁴⁶ including the testimony of György and Gábor Papp himself, we can reconstruct the events as follows. György’s reassignment to Újpest had already been decided on 7 September, however, as he was uncertain whether the assistant pastor, Béla Tóth, whom he had replaced, would return to

140 RL. Fond A1b. 80/1953 Testimonies of László Anderkó, Mrs. Antal György and Mrs. László Patus

141 RL. Fond A1b. 1614/1953 Letter of Dr. Gyula Mády to István Benkő, Budapest, 18 July 1953.

142 RL. Fond A1b. 1614/1953 Executive Committee of District Council IV, certified copy of minutes, 23 July 1953.

143 RL. Fond A1b. 1829/1953 Letter of Antal György to Bishop Albert Bereczky, Budapest, 1 September 1953; RL A1b 1614/1953 Letter of Bishop Albert Bereczky to Dean István Benkő, Budapest, 3 September 1953.

144 RL. Fond A1b. 1829/1953 Letter of Dr. Gyula Mády to the Bishop’s Office, Újpest, 3 September 1953.

145 RL. Fond A1b. 1848/1953 Assignment of Assistant Pastor, Budapest, 7 September 1953; RL. Fond A1b. 1848/1953 Letter of Antal György to Bishop Albert Bereczky, Budapest, 11 September 1953.

146 RL. Fond A1b. 1316–1317/1954 Minutes, Rákosszentmihály, 11 July 1954.

his former place of service, and whether Gábor Papp would lead the evening Bible study on 9 September, György attended the Bible study to ensure that those who arrived would not be left without a service. Although Gábor Papp had already been informed of his suspension by telephone, he had not yet received the written documentation. As a result, he took the decision to proceed with the Bible study. As is customary, at the end of the Bible study, the church members who were in close contact with the pastor, Papp, and the assistant pastor stayed to chat. It was during this time that Papp told them the news of his suspension. The confusion of the audience led to Papp reading them the critical letter that had led to his suspension. Upon hearing the tone of the letter, György decided to leave after two pages and went home.

The fact that all this was a disciplinary offence was only brought to light almost a year later, in a report written by Sándor Fekete, dean of Budapest Interior Church County and chairman of the Dunamellék Reformed Church District's Mission Supervisory Committee, to Albert Bereczky on 25 May 1954.¹⁴⁷ At that time, Dean Fekete had already expressed his opinion that György should have prevented Papp, who had been suspended, from having contact with church members, and should have reported this to the church authorities.

The Dunamellék's Mission Supervisory Committee, and in particular its chairman, dean Sándor Fekete, supervised and enforced that the pastors carried out their ministry in accordance with the ideological and practical intentions of the church leadership, which was adapting to the demands of the Communist party state. In the Dunamellék Church District (situated in central Hungary, along the line of the Danube), Dean Fekete played a decisive role in most cases of discipline, replacement or removal from ministry of pastors during this period. Dean Fekete used selective methods to ensure that the candidates of the church government were given the position in the election of pastors and even higher church officials. His actions as a church leader were repeatedly described by his contemporaries 'reign of terror'.¹⁴⁸

Dean Fekete's report, however, provides the context in which the disciplinary case against György makes sense: namely, the question of filling the pastoral vacancy left by the removal of Gábor Papp. This was the reason for

147 RL. Fond A1b. 395/1954 Report of Dean Sándor Fekete to Bishop Albert Bereczky, Budapest, 25 May 1954.

148 For further examples, see Lányi: *Méltatlanul*, 151–155; Lányi: Ecclesiastical Authority Terror, 53–78.; Lányi Gábor: „Amikor a hóhért akasztják...”. Fekete Sándor kiszorítása a hatalomból, In: Kiss Réka – Lányi Gábor (szerk.): *Hagyomány, Identitás, Történelem* 2018, Budapest, L'Harmattan – Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem, 2019, 445–455.

Fekete's appearance at the meeting of the church elders of the Külső-Csepel Reformed Congregation on 20 May 1954. At the meeting, Fekete got the impression that, in order to secure his election, György wanted to create an atmosphere at the session that would make it seem as though the church authorities were trying to deprive him of his pastoral position in Csepel without reason and by force. In Fekete's view, György is undermining confidence in the church leadership and its authority. This has led some elders to make reckless statements, such as accusing the church leadership of using terror in connection with the election or claiming that Christ was not on the side of the high priests. In addition, the congregation slandered László Ágai, the acting pastor of Belső-Csepel during the vacancy, who did not support György's election, by saying he "sold out to the bishop and Dean Fekete".¹⁴⁹

The next day, on 26 May 1954, the Presidium of the General Assembly of the Dunamellék Reformed Church District initiated disciplinary proceedings against Antal György on the basis of a report by Dean Fekete, citing György's failure to prevent Papp from communicating with the congregation, reading the letter and reporting it to the higher church authorities. The fact that György left the place of the reading is twisted by the indictment: "his departure may have given the impression that he did not want to disturb the people present with his official presence."¹⁵⁰ The other charge – and in fact the real reason for the whole disciplinary procedure – is that György, in order to get himself elected, created distrust of the top church authority and created the feeling that he was being forcibly deprived of the opportunity to be elected. The third charge alleges something over which György had almost no control: namely, that Gábor Papp, as a barred pastor, supported his election, which György "tolerated."

György wrote to Dean Fekete after the procedure started. In the letter, he distanced himself from Gábor Papp: "I was not and I am not a person who follows the line of Gábor Papp. I have always condemned and still condemn Gábor Papp's wrong course".¹⁵¹ On the other hand, he argued that Papp's unpopularity within his congregation meant that securing his support would harm his chances of being elected.

An interesting detail is that György mentions that a chief administrator of the Budapest ÁEH recently stated to him that he had no objection to Györ-

149 RL. Fond A1b. 395/1954 Report of Dean Sándor Fekete to Bishop Albert Bereczky, Budapest, 25 May 1954.

150 RL. Fond A1b. 395/1954 Order to initiate disciplinary proceedings, 26 May 1954.

151 RL. Fond A1b. 970/1954 Letter from Antal György to Sándor Fekete, Újpest, 31 May 1954.

gy's move to Külső-Csepel. No further information is available regarding György's ÁEH contacts or activities in this regard.

György also says that if the congregation persists in its support for him,¹⁵² then he sees God's command in his election to Külső-Csepel. Finally, he concludes, "I humbly submit to the prospective proceedings in the firm conviction that God will arrange all things wisely and in this I humbly rest".¹⁵³

In the case of Antal György, the acting judge of the case, Rev. Dezső Hörömpő was appointed by the Külső-Budapesti Reformed Church County (led by not Dean Fekete, but by Dean István Benkő). Hörömpő called the witnesses of the case to the council room of the Újpest-Belváros congregation on 11 July 1954.¹⁵⁴ István Benkő, the dean of the Külső-Budapesti Reformed Church County, asked the accusing Church District to call witnesses to corroborate the accusation.¹⁵⁵ The bishop was forced to retract that there were no witnesses to the accusation, the church district having based the charges on the report of Dean Fekete, as chairman of the mission supervisory committee.¹⁵⁶

The transcripts of the 9 witness statements taken at the 11 July inquiry¹⁵⁷ contain many instructive details about the case, but also about the state of affairs of the era. On the one hand, the testimonies verify György and Papp's version of the letter reading. The reading did not take place in the context of a Bible study, but afterwards, in a close, confidential circle. Papp had not received his suspension order at that time, although he knew about it and told those who remained after the Bible study. Shortly after the reading of the letter began, György left for home.

The testimonies also reveal that the elders held a meeting on 9 July, at which they decided to accept the church leadership's candidate,¹⁵⁸ but asked for the disciplinary proceedings against György to be dropped "because we

152 The only written document regarding the congregational support mentioned by György is a letter to the bishop, handwritten anonymously on "behalf of the congregation" on a piece of squared paper, in plain language, stating that if Gábor Papp "is not returned", György should become the new pastor. RL. Fond A1b. 78/1954 Anonymous letter to Bishop Albert Bereczky, undated.

153 Ibid.

154 RL. Fond A1b. 1267/1954 Notification, 30 July 1954.

155 RL. Fond A1b. 1237/1954 Letter from István Benkő to Albert Bereczky, Rákospalota, 3 July 1954.

156 RL. Fond A1b. 1237/1954 Letter from Bishop Albert Bereczky to Dean István Benkő, Budapest, 10 July 1954.

157 RL. Fond A1b. 1316-1317/1954 Minutes, Rákosszentmihály, 11 July 1954.

158 Lukács József, RL. Fond A1b. 1317/1954 Note on the presbytery meeting held on 9 July 1954.

consider him completely innocent in this matter.”¹⁵⁹ Several testimonies mention Dean Fekete’s “pushy” behaviour. It was this, rather than György’s presumed mood-setting, was what caused some elders to be highly critical of the church government. Finally, Dezső Hörömpő summarised the results of his investigation as it follows: “On the basis of the testimonies recorded, it appears that the circumstances on which the disciplinary proceedings against Antal György were initiated are not sufficiently substantiated. However, the session of the congregation, in contrast to their former stubborn position, had come to the better understanding and full appreciation of the fact, that the intervention of the supreme church authority in the governance of pastoral election was and is in all respects in the well-understood interest and future of the congregation and therefore they feel bound to respectfully accept this governance”.¹⁶⁰

The elders also asked for the proceedings against Antal György to end, a request which was supported by Hörömpő himself and which was also presented to the presidency of the Church District by Dean Benkő.¹⁶¹ Despite the absence of the relevant document, the Church District has not retracted the charges. The Church District therefore had to hear the case on 17 November 1954 and 8 January 1955, when György was acquitted of the charge of disciplinary misconduct. However, following an appeal by the prosecutor, the Church District Court found György guilty and gave him a “reprimand” on 8 March 1955.

The reasoning behind the verdict is essentially a paraphrase of the indictment, and ultimately of Dean Fekete’s report of 25 May 1954. According to this, György’s crime was that he had listened to at least part of Papp’s letter and failed to report it to the competent church authority. He did not express his disapproval of the allegations in the letter and his sudden departure may have given the impression that he did not wish to embarrass those present by his official presence. Furthermore, “in reaching its judgment of conviction, the court considered it to the detriment of the complainant that he refused to name those who were with him when Gábor Papp’s letter was read, on the grounds that he did not want to expose these church members to possible future harassment. In doing so, Antal György revealed a great

159 RL. Fond A1b. 1316–1317/1954 Minutes, 5th witness statement, Rákosszentmihály, 11 July 1954.

160 RL. Fond A1b. 1316–1317/1954 Report of Dezső Hörömpő, Rákosszentmihály, 11 July 1954.

161 RL. Fond A1b. 1317/1954 Letter of István Benkő to the Presidency of the Dunamelléki Reformed Church District, Bp.–Rákospalota, 14 July 1954.

distrust of his church leaders.”¹⁶²

Finally, they add this in conclusion: “The Court of Appeal has imposed the lightest disciplinary sanction in the hope that, by changing his distrust of his church leaders in this case, Assistant Pastor Antal György will serve our church with full confidence in the church government.”¹⁶³

As mentioned above, György, in his defence to Sándor Fekete, refers to the fact that the “state church commissioner” had recently stated to him that he had no objection to his election to Külső-Csepel.¹⁶⁴ Although the case of Antal György has a trace in the ÁEH presidential documents, it is not exactly in a supportive final note. János Horváth, President of the ÁEH, provides Zoltán Vas, Head of the Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, with a one-page briefing on the matter. It is unclear why the Council of Ministers was concerned about the case, but a brief comment suggests that György himself may have revealed the unworthiness of his case to them.¹⁶⁵ Horváth’s version of György paints a picture of a man who not only failed to report the letter to his superiors, but also participated in its drafting. On this basis, “it is also our opinion that György is not a suitable pastor for Csepel”¹⁶⁶ – Horváth concludes his viewpoint. The president of the ÁEH most probably got his information from Dean Fekete.

Epilogue

It was mentioned that the Church County’s request to withdraw the disciplinary case was not accepted by the Church District, which instead continued the case following its acquittal judgement. Despite this, the district, or at least Bishop Bereczky, appointed György as an assistant pastor in the congregation of Szedres, near Szekszárd, before the case was closed. Meanwhile, György was going through a personal tragedy. His newborn daughter was born with a congenital heart defect and died at two months old. The pastor’s lines to Bereczky paint the milieu of this period – the vulnerability of an assistant pastor to the power of the bishop – in the darkest colours:

162 RL. Fond A1e. 2-1955. bir. no. Judgment of the Court of the Dunamelléki Reformed Church District, 8 March 1955.

163 Ibid.

164 RL. Fond A1b. 970/1954 Letter from Antal György to Sándor Fekete, Újpest, 31 May 1954.

165 “So the disciplinary against him was not based on trumped-up charges as he wrote in his letter.” Hungarian National Archives, Budapest. Fond XIX-A-21-a. ÁEH Presidential Files 195/1954 Letter from János Horváth to Zoltán Vass, 2 July 1954.

166 Ibid.

“With a broken heart, from the grave of my child, I humbly apologize to Your Eminence, Most Reverend Bishop, if I have caused Your Eminence any grief. I promise that I will obey in all things Your Eminence’s actions, and if you will be so kind as to appoint me to any congregation in the district, I will gladly and willingly accept the service of my Church.”¹⁶⁷

Two years later, in January 1956, György became an independent pastor in Szedres,¹⁶⁸ and in 1968 he was elected pastor of Decs, where he served for a decade and a half, until his retirement in 1984.¹⁶⁹ In 1984, he retired and moved to Püspökladány, where he became an honorary elder. He wrote several books on religious subjects, seven of which were published in print. His church history reading book “The Cloud of Testimonies” was a popular aid for confirmation education in the 1990s.¹⁷⁰ He drove his car around the county, lecturing and serving wherever he was needed.¹⁷¹ He passed away in Püspökladány on 20 January 2013, having reached the age of 100.

I have not found any indication that he or his family were in any way compensated by the Dunamellék Reformed Church District for the clearly undignified disciplinary proceedings against him.

Concluding thoughts

The case of Antal György is a vivid example of what can be described as the “fall from grace of church discipline,” when church discipline is not exercised according to its scriptural intentions, for the purification and improvement of congregational life and pastoral ministry, but in the service of selfish church politics and even possibly individual career interests. The clear motivation for Antal György’s church disciplinary case was to oust him as pastor of the Külső-Csepel congregation. Dean Sándor Fekete constructs György’s supposed responsibility almost a year after the reading of Gábor Papp’s letter, using the disciplinary case to put pressure on the assistant

167 RL. Fond A1b. 1970/1954 Letter from Antal György to Albert Bereczky, 7 October 1954.

168 RL. Fond A1b. 635/1956 Extract from the minutes of the Szedres Reformed Congregation of 24 May 1956; letter of Dean Géza Kathona to Bishop Albert Bereczky, Szekszárd, 28 May 1956.

169 Bishop’s Office of the Dunamellék Reformed Church District, pastoral records, Antal György (1913–2013)

170 György Antal: *A bizonyosságok fellege. Egyháztörténeti olvasókönyv*, Budapest, Ráday Kollégium Nyomdája, 1990.

171 <https://regi.reformatus.hu/mutat/elhunyt-gyorgy-antal/>; <https://ttre.hu/tartalom/767/3/keruleti/elhunyt-gyoergy-antal-> (retrieved 11 November 2024)

pastor himself, but also on the congregation, that if they did not wish him harm, they would not count him in the pastoral election due. It is improperly exercised church discipline, which is not exercised for the sake of returning the sinner to the right path, but rather for any other purpose, especially when used for a self-serving, uncharitable one.

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ISTVÁN DEMJÉN'S PASTORAL MINISTRY AND HIS FORCED SUSPENSION

Among the studies on the church history of the Horthy era, which have been appearing in increasing numbers in recent years, interested readers can discover many exciting portraits and biographies of pastors. Although research has revealed the careers of many renowned pastors who became known through their valuable work, the name of István Demjén, the pastor who (re)founded the Budafok Reformed Parish, has so far remained virtually unknown outside the local community. This lack of interest in his person can certainly be explained by the fact that Demjén's creative energies were not used in writing – his first book, a manuscript on the history of the Budafok congregation, which was closed in 1944, was published in 2007, almost half a century after his death –, nor in politics or work at higher levels of the church organisation. István Demjén was primarily an organiser. During his pastoral career, he organised countless communities, including mother, branch and mission parishes, Bible study groups and scout troops, among others. He founded several magazines and organised more than one event of national importance, and it was thanks to his diligent organising work that the Reformed Church in Budafok was completed in 1927. After 1945, however, he was sidelined for personal and political reasons and then forced into retirement. The following study is intended to present the life story of this lesser known, yet in many other ways extraordinary, and in certain respects characteristic of a significant portion of the Reformed clergy of the Horthy era.

The Life of István Demjén until 1922

István Demjén was born on 9 January 1888 in Budapest, but he spent his childhood in Szatmárnémeti (now Satu Mare, Romania), where his father, Sándor Demjén, was a high-ranking postal official, and his mother, Ilona Molnár, who was the headmistress of the local Reformed teachers' training school, and then of the girls' secondary school, from 1909 to 1929.¹⁷² The family's bourgeois culture and financial situation is reflected in the fact that although he attended school in Szatmár until his graduation, but completed the fifth grade in Breslau (now Wrocław, Poland) in order to learn German. The reasons behind his decision to begin theological studies in Debrecen in 1906 are not known, but he admits that the 1908/09 academic year in Strassbourg, funded by his parents, and especially for the influence of Professor Ernst von Dobschütz (1870–1934) who later served in Halle, played a decisive role in shaping his vocation as a pastor.¹⁷³

After a short detour, in 1910 he was transferred to Pancsova (now Pančevo, Serbia) by Bishop Lajos Erőss. The parish of Pancsova included vast areas in the South, where Reformed people, mostly farm servants, rarely saw a pastor. Demjén, after conducting German-Hungarian bilingual services in Pancsova, pastored these scattered Hungarian Reformed people. As a fruit of his ministry, a Reformed missionary congregation was established in Kevevára (now Kovin, Serbia) in the spring of 1912. Demjén was therefore aware of the challenges of the diaspora very early on, and at the same time, he was confronted with the most pressing issues of the fate of the Hungarians in the South, a region surrounded by a sea of nationalities. By his own admission, he was at that time and later engaged in both Reformed Church and Hungarian national service. However, in the autumn of 1912, he was invited to become the regular pastor of the ecclesia of Kisadorján (now Adrianu Mic, Romania). During his time there, he achieved more lasting results through the founding of the local branch of the Calvinist Association (Kálvin Szövetség), which was spreading nationwide at the time and mainly

¹⁷² István Demjén's autobiography, written during the Second World War, is an unusually long autobiography for a national collection of pastoral autobiographies, and it describes the pre-1943 period of his life in great detail and contains a wealth of information. Molnár, Sándor Károly: *Budafoki református lelkészek önéletrajzai 1943-ból.* (Székely Sándor, Németh Győző, Lukáts József, Demjén István önéletrajza.), *Acta Papensia*. 2016. XVI. issue. 3–4. No. 375–433.

¹⁷³ Molnár: *ibid.* 385.; Szögi, László: *Magyarországi diákok németországi egyetemeken és főiskolákon, 1789–1919.* Budapest, 2001. 472.

focused on conservative church regeneration and social policy.¹⁷⁴ Under his leadership, the infrastructure of the congregation was renewed, with the church, the parish and the school being renovated. His successful work in organising the church here came to an end in 1915 when Demjén accepted an invitation from the congregation in Kevevéra. However, he was appointed military chaplain of the 15th K.u.K. Infantry Division in the autumn of the same year, and did not return to his family and congregation until early 1918.¹⁷⁵

For Demjén, as for many of his fellow camp pastors, this almost two-and-a-half years of service as a military chaplain remained a defining experience for the rest of his life.¹⁷⁶ The experiences of the front line, concentrated doses of violence, first-hand impressions of the national conflicts within the monarchy, and struggles between rival denominations influenced the thinking of many of his fellow pastors for decades. Demjén did considerable organisational work among the soldiers entrusted to his care, and during his stay in Temesvár (Timisoara, Romania), he was even responsible for supervising a German-speaking Lutheran congregation. However, with the help of Dezső Baltazár, the Bishop of Tiszántúl who was responsible for the military chaplains, he managed to get new pastors assigned to his unit.¹⁷⁷ Meanwhile, his wife, Irén Bod, who proved to be a faithful companion in the service, performed some of the pastoral duties in Kevevéra, raised their only child, who was born in 1913, and tried to take care of the farm.¹⁷⁸

At the very end of 1918, Demjén was caught in Kevevéra when the Entente troops marched in. He stood his ground there until 1921, enduring increasingly poor conditions. The land of the congregation was confiscated, his personal property suffered serious damage, and he had no income in the final months. Nevertheless, he wanted to remain in his place of service. On several occasions he crossed the border with important information and documents, which he passed on to the irredentist circles in Hungary. In the autumn of 1921, however, the secret conspiracy was exposed and Demjén

174 A Kálvin–Szövetség 1912–13. évi életéből. Titkári jelentés. III. In: *Protestáns Egyházi és Iskolai Lap*, 1913. LVI. issue. 47. No. 738.

175 During his pastoral ministry at Camp, he also sought to focus national attention on the challenges facing his congregation. Demjén István: Kérelem lelkészársaimhoz, a tanító és presbiter urakhoz. In: *Debreczeni Protestáns Lap*, 1916. XXXVI. issue. 35. no. 427–428.

176 He also recalls his experiences at great length in his memoirs: Ld. Molnár: *ibid.* 390–395.

177 Archives of Transtibiscan Reformed Church District (TtREL) I. 1. e. Presidential papers. 19. d. 369/1917. Letter from István Demjén to Bishop Dezső Baltazár, 6. 2. 1917.

178 Molnár: *ibid.* 395.

was forced to flee, ending up in Szeged in December. He served as a deputy pastor in the Szeged Reformed congregation until his situation became hopeless following the election of the new pastor in spring 1922. At this point, he almost considered leaving the ministry, but then received an invitation from congregation of Budafok.¹⁷⁹

The decades in Budafok (1922–1952)

The Reformed congregation of Budafok, founded in 1900 in the Catholic Swabian majority settlement, was not a large one, but the world war and the following periods, and the departure of its pastor, János Murányi, to America, almost disintegrated the community. István Demjén spent his first years organising the congregation, restoring the neglected buildings and stabilising the pastoral existence.

However, the diligent and conscientious pastor's hard work soon enabled the struggling congregation to flourish. Demjén re-launched his Church News („Egyházi Híradó”), a newspaper he had started in 1917 for his congregation in Kevevára. By the mid-1920s, the paper had already reached several thousand copies and had become a common forum for the Reformed congregations of the settlements around Budapest. He made a great effort to organise his congregation, which consisted mainly of proletarians, workers and officials who had fled the annexed territories. He regularly visited families, building personal relationships with most of the church members, who could come to him with any problems they had. And to make the care of the poor more effective, from 1934 the congregation also carried out its diaconal work according to the so-called „Eger norm”.¹⁸⁰ He founded a scout troop for working-class children, which by the 1930s had more than 100 members, and its impact on the youngsters, many of whom were war orphans, can hardly be overestimated. Demjén's pedagogical work left a lifelong mark on the former members. He also helped many young people to find employment through his close connections with factories and workshops in the area.¹⁸¹ He was passionate about evangelising the working classes, so he even travelled to Zurich at his own expense to study local conditions, but he

¹⁷⁹ Molnár: *ibid.* 396–401.

¹⁸⁰ Archives of the Reformed Congregation of Budapest–Budafok (BBEI), Filed documents. 113/1934. Agreement on the introduction of the „Eger norm”. 26. 1. 1934.

¹⁸¹ Lajos Szász: Református egyházközségi cserkészlet. A Budafoki 241. sz. Bethlen Gábor Cserkészcsapat története (1922–1948). In: *Magyar cserkészélet (1910–1948)*. Budapest, Magyar Cserkészszövetség, 2020. 245–257.

played no part in the life of the Hungarian Evangelical Workers' Association, founded in 1938.¹⁸² By 1925, the growing congregation had already begun the ambitious project of building a church. With the help of nationwide fundraising, significant personal sacrifices and a long-term loan, the Church of the Hungarian Resurrection („Magyar Feltámadás Temploma”) was built in 1927 in Budafok, which was one of the first newly built Reformed churches in Hungary after Trianon.¹⁸³

With the leadership of the pastor, the spiritual side of the congregation's work became more emphasised. The work, which at first seemed so small even for a single pastor, increased to such an extent that by the 1930s there were three pastors serving the congregation. Demjén was close to the so-called historical Calvinism inspired by Jenő Sebestyén and propagated in the pages of the Calvinist Review, which advocated a return to the historical creeds, promoting conservative theological and political renewal, as well as supporting the work of the John Calvin Society („Kálvin János Társaság”). This approach led to the establishment of a parish disciplinary court in the congregation as early as 1923.¹⁸⁴ The strict upholding of moral values remained a feature of the community in later years. István Demjén's numerous personal letters to his pastors, which are not typical of the church archives of the time, prove that according to the statistics, he had a personal relationship with several hundred of the approximately 3,000 Reformed people in Budafok. In 1943, Demjén became the editor of the Reformed Church, the official journal of the John Calvin Society, and Jenő Sebestyén became the chairman of the editorial board.¹⁸⁵ From 1941 until the end of the World War, he was a continuous member of the board of the Soli Deo Gloria Student Union, the student organisation of the historical Calvinist movement, as president of the senior class.¹⁸⁶

182 Molnár: *ibid.* 419–420.

183 A subjective, colourful and experiential account of the church building can be read in István Demjén's history of the congregation, written in 1944, at the same time as his autobiography, which is quoted several times. Demjén István: *Csodálatos, hogyan segített Isten minden munkánkban. A Budafoki Református Egyház története 1900. november 11-től 1945 februárig.* Budapest, Budafoki Református Egyházközség, 2007. [It is wonderful how God has helped us in all our work. The History of the Budafok Reformed Church from 11 November 1900 to February 1945.]

184 *Kálvinista Szemle*, 1923. IV. issue. 52. No. 444.

185 *Dunántúli Protestáns Lap*, 1943. LIV. issue. 8. No. 38.

186 Havas Gábor – Kulifay Albert: *A Soli Deo Gloria Szövetség története*, [Budapest], 1992. Függelék 25–27.

Just a few years after he arrived, he had become involved in the diocesan hierarchy. He was first elected diocesan magistrate in 1928, at the same time as being elected diocesan missionary rapporteur. In 1938, he was appointed deputy to the dean and diocesan pastoral registrar, a post he held until 1950. In 1942, he was also elected to the office of district council judge.¹⁸⁷ Demjén was well known among the members of the congregations around Budapest, and many respected him for his work as a newspaper editor and for his strong missionary work in the field of minority affairs. This is why his name was included among the candidates for the title of dean when the Pest District Diocese was established in 1938. However, in the end, it was István Benkő, a strongman of the „student alliance” group, who became dean and who was involved in the forced retirement of Demjén in 1952.¹⁸⁸

Demjén tried to use all possible means of congregational inspiration. In addition to family visits and personal correspondence, they bought land and houses for missionary purposes, held evangelistic evenings and evangelistic series lasting several weeks, organised travelling trips for various groups within the congregation, partly to build community spirit and partly to familiarise themselves with the Hungarian landscape and people.¹⁸⁹ The pastor placed particular emphasis on the care of the sporadic communities belonging to Budafok, of which Budaörs, Törökbálint and Nagytétény were enriched with church houses or even became independent mother parishes as a result of his ministry.¹⁹⁰

Besides his church-organising and press work, István Demjén also took part in national political and ecclesiastical life. In 1926, he was one of the main organisers of the national Reformed commemoration of the anniversary of the Battle of Mohács, and in the following two years he was one of

187 Ráday Archives of the Reformed Church District of Dunamellék (RL) A/1 f. Pastoral registry paper of István Demjén.

188 Molnár: *ibid.* 420. During the Horthy era, representatives of historical Calvinism fought almost constantly with the supporters of the Hungarian Evangelical Christian Students' Union (Member of the International Federation of Evangelical Students). The former emphasised Reformed denominational values and creeds, whereas the latter were more open to ecumenical thinking.

189 A „kősziklára épített” balatoni faház története. A budafoki egyház üdültetése. [The story of the wooden house at Lake Balaton which was „built upon the rock”. The holiday of the Budafok Church.] In: *Református Élet*, 1937. IV. issue. 39. No. 368–369.

190 Provides insights into the church-organising activities of István Demjén in connection with the community of Törökbálint: Czibor József: *Viharok szárnyán. A deáki református keresztyén egyházközség története*. [History of the reformed congregation of Deáki]. Pozsony, Kalligram Kiadó, 2006. 182–187.

the main organisers of the resulting National Reformed Grand Assemblies.¹⁹¹ Like many of his fellow pastors, he also wanted to play a role in political life. He was attracted to the National Radical Party of Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, whose support led him to stand as a candidate for the mandate to the parliament in the Sarkad district in 1931 as one of the leaders of the party's rural organisation.¹⁹² Demjén was also present at the party's flag-unfurling ceremony in Tarpa in January 1931, in the company of Bajcsy-Zsilinszky and Géza Féja, among others.¹⁹³ However, like many others, he was also deprived him of the mandate he had otherwise considered secure due to the electoral terror exerted by the government.¹⁹⁴ After the election failure, he retired from political life, although he continued to maintain close contact with some of the public figures of the Reformed denomination in Budapest. In 1933, presumably at the request of Gyula Gömbös, whom he knew personally through his interest in Nagytétény, he accepted the post of vice-president of the Budafok branch of the Hungarian Life Party. He also maintained close relations with Lajos Szász, László Bakay, András Tasnádi Nagy, and several other Reformed politicians who had held government posts during the Second World War, and although he was not the only Reformed pastor in Budapest to have such ties,¹⁹⁵ he was later accused of these friendly ties, along with others.

The Second World War and internment

From the surviving sources and from his correspondence in the congregational archives, it seems that Demjén experienced the Second World War from the Hungarian perspective as an inevitable life-or-death struggle that the Hungarian people had to fight in order to survive. He strongly supported and approved the implementation of territorial revision due to his personal

191 Molnár: *ibid.* 410–412.; Szász Lajos: Országos Református Nagygyűlések a Horthy-korszakban. In: *HIT 2018. Hagyomány, Identitás, Történelem*. Budapest, Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem – L'Harmattan Kiadó, 2019. 375–390.

192 Molnár: *ibid.* 413.

193 Bartha Ákos: *Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Endre. Életút és utóélet*. Budapest, MTA Bölcsészettudományi Központ Történettudományi Intézet, 2019. 205., 208., 236.

194 *Képviselőházi Napló [Records of the House of Representatives]*, 1931. I. k., 1. o. 1931., 271. (Speech of Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky.)

195 Szabó Julianna (ed.): *Ég, de meg nem emésztetik. Szabó Imre a Budapesti Református Egyházmegye első esperese. Naplók 1914–1954*. Budapest, Budahegyvidéki Református Egyházközség, 2001. 166.

connections, in line with the public opinion. It is important to note that, like many of his right-wing colleagues, he became strongly anti-communist in the Horthy era, as a result of the activities of the Hungarian communist party in 1919, and regarded the Soviet Union as the number one enemy of European culture and Christianity. In several of his surviving letters we can read that he feared the total destruction of Hungarian identity in connection with the world war. In August 1944, for example, he wrote the following letter of reasoning to a former scout who was fighting on the front line: “What we have now is a life-or-death struggle of Hungarians [...] The idea of Tsar Peter the Great was to unite the northern Slavs with the southern Slavs and gradually to make the Tsar of all Russians the ruler of all Europe. This world policy was adopted by Stalin. And since we Hungarians are the wedge between the northern and southern Slavs, we Hungarians must be destroyed from here. In 1941, Molotov, their People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs, told the Russians in no uncertain terms that in the event of victory the Hungarians would have to be resettled in Siberia or Afghanistan, and the British agreed to this”.¹⁹⁶

Relatively little is known about Demjén’s views on Jewry and the persecution of Jews. In the first half of 1944, he baptised around a dozen Jewish believers in the congregation, in each case meticulously recording in the baptismal register that each person had completed the obligatory preparation required by church law.¹⁹⁷ The parish archives also preserve several letters requesting help and protection, in which pastors or others asked Demjén to intervene, for example, in matters concerning the wearing of the yellow star, with influential political leaders, especially Lajos Szász or László Baký. Unfortunately, the letters of reply have not survived, but one case shows that Demjén did not refuse to help, and he refers to this in his letter of 1945 appealing against his internment sentence.¹⁹⁸ In the same letter, he states that it was during the world war that he had a dispute with László Baký over the Jewish ordinances, which led to the deterioration of their relationship. Demjén also refers to the fact that he sent a printed circular to his colleagues when the persecution of the Jews began, which resulted in several attacks on him. Unfortunately, no copy of this circular has been found yet. He also mentions that, in the autumn of 1944, he first assisted a group of Jewish la-

196 BBEI Filed documents, 728/1944. Brief of István Demjén, 25. 08. 1944.

197 BBEI, Register of Christenings, 1944.

198 RL A/1b Files of the Bishop. 1367/1945. István Demjén’s brief to Bishop László Ravasz, 6. 08. 1945.

bourers in opposition to the orders from Arrow-Cross officers, and then he also arranged for the proper care of the 1,000 Jewish women who had been resettled in Budafok in November of that year.¹⁹⁹

The congregation in Budafok was severely affected by the war, its properties were bombed several times, and many members of the congregation were killed, taken prisoner or deported, while others left for unknown destinations. The front reached Budafok on Christmas Day in 1944. Demjén, who had left for the afternoon service on the first day of Christmas, was unable to return to the congregation until 13 February, when his charismatic assistant pastor-lecturer, Sándor Székely, took his place.²⁰⁰

On 4 June 1945, Demjén was arrested on charges of „national socialist activity”.²⁰¹ During a search of his house, parts of his correspondence and parts of his library were seized as incriminating evidence. In his confession recorded on 19 June, Demjén gave incriminating evidence against himself, but later appealed against this, claiming that his confession had been coerced.²⁰² Following the search and confession, the head of the investigation charged Demjén with war crimes, although two witnesses who had been called gave evidence exonerating him, and finally, on 19 June, the decision was taken to intern the pastor.²⁰³ However, after his internment, Demjén appealed against the sentence to the Ministry of Interior, complaining about the treatment he had received during the interrogation, categorically denying the charges against him, and citing mitigating circumstances, such as his intervention in the case of the Jewish labourers passing through Budafok, as mentioned earlier. In his appeal – which has been preserved as a copy –, Demjén denied making political statements from the pulpit, a claim that was supported by witness testimonies. Nevertheless, the church archives include a number of letters that reveal he did, in fact, openly share his premonition about the Soviet occupation of Hungary in his personal correspondence. He also made it clear that his friendships with László Baký and Lajos Szász were personal and had lasted decades, entirely separate from any political involvement, and further described in detail the serious work for he had done to help the

199 The latter statement is confirmed by the testimony of Dr Endre Pálházi, mayor of Budafok, recorded on 19 June 1945. *The Historical Archives of the State Security Services* (ÁBTL) 3.1.9. V-90429/8-9. Inspection File of István Demjén.

200 *Sándor Székely*. Összeáll. Freyné Székely Ágnes. Budafok, Budapest-Budafoki Református Egyházközség, 2017.

201 ÁBTL 3.1.9. V-90429/4.

202 ÁBTL 3.1.9. V-90429/7.

203 ÁBTL 3.1.9. V-90429/14.

people in Budafok who were living in poor financial circumstances.²⁰⁴ He was ultimately released from internment on 2 August 1945.

The judgment and the fact of internment did not leave a mark on Demjén, who, in the following years, even with the ever-shrinking opportunities, did very serious work in his congregation. During 1946/47, Sunday services were held in four locations with 3,500 participants, while scouting brought together nearly 100 adolescent boys, and almost 150 young children attended Sunday school regularly. Over the course of the year, evangelistic weeks were held for several weeks. Adult Bible study groups were organised and regular family visits were made on a regional basis, for several weeks in the summer the church also provided holidays for poor children at a small holiday resort on the shores of Lake Balaton.²⁰⁵

The congregation's extraordinary activity was characterised by the fact that, even before the national introduction of the voluntary membership system, around 2,200 of the slightly fewer than 3,000 Reformed members had already declared their intention to maintain their membership.²⁰⁶ The decline in congregational life was only gradually felt. The channels of communication established by the pastor became increasingly limited; in 1946 a two-page Pastoral Letter was issued, however in 1947, only a much smaller Newsletter could be released.²⁰⁷ Even in 1948, in the year of the Agreement concluded between the state and the church and noted "regretfully" in the presbytery, the number of members of the presbytery had to be increased in view of the large number of volunteers, and the number of volunteers with their own badges in the congregation also broke records that year.²⁰⁸

However, by 1950, church work had collapsed in many areas of ministry, faith education had been severely curtailed, the church's waterfront resort could no longer be used for religious conferences, and after the the scout movement was banned, scouting activities within the church were also hindered. In addition, also in that year, the Budatétény part of the church was put at risk when the district council refused to allow the public school build-

204 RL A/1b Files of the Bishop. 1367/1945. István Demjén's brief to Bishop László Ravasz, 6. 08. 1945.

205 RL A/8. Files of the Diocese of Pest District. 29. d. Missziói jelentések. Missional report of the Congregation of Budafok about the year 1946/47.

206 BBEI Minutes of the Presbytery, 23. 04. 1948. nr. 3.

207 The only known copy of the printed Pastoral Letter, dated 24 August 1946, is kept in the National Széchényi Library, signature: MHC 4.733.

208 BBEI, Minutes of the Presbytery, 15. 04. 1948. nr. 4.

ing, which had been used until then, to be used for further worship.²⁰⁹

Although we can be sure that István Demjén did not agree with the dictatorial political system that emerged at the end of the 1940s, nor with the changes to church personnel that took place in its shadow, his protest, or if you like his resistance, was more symbolic and could be described as passive rather than active. In 1945, Demjén made the decision that he would not shave his beard until the Soviet army had left Hungary. This vow was widely known, and in 1948/49 he was reluctant to leave the safety of Budafok because of his huge beard, lest he attract attention. He avoided this attention and avoided contact with his colleagues in general. He usually stayed away from diocesan meetings and pastors' meetings, asking to be excused. In addition, a secluded informal circle of friends, consisting of pastors, formed around him. He regularly discussed current church affairs with them, and it was certainly in this protected environment that he was able to express his dissent more courageously. It was an act of symbolic significance that, on the occasion of the church renewal in 1951 – and just like many other congregations – the presbytery of Budafok nominated László Ravasz, the former bishop who by that time had only kept his pulpit in Kálvin Square, as a member of the synod, against the official list of candidates. The presbytery's argument, with its impressive laconicism, was also a serious criticism of the current church leadership: "The development of our Church coincided with the episcopate of László Ravasz".²¹⁰ In addition, Demjén invited pastors and laymen who had been marginalised by the official establishment to a traditional, but by then quite striking, five-week evangelistic series in Budafok, including former theology teacher, diocesan registrar István Kováts J.; Károly Dobos, theology teacher Jenő Sebestyén; Gyula Bogdán and László Teleki.

István Demjén's character and his devotion to the members of the congregation are testified by his correspondence from 1951. During that year, several people from the congregation and Demjén's personal acquaintances were deported, and he tried to keep in touch with them by letter, while also encouraging the competent pastors to maintain the spirit of the people forced into difficult circumstances. Many of his letters went unanswered, as most local pastors refused to take the risk of helping the displaced, while others, such as Pastor Ferenc Porzso of Dombrád, helped to deliver donations.²¹¹

209 BBEI, Filed documents, 101/1950.

210 BBEI Minutes of the Presbytery, 25. 06. 1951. nr. 2.

211 BBEI Filed documents, 135/1951; 138/1951.

The removal of István Demjén in 1952

Although the State Office for Church Affairs and the State Security often complained of a lack of manpower in the outer districts, which also slowed down the pace of surveillance, by 1950 Demjén's activities had reached the threshold of the State Party's pendulum. In a compilation from the XXII district dated November 1950, we can read some lines about him that also contain some praise: "He organizes the faithful in a violent way, he uses spiritual terror. He tries to rally the faithful in the church in every way to the church line".²¹² Behind the war rhetoric of the official who compiled the report, there is a negative recognition of the activities of the Budafok pastor. They also considered Demjén to be serious and effective in his church-organising duties.

The 1951 report already mentions Demjén's beard and notes that he should be removed from his post: "He seems to be hostile. After the liberation, he grew a beard and vowed never to cut it off as long as the democratic system lasted. He should be retired".²¹³ But the retirement was not rushed; it took an event that went against the state party's ecclesiastical doctrine to set the wheels of the slow-moving machine in motion. According to a report following the incident, "It is noteworthy that 15 members of the Reformed presbytery here were also fanatical ref[ormed] leaders who took part in the procession".²¹⁴ Later, newspaper articles attacking Demjén made it clear that he was suspected of orchestrating the appearance of the Reformed presbyters in the procession. This was a violation of the „divide et impera” principle of communist church policy towards Christian churches at the local level, and threatened to lead to a joint action by the churches in the district.

In view of the above, it is therefore not surprising that an investigation was opened against Demjén on charges of incitement, and the decision to terminate the investigation was issued only on 13 June 1952.²¹⁵ Nevertheless, Bishop Albert Bereczky summoned Demjén to his office on 27 June, where, among other things, the proceedings against him were discussed. According

212 Budapest City Archives (BFL) XXIII. 102. c. 110. d., 122. biz./1950. Report. The political position of the priests of the Churches of the XXII district. Budapest, 08. 11. 1950.

213 BFL XXIII. 134. 1. d. Survey of pastors. 1951. Data sheet on the Reformed Church's remunerations. /1 January 1952/ nr. 44.

214 BFL XXIII. 102. c. 110. d. nr. 1116/82/1. Sándor Szerényi. Report on the progress of the Holy Saturday processes. Budapest, 15. 04. 1952. 11.

215 RL A/1b Files of the Bishop. 1768/1952. Decision in the case of István Demjén, 13. 06. 1952.

to a letter Demjén wrote the following day, he was so shaken by the conversation with Bereczky that he suffered a nervous breakdown upon returning home on that same day. In his letter he informed his church superior and asked the bishop to intervene in the proceedings against him.²¹⁶ Demjén requested sick leave, but Bereczky, citing his suddenly deteriorating health, asked the dean István Benkő, a few days later to urgently call on Demjén to ask for his retirement, and if Demjén was not willing to consider this option, Bereczky suggested using the possibilities offered by church law.²¹⁷ The urgency was necessary because Ferenc Kenéz, then barely 30 years old, a pastor from Nágocs, a protégé of Lajos Ács, a member of the political committee and Somogy County Party Secretary, and Bereczky's personal benefactor, wanted a congregation in the capital.²¹⁸ In his letter of resignation dated 1956, Roland Kiss states that it was already decided in April 1952 that Demjén should be retired because "this is the will of the party".²¹⁹ Bishop Albert Bereczky willingly complied with this will.

Despite Demjén's eventual submission of his retirement application, he was unable to avoid persecution. On 11 July 1952, a short article appeared in one of the evening papers of the capital, which noted with satisfaction that the clerical reactionary pastor, who had been an exploiter and fought against the democratic state order, had applied for retirement. In the same article, he was also held accountable for his directive to Reformed parishioners to attend Catholic processions, and for his facial hair, which was deemed to carry a political message.²²⁰ It is typical of the public mood within the church at the time that, a few days later, and which also raises the suspicion of a concerted smear campaign, the Reformed church's weekly

216 RL A/1b Files of the Bishop. 1768/1952. István Demjén's brief to Bishop Albert Bereczky, 28. 06. 1952.

217 RL A/1b Files of the Bishop. 1768/1952. Albert Bereczky's brief to István Benkő, 01. 07. 1952.

218 Ferenc Kenéz, of course, denies all this in his highly subjective memoirs, although he admits that a significant proportion of the congregation in Budafok thought their beloved pastor, István Demjén, had to retire because of him. Kenéz Ferenc: *Aki soha nem kellett. Önéletrajz*, h. n., Szent Gellért Kiadó, 2011. 52–53.

219 Roland Kiss's brief to the president of the State Office of Church Affairs. In: *Adalékok a Magyarországi Református Egyházban az 1956–1957-es esztendőben történetekhez. Dokumentumok a Református Megújulási Mozgalom és az Országos Intézőbizottság tevékenysége, valamint a megtorlások történetéből*. Ed.: Ladányi Sándor, Budapest, Kálvin Kiadó, 2006. 245–246.

220 A lelkipásztor „szakállá” – és amit azzal sem tud eltakarni [The „beard” of the pastor – and what it can not cover up], *Esti Budapest*, 1952. I. évfolyam. 84. sz. 3.

newspaper *Az Út*, published his short article loaded with almost verbatim accusations.²²¹ Nevertheless, Demjén's retirement did not cause much of a stir among his contemporaries either, presumably because Károly Dobos, a much better-known pastor in Fásor, also retired at the same time, and the Budafok pastor's perceived injustice was somewhat overshadowed by Dobos's case.

The Years of Retirement (1952–1962)

István Demjén retired in August 1952. Following a brief election process, not without persuasion and pressure, he was replaced by Ferenc Kenéz, who shortly afterwards took up a full-time position in the Convention and his subordinates replaced him in the congregation. The change of pastor brought about a radical change in the life of the congregation. Some of the congregation's leadership resigned, while others were removed from the reduced presbytery as a result of a forced renewal.²²² From 1952 onward, the initial signs of resistance to the official church policy in the congregation of Budafok vanished, at least in appearance, as evidenced by the surviving sources. The pastor did his utmost to comply with the directives from above, used the prescribed guidelines to prepare sermons and presented the most important church documents and statements to the congregation in a didactic manner.

However, the tension within the community was palpable for years, with Kenéz complaining to a party-state representative in 1953 that some members of the presbytery were still taking the „Demjén line”, and encouraging each other that they would not have to put up with this „communist pastor” for much longer.²²³ The congregation was convinced that Demjén had to be removed from his post because of Kenéz's ambitions, however, the state's church officials also wrote about Demjén's „removal” due to his „fascist” tendencies.²²⁴ Furthermore, the presbytery and the congregation also expressed their dissatisfaction with the situation, as well as their loyalty to the ousted pastor, by voting for Demjén to receive more substantial financial support both in the years leading up to and following his retirement.²²⁵ In

221 Nyugdíjazását kérte [Requested his retirement], *Az Út*, 1952. V. évfolyam. 28. sz. 2.

222 BBEI, Filed documents, 171/1953.; 197/1953.

223 Sándor Szerényi: June 1953 monthly report. In: *Egyházügyi hangulat-jelentések 1951, 1953*. Budapest, Osiris – Budapest Főváros Levéltára, 2000. 388.

224 Ibid.

225 BBEI, Minutes of the Presbytery, 07. 09. 1952. nr. 1.; 07. 02. 1954. nr. 7.

addition to the official financial support sent to Demjén, the congregation collected 200 forints for their retired pastor in 1955.²²⁶

And István Demjén was in need of financial support. In autumn 1952, he left Budafok in poor health and moved to live with his pastor son in Örkény, where he spent the last ten years of his life. During his long pastoral ministry, Demjén never considered his own financial security and well-being to be an important consideration. On arriving in Budafok, he had to start a new life completely penniless and emaciated, but he did not want to burden his small congregation of poor workers. His salary was low, and even that went often unpaid, especially in the years after the Second World War. Thus the congregation owed him a substantial sum, which they were slow to repay. With his modest pension, he could not hope to maintain an independent household, so he and his wife had to rely on his son for support. He was meticulous, however, in ensuring that any letter requesting his help was addressed to the elder and the presbytery, and not to the successor who took his place.²²⁷

Budafok was also impacted by the 1956 revolution. From the scattered sources and the recollections of Ferenc Kenéz, we can surmise that the tension that had been building up in the congregation for years turned against the pastor transferred to Budafok by the church leadership serving the party state. According to Kenéz, some people tried to bring Demjén back to Budafok, while others insulted Kenéz.²²⁸ Unfortunately, we cannot confirm or refute either of these claims with other sources, but we believe both are possible based on the events of the period before 1956. After the revolution has been quashed, the time for retaliation came to Budafok as well, and the well-respected district chief physician, Dr Pál Takács, who had been a lay leader of the Reformed congregation alongside Demjén for years, was imprisoned for many years for his revolutionary activities.²²⁹ According to Kenéz, many people believed that the pastor was also responsible for the severe sentence.²³⁰ It is therefore not surprising that the relationship between Kenéz and the congregation was permanently damaged. First, he went abroad for a year and then left the congregation in 1959.

226 BBEI, Filed documents, 139/1955.

227 BBEI, Filed documents, 25/1956. István Demjén's brief to the Presbytery in Budafok. 21. 02. 1956.

228 Kenéz: *ibid.* 60–64.

229 Lajos Szász: Dr. Takács Pál. In: *Emlékezés és felejtés. Egyházi sorsok a diktatúrák árnyékában.* Budapest, Református Közéleti és Kulturális Központ Alapítvány, 2018. 36–37.

230 Kenéz: *ibid.* 64.

He was succeeded by Sándor Virágh, who wisely realised that it is still not possible to build a community in Budafok without Demjén. During his brief service in Budafok, he tried to repair the damage done earlier, one of the symbolic acts of which was to pay a personal visit to the increasingly unwell Demjén. In the spring of 1960, they sent each other a series of cordial letters, in one of these, Virágh wrote: "Today's congregation is living from the fruits of your good basic work, and I will try to build on the good foundation".²³¹ Virágh also made sure that Demjén's regular congregational aid increased by 100 forints a month, and often by more than that. The money was put to good use by the increasingly unwell Demjén. During 1959, he was treated for Asian flu, and the cost of the treatment was so high that he had sell some of his clothes and part of his library.

Abandoned, ravaged by illness, emaciated and weakened, but touched by the kindness of his successor in Budafok, the increasingly weary pastor recalled memories of his three decades of ministry in Budafok, perhaps more for himself than for the addressee of his letter: "The relationship between my former congregation in Budafok and me was ideal. I was first a loving caring brother to each member of the congregation, and then a caring father, so that they came to me with more confidence than a child to his parent, a husband to his wife. – I did my best to help anyone in need, whether they were experiencing sorrow or financial difficulties. – I never held a grudge against anyone, but the love that poured out of my heart was felt and felt by everyone. Before me, there was neither rich nor poor, but I loved everyone as a sweet child of my soul, and this love returned its warmth to me".²³²

After a long illness, István Demjén passed away on 6 August 1962, and was laid to rest in Örkény on 14 August, with Andor Békési and Zoltán Tánzos serving as pastors.²³³ Tánzos was appointed to Budafok in the spring of 1962, succeeding Sándor Virágh, and served in the congregation until 1987. He believed that maintaining contact with István Demjén and his widow was important, as was ensuring that Demjén's congregation-organising activities were not forgotten in the community's memory.²³⁴ The people of Budafok did their utmost to ease the financial burden of the widow, and the presbytery, still vividly remembering Demjén's ministry, commemorat-

231 BBEI, Filed documents, 70/1960. Sándor Virágh's brief to István Demjén, 05. 06. 1960.

232 BBEI, Filed documents, 70/1960. István Demjén's István brief to Sándor Virágh, 10. 05. 1960.

233 BBEI, Filed documents, 172/1962. István Demjén's obituary.

234 BBEI, Filed documents, 204/1962. Widow of István Demjén's brief to Zoltán Tánzos, 27. 09. 1962.

ed the pastor's work in Budafok in a dignified manner, which contrasts with the church press's total silence on the matter: "István Demjén was the father of the congregation. By the grace of God, he built an eloquent church, a congregation house in Budafok, built congregation houses in the places of service, bought plots of land on the shores of Lake Balaton for the recreation of the congregation members; in addition to these external buildings, his ministry united the scattered flock and bound the young men, girls, and adult church members to the altar of the Lord with a sacrificial bond of love. During his ministry of nearly three decades, God richly blessed his people".²³⁵

We remember István Demjén as a Reformed pastor who was the victim of various persecutions during the turbulent times of the first half of the 20th century. Following the First World War, he was expelled from his post by the occupying Serb troops, and after the Second World War, he was prosecuted and finally forced into retirement. However, beyond the hardships and persecution we have to see in István Demjén, one of the undeservedly forgotten sacrificial workers of the Hungarian Reformed Church, who served the Hungarian Reformed Church and its local communities in various places of service for many decades, regardless of his own health and financial security, and serving the Reformed parish of Budafok for the longest time, for almost three decades. His character and his contributions are worthy of a place in the Hungarian Reformed community's collective remembrance.

235 BBEI, Minutes of the Presbytery, 15. 10. 1962. nr. 67.

MARIANNA SZÉKELY²³⁶

“HIM BEING CAST INTO FIRE NOT TO BE VAIN” – THE TRIALS OF PASTOR BARNÁ HORKAY DURING THE SOVIET ERA

His studies

Barna József Horkay was born in 1908 in Kistárkány²³⁷, the third child of Barna Horkay and Anna Sasi Szabó, raised in a Reformed pastor's family of ten children. After completing his elementary education, he commenced his high school studies at the Reformed High School in Sárospatak in 1919, following in the footsteps of his brother László. During his eight years at the institution, he distinguished himself through his diligence and talent, which became increasingly evident among his peers. In addition to his academic pursuits, he played an active role in various aspects of school life. He was a regular poet at ceremonies and, as a senior student he was elected youth president of the I. György Rákóczi Association.²³⁸ In the 1926–27 academic year, he was one of six students to pass their school-leaving exams with distinction.²³⁹ Evidence suggests that members of his family have been pastors since 1720, and he displayed a precocious interest in religion. At the age of eight, he fashioned a “pulpit” from a bale of hay in the barn and delivered a sermon from it. However, his career trajectory did not align with the priesthood, as his paternal uncle, who also served as his godfather, aspired for him to pursue a military career, preferring to enrol Barna in the armed forces. This decision was met with reluctance from the young man, who instead harboured a strong desire to emulate the professional paths of his father and brother, the latter of whom was then enrolled in the fourth year of his theological studies in Sárospatak. However, due to unforeseen circumstances, he was unable to attend the officer training school the following summer, a development that, according to his own account, he welcomed, as it

²³⁶ Marianna Székely, Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian College, Berehovo, Ukraine, szekely.marianna@kmf.org.ua

²³⁷ ДАЗО – Державний Архів Закарпатської області, ф. Р-1420, оп. 1,

²³⁸ *A Sárospataki Református Főiskola értesítője az 1926-27-ik iskolai évről.* 1927. 58–73.

²³⁹ As posited by Anna Horkay, the direct lineage of the pastoral profession within their family can be traced back to 1708.

enabled him to enrol at the Theological Academy in Sárospatak.²⁴⁰ During his four years at the academy, he participated in social activities to the same extent as during his high school years. In his first year, he was a committee member of the College Youth Association, the Religious Students' Association and the Sárospatak Academic Athletic Club,²⁴¹ and later he also led the college choir.²⁴²

His years as a young pastor

Barna Horkay's transition into the role of pastor occurred in 1931, a moment he recollects with the following words: "*On the afternoon of that day, I was formally inducted as a Hungarian pastor*".²⁴³ For a period of two years thereafter, he continued to serve in Sárospatak, assuming the role of deputy assistant teacher at the Teachers' College. In this capacity, he fulfilled the responsibilities of institutional pastor, overseeing the Sunday school and Bible study groups, and serving as teacher-president of the John Calvin Society in collaboration with Dr Béla Vasady, the director of the theology department. This society²⁴⁴ comprised a group of theologians and students from the Teachers' College. In 1933, he was transferred to Mukačevo / Мукачево/ (Munkács), where he served as assistant pastor alongside Bishop Béla Bertók. Following the retirement of Ferenc Biky in October 1934, the pastoral post in Виноградів /Vinohragyiv/ (Vinohragyiv) became vacant. The congregation sought to fill the position by invitation; however, due to the presence of two candidates, they were unable to reach a decision. Consequently, Imre Isaák, dean of Diocese of Máramaros-Ugocsa, called for the election of a pastor. Although as many as five pastors had applied for the post, at the pastors' election meeting held in February 1935, Barna Horkay received the most votes, a fact which was reported in the Prágai Magyar Hírlap, '*with the electorate noting the result with relief and cheers*'.²⁴⁵ At the age of twenty-six, Horkay took over the leadership of a congregation of a church county, and which had previously been the ministry of mostly older pastors.

240 Barna Horkay: *A Keleti Baráti Kör. Képek a kárpátaljai ébredésből*. Kom Over En Help Alapítvány, 1998. 19.

241 *A Sárospataki Református Főiskola értesítője az 1929–30-ik iskolai évről*. 1930. 23.

242 *A Sárospataki Református Főiskola értesítője az 1927–28-ik iskolai évről*. 1928. 88.

243 Barna Horkay: *A Keleti Baráti Kör. Képek a kárpátaljai ébredésből*. Kom Over En Help Alapítvány, 1998. 21.

244 *A Sárospataki Református Főiskola értesítője az 1931–32-ik iskolai évről*. 1932. 138.

245 *Prágai Magyar Hírlap*. 22 February 1935. 14. vol. No. 45.

In the initial year of Barna Horkay's endeavours in Vinohragyiv, in July 1935, Widow Lászlóné Atzél (née Lujza Perényi), a direct descendant of the ancient Perényi family, donated two farmhouses with 30 acres of land near Vinohragyiv to the Reformed Church for the purpose of establishing an orphanage for Hungarian children, regardless of denomination. Perényi requested that the institution should be called the Atzél-Perényi Szeretet Árvaház.²⁴⁶ The motivation behind this act of benevolence on the part of Lujza Perényi, a practising Catholic, was to honour the memory of her deceased husband, László Atzél, who had been a Reformed school inspector in Ugocsa County. The institution is set to commence its operations with a population of eight orphans, under the guidance of the widowed Jánosné Kovács, a teacher hailing from Vinohragyiv, and is scheduled to be formally inaugurated on 6 October.²⁴⁷

Therefore, the young pastor was assigned with expanded responsibilities, which will include the management of the orphanage budget²⁴⁸, maintained by voluntary contributions from the congregations of Diocese of Máramaros-Ugocsa. He will also be responsible for the expansion of the institution as the number of children increases.²⁴⁹ Furthermore, he is regularly invited to various service occasions, for example, in November 1935 he will be delivering a lecture alongside missionary Mária Molnár in Вишково /Viskovo/ (Visk)²⁵⁰, who will visit several settlements, including Vinohragyiv, during her tour of Subcarpathian testimonies.²⁵¹

On 15–16 August 1936, the congregation of Barna Horkay will play host to the annual national conference²⁵² of the Sub-Carpathian Reformed Church District for the second time, marking the ninth iteration of the event. The event will be attended by representatives of almost all the congregations of Subcarpathia, and will be held in two venues: the Reformed Church and the

246 *Prágai Magyar Hírlap*, 1935. augusztus 1. 14. évf. szám, Marianna Székely: A nagyszőlősi Atzél-Perényi Szeretet Árvaház. In: *Küldetés. A Kárpátaljai Református Egyház Lapja*. XX-VII. évf. 2. szám, 2019. február

247 *Prágai Magyar Hírlap*, 1 August 1935. 14. vol.

248 Gyula Kiss (ed.): *A Magyarországi Református Egyház egyetlen névtára 1941*. Budapest, 1941. 223.

249 Barna Horkay. *A Keleti Baráti Kör. Képek a kárpátaljai ébredésből*. Kom Over En Help Alapítvány, 1998. 13.

250 *Prágai Magyar Hírlap*. 15 November 1935. 14. vol., No. 261.

251 Barna Horkay. *Pictures from the Transcarpathian Awakening*. Kom Over En Help Foundation, 1998. 12.

252 The first conference was organised in 1927, following a decision of the Sub-Carpathian Reformed Church District, and its venue was Vinohragyiv.

Atzél-Perényi Orphanage. The event will feature a keynote address by Bishop Béla Bertók, along with contributions from Imre Isaák, dean of the Máramaros-Ugocsa Diocese, Géza Papp of Ungtarnóc /Тарнівці/, and Zsigmond Simon from Астреї /Asztej/ (Ásztély), Zoltán Király of Чоп /Csop/ (Csap), István Kiss of Вилок /Vilok/ (Tiszaújlak), Imre Narancsik of Мужієве /Muzsijeve/ (Nagymuzsaly), János Tornyay of Tekove /Теково/ (Tekeháza) and Béla Szabó missionary pastor of district. Barna Horkay, the host pastor, will present the history of the Vinohragyiv congregation. “The Reformed Parish of Vinohragyiv volunteered to organise the conference and to take on the obligations that came with it, but they were not ashamed either, because the conference was a great success in every respect and the guests were delighted with the Hungarian hospitality of the people of Vinohragyiv” – as reported in the press at the time. Thus, the congregation and its leadership successfully welcomed and hosted thousands of people.²⁵³

In the autumn of the same year, a group of pastors in Хуст /Huszt/ (Huszt) founded the Circle of Friends/Eastern Circle of Friends²⁵⁴, which Barna Horkay also attended. It was during one of these meetings, according to his recollections, that he came to a living faith.²⁵⁵ From then on, he became an active member of the organisation, organising quiet days, evangelistic weeks, girls’ conferences, Bible study groups and also increasing the spiritual work among the youth.²⁵⁶ Benő Békefi, a renowned evangelizer of the era, documented this development in one of his writings.

In November 1938, Barna Horkay was compelled to relinquish his posi-

253 *Prágai Magyar Hírlap*. 15 November 1935. Vol. 15, No. 188.

254 The establishment of this community was primarily associated with the inception of the inner mission, a movement spearheaded by Béla Szabó, the pastor of Huszt. In the autumn of 1936, Szabó, along with Kálmán Tóth, pastor of Чорнотисів /Csornotisziv/ (Feketeadó), and Zsigmond Simon, pastor of Asztély, founded a community of friends in Huszt, uniting all individuals involved in the inner mission. This community comprised pastors, teachers, teachers’ assistants, and ordinary members of the congregation. Subsequently, the community became known as the Sun-Eastern or Eastern Circle of Friends, and its primary objective was to promote Reformed education. Its activities aligned with its founding purpose: to undertake missionary work within the framework of the official church, i.e. to organise women’s and girls’ circles, youth associations, visiting the sick, and giving tithes to support the poor, sick and needy, and later to support the missionary work. Orbán Marianna: *Ébredési mozgalom a Kárpátaljai Református Egyházban*. In: *Acta Beregszásensis*, 2009. No. 2. 239–244.

255 Barna Horkay. *A Keleti Baráti Kör. Képek a kárpátaljai ébredésből*. Kom Over En Help Alapítvány, 1998, 15.

256 *Nyírségi Virrasztó*. 15 March 1940. No. 1.

tion of service. Subsequent to the First Vienna Award, Vinohragyiv did not come under Hungarian jurisdiction; however, due to the fact that his place of residence was situated within liberated territory, the local authorities expelled him from the country.²⁵⁷ He subsequently served in Tarpa for a period of two and a half months, after which he was granted the opportunity to return to his own congregation and continue the work he had previously initiated. He participated actively in the Circle of Friends held on the first Wednesday of each month, always in a different location, for the purpose of studying the Word of God. He is a regular minister at these meetings, and from 1941 onwards, when circulars were also sent out on the proceedings of the meetings to members who were absent for some reason, his name is often found among the authors.²⁵⁸ He serves at youth conferences and evangelisation events organised by the Circle of Friends, but he is also in touch with evangelical movements in Hungary.²⁵⁹ Consequently, he is invited to serve in numerous locations. For instance, he delivered a speech at the 3rd National Reformed Conference in Nyíregyháza in March 1942, and he was one of the ministers at the evangelisation week organised in July of the same year in the House of Reconciliation in Sződliget, alongside László Bakó and Benő Békefi. The latter, whom he had encountered in 1939 at a meeting of the Circle of Friends in Батъово /Batyovo/ (Bátyu), was invited on several occasions to serve in Vinohragyiv: in March 1940 and April 1942 he held an evangelistic week in the congregation.²⁶⁰ The second occasion was overshadowed by the tragic event of two deaths in Barna Horkay's family the previous week: he lost his mother and his sister Judit, both of whom were seriously ill, within hours of each other.

Another significant event in the pastor's life in 1942 was his marriage. Two years earlier, when he was in Sződliget, as previously referenced, as a speaker at a summer silent day for women church workers, he encountered Dolorosa Törzsök, who was the leader of the Battonya Girls' Circle and Sunday school. They conversed infrequently, but nevertheless developed a mutual attraction. Their engagement was formalised on 26 July 1942, and the

257 Barna Horkay. *A Keleti Baráti Kör. Képek a kárpátaljai ébredésből*. Kom Over En Help Alapítvány, 1998. 29–31.

258 Barna Horkay published fifteen such circular letters from the period 1941–1944 in his memoirs. See Barna Horkay. *A Keleti Baráti Kör. Képek a kárpátaljai ébredésből*. Kom Over En Help Alapítvány, 1998. 48–94.

259 Nyírségi Virrasztó. 15 March 1942 Vol. 7 No. 6 and 1 August 1942 Vol. 7 No. 15.

260 Nyírségi Virrasztó. 1 May 1942, Vol. 7 No. 9, and Barna Horkay. *A Keleti Baráti Kör. Képek a kárpátaljai ébredésből*. Kom Over En Help Alapítvány, 1998. 48–94.

couple were married on 27 October of the same year. In his wife, he found a devoted and supportive partner.²⁶¹ Together, they engaged in various charitable activities, including girls' and women's meetings, providing assistance to the poor, undertaking gypsy missionary work, and participating in documentary missions. With the onset of the Second World War, they also began visiting wounded soldiers. During this period, Barna Horkay carried out numerous activities in Vinohragyiv with the assistance of his wife.

The events of 1944–1947

During the Second World War, as the Soviet troops advanced, the populace experienced a profound sense of trepidation and apprehension at the prospect of the atrocities and anti-religious sentiment of the Soviets, a sentiment that would ultimately be substantiated. A month after the Soviet troops invaded Subcarpathia in October 1944, men between the ages of 18 and 50 were compelled to work for three days in Hungarian settlements, a “Malenyky robot”, which subsequently evolved into a forced labour camp, which lasted for several years. Although this call did not apply to clergymen, the situation remained precarious.²⁶² During the autumn of 1944, several pastors and assistant pastors fled their posts, and of the three deacons, only the head of the diocese of Bereg, Gyula Bary, remained in his position.²⁶³ The remaining two deaneries were placed under the oversight of the deputies, Béla Gencsy in Ung and Sándor Lajos in Máramaros-Ugozca, as authorised by Imre Révész, Bishop of the Reformed Church District of Tiszántúl, in a circular letter dated 18 January 1945. The bishop stated that “in the part of the diocese not accessible to the deacon, which is presumably the part in

261 Ibid. B. Horkay, 1998, 51.

262 Marianna Orbán. A Kárpátaljai Református Egyház története 1944–1949 között. In: *Történeti Tanulmányok XVI. A Debreceni Egyetem Történelmi Intézetének kiadványa.* Debrecen, 2008. 303–317.

263 Ibolya Nagy Szamborovszkyné: Idegen világban: Bary Gyula beregi esperes lelkészi tevékenysége a szovjetesítés időszakában. In: Réka Kiss – Gábor Lányi (eds.): *Hagyomány Identitás Történelem 2024/1*, Budapest, Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem, Hittudományi Kar Egyháztörténeti Kutatóintézet, 2024. I.évf. 1. sz. 121.; Gusztáv Fodor: A református egyház első évtizede Kárpátalja szovjetizálásának idején (1944–1954), in: Molnár D Erzsébet – Molnár D István (szerk.): *Hadifogság, málenkij robot, gulág. Kárpát-medencei magyarok és németek elhurcolása a Szovjetunió hadifogoly- és kényszermunkatáboraiába (1944–1953)*, Beregszász–Ungvár, „Rik-U” Kiadó, 2017, 99.

Ugocsa, the legal deputy of the dean should take over the administration”.²⁶⁴ Of these three, Gyula Bary was the most senior, and was therefore the most likely to be seen by the authorities as a potential negotiating partner.²⁶⁵

Notwithstanding the challenging circumstances, the Eastern Circle of Friends persisted in their missionary endeavours within the ecclesiastical milieu, encompassing initiatives such as girls’ circles, youth Bible study, confirmation classes, and home services. However, the Soviet authorities had already prohibited their engagement with school-age children by 1945.²⁶⁶ The monthly meetings of the Circle of Friends persisted, though the participation rate exhibited a notable increase. For instance, the average attendance during the 1942–1943 period ranged from 20 to 40 individuals, whereas from the autumn of 1944 onward, the attendance figure varied between 120 and 1,300 participants. The prevailing burdens, uncertainties and fears of everyday life were increasingly drawing people towards spirituality and the Church, thereby fostering an intensification of spiritual awakening in Subcarpathia. This phenomenon naturally attracted the attention of the contemporary, historically atheistic state authorities, though no overt measures have been taken thus far. However, it is noteworthy to mention an incident that transpired with four pastors from a social circle, including Barna Horkay, while they were visiting a fellow pastor in a village in Ужгород / Uzshorod/ (Ungvár). They were travelling in a carriage when an unmarked lorry collided with them intentionally. They pulled over, but the rear axle of the wagon became stuck in the car’s wheels, causing the wagon to roll over. The vehicle continued forward. No one sustained injuries. The identity of the perpetrator of this incident remains unknown.²⁶⁷ Could it be merely a curious coincidence that Greek Catholic Bishop Tódor Romzsa was killed in a similar accident!?²⁶⁸

264 KRELM – Kárpátaljai Református Egyház Levéltára és Múzeuma, Bulcsú, I. 10.c., *A tiszántúli református egyházkerület püspökétől. 7/1945. szám alatt. Körlevél a máramaros-ugocsai egyházmegye lelkipásztoraihoz.* Debrecen, 1945. január 18.

265 Marianna Székely: Szikszai Aladár a Keleti Baráti Körről. In: Szamborovszkyné Nagy Ibolya (szerk.): *Magyar öntudat és krisztusi, keresztyén elvek.* Narancsik Imre Kutatói Műhely, Beregszász, 2019. 139–140. , Ibid. Horkay: A Keleti, 100.

266 Ibolya Nagy Szamborovszkyné: Idegen világban: Bary Gyula beregi esperes lelkészi tevékenysége a szovjetesítés időszakában. In: Réka Kiss – Gábor Lányi (szerk.): *Hagyomány Identitás Történelem 2024/1*, Budapest, Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem, Hittudományi Kar Egyháztörténeti Kutatóintézet, 2024. I. évf. 1. sz. 121–122.

267 Horkay: A Keleti, ibid. 108–110

268 Marianna Orbán: Ébredési mozgalom a Kárpátaljai Református Egyházban. In: *Acta Beregsasiensis.*, 2009. 2. No. 239–244.

By 1945, the membership of the Eastern Circle of Friends had grown to a sufficient size to allow a select group of six pastors to form a narrow inner core: Barna Horkay of Vinohragyiv, József Pázsit of Тисобикень /Tiszobikeny/ (Tiszabökény), István Asszonyi of Форголань (Forgolány), Zsigmond Simon of Астреј /Asztej/ (Asztély), Zoltán Kovács of Вилок /Vilok/ (Tiszaújlak) and József Zimányi of Gecse.²⁶⁹ The members of the “Six” met on a weekly and, occasionally, monthly basis to discuss the programme of the conferences, the affairs and tasks of the individual communities. Consequently, the “Six” can be regarded as the steering committee of the Eastern Circle of Friends. In 1946, on the initiative of József Zimányi, a one-month Bible school was organised in Gecse, attended by approximately 20 young people, with the objective of training church workers. This event served to further raise the profile of the Friendship Circle pastors within their respective communities.²⁷⁰

In 1947, the intensity and pace of the events escalated significantly. The state security services initiated an attempt to recruit Barna Horkay as an informant in the early months of the year. He was subjected to interrogation on several occasions over a period of two months. However, due to his apparent lack of cooperation, he was no longer called in for further questioning.²⁷¹ At that time, the relationship between the church and the state had not yet been formally established, and the churches had not yet been officially registered. The Circle of Friends expressed concerns that this could result in the state imposing a suspension on the official operations of the church. They were unaware of any ongoing negotiations with any of the deacons on behalf of the state and urged the church leadership to take the necessary steps as soon as possible.²⁷² Consequently, the three deacons instigated the election of the leader of the Sub-Carpathian Reformed Church (CRECh) in January 1947, proposing István Györke²⁷³, who, as the results of the 12 February ballot demonstrate, was unanimously elected by the congregations. However, as questions arose about the powers of the office (in

269 Of its former founders, Kálmán Tóth left the territory of Transcarpathia in 1936, and Béla Szabó in 1939, to serve elsewhere.

270 Marianna Székely: Aladár a Keleti Baráti Körről. In: Szamborovszkyné Nagy Ibolya (szerk): *Magyar öntudat és krisztusi, keresztyén elvek*. Narancsik Imre Kutatói Műhely, Beregszász, 2019. 141.

271 Horkay: A Keleti, *ibid.* 116.

272 Horkay: A Keleti, *ibid.* 117–118.

273 KRELM, I. 10.c. *A Tivadarfalvai Református Egyházközség presbiteri jegyzőkönyve*, 25 January 1947.

particular, whether it should be a regional delegate, who is the liaison between the church and the state, or a bishop at the head of the CRECh?)²⁷⁴, István Györke withdrew, and after negotiations with Lyamin-Agafonov, the regional delegate of the Council for Religious Affairs, Gyula Bary became the star, or senior regional delegate, from May 1947.²⁷⁵

In March 1947, the “Six” met in Gecse, where the idea was proposed that they should also testify their faith in God to the state. They agreed and entrusted József Zimányi and Barna Horkay with the task of taking further steps. The next day the two pastors went to Berehovo to the local authorities, where the major who received them had them write down what they had to say. Barna Horkay remembers the transcript thus: “*You took the glory of the victory for yourself. You put yourself in the place of God in everything. Next to huge fields of wheat, large billboards proclaimed the boast: without God and without prayer, but with fertilizer and a tractor! For this the Lord will humble you like Nebuchadnezzar. Your own sons will despise you. - While you still have time, go within yourself, give glory to the majestic God! It will benefit your people. The arrogant Belshazzar and his empire were lost in one night. - József Zimányi, Barna Horkay*”.²⁷⁶ This surviving version of the document was published by Gusztáv Fodor in his work “*Those who came out of the great tribulation...*”, from 2017. It is dated Ungvár, the text is longer and among the signatories we find Zsigmond Simon.²⁷⁷ The difference between the two versions can be explained as follows: the major from Berehovo, after receiving the document, simply says that they should go to Uzhhorod the next day and repeat this to the regional religious representative. The next day, Simon Zsigmond, the leader of the Circle of Friends, joins Horkay and Zimányi when they also make a profession of faith before Agafonov’s regional religious representative. This event is followed by the

274 Ibolya Nagy Szamborovszkyé: Idegen világban: Bary Gyula beregi esperes lelkész tevékenysége a szovjetesítés időszakában. In: Kiss Réka – Lányi Gábor (ed.): *Hagyomány Identitás Történelem 2024/1*, Budapest, Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem, Hittudományi Kar Egházttörténeti Kutatóintézet, 2024. I. Issue. 1. No. 125.

275 Ibolya Nagy Szamborovszkyé: Gencsy Béla egyházvezetői tevékenységének főbb irányvonalai az államszocializmus idején. In: Kiss Réka – Lányi Gábor (szerk.): *Hagyomány Identitás Történelem 2022*, Budapest, Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem, Hittudományi Kar Egházttörténeti Kutatóintézet, Budapest, 2023. 272.

276 i.m. Horkay: A Keleti, 116–117.

277 Gusztáv Fodor: *Akik a nagy nyomorúságból jöttek... A sztálini diktatúra koncepciós pereit kárpátaljai református lelkészek ellen a KGB ungvári levéltárának dokumentumai alapján. Peranyagok, életrajzi adatok, fényképek*. Kárpátaljai Református Egyház – Református Közéleti és Kulturális Központ Alapítvány, Debrecen, 2017. 178–179.

state authorities banning the Eastern Circle of Friends, which is was notified to Simon Zsigmond on 11 June. ²⁷⁸

The reaction of the official church leadership has already materialised months earlier with deacon Alexander Lajos, who had not previously opposed the movement²⁷⁹, being summoned to the church in September 1947.²⁸⁰ This was followed a month later by a circular letter in May 1947 from Gyula Bary, who by then had already become a Reformed Church regional commissioner, in which he also referred to the state leadership's attitude towards the aforementioned revival movement: 'He states that the state government has not rewarded the many and varied incitements of the so-called Circle of Friends, and that, in fact, without proper mandate or authorization, its actions, which have the character of fishing in the mud, have been clearly dropped.'²⁸¹ At the beginning of October, the KGB²⁸² began to summon and interrogate the young people attending the Bible study group, and in the middle of the month, Barna Horkay and József Zimányi were arrested.

His arrest, detention on remand and sentencing

On 16 October 1947, Lieutenant Fedotov, the chief operational officer of the Vinohragyiv's District Department of the Ministry of State Security²⁸³, following an examination²⁸⁴ of the material received, ordered the arrest of Barna Horkay and a search warrant to be carried out on him. He was also

278 Fodor: Who are the great, 178–179.

279 As far as we know, of the three deacons, only his opinion is known about the movement before 1947, according to which during his visitations in 1946, "Mr. Deacon notes with satisfaction the spiritual awakening movement that began in 1945 in the Verbóc congregation," where József Csík, a pastor of the Friendship Circle, was the head of the congregation. In Tiszaújlak, where another friendly pastor, Zoltán Kovács, was serving, during his visit to the deanery on 7 May 1946, the dean "...is pleased to note and heartily approves of the revival movement in our diocese." *Presbytery minutes of the Reformed Church of Verbóc*, 9 April 1946 and *Presbytery minutes of the Reformed Church of Tiszaújlak*, 7 May 1946.

280 KRELM, I. 10.c. *Lajos Sándor máramaros-ugaocsai esperes 22/1947. számú, 1947. április 8-án kelt körlevele.*

281 Abbreviated name for the State Security Office.

282 KRELM, I. 10.c. *Bary Gyula Református egyházi területi megbízott 3/1947. számú, 1947 májusában kelt körlevele*

283 Shortened version of Nagyszőlős.

284 This suggests that they had been watching the pastor for some time and collecting material on him.

ordered to be detained in order to prevent his possible escape. The latter document also states that Barna Horkay is suspected of having committed an offence under USSR Criminal Code 54-14tc²⁸⁵. At approximately 12 p.m. on 17 October, the authorities began a search of the house, collected any items deemed suspicious, and informed his wife that she should prepare a change of underwear and food for her husband, as they were taking him with them. At midnight, they boarded a train to Uzshorod, bound for the KGB. It is noteworthy that at the time of his detention, Barna Horkay had left his pregnant wife and their two children at home.

In Uzshorod, he is initially held in pre-trial detention, where he is questioned for the first time after five days. The interrogation is conducted by the head of the Subcarpathian Regional Investigation Department of the Ministry of State Security, Major Stroganov.²⁸⁶ He is charged with serious offences and is regularly interrogated, as are people in his entourage. He remained in pre-trial detention for several months, until January 1948, during which time he does not recall being physically abused. Instead, he describes other methods of coercion, including being placed in a cell with six beds and six other people. He is given two options: either sleep on the floor or share his bed with another detainee. On occasion, he is detained for extended periods in the interrogation room without being questioned. However, he is taken for walks each morning, albeit under the cover of darkness, which

285 The two documents mentioned above can be found in the file of the case files of József Zimányi and Barna Horkay Zimányi, marked F.P.2258., op.1., od.zb.5983, Delo C-2274, in the Uzshorod Archive of the State Security Office of Ukraine. *Gusztáv Fodor: Akik a nagy nyomorúságból jöttek... A sztálini diktatúra koncepció s pere i kárpátaljai református lelkészek ellen a KGB ungvári levéltárának dokumentumai alapján. Peranyagok, életrajzi adatok, fényképek.* Kárpátaljai Református Egyház – Református Közéleti és Kulturális Központ Alapítvány, Debrecen, 2017. 153-165 és 193-220.

286 You can read more about this in Barna Horkay's memoirs, which can be summarised as follows: 1. he was a member of the Veres military conspiracy, 2. he was a member of the Eastern Circle of Friends, founded in 1946, whose aim was to extend Hungary's borders eastwards at the expense of the Soviet Union, 3. he participated in the deportation of Jews and the confiscation of their property, 4. he was a confidant of the Hungarian gendarmes, 5. he participated in the forced Hungarianisation of Ukrainians between 1939 and 1944, 6. he was a member of the Circle of Friends of the East, founded in 1946, whose aim was to extend Hungary's borders eastwards at the expense of the Soviet Union. The first five charges were quickly dropped: he did not even know who Veres was, the Circle of Friends of the East was founded in 1936 and its members were not politically active, he did not participate in the deportation of Jews, he did not take their property, the gendarmes only came to see him when they had to check some data from the register, he did not speak Ukrainian, and his supporters were all Hungarians.

provides minimal sunlight. Despite not having his Bible, he engages in spiritual discourse with his cellmates upon learning of his status as a pastor. He receives a weekly food parcel from his family, which he shares with his cellmates, who also have a positive attitude towards him and do not allow him to sleep on the floor. The parcels help him learn that his third child, Samuel, has just been born.²⁸⁷ His wife writes the child's name on the parcel as the sender, as she cannot write a letter.

The official indictment against him is made on 18 January 1948. *"In 1936, he was an active member of the "Brothers of the East" club and engaged in anti-Soviet activities. As an organizer and leader of the circle of preacher training and the "Followers of Christ" society, he educated young people in the spirit of Reformed fanaticism, thus separating them from participation in the cultural-enlightenment and socio-political life organized by the Soviet state and party organizations in the village. He was the instigator of the compilation and sending of an anti-Soviet letter addressed to a leader of the Soviet government, [...] i.e. he committed the offences under Articles 54-10, para. 2, 109 and 196 of the Criminal Code of the USSR"*²⁸⁸ The "Brothers of the East" club referenced in the indictment is likely to be interpreted as the Eastern Circle of Friends, and the missionary movement is designated as anti-Soviet. The establishment of a Bible school in Gece is regarded as an act of subversion against the regime, and the pastor's testimony to the authorities is also denounced, characterising it as a letter addressed to a leader of the Soviet government. In essence, the atheist state power accuses the religious group of religious fanaticism for activities that are an integral part of the pastoral profession. The sentence proposed by Major Stroganov, as mentioned above, is 10 years' imprisonment in a correctional labour camp.

Following his transfer from the police/KGB prison to another prison in Uzhhorod on 21 January 1948, Barna Horkay found himself in a facility where, in addition to political prisoners, there were also prisoners of public order. Those who had completed their interrogation were transferred to this prison, where they were usually tried within two weeks. It is noteworthy that Barna Horkay was transferred to this prison on the same day as József Zimányi, who had been arrested the day before and faced similar charges. Despite having been held in the same prison for almost half a year, the two individuals in question only spent two weeks in the same cell. Barna Horkay awaited his trial daily for several months, but was never called.

²⁸⁷ Horkay: A Keleti, *ibid.* 157–160.

²⁸⁸ Fodor: Akik a nagy, *ibid.* 161–162.

It was not until later that he discovered the reason for this: the absence of any tangible physical evidence against him, and his case being referred to the Special Council under the Ministry of State Security of the Soviet Union for sentencing. This council was responsible for ruling on cases of indeterminacy.²⁸⁹ On 15 May 1948, the pastor's case was adjudicated, and he was convicted of the offences delineated in Articles 54-10, Part II, 109 and 196 of the USSR Criminal Code. He was sentenced²⁹⁰ to seven years' imprisonment in a correctional labour camp, a sentence that was also imposed on József Zimányi. It is important to note that there was no possibility of appeal, and the prisoners were kept in a state of constant anticipation while awaiting the unknown destination of their future exile.²⁹¹

In the camp

The departure occurred in mid-June 1948²⁹², and Barna Horkay and József Zimányi, along with several other prisoners, including four individuals of Hungarian origin, were initially transferred to the distribution camp in Lemberg, a former military barracks. Upon their arrival, a thorough screening process was conducted, during which Horkay lost sight of his fellow travellers. Due to the overcrowded conditions in his housing, he found it difficult to sleep at night, as the room was frequently plagued by thieves. The following day, they reunited with Zimányi and other acquaintances²⁹³, and managed to reach their place, albeit to find it overcrowded, with seventy-two people in the room, leaving only a narrow space for sleeping. During his time in Lemberg, he encountered numerous rabbis of Hungarian origin, and a doctor from Mukačevo, who was also a prisoner at the medical clinic. The doctor attempts to provide them with medical care, treating them for scabies and applying ointment. The ointment is unpleasant but it allows them to sleep comfortably.²⁹⁴ József Zimányi is the first to be sent to the distribution camp, and then he too is put on the wagon, the only Hungarian there. The wagon contains bunk beds, so there is not much space. They proceed steadily, their first stop being the city of Omsk, where they have the opportunity to bathe in the city. Their next stop is Novosibirsk, where there

289 Fodor: *Akik a nagy*, *ibid.* 163.

290 Fodor: *Akik a nagy*, *ibid.* 198.

291 Horkay: *A Keleti*, *ibid.* 163.

292 Today known as Lviv (Львів), it is the capital of a county neighbouring Subcarpathia.

293 One man's foot was on the other man's head.

294 A group of prisoners on the move.

was also a distribution camp, and they spend a week there before being transferred to Buchta-Vanyina on the Pacific coast.²⁹⁵

At the medical clinic, he encounters Gusztáv Menczer, a medical student from Budapest who is also a prisoner there and assisting the camp doctor. Due to his benevolence, he only receives half of the recommended dose of typhus vaccine, in order to avoid the risk of fever. He remained in this location until June 1949, when he was relocated by boat with 1,500 other prisoners to Magadan, a port city situated on the Sea of Okhotsk, located 1,400 km north of the original site. During October of that year, he and 20 of his companions were transported further north to the Kolima region, an area of the Taiga that had only been reached the previous year. Their assigned task was the construction of a new hut, located adjacent to an existing, smaller structure. In March 1950, he was able to depart from this area, which was deemed unsuitable for human habitation, due to his deteriorating health. The combination of extreme cold, arduous labour and inadequate nutrition had significantly compromised his physical condition, resulting in his transfer to a medical facility in Nekszikán, situated 320 kilometres to the south.²⁹⁶ As far as can be ascertained, he will remain in this settlement until his release.

The camps Barna Horkay visited shared several similarities: hard physical labour, poor food, cold conditions, poor public safety, and diseases that were more easily contracted by a weakened body and more difficult to treat.

In Vanyina, he was tasked with digging deep holes in the frozen ground or arranging piles of felled pine trunks. In Magadan, he was employed in the drying room of the camp baths, and during his time in Tajga, he served as the barrack supervisor, responsible for cleaning, heating and cooking for his fellow campers. A significant challenge he faced was the provision of fire and water, a task made arduous by the snow-covered landscape and temperatures of around -60°C. The most arduous aspect of his work was the cleaning of a small factory in Nyeksikian, where he was employed on night shifts, which made the work dangerous. The distinction between political and public camps was marked by a significant disparity in discipline and security. In political camps, prisoners were escorted by guards at all

295 Бухта Ванина /Buhta Vanina/, a port town on the shore of the Tatar Strait (Sea of Okhotsk). i.m. : Horkay: A Keleti, *ibid.* 163–165.

296 Nyksikian is one of the smaller settlements in the Magadan area, which is located on the A.D. 62°N, 147°E, so the area 320 km north of it, referred to in Barna Horkay's memoirs as Kolima or Tajga, must be somewhere near the Arctic Circle. This is also suggested by the fact that the pastor experienced the phenomenon of the aurora borealis several times during his imprisonment in the camp.

times, public security was robust, and there was minimal risk of theft or violence from fellow prisoners. Conversely, prisoners in public camps were sometimes permitted to go unescorted, however, the most formidable prisoners were able to steal from others, and their own lives were not secure. In Nekszikán, after completing their sentences in the public camps, prisoners remained in the settlement. If they desired something, the lives of others were of little concern to them. On two separate occasions, Barna Horkay was subjected to threats against his person, both times occurring when he was en route to his place of employment and assailed by robbers wielding a knife. A third incident, involving the theft of his outer garments, also occurred, and this, in the extreme cold of -56°C, was equally perilous.²⁹⁷

On each occasion, he was miraculously saved, for which he expressed gratitude towards a higher power. For an individual accustomed to temperate climates, temperatures of -50 to -60°C are not only unusual but also unfamiliar²⁹⁸, and it is one to which he must adapt, with the necessary practices to protect against them, and sometimes at his own expense. On one occasion, Barna Horkay sought to complete a task that required him to cover a greater distance more quickly. He ran in the cold, and almost froze his nose as a result. On other occasions, he was perplexed by the behaviour of people on the street who pointed to their faces when he passed them; he was white from the cold, they warned him. In addition to the cold, the poor diet was also taking its toll on the man's health. "*Sometimes we stayed hungry after lunch. It was good to eat the discarded fish bones under the table. Canned fish bones are edible,*" recalls the pastor".²⁹⁹ Upon arriving in Nekeshkian, the circumstances improved marginally, as he was able to write letters home and his family was able to send him food parcels.³⁰⁰ Prior to this, he had only been able to write to his family once, and received a reply informing him that his daughter Erzsike was very ill. For a year and a half after that, he had no contact with his loved ones. This period of uncertainty is characterised by a persistent contemplation

297 Horkay: A Keleti, *ibid.* 163–195.

298 From Nyksik to Ojmiak, the "cold pole" of the Northern Hemisphere is only 265 km away.

299 Horkay: A Keleti, *ibid.* 172.

300 Prior to this, he had only been able to write a single epistle to his place of residence, which had been answered by a reply informing him that his daughter Erzsike was gravely ill. Thereafter, she experienced a period of no communication with her family and friends that lasted for a year and a half. During this time, she existed in a state of uncertainty regarding the events that had transpired.

on the most suitable course of action for the child. However, a turning point emerges when a promise is fulfilled, as illustrated by the words of Job 5:24, which state, “You will know that your tent is secure; you will take stock of your property and find nothing missing.” This promise signifies the healing of Erzsike, the daughter of the pastor.

On each occasion he was miraculously saved, he thanked God for preserving his life.

The enhancement of working conditions and the provision of home packages have had a positive impact on Barna Horkay’s health, with fewer illnesses being experienced and less frequent hospitalisation. During his years of travel and residence in various camps, the pastor was hospitalised on multiple occasions for ailments including jaundice, scurvy and heart weakness. However, when reflecting on these illnesses, he does not perceive them as a form of retribution, but rather as divine guidance. During his hospitalisation, he is temporarily relieved from the arduous physical work in the winter months.³⁰¹ During the eight years that Barna Horkay is compelled to be away from his place of residence, he encounters numerous individuals from diverse geographical locations, speaking a variety of languages, and holding different religious beliefs and perspectives on life. In most cases, when they learn that he is a pastor, they look at him with respect, regardless of denomination or language, and ask him to speak to them from the Bible. The pastor is happy to take the opportunity to confess his faith, which has landed him in a camp. On rare occasions, he is challenged because of his convictions, or even scowled at because of his nationality. However, irrespective of his circumstances, he consistently finds support from his peers, who, whether Hungarian or Sub-carpathian, sometimes even Hungarian-born, offer assistance or stand by him in times of need. During his stay in Nykszikany, he developed a close friendship with György Csanaki, a soldier of Pilismarót who was forcibly removed from Uzhorod by the Soviet authorities in 1945.³⁰² In addition to this individual, there were several other Hungarians residing in the settlement; however, these individuals remain unnamed in the published memoirs.

301 Horkay: A Keleti, *ibid.* 167, 171.

302 Horkay: A Keleti, *ibid.* 163–195.

Following his release from the camp on 24 June 1953 with a time permit³⁰³, he was not permitted to return home, and so he took up temporary employment in Nyeksikan as a night watchman at the central pharmacy and a day watcher for a young child while his parents were at work. He now receives a salary to support his family. More than two years later, his wife informed him by letter that several people had recently returned from the camp/exile. Consequently, Barna Horkay sought authorisation to return home from the police in Nykesikan and then in the neighbouring Suszumán. On 20 August 1955, he was granted permission to return home.

The return journey from Nykosia, which is located 6,800 km as the crow flies from Vinohragyiv, entailed a total travel time of 37 days and a total distance of approximately 17,000 km for Barna Horkay, even if he had opted for the direct flight from Magadan to Habarovsk, bypassing the more lengthy and unpredictable sea route. While this option is undoubtedly more expensive, it does offer greater speed and safety.³⁰⁴ From there, he proceeded by train. After several weeks and multiple transfers, he arrives home in Vinohragyiv on the morning of 7 September 1955.

Home again

Following an eight-year period of absence, he is reunited with his family, including his son, Samuel, who is able to meet his father in person for the first time. He expresses contentment in seeing his wife, children and elderly father, despite the numerous difficulties and illnesses they have endured during his absence. The old congregation also expresses joy at his return; the pastorate was vacant at the time. Sándor Lajos, former deacon of Máramaros-Ugocsa, who had relocated from Фанчикове /Fancsikove/ (Fancsika) to Vinohragyiv in 1949, passed away that year. Béla Szabó, a pastor from Перехрестя /Perehresztya/ (Tiszakeresztúr), who is also applying for the vacant post, is serving as deputy pastor.³⁰⁵ Following a unanimous vote by the Council of Twenty, Barna Horkay

303 Those who successfully completed their daily work assignments beyond the prescribed threshold, that is to say, at a rate of 100%, were granted a reduction in their period of incarceration by a single day. This initiative was implemented with the objective of reducing the overall duration of imprisonment within the camp.

304 Horkay: A Keleti, *ibid.* 192-194.

305 The name of the twenty-member congregational council that served as the presbytery during the Soviet era.

was elected as pastor, a decision that was subsequently confirmed by the congregation, approved by the relevant state authorities, and acknowledged by the church leadership.³⁰⁶ The installation/re-inauguration of Horkay as pastor took place on 18 October 1955.

Following their release from internment in the camps, from 1955 onwards, pastors gradually returned and resumed their ministry. However, there was an absence of training for new pastors, and the older pastors gradually withdrew from active ministry, thus resulting in a significant shortage of pastors. Concurrently, Barna Horkay began serving in an increasing number of congregations: from 1955 in Fancsikove, then from 1966 in Чорний Потік /Csortnij Potyik/ (Feketepatak) and Матійово /Matyijovo/ Mátyfalva, from 1967 in Perehresztya, and from 1972 in Нове Село /Nove Szelo/ (Tiszaújhely). He also served as deacon from 1956 until his retirement.³⁰⁷ Despite not owning a car, he would often travel to these congregations by bicycle, and would use public transport for the remaining journey. He carried out the duties entrusted to him in six parishes in parallel, and with unwavering dedication and humility. Following his return from captivity, he and his wife had three more daughters, Margaret, Anna and Martha. Their eldest son, Barna, passed away in 1976.

Following his retirement at the age of seventy-nine, several young pastors were already working in various congregations of Subcarpathia as a result of the local pastor training programme that had been initiated³⁰⁸ earlier. In the same year, 1987, he relocated with his family to Tiszaeszlár, Hungary, to reside with his daughter and son-in-law, where he continued his pastoral ministry for a further ten years. On 29 June 1989, the Subcarpathian Regional Prosecutor's Office under No. 13/67 rehabilitated him as a victim of political repression for lack of criminal offence.³⁰⁹ In 1992, the Reformed Theological Academy of Sárospatak awarded him the title of honorary teacher. Five years later, he and his wife relocated to Sárospatak, and in 1998, at the age of ninety, he authored his memoirs entitled *The Eastern Circle of Friends*, in which, in addition to recounting the major milestones of his life, his testimony of his faith also plays an important role.

306 Horkay: A Keleti, *ibid.* 196–198.

307 Fodor: Akik a nagy, *ibid.* 167.

308 The Soviet authorities have not granted permission for the study of theology in Hungary by young people. However, those who have been invited to do so study under the supervision of the bishop and deans for a limited period of time.

309 Fodor: Akik a nagy, *ibid.* 167.

“Since he has no more business here, He brings the treasures of his gratitude to the Lord, where they are so many... And where the Lord says, ‘My son!’”³¹⁰ This quote by Lajos Füle can be found on his headstone in the Reformed cemetery in Sárospatak.

³¹⁰ Fodor: Akik a nagy, ibid. 167.

IBOLYA SZAMBOROVSKY-NAGY³¹¹

THE LIFE PATH AND MARTYRDOM OF IMRE NARANCSIK, THE PASTOR OF NAGYMUZSALY

Imre Narancsik's life and martyrdom rarely become the focus of scholarly research, despite his public activities – conducted up until the Soviet occupation in 1944 – being almost unparalleled. His name, however, remains relatively unknown due to his painfully early death. Our goal is precisely derived from this: to systematically and chronologically uncover his life path – even if in outline – while thoroughly exploring his activities as a pastor, public writer, editor, and historian of science, based on contemporary sources and documents.

The research on Imre Narancsik's life journey is quite limited. Until now, only one major study has been published, in which the authors first attempted to compile his biography and outline the breadth of his activities.³¹² Following this, a collection associated with the name of Gusztáv Fodor was published, which provided an excerpted selection from the court documents of the Stalinist show trials against Reformed pastors in Transcarpathia.³¹³ The most recent scholarly work dedicated to Narancsik (in article format) was published by the author of these lines in the RefWiki online Reformed church and cultural history encyclopedia.³¹⁴ As is apparent, the life of the late pastor has not been extensively researched, which is why this research project was born. We want to bring to life the exemplary life journey of our Reformed predecessors, including Imre Narancsik, who was a model in many ways. Furthermore, we aim to highlight the multifaceted activities he undertook as a pastor and as a person living in a minority context, while

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³¹² Fodor Gusztáv, Fodor Krisztina, Szabadi István, Szamborovszkyné Nagy Ibolya: *Narancsik Imre, a tudós lelkész, próféta és mártír*. NIKM, Beregszász–Debrecen, 2015.

³¹³ Narancsik Imre lelkész 1891–1948, in: Fodor, Gusztáv: *Akik a nagy nyomorúságból jöttek. A sztálini diktatúra koncepciók pereit kárpátaljai református lelkészek ellen a KGB ungvári levéltárának dokumentumai alapján. Peranyagok, életrajzi adatok, fényképek*. KRE – RKKKA, h.n., 2017. 90–117.

³¹⁴ Szamborovszkyné Nagy, Ibolya: Narancsik Imre (1904–1948), In: Földváryné, Kiss Réka (ed.): *RefWiki: Református Online Enciklopédia*, Budapest, Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem, 2023. Available: [https://refwiki.kre.hu/index.php?title=Narancsik_Imre_\(1904%E2%80%931948\)](https://refwiki.kre.hu/index.php?title=Narancsik_Imre_(1904%E2%80%931948))

also illustrating the value he represented in his immediate environment, how he influenced his parishioners in a minority setting, and pointing out what, and perhaps why, disturbed the new rulers of this region.

Origin, studies, and the beginning of his career

Imre Narancsik was born on 25 January 1904, in Csallóközaranyos (now Zlatná na Ostrove, Nitra District, Komárno Region, Slovakia). His mother was Terézia Cseke, and his father was Imre Narancsik.³¹⁵ The future pastor later recalled his father as a smallholder with 20–30 cadastral acres. Imre was the firstborn child of his parents, followed by four younger brothers: Károly, who took over the family farm, Elek, who became a pastor, Péter, who worked as an officer at the Hungarian State Railways, and the youngest, Vince, about whom we only know that he graduated from the second year of the Munkács Hungarian Royal State Commercial Secondary School in 1943.³¹⁶ In his autobiography, Imre also mentioned that, according to family tradition, they originated from Galgóc (now Hlohovec) and originally held a noble title.³¹⁷

He completed the first two grades of elementary school at the Reformed School in Csallóközaranyos, but attended the local state elementary school for grades 3–6. At the age of thirteen, in 1917, he was enrolled in the Catholic Grammar School of the Benedictine Order in Komárom,³¹⁸ which he graduated with distinction in 1925.³¹⁹ In the autumn of the same year, he became a student at the Losonc Reformed Theological Seminary,³²⁰ which had just been established. He was an outstanding student throughout his time at the seminary, and he passed his basic exams with excellent results in both written and oral forms between October 4–8, 1928. His tirelessness and affinity for learning were also evident in the fact that, thanks to his knowledge of

315 Narancsik Imre törzskönyvi lapja. Lelkészi törzslapok. *Tiszántúli Református Egyházkerület Levéltára* (TtREL) I.1.i.18.; See also: DUPKA György: *Kárpátaljai magyar Guláglexikon. Lefejezett értelmiség, 1944–1959*, Ungvár–Budapest, Intermix Kiadó, 1999, 79.

However, Dupka incorrectly stated Narancsik's year of birth in the indicated article as 1910.

316 Vitéz Pelládi Sándor (ed.): *A Munkácsi M. Kir. Állami Négytanfolyamú Kereskedelmi Középiskola évkönyve az 1942/43. iskolai évről*, Munkács, 1943, 9–10.

317 Narancsik Imre önéletrajza, TtREL I.8.d.23, 3.

318A *Komáromi Sz. Benedekrendi Kath. Főgimnázium értesítője az 1917/1918. iskolai évről*, Jókai-Könyvnyomda R.-T., Komárom, 1918, 20.

319 Gidró, Bonifác (ed.): *A Komárnói Sz. Benedek-rendi Kath. Főgimnázium értesítője az 1924/25. iskolai évről*, Komárom, 1925, 3.

320 Puntigán, József: *A Losonci Theológiai Szeminárium (1925–1939)*, Losonc, 2005, 302.

German, he attended Old Testament courses at the theological faculty of the University of Halle³²¹ in the 1928/29 academic year. There is a high probability that during this time he became acquainted with the theological spirit of Karl Barth's neo-Reformation. We presume that while studying in Halle, he may have visited the city of Münster, 50 kilometers away, where Barth was teaching at the university. From 1928 to 1931, he was invited to teach Ancient Greek, Hebrew, and parts of Old Testament studies at the Losonc Theological Seminary.³²² In 1936, the leadership of the seminary entrusted the young pastor with teaching dogmatics and its auxiliary sciences, which he taught in the Barthian spirit until 1938.³²³ By this time, he was proficient in German and Czech, and had a moderate command of English. He passed both of his ordination exams in Losonc with distinction (the first on 29 May 1929, and the second on 30 June 1931).

In December 1929, after completing his first ordination exam, he briefly served as a chaplain in Zsigárd³²⁴ (now Žihárec, Nitra District, Slovakia), while also becoming the secretary of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in Slovakia starting in January 1930. In addition to his work as synod secretary, in January 1930, he was appointed as a regular religious instructor at the State Teacher Training Institute in Bratislava. During the 1930/1931 academic year, he taught religion for 2–3 hours per week to 37 students from the Bratislava Hungarian State Realgymnasium, 5 from the German Realgymnasium, 3 from the German Civic Boys' School, and 19 students from the State Teacher Training Institute at the local Reformed Church council hall.³²⁵ In the 1932/33 academic year, Narancsik taught religion for 4 hours per week at the Ursuline convent³²⁶ school and 7 hours per week at the state Hungarian teacher training school, totaling 11 hours

321 The full name of the town at that time was Halle an der Saale.

322 Kiss, József (ed.): *A Magyarországi Református Egyház egyetemes névtára az 1930–1932. évekre*. A Református Egyetemes Konvent megbízásából kiadta a Bethlen Gábor Irodalmi és Nyomdai Részvénytársaság, Budapest, 1930. 185.

323 Kövy, Zsolt: A Losonci Református Teológiai Szeminárium. In: *Sárospataki Füzetek*. 2003/1, 119.

324 Változások a lelkészi és tanítói karban. In: *A Komáromi Református Egyházmegye Révkomáromban 1933. május 4.-én tartott rendkívüli és szeptember 12.-én tartott rendes közgyűlésének jegyzőkönyve*, Jókai Könyvnyomda, Komárno, 1933. 42.

325 Jelentés: a komáromi ref. e.-m. területén nem ref. jellegű, különböző fokú és nyelvű intézetekbe járó ref. tanulók rendszeres vallásoktatásáról az 1930 31. tanévben. In *Jegyzőkönyv a Komáromi Református Egyházmegye Révkomáromban 1931. augusztus hó 25. napján tartott rendes évi közgyűléséről*, Jókai Könyvnyomda, Komárno, 1931. 103.

326 Order of Saint Ursula, also known as the Ursulines.

a week across the two institutions, with 86 students attending both.³²⁷ In addition, he taught 34 boys and 38 girls in combined classes in grades I–V at the Augustinian Confession elementary school, 4 hours per week, in the same academic year.³²⁸ His work as a religious educator was so well-regarded that the Komárom Diocese awarded him special diocesan recognition for his successful and excellent results in teaching religion and music.

On 12 March 1932, he moved to Bratislava to serve as secretary to Elemér Balogh, bishop of the Reformed Church District of Dunántúl. Then, starting 31 August 1935, he was assigned to the Reformed Diocese of Bars “for the so-called post of dean’s assistant pastor’s position in Garamkissalló”.³²⁹ After a month, he was transferred to Léva by his bishop, where he served until the end of January 1936.

Moving to Nagymuzsaly, founding a family

In January 1936, “three presbyters from Muzsaly, the two János Tóths and János Sztreha, heard him preach in Léva. As soon as they came out of the church, they invited him to become their pastor. It was a miracle that this highly educated pastor, theology professor accepted the invitation from the Muzsaly congregation, which was looking for a pastor,” recalled 79-year-old Ferenc Pataky, whose father had been a presbyter in Nagymuzsaly during Narancsik’s time.³³⁰ The pastor arrived at his future place of service on February 11, 1936, and was installed into his position on February 16.³³¹ He was ordained as a pastor on September 22, 1939, in Debrecen.³³² After changing his place of service, he married Gabriella Tusa, a state school teacher on July 2 of the same year in Visk (Ugocsa County).³³³ In Pataky’s recollection,

327 *A Komáromi Református Egyházmegye Révkomáromban 1933. május 4.-én tartott rendkívüli és szeptember 12.-én tartott rendes közgyűlésének jegyzőkönyve*, Jókai Könyvnyomda, Komárno, 1933. 60.

328 *Ibidem*, 61.

329 Narancsik Imre önéletrajza, *TtREL* I.8.d.23, 4.

330 Badó, Zsolt: Narancsik Imre nagymuzsalyi lelkipásztor, in: *Kárpátalja*, 9(2009/434), 2009. május 8., 11.

331 Narancsik Imre törzskönyvi lapja, *TtREL* I.1.i.18, 2.

332 Szabadi, István (szerk.): *Tiszántúli református lelkész önéletrajzok 1942–1944. I. kötet*, Debrecen – Nagyvárad, 2016, 90.

333 The daughter of Menyhért Tusa, a pastor from Visk, and Julianna Biki, who graduated in 1933 from the VIII/B class of the Beregszász State Secondary School, see: Benda, István – Orosz, László (ed.): *A Beregszászi Magyar Gimnázium története 1864–1989*. Magyarságkutatás Intézet, Budapest, 1990. 154.

he also mentioned that “my parents and my grandmother had a very close, good relationship with the Narancsik family, and from them, I learned that Imre Narancsik came to Transcarpathia because of his love. His future wife, Ella Tusa, was his student. Whenever possible, he traveled by train to Visk to be with his love, and their wedding took place here in the Muzsaly parsonage, where they also lived”.³³⁴ This recollection seems to be based on facts, as Narancsik’s wife indeed completed her teacher training in Pozsony (now Bratislava).³³⁵ The couple had two daughters: Gabriella, born on 16 June 1939, and Ágnes, born on 19 August 1942.

His wife, Gabriella, received her appointment as a regular teacher at the state elementary school in Nagymuzsaly from the Hungarian Royal Minister of Religion and Public Education (Bálint Hóman) in October 1939 (90.900/1939. VI. ü. o. no.).³³⁶

The editor, public figure, publicist, and speaker in the time of the First Czechoslovak Republic

Imre Narancsik must have had a good sense of style, as he was already publishing articles while he was still in high school and, as a theology student in Losonc, became involved in the Reformed youth movement, the Bethlen Gábor Movement.³³⁷ Along with Imre Varga, he co-edited the movement’s student newspaper, *Református Élet* (Reformed Life).

An important milestone in his life was the 1929 publication of *Baráti Szó* (Friendly Word) in Beregszász (now Berehove), which he co-edited with Imre Varga and Gyula Tárnok. This was a politically neutral ecclesiastical and social monthly journal, closely aligned with the *Regősmovement* and the *Sarló*. In the tenth issue of *Mi Lapunk* (Our Newspaper) in 1929, a short news item about the publication of *Baráti Szó* mentioned that “the new journal has no subscription fee and is sent free of charge to anyone interested”.³³⁸ The first issues were unnumbered, more like pamphlets, and only the publisher’s name (Kálmán Tóth) appeared on them. Starting from September 1929, the first official volume of the journal was published in Komárom,

334 Badó: op.cit., 11.

335 Dr. Krüzsely, József: Narancsik Imre emlékezetére. In: *Bethlen Naptár* (Ligonier), 1964. 117.

336 S.n.: Kinevezés, in: *Hivatalos Közlöny*, 47(1939/20), 407.

337 Fodor–Fodor–Szabadi–Szamborovszkyné Nagy: op.cit., 7.

338 Turczel, Lajos: Két kor mezsgyéjén (A magyar irodalom fejlődési feltételei és problémái Csehszlovákiában 1918 és 1938 között), Madách, Bratislava, 1983. 164.

with Gyula Tárnok as the responsible editor and publisher, and Imre Narancsik, later followed by Imre Varga, as the chief editor.³³⁹ The journal was indeed sent free of charge to anyone, but the editorial board accepted voluntary donations and contributions. Most of the writers were pastors or seminary students; however, the journal ceased publication after the fifth issue of the second volume, released in June 1930.³⁴⁰ In his 1932 memoir, Rezső Szalatnay wrote that “the journal, which had brought Calvinism’s activism into modern service, was banned by the church convention”.³⁴¹ This contemporary remark seems to have some validity, as it is known from Vilmos Galo’s research that in 1930, the Convent entrusted Imre Narancsik and Imre Varga (as assistant pastors) with the spiritual care of Reformed youth in secondary and higher education. The initial phase was quite successful, but at the 1931 countrywide conference, some left-wing youth views sparked significant debate. The conference caused a scandal, and as a result, *Baráti Szó* ceased publication, and Narancsik and Varga resigned from their positions.³⁴²

Almost simultaneously (on 15 November 1931), a manifestation meeting was held by the Hungarian university students in Bratislava at the Faculty of Law of the Comenius University. In the pamphlet they drafted, they identified specific fields – sociology, minority studies, ethnography, people’s history, minority Hungarian literary history, and Slavic-Hungarian cultural relations – where, according to them, minority Hungarian scholarship should be mobilized at the Masaryk Academy. Among the contributors to the Bratislava pamphlet were, among others, Edgár Balogh, Kálmán Berecz, Lajos Derne, Norbert Duka Zólyomi, and Imre Narancsik,³⁴³ who developed the methods for sociological research.³⁴⁴ This group collaborated with József Szent-Ivány, the leader of the Hungarian National Party, while disapproving of the left-wing radicalization of *Sarló*. According to Zoltán Fónod, alongside

339 The members of the editorial board were: Bertalan Csáji, Zoltán Csomár, Béla Sörös, Sándor Vargha.

340 Fónod, Zoltán (főszerk.): *A cseh/szlovákiai magyar irodalom lexikona 1918–2004*, Madách–Posonium, 2004. 37.

341 Szalatnay, Rezső: *Van menekvés*. Slovenská Grafia, Bratislava, 1932. 194.

342 Galo, Vilmos: „Jézus Krisztus együgyű szolgája”: Tóth Kálmán református lelkész élete és munkássága (1904–1956), in: Makkai, Béla (szerk.) *A Felvidék krónikása: tanulmányok a 70 éves Popély Gyula tiszteletére*. Budapest, Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem – L’Harmattan Kiadó, 2015. 217.

343 Popély, Gyula: *A Csehszlovákiai Magyar Tudományos, Irodalmi és Művészeti Társaság megalakulása (folytatás)*. In: *Irodalmi Szemle*, 1970/1. 241.

344 *Ibid*, 74–75.

Ferdinánd Szerényi, Narancsik was also the vice president of the university youth movement that became known as the Hungarian Workers' Union.³⁴⁵

Narancsik was also a founding member of the executive board of the Czechoslovak Hungarian Minority Society (CzHMS), which was established on 19 January 1936, in Bratislava, alongside Norbert Duka Zólyomi, István Hornyánszky Jr., and Jenő Krammer.³⁴⁶ Later, after moving to Transcarpathia, he took on public roles in the region: he became the vice president of the Cultural Committee of the United Hungarian Party of Upper Hungary (in Hungarian: Felvidék). In the following year, 1937, he became a member of the editorial board of the Reformed social magazine *Összefogás* (Unity).³⁴⁷

He took on public speaking engagements at a very young age. For example, at the age of 26, he participated in the 5th Reformed Student Conference of the Slovak Reformed Church in Rožňava,³⁴⁸ followed by numerous similar invitations and lectures in both Slovakia and Ruthenia, including Nagykována, Kamocsa, Csap, Tornagörgő, and Debrecen. He became a regular speaker for the so-called *Széchenyi Circle*, a civil organization for university students from Prague, Brno, and Bratislava, where he gave informative lectures on various topics.

His first significant journalistic work was his contribution to the literary debate initiated by Dezső Kosztolányi in the July 1929 issue of *A Toll (The Pen)*, titled *The Betrayal of the Illiterate (A Separate Opinion on Endre Ady)*,³⁴⁹ which is still referenced in bibliographies of works about Ady published after 2000.³⁵⁰ From 1934, he became a regular contributor to *Magyar Írás* (Hungarian Writing),³⁵¹ publishing alongside notable names like Géza

345 Fónod: op.cit., 266.

346 Ibid, 69.

347 *Összefogás* was a Reformed social newspaper published fortnightly from 15 May to 25 December 1937. It was published in Rimaszombat by Béla Sörös, and the editor-in-chief was Imre Varga, a Reformed pastor from Rimaszombat. The members of the editorial board were also respected personalities: Sándor Agyagássy, Pál Csáji, Imre Narancsik and Béla Szilassy. The newspaper was published by "the Reformed *Összefogás* as the official organ of the Universal Reformed Church". This movement was launched in 1935 by Béla Szilassy and Béla Sörös in order to increase the public profile of the Reformed Hungarians, see: Fónod: op.cit., 322.

348 S.n.: Magyar élet idegenben, *Budapesti Hírlap*, 50 (1930/134), 1930. június 15., 26.

349 Narancsik, I(mre): Az Ady-problémához. In: *Baráti Szó*, 1(1929/4). dec. 38-39.

350 Veres, András: Kosztolányi Ady-komplexuma, Balassi Kiadó, Budapest, 2012. 364.

351 *MAGYAR ÍRÁS (HUNGARIAN WRITING)* – Literature, art, criticism. (Literary, art, criticism, social magazine and observer.) Published by the Slovenszkó Kazinczy Book and Newspaper Publishing Cooperative.

Féja, Boris Palotai, Zoltán Somlyó, Mihály Tamás, Áron Tamási, and Jenő Tersánszky.³⁵² In the January 1937 issue of the aforementioned magazine, his work *Magyarság és Európa* (Hungary and Europe) was reviewed by László Németh in the *Korunk Szava* publication.³⁵³ Also published in *Magyar Írás* was his article *The Third Reich and Humanism*, which, according to Tamás Gusztáv Filep's analysis, faithfully reflected a positive openness and critical stance toward events in Italy and Germany, a view which also appeared in Slovakian Hungarian public life and journalism.³⁵⁴ Narancsik Imre's name is also found among the authors of the study collection *Magyarság Csehszlovákiában 1918–1938*³⁵⁵ (Hungarians in Czechoslovakia 1918–1938), which includes 23 essays.³⁵⁶

Public life engagement after the return to the Kingdom of Hungary

After the First Vienna Award in the autumn of 1938, Narancsik became a member of the Bereg and Ugocsa Counties' Legislative Authority Committee. Once all of TransCarpathia was returned to the Kingdom of Hungary, János Gömörý convened a meeting of former Slovakian and Ruthenian Hungarian writers at the Pilvax Café in Budapest on April 1–2, 1939, on behalf of the intellectuals. The participants here compiled a ten-point resolution for the program for which – in addition to Narancsik – Kálmán Berecz, Sándor Vájlók and Bolya, and Canon Miklós Pfeiffer submitted their written proposals.³⁵⁷ According to Ildikó Bajcsi, the intellectual circle of *Slovakian writers and cultural workers* who gathered at Pilvax distanced themselves from the totalitarian direction of Imrédy's regime.³⁵⁸ It is believed that this program had little resonance at the time, but – as Veronika Szeghy-Gayer put it –, it must be seen as a noteworthy effort of cooperation, as the intellectuals raised the issue of continuing the institu-

352 Lakatos, Éva: *Magyar irodalmi folyóiratok. Ma Este–Magyar Szemle. A Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum Bibliográfiai Füzetek*, A. sorozat 11–13. Budapest, 1978. 1062.

353 Hartyányi István, Kovács Zoltán (compiled): *Németh László bibliográfia*. PIM, Budapest, 1992. 19.

354 Filep, Tamás Gusztáv: *A humanista voksa. Írások a csehszlovákiai magyar kisebbség történetének köréből 1918–1945*. Kalligram Kiadó, Pozsony, 2007, 168.

355 The collection of studies was published as a special issue of *Az Ország Útja* (The Road of the Country) Book Day in June 1938, edited by István Borsody.

356 Hartyányi–Kovács: op.cit., 248.

357 Filep: op.cit., 217.

358 Bajcsi, Ildikó: *Nemzetűség és őrsegyváltás. A komáromi és környékbeli zsidóság jogfosztása 1938–1944*. Múlt és Jövő Kiadó, Budapest, 2023. 52.

tions established during the minority period.³⁵⁹

Despite this – or precisely because of this – Narancsik’s name appeared among the list of members in the *cultural department* of the United Hungarian Party, which was founded on 10 June 1939, in Budapest. Other prominent names included Marcell Jankovich, Miklós Pfeiffer, János Gömör, County Head Endre Korláth, and Menyhért Simon. In his speech, Narancsik outlined the cultural, social, and societal problems of the reannexed Upper Hungary (Felvidék), particularly TransCarpathia.³⁶⁰ In 1940, he became a member of the Hungarian Society for Social Sciences,³⁶¹ and his name was included in the Book of Gold of the Martyrs and Heroes of Upper Hungary (Felvidék).³⁶²

In 1941, when the Christian Youth Association (CYA) launched the People’s College movement in TransCarpathia, Narancsik was one of the founding members of the *TransCarpathian branch* and remained an active participant. In fact, in March 1942, he was present as an examiner at the first final exams of the CYA’s People’s College in Beregszász (now Berehove), where he evaluated students’ performance in national education and health studies.³⁶³ He regularly and willingly gave lectures at other People’s College events,³⁶⁴ as well as at a lecture series organised by the Beregszász gymnasium under the title *Parents’ School*.³⁶⁵ One of his public engagements led to the following: in 1941, he became the secretary-general of the northeastern Hungarian branch of the United Christian National League, where he presented the

359 For more information see: Szeghy-Gayer, Veronika: *Felvidékből Szlovenszko. Magyar értelmiségi útkeresések Eperjesen és Kassán a két világháború között*. Kalligram Kiadó, Pozsony, 2016. 222.

360 S.n.: Megalakult az Egyesült Magyar párt kultúrszakosztálya, in: *Felvidéki Magyar Hírlap*, 2(1939/131), 1939. június 11., 9.

361 S.n.: A Társulat élete, in: *Társadalomtudomány*, 21(1941/3), 367.

362 Kemény, Gábor: Északi magyar szellem, in: *Felvidéki mártírok és hősök aranykönyve. Felvidéki irodalmi emlékkönyv*. MEFHOSZ, Budapest, 1940. 399.

363 S.n.: Nagy sikerrel zárult az első beregszászi népfőiskola, in: *Kárpáti Híradó*, 19(1942/53), 1942. március 6. 5. The members of the examination committee were also: Szabolcs Péchy Bereg County Governor, Zoltán Fekesházy sub-governor, Gyula Bary Reformed dean, count László Teleki President of the KIE Association, Kálmán Hubay The mayor of Beregszász.

364 Cs.K.: Népfőiskolái tanfolyam záróünnepélye Mosonrónafőn, in: *Dunántúli Protestáns Lap*, 55(1944/1), 1944. január 4., 4.

365 S.n.: Beregi hírek. Szülők iskolája Beregszászon, in: *Kárpáti Híradó*, 21(1944/35), 1944. február 13., 1.

1941 Act XV from a religious and racial-biological perspective.³⁶⁶

In the December 1942 elections of the Bereg Diocese, Imre Narancsik, the pastor of Nagymuzsaly, was elected as the pastoral secretary.³⁶⁷ He was also an active member of the Northeastern-Hungarian Hungarian Cultural Association, as in March 1943, when the association's headquarters was moved from Ungvár to Beregszász, he was elected to the association's central leadership during the re-election.³⁶⁸ Meanwhile, he continued to publish in the *Protestáns Szemle* (Protestant Review), *Theológiai Szemle* (Theological Review), and the *Kárpáti Magyar Gazda* (Carpathian Hungarian Farmer) daily newspapers. In the first two, he wrote on scientific and theological topics, while in the latter, he focused on cultural and agricultural subjects.

In 1964, József Krüzsely, a Hungarian Reformed pastor from Geneva,³⁶⁹ wrote about a conversation he had with Narancsik in a memoir. The conversation took place during the summer in Nagymuzsaly. While the exact year was not specified by the author, he mentioned that it “happened during the war” and that Narancsik was “about forty years old at the time,” which suggests that the year was 1944. The memoir reads: “We walked down the long village road towards the Jewish cemetery. [...] We walked together, speaking quietly. [...] Military vehicles were heading to the front. Beyond the Carpathians, artillery fire could be heard, and the earth gave us a dull thud under our feet. Suddenly, I thought: what will happen if the Russians come to Transcarpathia? I pondered this and voiced my suspicion.

‘I will stay here,’ came the response of my host, in a dull tone.

‘And if the Russians don’t need priests?’ I continued, asking the fate with blind suspicion.

366 Porcsalmy, János: Vita a zsidó–magyar házassági tilalomról a Beregvármegyei Kaszinóban, in: *Kárpáti Híradó* 18(1941), 1941. szeptember 25., 4.; S.n.: Kialakulóban a Keresztény nemzeti liga északkeletmagyarországi egységfrontja. A beregszászi értekezetlet és közgyűlés munkája, in: *Kárpáti Híradó*, 19(1942/70), 1942. március 27., 4.

367 S.n.: A beregi ref. egyházmegye. In: *Az Óslakó*, 5(1942/49), 1942. december. 13., 3.

368 S.n.: Az ÉMKE központját Ungvárról elvitték Beregszászba, in: *Kárpáti Híradó*, 20(1943/53), 1943. március 6., 2.

369 József Krüzsely was born in Visk (formerly Máramaros county, now Transcarpathia), attended law school in Prague and Budapest, and has left Hungary in 1946. He studied theology at the University of Geneva. In 1957, he became a Reformed pastor with the support of the Swiss Reformed Churches Aid Organization, and served as a Hungarian-language pastor in French Switzerland and the Canton of Bern (Geneva, Lausanne, Bern) for 30 years. See: Website of the Hungarian Protestant Church in Geneva (available at: <https://genfi-protestans.com/tortenet/>) and Nyugati Hírlevél, an independent electronic newspaper, (available at: <https://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00014/00074/>)

‘Then I will lay down my robes, but I will stay with my people,’ came the answer again”.³⁷⁰

Soviet arrest and martyrdom

After the Soviet Red Army occupied TransCarpathia in October 1944, the deportation of the local Hungarian and German male population began. However, the pastors were demonstratively not taken at that time. Nevertheless, from 1946 onwards, Reformed pastors who had played an active role in the region were arrested on charges of *anti-Soviet activities*. The arrest warrant for Imre Narancsik was issued on November 21, 1946, by lieutenant Kovály.³⁷¹ The authorization for the arrest was signed by lieutenant-colonel Aksyenov on November 27, and he was arrested the following day, on November 28.³⁷² In a memoir, Ferenc Pataky – mentioned earlier in the study – recalled the arrest: “Once, at the end of 1946, Narancsik was travelling by cart to Vári (now Vary) with his uncle-in-law to the mill. As they were returning, they were pulled off the cart and taken to Ungvár (today Uzhhorod)”.³⁷³ The Reverend was charged with *anti-Soviet activities* under Articles 54-4 and 54-10, paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code of the USSR,³⁷⁴ which he allegedly carried out between 1941 and the autumn of 1944. Despite the anachronism that the area where Narancsik lived was not under Soviet Union control during those years, this did not affect the proceedings.

The charges against him specifically included the following points:

- he was the editor of the fascist regional newspaper *Magyar Gazda*;
- during 1941 and until the arrival of Red Army units, he regularly used the newspaper for active anti-Soviet agitation;
- he was the author of many anti-Soviet articles;
- he personally called upon the Hungarian population to fight the Red Army with arms;
- he praised the political system of *fascist* Germany;

370 Dr. Krüzsely: op.cit., 117.

371 Kovály was the chief operational officer of the Berehove District Office of the State Security Office.

372 Aksyenov was a lieutenant colonel in the Transcarpathian Regional Department of the State Security Service.

373 Badó: op.cit., 8.

374 Arkhiv Upravlinnia Sluzhbi Bezpeki Ukraïni v Zakarpats'kii oblasti, AUSBU ZO (in English: Archive of the Department of the Security Service of Ukraine in the Transcarpathian region), Fond P-2258, Op. 1, Od. zb. 3292. D. 1063.

- he informed the Hungarian authorities about individuals sympathetic to the Communist Party.³⁷⁵

Imre Narancsik was held in investigative detention in Uzhhorod from November 28, 1946, to February 10, 1947, in the KGB prison,³⁷⁶ where he endured severe abuse during interrogation. This was described in a later memoir by Reverend József Zimányi: “There was a very kind, half-Rusyn, half-Hungarian guard at the Uzhhorod KGB prison named Bodnár... He told me: ‘Reverend, it is good for you; you can enter this cell if they call you, you can step out, but in this cell was Narancsik Imre, the pastor from Nagymuzsaly, whose hands I had to tie behind his back, open the door, and kick him from behind so that he fell face first to the ground. He couldn’t protect himself from the fall. I had to do it because I was ordered to. It was so terrible that I had to do this’”.³⁷⁷ Zimányi’s memoir includes another passage about Narancsik: “This pastor himself edited a newspaper that contained political articles. He wrote things in his paper like ‘*Hungarian soldiers, wade knee-deep in the blood of the Reds, stomp the atheists into the blood;*’ and he signed his name. When the Russians came in, the Jehovah’s Witnesses caught him, gathered the papers and took them to the KGB. They claimed to hate political systems, but they handed people over to it. They brought Narancsik in for questioning, but at first, he could defend himself by proving he was on vacation when the newspaper was published, and he had only signed his name. Later, however, newspaper articles surfaced from times when he was no longer on vacation, and he could not defend himself with that argument. These were articles written with hatred against communism”.³⁷⁸ This text repeats the same fact as stated in the appeal submitted by Narancsik, namely that it was the Jehovah’s Witnesses who may have been his accusers. An interesting coincidence is that these informers (who were referred to as communists in the court documents) had already been interrogated in December 1945 by the Beregszász (now Berehove) district office of the State Security Bureau. These interrogation records were later used in the 1947 trial against Narancsik, as they were attached to the court files.³⁷⁹

375 Ibidem.

376 The full English name: *Committee for State Security* (espionage: KGB), foreign intelligence and domestic security agency of the Soviet Union.

377 Zimányi, József: *Tűzszlopoddal jéghegyek között. Zimányi József életútja. Kiadja: Zimányiné Piros Erzsébet, 2023. 72.* Available at: <https://www.zimanyi.hu/download/TuzszlopoddalJeghegyekKozott-ZimanyiJozsef.pdf>

378 Ibidem.

379 AUSBU ZO, Fond P-2258, op. 1, od. zb. 3292. d. 1063. ark. 35-40.

The Verdict and Appeal

On 27 February 1947, the verdict was pronounced against Imre Narancsik: under the provisions of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic's Criminal Code (Article 54-4), he was sentenced to 8 years of imprisonment in a forced labor camp. In addition, based on Articles 29a, b, and c of the Criminal Code, he was sentenced to 5 years' legal deprivation and the confiscation of his personal property as a cumulative punishment. There is a recollection of this trial in an interview with Ferenc Pataky: "When he was sentenced, several members of the church board went to Ungvár (today Uzhhorod) to prove his innocence, including my father, János Sztatmári, János Beregszászi, and Mihály Sztreha. They strongly defended him, but despite this, they convicted him based on the newspaper articles he had written".³⁸⁰ The people mentioned by the memoirist as witnesses in favour of the pastor – Gizella Elek, Ferenc Pataki, János Lengyel, and Mihály Sztreha – are listed in the court records.³⁸¹ His sentence was due to start on 28 November, 1946, and the judgment could be appealed to the Supreme Court of the USSR within five days. Among the court documents is an appeal dated 3 March 1947 bearing the signature of an attorney named Boreckiy, but the style of the text closely resembles Narancsik's own language. In his appeal, he specifically refuted the accusations against him:

- the newspaper mentioned in the case was a small, local publication focused on agriculture, not politics;
- he was not the editor of the newspaper, only an assistant for three months, and he was not a permanent member of the editorial staff;
- during the trial, only one article with his name as the author was presented, an MTI³⁸² news piece about Horthy's birthday;
- the people named in the case – G. Varga, G. Kovács, and Zs. Tar – were not communists but Jehovah's Witnesses at the time;
- he did not engage in anti-Soviet activities; on the contrary, he persuaded the people of the village not to flee from the Red Army;
- he did not have any literature that could be classified as anti-Soviet, unless Mussolini's *Conversations with My Son Bruno* is considered as such, although Lenin's works were also in his library, this was not mentioned during the trial.³⁸³

380 Badó: op.cit., 8.

381 AUSBU ZO, Fond P-2258, op. 1, od. zb. 3292. d. 1063.

382 The full English name: *Hungarian Telegraph Office*, espionage: MTI

383 Fellebbezési kérelem, Ibidem.

The rejection of the appeal and Imre Narancsik's fate

On 21 March 1947, the Supreme Court of the USSR rejected Narancsik's appeal. After this, in late March 1947, he was sent to the Tayset No. 7 labour camp in the Irkutsk Oblast in a poor state of health, and from there, he was sent to Irkutsk. Gusztáv Menczer, a third-year medical student from Budapest, was also taken into Soviet captivity and sent to the same Tajset No. 7 camp. Once it became known that Menczer was a doctor (under Soviet conditions, having completed 2.5 years of medical studies qualified him as such), he was assigned to the camp's hospital. Eventually, both Menczer and Narancsik, along with a group of prisoners, were transferred to Irkutsk to work on the construction of the Baikal-Amur railway. In his book *The Gulag's Prison Camps*, Menczer describes the conditions as follows: "When we arrived at the designated prison camp, and the prisoners were handed over, the commander of the transport group told me to stay there overnight, as they would come for me the next day. [...] They then took me to an area called a hospital, which consisted of a three-room barrack for patients, a kitchen, and a small isolated house. [...] The area we were assigned to for supplies could have been as large as France. The mosquitoes were as numerous as the sea. In one of the new houses, the staff lived. The doctors and two orderlies had separate rooms, and each had a cot. For the miscellaneous tasks – at my suggestion – we took Narancsik Imre, the Reformed pastor from Muzsaly in Transcarpathia. This is how I began to help the fellow prisoners. Since everyone else was working during 'working hours' or on duty, it was Imre brother who brought the food to each of us from the kitchen. He collected about 15 kilograms of leftovers".³⁸⁴

Imre Narancsik was taken by his Creator in April 1948, in Siberian Irkutsk, far from his homeland. His death was not caused by the abuse he suffered in prison or the strenuous labour, but by dystrophy (a nutritional disorder), as determined by Menczer.

³⁸⁴ Menczer Gusztáv: *A Gulág rabtelepei. A bolsevizmus népirtásának színtere*. Századvég Kiadó, Budapest, 2016. 31.

The fate of Narancsik's family left behind in Nagymuzsaly

Regarding Narancsik's family, who remained in Nagymuzsaly (now Muzhiyeve), Ferenc Pataky recalled: "The pastor's wife, along with their two daughters, was expelled from the parsonage, and in their place, a Russian officer moved in with his wife and son. My father brought back a cartload of books from there. Later, pastors and doctors sorted through them in the back room of our house. There were many medical books among them; the little they gave in exchange for the valuable books was important to them (Narancsik's family – ISZN), as they had to live off something. The pastor's wife was initially given a one-room house by the school director, as she continued to teach at the school for a time. After a while, they had to move out from there as well, and a family took them in here on the main street. Later, they moved to Nagyszőlős, and eventually, with the help of a relative pastor's family, they managed to emigrate to Hungary".³⁸⁵

Memory and Remembrance

Although Imre Narancsik was not born in Transcarpathia, his memory lives on in Nagymuzsaly (now Muzhiyeve) to this day. In the account by Ferenc Pataky, which has been mentioned multiple times, many details have been found that are confirmed by other sources as well. Zoltán Bereczky, also a resident of Nagymuzsaly, was ten years old in 1944 and in 2009 he recalled the pastor's deportation: "On 24 October 1944, the Russian soldiers entered Muzsaly without resistance. Imre Narancsik and my father, György Bereczky, welcomed them. They occupied the village without firing a shot. 'Well, we got through the war,' they said, but they were wrong. Not long after, the Hungarian men from Nagymuzsaly, including my father and his brother, Dr Gusztáv Bereczky, a lawyer, were taken for a three-day work assignment. A total of 132 Hungarian men from Muzsaly died in the Boriss-ov camp in Belarus. Imre Narancsik stayed a while longer, but eventually, he too was taken away. His family was expelled from the parsonage, and a border guard lieutenant colonel named Popov moved in. The pastor regularly travelled to examine students at the seminary, corresponded in several languages, edited a newspaper, and had excellent connections. But if needed, he would take the sprayer, walk to Várna Hill, and personally spray the church's vineyard, weed the garden, and he had two cows and Angora rab-

385 Badó: op.cit., 8.

bits. I can hardly imagine that nowadays with a Reformed pastor. Everyone looked up to him; he had respect”.³⁸⁶

Perhaps the most human portrayal of his character comes from Elemér Ortutay, a Greek Catholic priest and theology teacher, who summarised his personality in one of his memoirs: “His iron logic, persuasive eloquence, burning and pure Hungarian consciousness, and the priestly sense of vocation that radiated from his essence had a great impact on me. I can say without exaggeration that I owe much of my self-conscious Hungarian identity and my human and priestly sense of calling to Imre Narancsik. It may seem strange to many that the words and life of a Reformed pastor had such a decisive influence on the life of a Greek Catholic theologian, but that is the fact. I hold Narancsik Imre in great respect and gratitude”.³⁸⁷

The frequently cited Ferenc Pataky also shared true facts regarding the rehabilitation of the pastor: “In the early 1990s, we received a letter in Russian, informing us that the authorities had rehabilitated the pastor. We translated it together and informed the congregation, and then we unveiled a marble plaque in honour of our martyr pastor, Imre Narancsik, on the church wall. The two daughters and the widow were present at the unveiling ceremony. The pastor’s wife requested that if we got the Reformed parsonage back, we must invite them to Muzsaly. Unfortunately, she had passed away by that time”.³⁸⁸

The reference to the *early 1990s* in the above memoir refers to spring of 1991, as the resolution regarding the pastor’s rehabilitation was passed on 28 February 1991. The question of why the notification about the rehabilitation was sent to the pastor of Muzsaly at the time is answered in the last paragraph of the resolution: “There is no information in the case file about the residence of Narancsik and his relatives. The results of the investigation should be communicated to the pastor of Muzhiyevé, Mihály Sztreha, in the Beregszász district”.³⁸⁹ The memorial plaque was placed on the wall of the Reformed Church vestibule in 1993, and on 4 December 2009, a library named after him was inaugurated in the community house.³⁹⁰ On 27 No-

386 Ibid.

387 ORTUTAY Elemér: “...*holnap is felkel a nap*”. *Emékeim*, Ungvár–Budapest, Intermix Kiadó, 1993, 51–52.

388 Badó: op.cit., 8.

389 Határozat Narancsik Imre rehabilitációjáról, idézi: Fodor: op.cit., 117.

390 FISCHER Zsolt: Könyvtáratás Nagymuzsalyban, *Kárpátalja*, 9 (2009/465), 2009. december 11. Available at: <https://karpataljalap.net/2009/12/11/konyvtaratas-nagymuzsalyban>

vember 2015, the Narancsik Imre Research Workshop was established in the Narancsik Imre Library in Nagymuzsaly with 11 members. The workshop, guided by the spirit of the scholarly pastor, set out to uncover the history of the Transcarpathian reformed people using authentic sources.³⁹¹ The author of these lines is also a member of this workshop. Soli Deo Gloria.

In conclusion, it can be stated that Imre Narancsik was a person endowed with exceptional talents, whose intellectual abilities were recognised by his professors and church leaders during his university years. After finishing his theological studies, he primarily taught religious education in Bratislava and the surrounding areas, a job that was not typically the primary desire of graduated theologians (even if they were in an assistant pastor position). Nevertheless, Narancsik performed his duties with full dedication and conscientiousness in this position, utilizing his unique erudition. Perhaps this was also essential for him to be appointed as the bishop's secretary in Levoča, where the elders from Nagymuzsaly found him and invited him to become the pastor of their village after his sermon. Of course, the people from Nagymuzsaly who visited Levoča did not know at the time that Narancsik was in love with a woman from Transcarpathia. With this knowledge, it is not so surprising that he accepted the invitation from the Transcarpathian faithful, as it brought him into a full pastoral role and brought him closer to his future wife, Gabriella Tusa. However, his relocation had little impact on his previous activities: he continued to perform his pastoral duties in Nagymuzsaly with great enthusiasm and vigour, visiting the seminary to teach until 1938 and continuing his work as a public writer. He also continued his sociological and history-of-science work.

Imre Narancsik did not flee before the Soviet troops entered, nor did he leave his parishioners, continuing his pastoral duties. He did not commit any offence against the new rulers of the region after 1944; he did not renounce his faith, ideas, or actions. His consistent life philosophy also played a role in his persecution and ultimately led to his martyrdom. However, his figure and activities became engraved in the memory of the local people.

391BADÓ Zsolt: Megalakult a Narancsik Imre Kutatói Műhely. A Kárpátaljai Református Egyház történetének szakszerű kutatásáért, *Kárpátalja*, 15 (2015/777), 2015. december 2. Available at: <https://karpataljalap.net/2015/12/02/megalakult-narancsik-imre-kutatoimuhely>

VIKTÓRIA CADENA-KÓCZIÁN³⁹²
SAFEGUARDING NATIONAL IDENTITY: LÁSZLÓ
TÓKÉS' MISSION IN DEJ

László Tókéš (b. 1952), a Reformed pastor and bishop, experienced a defining chapter of his career during his tenure as assistant pastor in Dej, Cluj County, where he served for seven years (1977–1984). As a Hungarian pastor belonging to a minority community, Tókéš became widely recognised for his opposition to a regime that systematically deprived both the church and individuals of their legal rights. His stance made him a target for attacks by the collaborationist leadership of the Reformed Church, resulting in his removal from pastoral duties and two years of unemployment.

Tókéš' time in Dej foreshadowed his pivotal role in the revolutionary events in Romania that ultimately led to the downfall of the totalitarian, nationalist-communist dictatorship. His experience of persecution in Dej was emblematic of his broader pastoral repression and sacrificial resistance, which would later culminate in the 1989 Revolution in Timișoara.

The crisis in Dej, marked by the disintegration of the visible body of Christ—the Church—was exacerbated by the actions of a collaborationist church leadership willing to go so far as to divide the parish. In this turbulent context, the deeply rooted Hungarian national identity of the Tókéš and Vass families, cultivated and upheld across generations, played a critical role. This paper seeks to explore how this national identity was maintained in defiance of a dictatorship intent on ethnic and cultural homogenisation, as well as the ensuing conflicts and persecution that shaped this period.

Context

As a result of the Treaty of Trianon (1920), Hungarian communities that found themselves in minority positions placed particular importance on preserving Hungarian cultural traditions, nurturing national historical memory and maintaining national identity. Among the Hungarians living as minorities in Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, Romania and Yugoslavia, the situation of the Hungarian community in Romania became especially dire during the communist era due to the regime's discriminatory and assimilationist policies.

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Within the broader framework of the Communist Party's general "cultural struggle", ethnic minorities became targeted groups. Hungarians, along with Germans, Jews, and the Roma, were treated as problematic communities. Among these, Hungarians represented the most significant minority issue due to their numbers and their strong historical connection to Transylvania. The communist regime imposed strict restrictions that had particularly severe consequences for Hungarian economic and cultural institutions. Businesses and banks were nationalised, and agriculture was collectivised. These measures dismantled the Hungarian middle class and leadership, significantly weakening the economic foundations of Hungarian churches, schools, and cultural associations.³⁹³

István Tőkés³⁹⁴, along with Hungarian researchers Dezső Buzogány and Csongor Jánosi³⁹⁵, highlighted that the state systematically and comprehensively sought to diminish the societal role of the church. After 1944, the government effectively dismantled church-run schools and institutions, including orphanages, hospitals, diaconal institutes, youth organisations, relief agencies, and pension funds. In addition, local religious communities suffered significant property losses when the state confiscated their forests, land and buildings. These measures led to severe impoverishment and social isolation.

The Hungarian education system in Romania, which operated over a thousand schools nationwide, suffered major setbacks with the nationalisation of schools in 1948. The situation further deteriorated after the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, which sparked solidarity demonstrations in university centres such as Timișoara, Cluj, and Bucharest. These movements alarmed the Romanian communist leadership, which viewed Hungarian-language educational institutions as breeding grounds for separatist and nationalist sentiments. This perception led to stricter state supervision and further jeopardised the future of Hungarian education. During the 1950s, the Romanian Communist Party implemented educational policies aimed at gradually integrating Hungarian students into Romanian schools, further eroding the presence of Hungarian-language education.

By the 1960s, official state policy increasingly emphasised the creation of

393 Hitchens, Keith: *A Concise History of Romania*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014. 261–262.

394 Tőkés István: *A romániai magyar református egyház élete 1944–1989*. 2nd edition. Kolozsvár, 2014. 99.

395 Buzogány Dezső – Jánosi Csongor: *A református egyház Romániában a kommunista rendszer első felében*. Budapest, L'Harmattan, 2011. 10–12.

a “socialist nation” based on cultural, economic, and social homogenisation, striving to establish a unified, ethnically Romanian nation. Efforts to preserve minority identities were systematically suppressed. The rhetoric of state president Nicolae Ceaușescu became overtly chauvinistic and anti-Hungarian, reflecting his obsession with creating a “perfectly homogeneous” ethnic community³⁹⁶. This ideology justified the gradual dismantling of Hungarian cultural institutions and the marginalisation of minority education, posing a severe threat to the preservation of the Hungarian community’s ethnic and cultural identity.

Romanian historian Florin Abraham, in his analysis³⁹⁷ of events in the 1980s, highlights that numerous Hungarian-language educational institutions were closed during this period in Romania as part of a broader political strategy aimed at ethnic assimilation. One tool of this policy was a forced resettlement system that relocated members of the Transylvanian Hungarian community from their traditional homes to other regions. This aggressive assimilation policy represented a significant assault on the Hungarian intelligentsia, whose institutional and cultural foundations were systematically undermined. The already tense political relationship between Bucharest and Budapest further exacerbated tensions within the Hungarian community in Romania, prompting many ethnic Hungarians to consider emigrating to Hungary. Simultaneously, the Romanian state security agency, the *Securitate*³⁹⁸, intensified its efforts to recruit collaborators within the Hungarian community. These collaborators were tasked primarily with monitoring “nationalist-chauvinist” sentiments, aiming to identify and manage potentially destabilising or dissenting tendencies. Through this surveillance and intervention, the authorities sought to maintain the stability of the communist regime and suppress resistance movements organised along ethnic lines.

396 Tismăneanu, Vladimir: *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism*. Berkeley – Los Angeles – London, University of California Press, 2003. 22.

397 Abraham, Florin: *Romania Since the Second World War. A Political, Social and Economic History*. London – Oxford – New York – New Delhi – Sydney, Bloomsbury Academic, 2017. 88.

398 In Romania, the state used various institutions to monitor and re-educate the population, one of the most important tools being the state security apparatus with armed power (*Departamentul Securității de Stat*, or “*Securitate*”). In addition, an administrative unit was created that played a mediating role between the state and the church, further tightening control over religious institutions (*Departamentul Cultelor*).

Church historian János Molnár notes³⁹⁹ that the primary goal of totalitarian states is to eliminate both real and perceived enemies of the prevailing ideology. In this vein, the Romanian communist dictatorship sought to marginalise and remove “exploitative elements”, including the clergy. The Romanian Communist Party viewed the Roman Catholic Church, the Hungarian Reformed and Unitarian churches, the Saxon Lutheran Church, as well as Baptist and Pentecostal denominations, as threats. These religious institutions were subjected to strict control, often being labeled as “sects”, a categorisation that further intensified the oppressive measures imposed on their communities⁴⁰⁰. Hungarian historian Réka Földváy-Kiss emphasises⁴⁰¹ the deep social embeddedness of churches, which provided them with significant influence over the masses. This influence posed a substantial challenge to the Communist Party, which, rooted in atheistic principles, prioritised dismantling religious traditions and undermining related institutions. The church’s profound impact on society and its ability to mobilise public opinion made it a formidable adversary in the eyes of the regime. Consequently, the oppressive apparatus of the dictatorship pursued coordinated efforts to weaken the church’s power and diminish its societal role.

Following the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, sermons increasingly gained political significance as they conveyed values that sharply opposed the widely rejected communist ideology. In response, the state intensified its actions against the church, employing tactics such as persecution, imprisonment, forced labour, and even execution of pastors to suppress resistance and further weaken the church’s societal influence.

During the communist era, the Reformed Church in Romania was divided into two districts. The western district, located near the Hungarian border, was known as the Oradea (Nagyvárad) Church District, while the eastern region was referred to as the Cluj (Kolozsvár) Church District. In the period under review, László Papp served as the bishop of the Oradea Church District (1967–1990), while Gyula Nagy held the position of bishop of the Cluj Church District (1962–1990).

399 Molnár János: *Szigorúan ellenőrzött evangélium*. Vol. 1. Kolozsvár, Kriterion, 2014. 5–6.

400 Hitchens, Keith. *A Concise History of Romania*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014. 261–262.

401 Földváyiné Kiss Réka: 1956 és a református egyház. In: *Confessio* 2024/2. – digital publication, available at: <https://confessio.reformatus.hu/v/1956-es-a-reformatus-egyhazi/>, downloaded on 17 November 2024

The Tókécs Family

The Tókécs family played a prominent role within the 20th-century Hungarian Reformed Church in Romania, particularly through István Tókécs (1916–2016), the father of László Tókécs, who held a significant position within the church hierarchy. Born in Málnás and part of a multi-generational family of pastors and teachers, István Tókécs served as deputy bishop in Cluj (1965–1978) and as a professor of the New Testament at the Protestant Theological Institute (1973–1983). He and his wife, Erzsébet Vass (1918–2001), married in 1941 and raised eight children, instilling in them a profound sense of religious, cultural, and ethnic identity.

Erzsébet Vass, who also came from a pastor-teacher family in Sânmărtin (Szépkényerúszentmárton) in the Transylvanian Plain, was deeply committed to Hungarian cultural values. She placed special emphasis on teaching her children about Hungarian literature and history, passions she enthusiastically shared with them. Their home became a centre for nurturing national and cultural values, profoundly shaping the children's identities and worldviews. The family's eldest child, Erzsébet Gergely, recalls this cultural upbringing vividly: *“Key figures of Hungarian history—from Árpád with his leopard skin and Koppány, to the hopeful Miklós Horthy entering on a white horse—all featured in my mother's ‘history lessons’ held in our kitchen. Together, we mourned Ferenc Rákóczi, Kelemen Mikes, and the 13 martyrs of Arad, as well as the deportation of my mother's friend's 13-year-old half-Jewish son. (...) We grew up, leaving the frills behind, but the deep Hungarian identity, the embracing of Hungarian fate, and determination to act endured in our family”*.⁴⁰²

Vass Erzsébet and her son László shared a particularly close and emotionally profound bond. Erzsébet's influence on László's thinking was immense; she possessed not only intellectual brilliance, aesthetic sensitivity, and strong moral convictions but also embodied the ideals of selfless love and gentleness. Her values and beliefs—rooted in Reformed Christianity and Hungarian national identity—became cornerstones of László Tókécs' worldview. In one of his recollections, the bishop highlighted the stark contrast between his mother's unwavering principles and the oppressive political regime of the time: *“In the intimate setting of our kitchen, Mother raised us*

402 Gergely Erzsébet: Védni, ami védhető és építeni, ami építhető. In: Kóczyán Viktória – Sándor Krisztina – Szilágyi Zsolt (eds.): *Isten szeretetében, Erdély ölelésében. Meglepetéskötet Tókécs László 70. születésnapjára*. Pro Minoritate Alapítvány – Méry Ratio, 2022. 91.

in a way that the surveillance equipment had plenty to record... Her words, poems, history 'lessons', singing, and faithful testimonies, all conveyed what the state—theist and nationalist by nature—feared and organized to persecute. It was precisely this that they detected in her witness".⁴⁰³

The Assistant Pastor in Dej

After completing his theological studies, László Tókéš began his assistant pastor service in Braşov, and after two years, in 1977, he was assigned to Dej in Cluj County by the decision of Bishop Gyula Nagy. He continued his work there for the next seven years. During his time as assistant pastor in Dej, Tókéš not only focused on preaching but also placed significant emphasis on congregation building, youth work, and academic activities. Thanks to his service, he earned the trust and support of the congregation, although his activities were not favourably received by his superiors. This was because Tókéš regularly expressed his opposition to the dictatorial, discriminatory political system that sought to eliminate alternative identities, and he also criticised the church leadership that was complicit in maintaining this system.

Tókéš László's multifaceted activities, which increasingly provoked stronger sanctions, were defined by his struggle to protect and preserve Hungarian national identity. His involvement manifested in three areas: preaching and education, academic research, and public statements. In preaching and education, Tókéš' goal was to strengthen religious and national consciousness, while through his academic work, he focused on preserving the heritage of Hungarian culture and church history, as well as researching the ecclesiastical structures of his time including those of church politics. His public statements served as critiques of the political and church systems, as well as a stance against oppression, all aimed at strengthening a comprehensive national and ecclesiastical community consciousness.

Preaching and Education

In addition to his religious services, one significant aspect of László Tókéš' preaching work was the Bible study group he founded, called the Lajos Medgyes Bible Circle. The name of the group was derived from Lajos Medgyes (1817–1894), a local Reformed pastor and poet from a Székely family, whose life journey, together with the history of the Dej church, was

403 Tókéš László: Édesanyámról. In: Üzenet, 2002. Vol. XIII. No. 9. 1.

particularly important to Tókéš in recognising local Hungarian values. This is reflected in his programme plans and notes for the Bible Circle⁴⁰⁴. Tókéš consciously studied this historical context, focusing on the local Reformed community's resilience, value preservation, and the self-sacrificial commitment to Hungarian Reformed identity. He regarded the passing on of these values to the congregation, particularly the younger generation, as essential.

The religious, pedagogical, and cultural significance of the Bible study sessions is remarkable, as they served to strengthen both religious and national identity. The goals of the Bible classes went beyond religious education, becoming an important tool for popular education. They provided comprehensive knowledge of Hungarian historical and church historical events, church structures, as well as the significant works of Hungarian literature and music. Besides the theological training, these sessions aimed to strengthen cultural and historical consciousness among the youth while contributing to a deeper sense of community belonging. For young people in the small town, these meetings were not only a place for religious teaching, but also a space for nurturing Hungarian cultural heritage. The gatherings laid the foundations for identity formation and community solidarity.

At the Bible Circle meetings, topics focused on the historical significance of the Hungarian Reformation, as well as the legacy and intellectual heritage of Hungarian reformers. Participants became acquainted with significant events and figures in Hungarian history through detailed analyses of the work of István Bocskai, Gábor Bethlen and Miklós Bethlen, providing insights into the political and religious thought of the time. Tókéš placed special emphasis on the value of patriotism and commitment to one's homeland, which he also illustrated to the members of the Bible Circle through the example of poet János Arany, drawing attention to the poet's national sentiments and identity.

The Bible Circle also extended its activities to help participants become familiar with their church's publications. This included presenting the lives and works of the authors and translators of the Reformed hymnbook. Tókéš placed particular importance on the significance of Reformed press products, such as *Református Szemle* (Reformed Review), and introduced its history and role in Reformed community life. Young people gained insight into Protestant press culture and its community-building power.

Furthermore, the Bible Circle promoted Hungarian-themed theatrical and

404 The research was based on László Tókéš' Bible study program plans and notes from Dej, which were made available to the author by László Tókéš.

musical education: on 3 June 1980, the community attended a performance of András Sütő's play *A szuzai menyegző* (The Wedding of Szuz), and on 13 November 1980, they viewed Ferenc Erkel's opera *Hunyadi László*. Tőkés placed a strong emphasis on fostering classical music education, particularly the works of Hungarian composers. Through pieces such as Zoltán Kodály's *Psalmus Hungaricus*, the youth in Dej became acquainted with Hungarian musical heritage, which played an important part in the educational process aimed at strengthening national identity and preserving cultural heritage. These initiatives not only expanded religious and historical knowledge, but also reinforced a sense of community belonging, underscoring the importance of cultural education and the preservation of national heritage.

The selection of poetic and prose works presented during celebrations and Bible classes was significant, as both classical and contemporary Hungarian literary works aimed to preserve and strengthen national and cultural identity. The celebration of literary anniversaries was not only a form of remembrance but also a means of maintaining Hungarian cultural traditions, providing the community with an opportunity to form a deeper connection with their cultural past. The inclusion of folk ballads and folk prayers also served to nurture community solidarity and cultural memory, strengthening the shared sense of identity among participants.

The Dej Reformed congregation organised regular, traditional Mother's Day and Children's Day celebrations each year, which became prominent cultural events in the community's life. During his time as assistant pastor, Tőkés László organised the programme for these events, which included works from classical Hungarian poets and contemporary Transylvanian Hungarian lyricists. These events featured works from major poets like Sándor Petőfi, János Arany, Attila József, Endre Ady, Gyula Juhász, Jenő Dsida, and contemporary authors such as Sándor Weöres, Sándor Kányádi, Jenő Kiss, Mária Tamás, Viktor Nagy B., Marcella László, and other Transylvanian Hungarian poets. The programme also included folk ballads, folk prayers, and commemorations of significant literary anniversaries, such as the birth and death dates of István Zajzoni Rab, János Arany, Sebestyén Tinódi Lantos, Gyula Illyés, Sándor Reményik, Miklós Radnóti, Zsigmond Móricz, and Endre Ady.

During the Christmas season, traditional carol singing and nativity plays contributed greatly to keeping old Transylvanian folk customs alive, especially with the active participation of local youth. Tőkés László played a key role in popularising and preserving these customs, as he paid special attention to deepening the historical and cultural knowledge of the young people.

He explained the history of the nativity play, which arrived in the Hungarian-speaking region through Latin mystery plays in the fourteenth century and later evolved with shepherd dances into a mixed folk-religious genre. The local cultural value of the nativity play is evidenced by the fact that its most authentic form has been preserved in the Csík region, with the oldest versions of the custom found in Transylvania. The rich performance of the nativity play, which combined liturgical hymns, student songs, dance melodies, flute pieces and narrative elements, provided a lively and experiential transmission of tradition, bringing this heritage closer to the Hungarian folk spirit for both performers and listeners.

These cultural elements not only contributed to preserving traditions but also had a significant educational function, as they strengthened the community identity and religious values among the youth. Tótkés emphasized the spiritual and cultural significance of the nativity play, which, alongside nurturing Christian traditions, also preserved and transmitted the richness of Hungarian folklore to new generations. The musical pieces and dramatic elements presented during these performances were not only entertaining but also served as tools of tradition preservation, deeply embedding themselves in the cultural consciousness of the community.

Overall, the events organised by the Dej congregation can be viewed as a comprehensive cultural and religious educational programme, providing the local community with intellectual and cultural capital that has influenced the preservation of their identity in the long term. These programmes set an example of how religious and national self-identity can be nurtured and how the role of the church can be extended into cultural education, contributing to strengthening community solidarity and national self-identity.

Scientific Work

In issue 4/1982 of *Ellenpontok*⁴⁰⁵ (Counterpoints), a samizdat publication dedicated to improving the disenfranchised situation of Hungarians in Romania, László Tótkés published his study titled *The Situation of the Reformed Church in Transylvania*⁴⁰⁶. The study had been initially requested by *Ellenpontok* editor, poet Géza Szócs, for publication abroad. Contrary to

⁴⁰⁵ *Ellenpontok* is available online: <https://www.adatbank.ro/cedula.php?kod=480>, downloaded on 17 November 2024

⁴⁰⁶ Tótkés László: A református egyház helyzete Erdélyben. In: *Ellenpontok*. 1982. No. 4. 7-16. – digital publication, available at: https://www.adatbank.ro/html/alcim_pdf1563.pdf, downloaded on 21 November 2024

this intention, the study was published in *Ellenpontok* instead.⁴⁰⁷ The study criticised the portrayal of the Reformed Church's situation in Romanian official state and church communications, which Tókécs deemed misleading and disconnected from reality. His analysis highlighted how the state violated its own laws by restricting the exercise of the church's legally guaranteed rights and discussed false or partially untrue information appearing in official church communications. He presented what he considered an authentic view of the church and societal realities, sharply contrasting the official narrative. Tókécs criticised the subjugation of the Reformed Church in Romania to the state, a situation he argued the church leadership mistakenly viewed as a matter of survival. He asserted that official church media avoided criticism and ignored substantive issues. In practice, freedom of conscience and religion did not exist, dissenting opinions were suppressed, and the free practice of religion and the application of religious perspectives were obstructed. Furthermore, systematic discrimination based on conscience and religion prevailed. The state, in practice, denied the equality guaranteed by law and sought to expand the exclusive power of the Party while aiming to eradicate religious consciousness.

In his study, Tókécs emphasised that Hungarian Reformed youth were especially vulnerable to nationalist intolerance and atheist propaganda. Unlike the Romanian Orthodox Church, which officially lacked religious education, Hungarian Reformed students faced overtly anti-religious attacks. The social position of Hungarian clergy families was marginalised, and the church, along with its pastors, faced systematic discrimination. Cooperation between the church and the state was, in practice, limited to serving state interests, with the church's foreign representation also being directed by state officials.

Tókécs placed the issue of national freedom at the center of his analysis, noting that in the case of the Reformed Church in Romania, this freedom was closely intertwined with Hungarian national identity. According to Tókécs, the role of the "Hungarian church" was not only religious but also nation-preserving. It was tasked with advocating for the cultural, linguistic, and national rights of its members. However, these rights were continually undermined by discriminatory measures, including "Romanianization" and de-Protestantization. Additional obstacles included the merging of Protestant theological education, strict censorship of church press and publishing,

407 Molnár János: *A Securitate célkeresztjében: Tókécs László küzdelme a román politikai rendőrséggel*. Kolozsvár, Kriterion Könyvkiadó, 2013. 23.

and insufficient quantity of church publications. Together, these factors significantly hindered the religious and cultural functioning of the Reformed Church. As a result, the condition of the Hungarian community gradually and steadily deteriorated, a reality Tőkés detailed in his analysis to challenge the official state and church narratives⁴⁰⁸.

In January 1983, László Tőkés initiated a comprehensive survey in the Dej church county, focusing on two main aspects concerning Hungarian Reformed communities: hymnals and wall calendars. At the church district assembly in December 1982, where he attended as a non-voting member, the bishop's report stated that a unified new hymnal was almost ready for publication. This announcement motivated Tőkés to prepare a study for the *Református Szemle*, as he believed the new hymnal had been created "almost entirely excluding church publicity and opinion and after a prolonged silence".⁴⁰⁹ As part of his research, Tőkés wrote to his fellow pastors in the Dej County, requesting their cooperation for the survey.

The purpose of Tőkés' research was to assess the hymnal needs of congregations in the church county. He investigated how many copies of the old edition were needed and the demand for the new edition upon its release. The survey also included a qualitative analysis to determine which hymns pastors considered unnecessary for inclusion in a new hymnal. His research extended to the needs for wall calendars as well.⁴¹⁰

Tőkés sent over forty letters to pastors of various congregations, such as Szamosújvár (Gherla), Kérő (Chiuești), Retteg (Reteag), Magyarnemegye (Mintiu Gherlii), Magyaroszovát (Săvădisla), Váralja (Ciceu-Giurgești), Bethlen (Beclen), and Borzás (Borzesti). The survey resulted in at least thirty-seven responses, leading to two key conclusions. Firstly, the responses confirmed the relevance of Tőkés' questions. Secondly, they revealed that the pastors of the church county largely shared the assistant pastor's views.

408 After the writing, the *Securitate* made the decision to remove László Tőkés from the Dej community. They reported to the bishopric about Tőkés' alleged "nationalist-irredentist" activities and requested that a disciplinary procedure be initiated to transfer him to a position where he would have fewer opportunities to act. The church leadership began the disciplinary procedure against László Tőkés in the autumn of 1983. See: Molnár János: *A Securitate célkeresztjében: Tőkés László küzdelme a román politikai rendőrséggel*. Kolozsvár, Kriterion Könyvkiadó, 2013. 23-26.

409 Tőkés László: *Felmérés énekeskönyv-ügyben*. August, 1983. Manuscript, in Tőkés László's private archive

410 The source of the copies of the letters and response letters is László Tőkés' private archive, which he made available to the author.

On 8 August 1983, Tőkés submitted his findings in the form of a study to the church district's Executive Council, requesting its publication and recommending that the research be expanded to encompass the entire church.⁴¹¹

Tőkés' 1983 research provided written evidence that most pastors in the Dej county were dissatisfied with the church leadership's efforts to distribute materials aimed at strengthening Reformed spirituality. It was a widespread problem that congregations did not receive the requested quantities of these materials. The study also revealed that the deanery's community opposed the leadership's positive assessment of the situation, indicating a critical discrepancy between the official position and pastors' actual experiences.

While the official representatives of the Reformed Church in Romania made "special efforts and seized every opportunity to convince others that book publishing and the printing of various publications met the demands",⁴¹² the low number of hymnals and wall calendars was due to compromises made by the church leadership, which conformed to the expectations of the atheist communist regime. The regime's restrictions made it impossible to meet the demand for spiritual publications within the Hungarian Reformed Church. Consequently, the Hungarian community could not fully exercise its legally guaranteed right to religious freedom. The limitation of spiritual literature publishing was one form of discrimination based on national identity, a practice that László Tőkés denounced in his theological research.

Public Statements

As a student at the Protestant Theological Institute of Cluj, László Tőkés demonstrated a strong commitment to serving his community, including a dedication to protecting constitutionally guaranteed rights. His efforts were particularly evident in confronting injustice and openly opposing oppression. Over time, his public statements extended beyond the university and the Reformed Church community, addressing broader issues affecting the Hungarian minority and Romanian society at large. His activities often focused on combating injustices and representing the interests of the Hungarian community in public forums.

⁴¹¹ Tőkés László's letter to the Executive Council of the Cluj Church District on 8 August 1983. Archives of the Transylvanian Reformed Church District, Cluj-Napoca, files of the Executive Council of the Cluj Church District, 1983/1935.

⁴¹² Tőkés László: *Beszámoló az országos egyházi helyzetről*. 26 April, 1988. 95. Manuscript, in Tőkés László's private archive

In 1977, he penned an open letter⁴¹³ to *Előre*, a prominent daily newspaper, delivering a sharp critique in defense of religious communities and their practices. At just 25 years old, Tótkés challenged claims made by Erzsébet Kovács, a poet, in her book review⁴¹⁴. Kovács argued that religious convictions hindered the spread of communist ideals and societal goals. Tótkés strongly opposed these views, labeling the disparagement of religious believers as “humiliating and offensive”. He also condemned the implication that only individuals free of religious guidelines possessed the strength to “triumph”, characterising this as biased against religion. By doing so, Tótkés not only stood up for religious communities, particularly Hungarian Reformed Christians, but also indirectly criticised both communist ideology and its ecclesiastical collaborators.

A significant step in Tótkés’ advocacy was an open letter to Bishop László Papp of Oradea, though this letter never reached public circulation as intended. Written on 22 June 1983, during his sixth year as an assistant pastor in Dej, the letter was spurred by the case of Hungarian writer Gyula Illyés. Following Illyés’ death, Tótkés condemned Papp for previously criticising Illyés’ assertion that Romania’s Hungarian minority faced the threat of genocide. In an article published in *Református Szemle* in 1978, László Papp wrote the following: “It is highly regrettable that the shameful chorus of emigrants can be heard in certain Hungarian statements as well, such as those of the writer Gyula Illyés, who went so far in his assertions as to emphasize the danger of genocide in the context of the Hungarian national minority”.⁴¹⁵

In his “reply letter” to Papp, Tótkés not only affirmed the reality of the genocide threat facing the Hungarian community in Romania but also bolstered Illyés’ credibility by referencing his respected status in Romanian literary circles. He described Illyés as an antifascist and socialist revolutionary writer, esteemed by the Romanian Writers’ Union. This context amplified the weight of Illyés’ warnings. In the letter, Tótkés sharply criticised Papp for making what he deemed untruthful and defamatory remarks about Illyés, accusing the bishop of violating the Ninth Commandment against bearing false witness. He denounced Papp’s actions as damaging not only to Illyés’ reputation but also to the good name of the Reformed Church.

413 Tótkés László’s letter to the editorial board of *Előre* on 19 August 1977. Archives of the Transylvanian Reformed Church District, Cluj-Napoca, files of the Executive Council of the Cluj Church District, 1977/2469.

414 Kovács Erzsébet: Az ateizmusról – fiataloknak. In: *Előre*. 10 August 1977.

415 Felekezetközi teológiai konferencia. In: *Református Szemle*. 1978. May–June. Vol. 71. No. 3. 209.

With this letter intended for the public, Tőkés took a bold stance, defending the value of Gyula Illyés' – one of the greatest figures of Hungarian literature – literary and intellectual contributions, while openly opposing church leaders who aligned with the communist regime. He sought to bring to light the political and social challenges threatening the Hungarian community. This act underscored his dedication to upholding moral and religious principles, particularly the necessity of addressing abuses and injustices both within his church and in society at large.

Summary

As part of his parental heritage, the sense of Hungarian identity and national affiliation that László Tőkés brought with him from his family home formed a defining foundation for his pastoral and political career. The safeguarding and preservation of Hungarian national identity played a central role even during the early stages of his ministry. This mission took on particular significance during the homogenising efforts of the Ceaușescu regime, when the fight for the preservation of alternative identities—particularly those of Hungarian and Reformed Christian communities—became the main focus of his service, despite the existential risks involved.

During his time as an assistant pastor in Dej, this mission was especially evident. Through preaching and teaching, Tőkés placed an emphasis not only on the Christian faith but also on strengthening national consciousness. This work was reflected in the teaching of history and church history, as well as in promoting literary and musical culture, especially in the education of the younger generation. In his academic work, Tőkés revealed the situation of the contemporary Reformed Church and the discriminatory treatment faced by the Hungarian community. Moreover, in his public statements, Tőkés spoke out against religious criticism and the injustices of church leadership, while consistently prioritising the defence of national identity.

In totalitarian Romania, strengthening Hungarian identity and passing it on to the younger generation became, for Tőkés, a risky but essential guide for both his religious and national commitment. However, this approach not only led to church conflicts but ultimately resulted in the interruption of his pastoral work, while his struggle for Hungarian community rights and the preservation of national self-identity became exemplary.

LÁSZLÓ GONDA

RISK AND RENEWAL – GÉZA NÉMETH AND THE REFORMED CHURCH RENEWAL MOVEMENT

*“The patience of spiders, steady and slow,
Helps when the fevered winds begin to blow.
I lie in my worries on a rattling bed,
Wrinkles of sleeplessness where thoughts are led.
Tent darkness around me, sweet dreams take flight,
Heat the stove with diamonds to warm the night.”*

Ferenc Buda’s poetic words⁴¹⁶ aptly capture the state of mind that characterised the citizens of Hungary, including pastors and members of the Reformed Church, during the long, oppressive decades of the Rákosi and Kádár regimes. Living in a constant state of suspended hope, they endured a tense waiting, never certain whether change would come. And yet, 1989 arrived—the year many had waited for, but no longer believed would materialise. It became the *annus mirabilis*, the “year of miracles,” a moment of transformation and renewed hope.

In 1989, Hungary’s political landscape shifted dramatically. It became increasingly clear that the Kádár dictatorship, often referred to as “existing socialism,” could no longer endure. Even Károly Grósz’s reluctant reformist attempts within the party could not arrest the inevitable. The formation of the Hungarian Democratic Forum, the Free Initiatives Network, and the Alliance of Young Democrats, alongside the reorganising of historical political parties and their subsequent unification within the Opposition Round Table, indicated a clear path toward the establishment of a multi-party democratic system. During the National Round Table negotiations, it became evident that a peaceful transition to a new political and economic order was not only possible but imminent.

While political life in Hungary was undergoing profound change, the leadership of the Reformed Church in Hungary appeared more passive. Rather than embracing a thorough renewal, church leaders seemed content with superficial gestures—such as a general confession of past sins and limited

⁴¹⁶ Buda Ferenc: Lennék kisgyermek [I would be a little child]. This English text of the poem is a rough translation from the Hungarian original by a free service of artificial intelligence provided by OpenAI.

rehabilitation—believing that the status quo could persist with minimal adjustments. The structure of church leadership, with bishops holding lifelong appointments or resigning voluntarily, meant that there was no institutional pressure for resignation. This complacency within the ecclesiastical hierarchy stood in stark contrast to the broader societal transformation unfolding around it.

Géza Németh (1933–1995)⁴¹⁷ was a Reformed pastor who faced expulsion from the clergy in 1971, only to be reinstated to ministry at the end of 1988, though without formal rehabilitation. In the late 1980s, he played a key role in organising aid for refugees fleeing Transylvania, Romania to Hungary.⁴¹⁸ Together with a group of like-minded pastors and lay leaders, Németh advocated for significant reforms within the church. They believed that deep structural changes were essential for the renewal of the Reformed Church in Hungary (RCH), beginning with the resignation of the entire church leadership. Their position emphasised the necessity of free, fair elections within the church, free from state influence. Németh and his collaborators hoped to facilitate a transition to a more democratic and non-authoritarian internal structure, one led by credible leaders who had the trust and support of the church's membership.

Géza Németh was a key leader of the movement, and notably, the organisation he founded in collaboration with his colleagues and like-minded pastors was given the same name as the Reformed Church Renewal Movement (Református Egyházi Megújulási Mozgalom, REMM) during the 1956 Revolution.⁴¹⁹ Németh played an active and prominent role in the renewal efforts of

417 To Géza Németh's biography cf.: Gonda László: *Németh Géza szolgálata. Misszió kereten kívül.* Budapest. Legato Alapítvány, Méry Ratio. 2023.

418 To Géza Németh's ministry among refugees cf.: Kóczyán Viktória: "This nest is for all kinds of birds"? National identity questions in the refugee reception of the Reformed Church in Hungary. In: *Religion, State and Society*, 2022. volume 50. issue 5. 553–568.

419 To the history of the Reformed Church Renewal Movement of 1956–57 cf.: Ladányi Sándor: Vázlatos történelmi áttekintés a magyarországi református egyház közelebbi múltjának alakulásáról. In: Barcza József, Dienes Dénes (eds.): *A magyarországi református egyház története, 1918–1990.*Sárospatak.A Sárospataki Református Teológiai Akadémia Egyháztörténeti Tanszéke.1990.135–137.; Horváth Erzsébet (ed.): *Megújulás és visszarendeződés.*Budapest, Kálvin Kiadó, 2008.; Kiss Réka: *Kelt mint fent. Iratok a református Megújulási Mozgalom történetéből (1956–1957),* Budapest. Dunamelléki Református Egyházkerület.2007.; Kiss Réka: Adalékok a „második forradalom” történetéhez: a Református Megújulási Mozgalom. In: Bank Barbara; Kahler Frigyes (eds.): *Utak és útkeresztvezetők : Ünnepi tanulmányok M. Kiss Sándor tiszteletére,*Budapest, Történelmi Ismeretterjesztő Társulat Egyesület.2013. 407–417.

the 1956 Revolution,⁴²⁰ making his involvement a symbol of continuity with the organisation's objectives at that time. His leadership not only shaped the movement's direction but also served as a vital link between the past and the evolving goals of the renewal efforts within the Reformed Church.

The Reformed Church Renewal Movement (REMM) was officially founded on 22 April 1989,⁴²¹ in the prayer room of the Budapest-Rákosszentmihály Parish. The founding meeting was attended by 31 individuals, including 13 Reformed pastors.⁴²² Notable figures among the founding members included Tivadar Pánczél from Rákosszentmihály, István Török from Hejőbába, Olivér Czövek from Vecsés, István Zalatnay, Ferenc Orosz, a biochemist, and Attila Szűcs, a mechanical engineer. Gyöngyi Reményiné Baló, who, in addition to her secular work, had been collaborating with Géza Németh in ministry among refugees, was elected secretary of the movement and played a pivotal role in its development.

The following morning, in a radio program broadcast by Kossuth Radio, István Török and István Zalatnay announced the establishment of the Movement, highlighting its early public recognition. The central figure and driving force behind the Reformed Church Renewal Movement was Géza Németh.

A participant in the founding meeting recalls:

*“When REMM started, [Géza Németh] was very active and decisive in recruiting me. I’m not sure if it was officially a founding meeting, but it took place in Szentmihály, and there were about 15-20 people there. Géza brought us together to initiate the movement”.*⁴²³

Another participant, a young Reformed pastor, reflects on Németh's fore-

420 Ugró Miklós: „Ötvenéves letterem...”, Ugró Miklós beszélgetése Németh Gézával. In: Zalatnay István (ed.): *Miért fontos... az egyházi jövőkép? Németh Géza a református megújulásért.* Budapest.Erdélyi Gyülekezet, Méry Ratio. 2013. 130.

421 „REMM események időrendben” [The Events of REMM in a Chronological Order]. Manuscript in the private archive of Reményi Tiborné [cont.: RTMA], no author.

422 „Jelenléti ív. Készült a Református Megújulási Mozgalom 1989. ápr. 22.-én tartott összejövetelén, Rákosszentmihályon.” [List of Attendees of the Gathering of the Reformed Church Renewal Movement held at Rákosszentmihály [Budapest], on 22 April 1989.] Manuscript.RTMA. The document “The Events of REMM in Chronological Order” 32 founding members are mentioned but the list of attendees consists of only 31 names.

423 An interview with N.N., participant, Budapest, 6 February 2019, by László Gonda. The interview was made as a part of the research project „The Research of the Archives of Rev. Géza Németh (1933–1995) and the Preservation of His Memory” of the Legato Foundation for the Hungarian Culture in Transsylvania. The project was sponsored by the Batthyány Lajos Foundation.

sight in recognising the urgency of the political changes sweeping Central and Eastern Europe:

*“László Tőkés was already on a hunger strike in Temesvár/Timișoara, and the situation was becoming dire. Géza pushed forward with great determination, gathering people around him. I think Feri Orosz played a crucial role with his humility, and Tivadar Pánczél was also important. Géza encouraged us: ‘Let’s go, let’s do it, let’s write the statements!’”*⁴²⁴

The choice of the movement’s name was a bold one, particularly in the context of Hungary’s political climate in 1989. While Hungarian political life was beginning to reassess the 1956 Revolution, spurred by a statement from Minister of State Imre Pozsgai on 28 January 1989, it was far from clear whether the revolution would be officially rehabilitated in public discourse. In ecclesiastical circles, this name signified an open confrontation with the dominant theological and political currents within the church, which was monopolised by its leadership. The theological perspective⁴²⁵ championed by bishops such as Albert Bereczky, János Péter, Tibor Bartha, Károly Tóth, and Elemér Kocsis framed the 1956 uprising as a “rebellion against the Word of God.” According to this view, the 1956 dissenters, who had opposed the church leadership that aligned with the Rákosi regime, were seen as rebelling against a divinely sanctioned theology of the “narrow path” and the “theology of the serving church,” which the regime had supported as an expression of “evangelical Calvinism.”

As one participant in the movement stated: *“Németh Géza had a very clear vision in this regard. He believed that the work begun in 1956 should be continued. It is no accident that the REMM was chosen as the name of the movement. His vision included, that those ‘good people’ who had the courage to draft the Confession of Faith in 1956 were the ones who should now work*

⁴²⁴An interview with N.N., Reformed pastor, member of REMM, Budapest, 30 September 2021, by Viktória Kóczyán. The interview was made as a part of the research project „The Research of the Archives of Rev. Géza Németh (1933–1995) and the Preservation of His Memory” of the Legato Foundation for the Hungarian Culture in Transsylvania. The project was sponsored by the Batthyány Lajos Foundation.

⁴²⁵For an in–depth analysis of the „theology of the serving church” cf.: Bogárdi Szabó István: *Egyházvezetés és teológia a Magyarországi Református Egyházban 1948 és 1989 között*, Debrecen. Ethnica. 1995. See also: László Gonda: *Service of Evangelism, Evangelism of Service*. Utrecht. Boekencentrum.2008.

on the church's renewal".⁴²⁶

The movement, in both its name and its mission, sought to assert that continuity with the renewal efforts of 1956 should be vital for the reformation of the Hungarian Reformed church life.

The principal aim of REMM was to advocate for a comprehensive renewal of church leadership and to propose new candidates for positions of authority within the church. Dr István Török, a Reformed pastor in Hejőbába at the time and later a teacher of religion in Sárospatak, recalled the planning of the first key event organised by the movement: "We decided that Géza [Németh] would request [bishop] Károly Tóth to permit us to hold a major conference in early June. This renewal conference did take place in the Ráday Hall in 1989. I was labeled as a 'dangerous radical,' but this was inaccurate. I simply had a principle: that new leaders needed to be chosen. I even told Kúrti that, even if the bishop were St. John Chrisostomos, we would still have to choose someone else. We had to demonstrate that atheist communism had failed to choose the most suitable leaders from among us".⁴²⁷

The movement's public debut occurred on 3 June 1989, with the aforementioned conference held in the grand hall of the Ráday College in Budapest. The *Reformátusok Lapja*⁴²⁸ the event extensively, reporting that approximately 200 people attended.

The opening remarks were delivered by Pastor Tivadar Pánczél of Rákosszentmihály, who emphasised that the movement's primary objective was to promote the renewal of congregations and, by extension, the entire church. "We are not a clique," he stated. "We do not seek division".⁴²⁹ The main lecture was given by Sándor Tenke, a theology professor from Budapest. Legal advisor Imre Madarász and Géza Németh also addressed the gathering. According to the *Reformátusok Lapja*, "Bishop Dr. Károly Tóth expressed

426 An interview with N.N., participant, Budapest, 6 February 2019, by László Gonda. The interview was made as a part of the research project "The Research of the Archives of Rev. Géza Németh (1933–1995) and the Preservation of His Memory" of the Legato Foundation for the Hungarian Culture in Transsylvania. The project was sponsored by the Batthyány Lajos Foundation.

427 An interview with Dr István Török, Sárospatak, 16 November 2019, by László Gonda. The interview was made as a part of the research project "The Research of the Archives of Rev. Géza Németh (1933–1995) and the Preservation of His Memory" of the Legato Foundation for the Hungarian Culture in Transsylvania. The project was sponsored by the Batthyány Lajos Foundation.

428 *Reformátusok Lapja*: [lit.:The Paper of the Reformed Church Members]: The official and only weekly magazine of the Reformed Church in Hungary during the time of socialism.

429 Ibid.

his belief that such forums were necessary, even if they included critical elements”.⁴³⁰ However, he also noted that he did not agree with everything that had been presented during the event.

The next public meeting of the Reformed Church Renewal Movement (REMM), which garnered significant attention, took place on 12 October 1989, in the Oratory of the Reformed College of Debrecen.⁴³¹ The event featured a lecture by Dr István Török, a theologian who had been forcibly retired, as well as speeches from notable figures including writer István Csurka, Pastor Tivadar Pánczél, and Géza Németh. Németh’s lecture, titled “Reformed Presence in Today’s Hungarian Mass Communication,” was a key address at the conference. Bishop Elemér Kocsis of the Tiszántúli District of the RCH, the presiding bishop of the Synod, was also in attendance.

The following day, on 13 October 1989, a press release detailing the conference was published in daily national newspaper *Magyar Nemzet*⁴³² which quoted the Hungarian News Agency (MTI). The release included the following statement: *“The Renewal of the Reformed Church Cannot Be Postponed” (MTI) „The Reformed Church has supported anti-religious, anti-church, and anti-people policies for the past forty years, thereby losing its credibility before its approximately two million followers. This was stated, among other points, at the second national conference of the Reformed Church Renewal Working Community, held on Thursday in Debrecen, at the oratory of the Reformed Theological Academy. The conference also heard that the rehabilitation group of the Working Community had initiated both moral and legal rehabilitation for more than one hundred pastors and church members. Today, it is evident who has protected the church and its interests in recent decades, and who has served anti-church policies. The gathering has agreed that the renewal of the Reformed Church cannot be delayed. The church must confront its past, acknowledge its mistakes, revise outdated preaching practices, and raise the standard of its theology. Religious education will be reformed, and the Reformed Church intends to contribute to national education. The conference criticized the formal election practices of recent years, during which the former State Office for Church Affairs proposed the names of bishops and deans. A proposal was also made for the re-election of these*

430 Ibid.

431 “REMM események időrendben” [The Events of REMM in a Chronological Order]. Manuscript. RTMA. [No author.]

432 *Magyar Nemzet* [The Hungarian Nation]: a national daily newspaper owned by the Patriotic People’s Front, a satellite organisation of the ruling Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party.

positions in free church elections to restore the church's credibility".⁴³³

This announcement provoked a strong division of opinion within the church. In the subsequent issues of *Reformátusok Lapja*, responses from pastors, pastoral circles, and official church bodies distancing themselves from the Movement appeared regularly.⁴³⁴

In response to the protest, György [Pápai] Szabó, speaking on behalf of REMM, addressed the controversy in the columns of *Reformátusok Lapja*. He clarified that the communiqué published by MTI, which had been summarised by an MTI journalist, was not an official statement from REMM. Szabó pointed out that the phrase "the Reformed Church has lost its credibility" was a misrepresentation. He argued that it was not the church itself, with its two million believers, that had lost credibility, but rather the church leadership. Furthermore, he suggested that this critique might not necessarily apply to the current bishops. Szabó reaffirmed that the MTI report was otherwise accurate in its depiction of the Debrecen conference, expressing hope that REMM would „finally” be given the opportunity to present its perspective in *Reformátusok Lapja*.⁴³⁵

The editorial team of the newspaper responded by noting that they are not aware of any formal request by REMM for a correction of the statement in *Magyar Nemzet* and reminded readers that, as a movement, REMM lacked an official leadership to represent it.⁴³⁶

In addition, *Reform*, a new political tabloid, published a sensationalized report on the Debrecen conference, titled "Ecclesiastical Revolution in Calvin-

433 "Elodázhatatlan a református egyház megújítása", In: *Magyar Nemzet*, LII/241. (1989. október 13.). 4. [No author].

434 Dr. Kiss Boáz: "Ez a 'megújulás' nem az a megújulás, amelyre szükség van", in: *Reformátusok Lapja*, XXXIII/46. (1989. november 12.), 6.; "Elhatárolás. A bács-kiskunsági egyházmegye közleménye" in: *Reformátusok Lapja*, XXXIII/47. (1989. november 19.), 6.; "Visszautasítják a REMM-állásfoglalást. Lelkészértekezlet a veszprémi egyházmegyében", uo.; "Felháborodás a REMM-közlemény miatt. Közegyház és lelkészegyesület. A Dunántúli Református Lelkészegyesület elnöksége ülése Pápán", uo.; "A rákosligeti presbitérium tiltakozása", uo. ; "A debreceni REMM-konferencia visszhangja. A REFISZ elnökségének tiltakozása", in: *Reformátusok Lapja*, XXXIII/49. (1989. december 3.), 6. A lap ugyanott közli Ágoston János olvasói levelét is, amelyben a *Reformátusok Lapját* veszi védelmébe. The paper also publishes a letter to the editors by János Ágoston, in which he defends the *Reformátusok Lapja*.

435 Szabó György: "Válasz", In: *Reformátusok Lapja*, XXXIII/49. (1989. december 3.). 6.

436 Ibid.

ist Rome, Debrecen: Reformation Demanded by the Reformed Reformers”.⁴³⁷ The author of this article concluded with the assertion: “*The division within the church is starkly illustrated by the fact that the Reformátusok Lapja remains diligently silent regarding the steps taken by the Renewal Working Community.*” On 19 November 1989, *Reformátusok Lapja* published the report from *Reform* verbatim, along with an editorial commentary.⁴³⁸

The reception of Géza Németh’s lecture was noteworthy for its direct critique of church censorship. According to a report from a Hungarian Radio correspondent, Németh argued that “the only Reformed newspaper applies a censorship that prevents the truly pressing internal problems from being addressed.” The *Reformátusok Lapja* – ironically enough – published this very report criticising censorship.⁴³⁹

As the Reformed Church Renewal Movement (REMM) continued to grow, now meeting almost monthly, it began developing a detailed proposal for the renewal of church leadership. The group sent a circular letter to congregations, soliciting proposals for potential candidates for key positions, such as bishop, lay president of the district, dean, and lay president of the presbytery. A list of candidates supported by REMM was soon assembled,⁴⁴⁰ which included pastors and church members who had either suffered specific setbacks during the years of the dictatorship or, if not, had refrained from assuming collaborative roles within the church government. However, the REMM members were disappointed to find that some sought to nominate Elemér Kocsis, the sitting bishop of the Tiszántúli Church District, as the only candidate. Although Kocsis’s candidacy was widely considered, the name of Gusztáv Bölcskei – a young theology professor who would later serve as bishop of the same district for 18 years – was also being discussed.

Géza Németh played a pivotal role in these developments, demonstrating his characteristic pragmatism. He argued that, in addition to electing

437 Bajai Ernő István: “Egyházi forradalom a kálvinista Rómában, Debrecenben. Reformációt követelnek a református reformerek”, in: *Reform*, II/43. (1989. november 3.) 5–6. A lead was published on the front page with the following text: “The rolling of the heads of the four bishops are demanded.”, op.cit. 1.

438 “Sajtóvisszhang a REMM-ről. A megújulás csapdái. Hetilapunk buzgón hallgat?”. In: *Reformátusok Lapja*, XXXIII/47. (1989. november 19.). 6.

439 “REMM konferencia Debrecenben”. In: *Reformátusok Lapja*, XXXIII/44. (1989. október 29.), 5. [no author]. The weekly addressed the themes of the Debrecen conference later, too: „A debreceni REMM- konferencia előadásai”. In: *Reformátusok Lapja* XXXIII/46. (1989. november 12.), 7. [no author].

440 The document is preserved among the papers of REMM, RTMA.

new church leaders, it was equally important to renew the personnel of the central church administration. *“It is remarkable how clear [Németh] Géza’s ideas were on this matter,” recalled one participant. “He even had a list detailing how the Synod should be restructured... It was a crucial document.”*⁴⁴¹ *As official REMM candidates, there was a proposed list of individuals who should take over specific departments within the synodal office.”*⁴⁴²

Although Németh’s associates had humorously referred to him as the “bishop of the underground church,” he himself did not seek church office. However, he fully supported Loránt Hegedűs, pastor of Budapest-Szabadság tér, in his candidacy for the bishopric of the Dunamelléki District. Ultimately, REMM’s efforts yielded significant results: the Synod ordered a comprehensive renewal of the church, leading to the resignation of the long-standing church officials. As a result, REMM-backed candidates won episcopal elections in three of the four districts: Mihály Márkus in Dunántúl, Loránt Hegedűs in Dunamellél, and István Mészáros in Tiszáninnen. The Tiszántúli district re-elected its former bishop, Elemér Kocsis, while his opponent, Zoltán Aranyos, a former synodal councilor, was also closely tied to the previous church government structure.

One might question the level of risk taken by those who joined REMM during this period. Is it appropriate to commemorate these individuals in a conference or study volume dedicated to the “Martyrs of the Confessing Church”? In retrospect, given the onset of Hungary’s regime change, it might appear as though they were simply aligning themselves with the prevailing political currents, positioning themselves alongside the emerging opposition.

Nevertheless, we believe it is entirely justified to commemorate the members of the Reformed Church Renewal Movement and to document their efforts from three critical perspectives.

First, when viewed from today’s vantage point, it is clear that a direct path leads from the spring of 1989 to the free elections of 1990, the resignation of the Synod, and the general renewal of the church leadership. However, it is essential to recognise that, at the time, these outcomes were far from guaranteed. Those who advocated for the removal of church leaders who had collaborated with the state party apparatus, and who openly declared

⁴⁴¹ The document is preserved among the papers of REMM, RTMA.

⁴⁴² An interview with N.N., participant, Budapest, 6 February 2019, by László Gonda. The interview was made as a part of the research project “The Research of the Archives of Rev. Géza Németh (1933–1995) and the Preservation of His Memory” of the Legato Foundation for the Hungarian Culture in Transsylvania. The project was sponsored by the Batthyány Lajos Foundation.

their continuity with the 1956 renewal movement, took significant personal and professional risks. While the overt forms of state repression, such as the presence of „black cars” outside homes or the imprisonment of Reformed pastors, may have ceased by this time, the livelihoods and careers of those involved were still in jeopardy. When REMM first emerged, many of the individuals who had previously engaged in repressive actions were still entrenched in positions of power within both the church and the state. Furthermore, it is likely that – as was the case with Géza Németh – these individuals were still under active surveillance by state security services.

One member of the Reformed Church Renewal Movement (REMM) reflects on the early days of the group with a sense of both humor and caution: *“I remember when [Géza] Németh was present to ‘empower the group’ [laughs]. It was even more difficult in Debrecen than in Pest. And then he would say, ‘Notice, brothers and sisters, that the lion is not here, only its shadow is on the wall!’ So, the fears were still there, right?”*⁴⁴³

This anecdote highlights the precarious atmosphere that prevailed in the late 1980s, when uncertainty surrounding the future of Hungary’s political transition permeated every aspect of public and private life. For the REMM members, the risks of involvement were palpable.

The second significant risk faced by the movement was political. During the years of 1989-1990, it was unclear whether the changes brought about by the regime change would be irreversible. As events such as the attempted coup in Moscow later demonstrated, the momentum of political transformation could have faltered, potentially giving rise to a return to repressive governance—both in the state and within the church. This uncertainty was clearly a consideration for those who lent their names, signatures, and membership fees to the REMM at the time.

A third, equally important risk was psychological. At that moment in history, the Reformed Church in Hungary was dominated by a particular narrative, one that emphasized the authority and legitimacy of the church government. Criticising or opposing this narrative publicly was not only a rare act of courage but was often viewed as „sacrilege”. The repeated dissociative statements from pastors and church bodies in response to the REMM’s positions illustrate the intensity with which such opposition was

443 An interview with N.N., participant, Budapest, 6 February 2019, by László Gonda. The interview was made as a part of the research project “The Research of the Archives of Rev. Géza Németh (1933–1995) and the Preservation of His Memory” of the Legato Foundation for the Hungarian Culture in Transsylvania. The project was sponsored by the Batthyány Lajos Foundation.

met. Pastors and church members who aligned with the movement faced the risk of stigmatization. Those who dared to challenge the established order were often ridiculed, isolated, and ostracized. They were labeled as “disruptors of unity,” “troublemakers,” or “black sheep,” and such derogatory labels had the potential to make their professional and personal lives miserable. This social marginalisation could lead to long-lasting psychological and emotional trauma, leaving deep scars that would persist within the church community. In fact, the roots of the often-toxic internal culture within the Reformed Church may trace back to these experiences of exclusion and defamation.

Lastly, the REMM, led by Géza Németh and his colleagues, played a crucial role in what could be described as the – partial – transformation of the Reformed Church in Hungary. The movement’s primary impact lay in advocating for the renewal of church leadership and in the practical implementation of new nominations for church office. Although REMM’s influence waned in the years following the regime change, it continued its work well into the 1990s. Notably, the movement issued statements on a variety of issues, including the limitation of pastors’ political involvement and the encouragement for pastors who had migrated from Transylvania to return to their home country. Géza Németh’s untimely death in 1995 marked a significant loss for the movement. However, the work continued under the leadership of individuals such as Gyöngyi Reményiné Baló, and they once again put forward nominations for church offices during the 1996 elections. While this did not generate the same level of public attention or impact as during the regime change, it was emblematic of the movement’s continued advocacy for church reform. By the early 2000s, the movement had largely ceased its activities, although it had not formally disbanded. Its legacy was carried forward, in part, by the “Theological Life Today” (Théma) Association, which continued to address theological and ecclesiastical issues with some of the same concerns in mind.

One particularly memorable event in the history of REMM occurred on 8 June 1991⁴⁴⁴ in Budapest, when the movement organised an ecumenical conference at the former headquarters of the State Office for Church Affairs (ÁEH) on Lendvay Street, which at the time was already the headquarters of the Fidesz political party. This event can be considered a precursor to the later “Martyrs of the Confessing Church” conference series. The participants,

444 “REMM események időrendben” [The Events of REMM in a Chronological Order]. Manuscript. RTMA. [No author.]

including Géza Németh, symbolically encircled the ÁEH building with a human chain, representing the ongoing resistance to state-sanctioned church control. They also placed a memorial plaque on the building, which remains visible today, albeit only from within the inner courtyard. The inscription on the plaque reads: *“The State Office for Church Affairs operated in this building. In memory of the victims of communist religious persecution. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.”*

FILEP TAMÁS GUSZTÁV⁴⁴⁵
THE CROSSROADS BY ISTVÁN EGLIS. DACHAU,
1944-1945

Almost the entire membership of the Parish Workers' Union /Egyház-községi Munkásszervezetek Szakosztálya/ (EMSzO) was gathered in a mixed group – military deserters, Italians, Russians, and all sorts of others, as István Benkő said in an interview 35 years later⁴⁴⁶ – and transported without interrogation from the prison of the Pest County Court to the South railway station, then sent on their way to the Dachau camp. Two Roman Catholic priests from the group began to hear confessions at the station. According to one of them, Benkő, the other, István Eglis, made the following remark: “Well, we’ll take half a year for this!”⁴⁴⁷

Another member of the aforementioned group, journalist Ferenc Ilosvay, also remembers Eglis as having a similar habitus. Already at the station, one of his companions had told them where their journey would end. When the words “to Dachau” were uttered, the women in the group, who were also waiting to be deported, began to cry. I quote Ilosvay: “[...] Pista E., who was still standing next to me in his cassock, made only this brief remark:

- Now, boys, let us prepare ourselves for this journey, which will be a journey of self-education or sanctification for all of us”⁴⁴⁸

Eglis, Benkő and their companions were arrested on 5 December 1944 and arrived at Dachau on 19 December. The camp was liberated on 29 April. Benkő returned home in August 1945, Eglis returned later.

Last year, both in my lecture in the same programme and in the study version of the lecture, I spoke and wrote about Hungarians and Hungarian church people persecuted in the Nazi and Arrow Cross era, using the research results of Károly Hetényi Varga from the 1980s and quoting from his lexicon entry: “In Hungary, more than 100 priests and monks were arrested

445 The author is a historian of ideas and a staff member of the Institute for Minority Studies of the HUN-REN Centre for Social Sciences.

446 Károly Hetényi Varga: *Benkő István EMSzO-titkár*. In ib: *Akiket üldöztek az igazságért. Papi sorsok a horogkereszt és nyilaskereszt árnyékában*. Ecclesia, Budapest 1985, 19–33. Subsequent documentation: 34–51.

447 Ibid: 24.

448 Quoted from the memoirs of Ferenc Ilosvay by Szabolcs Szita: *The Gestapo in Hungary. A Gestapo Magyarországon. A terror és a rablás történetéből*. Korona Kiadó, Budapest 2002, 159.

for anti-war and anti-Nazi activities, illegal conspiracy and open opposition to the Arrow Cross terror, and for participating in the rescue of persecuted people. Of them, 35 were imprisoned in Sopronkőhida⁴⁴⁹ and 8 in Komárom prison. 10 clergymen were executed, one was persecuted to death and 15 priests were deported to concentration camps in Germany”⁴⁵⁰ Hetényi Varga later continued his research, and others have also looked into the matter; it is now certain that the number of deaths is somewhat higher, and we now know of about a dozen and a half people who were sent to foreign camps. There were priests who suffered the same fate but managed to escape. This was the case of József Király, a parish priest and Member of Parliament from Čičov (Csicsó) in Komárom County, who was arrested twice but managed to escape the march to Germany. A number of other Hungarian priests who had been classified as ‘non-foreigners’ by the Third Reich after the Anschluss, but who had probably been omitted from earlier lists, were also sent to concentration camps. At the very end of 1944, when Eglis and Benkő were already in Dachau, but not yet in the priests’ block but in quarantine, the latter says: “[...] touching things also happened. At Christmas a Hungarian priest brother from Burgenland broke into our barracks (prisoners were not allowed to enter each other’s barracks) and brought us a converted Holy Communion wafer wrapped in paper”⁴⁵¹

As I mentioned at the time, among the deported churchmen there were two Reformed pastors who were not taken to Dachau: Dr Zsigmond Varga Jr, who served in Vienna, died in the Gusen camp, and Kornél Nagy from Dunaalmás (who came from Diakovce /Deáki/ in the Highlands) died in the Haslach concentration camp.

There were no Hungarian clerical deaths in Dachau, or at least none that we know of. According to one source, which is obviously incomplete, nine Hungarian clergymen were released from there. The list of names includes Benkő, but strangely not Eglis: István Benkő, Roman Catholic doctrine teacher and EMSZO secretary, András Coman, Greek Catholic priest, Milán Kizdobranszki, Eastern Orthodox priest, György Novák, Capuchin priest, György Pallavicini, Roman Catholic theologian, Tamás Roszoha, Orthodox priest, János Schmalczl, Roman Catholic parish priest, Emil Szivák,

449 This mainly refers to the ordinnad who accompanied their bishop, József Mindszenty, into captivity.

450 *Egyházak ellenállása*. In *A magyar antifasiszta ellenállás és partizánmozgalom. Kislélexikon*. Főszerkesztő: Liptai Ervin. Edited: Bassa Endre és Gazsi József. [Közreadta a Hadtörténeti Intézet és Múzeum.] Kossuth Könyvkiadó [Budapest] 1987, [76]–77., itt: 77.

451 Károly Hetényi Varga: *István Benkő EMSZO secretary*. Ibid: 26.

Evangelical priest, István Sztakics, Orthodox deacon.⁴⁵²

Western records, however, identify only three of them as Hungarians, as they were the only ones to return to Hungary after the Second World War. From the names and denominations, it is possible that many of them did not see themselves as Hungarians, but we already knew, for example, that Emil Szivák of Jelšava (Jolsvatapolca), who was deported from what is now Slovakia, was Hungarian. In the novel we are about to read, István Eglis mentions an Evangelical priest from the Highlands and an Orthodox priest from Transylvania who do not consider themselves Hungarian. The Evangelical can only be Szivák. Two of the three people identified as Hungarian, István Eglis and István Benkő, were members of the Inter-Church Workers' Department of the Hungarian Front, a coalition of organisations involved in the resistance, or, according to another version of the name in the lexicon, the Parish Workers' Department, and were deported from Hungary along with several other civilians. Different numbers are given in the memorials and glossaries. In addition to the two priests, the deportees included József Zsidai [Zsiday] Zsidai, the central secretary general, György Szalay, the central secretary, Magda Tömör, a typist, Márton Karikás, a sergeant, and Ferenc Ilosvay, a journalist.⁴⁵³ According to Ilosvay, twenty-seven men and sixteen women were crammed into a prison van, although it is not clear from the text whether they were all linked to the EMSzO. The women were separated from the group at the Slovakian border and taken to Berlin.⁴⁵⁴ The number of deaths also varies between sources: some state that there were four. What is certain is that Magda Tömör and György Szalay did not return home from the camp.

Besides Benkő and Eglis, the third Dachau clergyman registered as Hungarian, Major Count György Pallavicini Jr, was not a priest, but only pretended to be one so that he could possibly be assigned to the camp's priests' block (this was the only block for clergymen in the camps of the Reich, and later two were created there: Dachau Block 26 and Block 28; one version of events states that the clergy were locked up here to avoid the "deportation"

452 Historical Repository. Digital History database. Available at https://www.tortenelmitar.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9753:19450429&catid=47:esemenytar&Itemid=82 (Last accessed 29 November 2024)

453 Parish Workers' Department, EMSzO, 1 Jan. 1937–1946. <https://lexikon.katolikus.hu/E/Egyh%C3%A1zk%C3%B6zs%C3%A9gi%20Munk%C3%A1sszakoszt%C3%A1ly.html> (Last accessed 29 November 2024)

454 For Ilosvay's remembrance, see Szabolcs Szita: *A Gestapo Magyarországon. A terror és a rablás történetéből*. Ibid. 158–159.

of the other deportees, while the other claims that the German Catholic Church fought for it with the help of the Vatican – the two may be valid together), but the fact is that he had previously been admitted to the Central Seminary in Budapest. For the time being, however, he was active in the Resistance before his arrest, playing an important role in its central body, the Hungarian Front.

In his novel, István Eglis does not describe anything specific about the EMSzO or his group's resistance activities, the setting is the camp and the fictional hero only remembers the circumstances of his arrest and an episode of his transport there. The extensive interview with Benkő, however, contains important information about the department.

Their tasks ranged from cultural work to the organisation of football matches, and included all forms of work that could interest young people. Its basic task was to organise a labour movement based on the papal encyclicals *Quadrogesimo anno* and *Rerum novarum*. The EMSzO had an advocacy section, a professional organisation, and its main aim was to educate people in the world view. It also published a weekly newspaper called *New Order*, edited by István Eglis. Courses and evening schools were organised, and Benkő even mentions workers' grammar schools, but does not specify or elaborate. Schools for actors and directors were also organised in the Rókus parish hall, with the invitation of well-known actors. One of the series of anecdotes was entitled 'What the worker expects from the priest, the journalist, the engineer and the teacher'. This was held, for example, in the premises of the St Stephen's Society.

According to the Catholic Encyclopedia, there were 413 groups with more than 15,000 members in 1940. In 1942 they were active in every parish in the capital and 63 in the countryside.⁴⁵⁵

In Benkő's narrative, the management is described as follows: the director was József Freesz (who died in 1951 from maltreatment in the nursing home), the two general secretaries were István Eglis and Ferenc Kovács. There were also two (central) secretaries, József Zsiday and István Benkő.

In the same interview with Hetényi-Varga, he says: "With the spread of the Nazi spirit in Hungary, this education in world outlook was increasingly directed against Hitler's ideas. There was a time when the EMSzO was the

455 Parish Workers' Department, EMSzO, 1 Jan. 1937–1946. <https://lexikon.katolikus.hu/E/Egyh%C3%A1zk%C3%B6zs%C3%A9gi%20Munk%C3%A1sszakoszt%C3%A1ly.html> (Last accessed 29 November 2024)

only one that dared to openly oppose the Arrow Cross”.⁴⁵⁶ (This may be an exaggeration, but it makes sense: the Arrow Cross movement, which considered itself socialist, also propagandised among the workers).

“The EMSzOs met in the inner rooms of the Catholic Circle with beer mugs. When I was giving a lecture,” says Benkő, “and an unauthorised person happened to enter, we immediately started drinking beer and singing. [...] We openly proclaimed that Nazism was fundamentally anti-human, anti-Christian. But from the very beginning we declared not only that Hitler’s Germany must lose the war, but also that we must, in our own way, however small, contribute to this defeat”.⁴⁵⁷

At the time of its semi-illegality, the name of the EMSZO centre was, as Benkő claims, the Archbishop’s Office for Workers’ Pastoral Care. The group was involved in the work of the Hungarian Front, the umbrella organisation of the resistance (and, in a way, in rescuing people). Benkő recalled that the leaflets bore signatures such as Communist Party, Social Democratic Party, Legitimist Party, Catholic Movements – the latter being them. This is obviously inaccurate; there was no such party as the Legitimist Party at the time, but the fact is that Catholics were involved in the movement, not independently of Pallavicini’s role. The EMSI is not listed among the publishers of the Front’s appeal, but other parties and organisations than those listed there joined it. Freesz and Eglis were also involved in the illegal negotiations, says Benkő, and there is no reason to doubt this. He also says that the last leaflets were ‘arranged’ by their headquarters alone. He is not sure of the reason for their demise, only that their printer was allegedly arrested and handed over in Monor.⁴⁵⁸ (Ilosvay, however, says they were brought down by an undercover agent.⁴⁵⁹) They were arrested by machine-gunned Germans who spoke Hungarian to the prisoners. They were taken to the detention centre of the Pestvidéki Tribunal, and their personal details were marked “anti-German behaviour”. After that they were not spoken to for a few days and they were scattered in the cells (apparently so that they could not talk to each other before a possible interrogation); according to Benkő, only Egli was badly beaten, the others were not touched. (Ilosvay, on the other hand, speaks of the maltreatment of others and their interrogation in

456 Károly Hetényi Varga: *István Benkő EMSO secretary*. Ibid: 21.

457 Ibid: 22.

458 Ibid: 23.

459 For Ilosvay’s remembrance, see Szabolcs Szita: *A Gestapo Magyarországon. A terror és a rablás történetéből*. Ibid., 156–157.

the Húvösvölgy valley.⁴⁶⁰) The other leader, Freesz, was not caught by the Gestapo because he had just moved out of his flat in Akácfa Street, because it was in the ghetto area, so he did not go to work and was “wired”.

According to the Hungarian Catholic Encyclopedia, Eglis was born in Husz in 1913 and died in Budapest in 1961. He was ordained as a priest in 1937, served as a chaplain in Csillaghegy and became secretary of the EMSO the following year. On his return from deportation he was a teacher at the State Teachers’ College, and in 1946 he became a ‘theology teacher, workers’ chaplain’. During the Rákosi regime he was arrested in 1953, released in October ‘56, and arrested again in the spring of 1957. His articles appeared in *Új Ember* and *Vigilia*, and several of his books were published between 1946 and 1948.⁴⁶¹ He probably wrote his memoirs of Dachau in the 1950s, but the book was not published until 2014.⁴⁶²

As a researcher of political deportees, I felt a great sense of loss when I first read the book. There were far fewer Hungarian political prisoners in Mauthausen, but at least five of them described their memories with specific events and names. After the Arrow Cross takeover, thousands of political prisoners from Hungary were sent to the main camp in Dachau, but there are hardly any sources about them. For example, Andor Szentmiklóssy, permanent deputy to the foreign minister, Aladár Huszár Baráti, former mayor of Budapest, Jenő Benda, editor-in-chief of *Pesti Hírlap*, former social democrat István Farkas and Zoltán Horváth, a small farmer and Member of Parliament active during the occupation, all died there. In Eglis’s novel there are only a few Hungarian prisoners, one or two of whom can be roughly identified; the explanation for this, which is also apparent in the work and can be deduced from the text, is that most of the Hungarians were sent to other camps and commandos in the Dachau camp system. In the main camp, there were hundreds of people in quarantine who could not be admitted “regularly” (although the protagonist sometimes sneaks in to see the dying), and there were barely a dozen in the “free” blocks. In the novel, the protagonist, as he walked through the streets of the camp, was “spotted

460 Ibid. 157.

461 István Eglis (Huszt, Máramaros vm., 17 Aug. 1913 – 21 Feb. 1963): religious teacher. <https://lexikon.katolikus.hu/E/Eglis.html> (Last accessed 29 November 2024)

462 István Eglis: *Keresztúton. Egy magyar pap Dachau poklában*. The text was edited and the footnotes were written by László Szigeti. With an afterword by Attila Viktor Sós. Új Ember, Budapest, 2014. For information on the author and his subsequent fate, see the epilogue to István Eglis, *Az ellenálló*: pp. 195–214. (The book concludes with a partial bibliography of Eglis’s writings).

here and there by Hungarians, but this time he didn't stop to play casino with them".⁴⁶³

At first glance, Eglis's book does not appear to be a historical source, or more precisely, it is not a primary document for researching the fate of Hungarian political prisoners, but it can be used to corroborate other memoirs. From my point of view, it is unfortunate that it does not include the small documentary study mentioned by the book's editor in the preface, which may or may not be so fictional – who knows.⁴⁶⁴ The Hungarian prisoner to whom Eglis refers is not named, and it is not certain that the stories have not been somewhat 'literaryised'. Secondly, the book seems to be a kind of roman à clef, with references to real people and events, i.e. a memoir written more like a novel. The chapters are well structured and introduce us to the patterns of behaviour, customs, and phases of camp life: work in the fields, the organisation of the barracks, the lice tests, visits to the quarantine, punishment exercises and religious services. There was little change in the general conditions, such as the arrival in Dachau of our prisoners from the evacuated camps in the East, the increase in the already unbearable overcrowding, the escalation of the passion of hunger in the last weeks ("He who can overcome the instinct of self-preservation is already close to sanctity"⁴⁶⁵) and, finally, the liberation of the camp (which the deportees did not know in advance if they would achieve, since they had been informed of Himmler's orders: The deportees must be liquidated before the Americans arrive).

The work is in fact a vivid description of spiritual changes and struggles. The protagonist and his friend Kóben, i.e. István Benkő, are residents of Barrack 26, an international clergymen's block, where an illegal priestly ordination took place⁴⁶⁶ and a chapel was built a few days before the arrival of the Hungarian group. Block 28 was reserved for the largest group of clergy,

463 István Eglis: *Keresztúton. Egy magyar pap Dachau poklában*. Ibid. [31.]

464 "A novel hidden for half a century is finally to be published. In addition to the original manuscript, the dossier also contained a small document. It contains fragmentary notes, some of them sketchy, which can be seen as preliminary studies for the later consolidated work. This text contains some overlaps and contradictions with the novel, and as it does not add anything to it, we have decided not to publish it." László Szigeti. In István Eglis. *Keresztúton. Egy magyar pap Dachau poklában*. Ibid. 5.

465 István Eglis: *Keresztúton. Egy magyar pap Dachau poklában*. Ibid. 146.

466 On 17 December 1944, the French bishop Gabriel Piguet ordained the seriously ill German Karl Leisner, who was only able to say one Mass before he died a few months after the camp was liberated in August. He was beatified in 1996.

the Poles. In the Nazi Reich, it is estimated that 8,000 clergymen were sent to concentration camps. Various figures circulate; in the work of Christian Feldmann, quoted by László Szigeti, it is stated that 2,579 Catholic priests alone were in Dachau and 1,034 died there.⁴⁶⁷ István Benkő, in his 1947 article recalling the Easter Mass two years earlier, says that twenty-one priests from twenty-one nations were deported there that spring.⁴⁶⁸

I quote from the reception of the novel: “The supreme question is that of charity, which goes to the very end in the common undertaking of suffering”.⁴⁶⁹ I would say that the theme of Eglis’s book is the constant struggle between the commandment of charity and human frailty. And that is what makes it so valuable. The great virtue of the novel, apart from the quoted interview with Benkő and the documentation which, as far as I know, is the only extensive Hungarian source on the priests’ block at Dachau, is that it lacks pomposity, hypocrisy and flattery. Almost every event described shows the priests to be as fallible as the other prisoners in the camp, perhaps consciously trying to overcome their weakness. They are in a privileged position in some respects (they can say Mass and pray), but otherwise they are subject to the same conditions as the other prisoners, they have to work like the others and try to be put in work teams so as not to starve, they all have to ‘organise’ (in the camp language this means stealing, in their case food, although they do not steal from each other but from the Reich). They are also jealous of the better position of their fellow inmates, envious when they see a better morsel (mouldy bread crust, or rotten potatoes) in someone else’s mouth, like the other prisoners. They too can catch typhus and die of consumption. They have to fight constantly (amongst themselves) for a better place in the barracks, if only to be able to sit down for a while after work.

For Eglis, and for the hero of the novel, this involves more meditation and soul-searching than most. And from the very first pages of the novel, in the context of an innocent situation, the author tells us where to look for the moral lessons of Dachau:

“- Do you want a cigarette? – A hand touched his shoulder and he answered angrily:

- I don’t want any!

- What, you smoked yesterday’s already?

467 László Szigeti: *A szerkesztő előszava*. I. m., 196.

468 István Benkő: Dachau csoda. *Új Ember*, 1947, No. 14, 6.

469 The thief got a piece of bread instead of a beating. <https://hirado.hu/2015/04/05/agyonyveres-helyett-egy-falat-kenyer-jart-a-tolvajnak/> (Last downloaded 29 November 2024)

- Yes - he lied. But there were still two and a half nasty French cigarettes in the little aluminium medicine box in his pocket. He secretly hated himself for lying, especially to Krautheim, who always shared his with him like a brother. But he had to save money because he was going to take a break from work and go back to the block. He wanted to be alone to finally smoke a cigarette".⁴⁷⁰

The hero is disgusted by the new prisoners who have just arrived. They are even more miserable than the other prisoners in the camps in the East. They are wearing rags, have lice and stinking wounds, and they have been brought to Dachau as the war approaches⁴⁷¹. The hero does not understand why he hates them. A Belgian priest, who is much older and has been in the camp for a long time, explains: "It's just the natural human instinct to protect yourself against disease".⁴⁷² Sacrifice is not part of human nature. The conversation ends with the following words:

"-Yes, Christianity. And then you see how much love of neighbour is at the heart of Christianity. And also how difficult it is to keep the love of one's neighbour".⁴⁷³

The priestly bloc is not distinguished by an exalted spirit, a characteristic that is evidently impractical in such circumstances. The Polish, French and Italian priests, along with the two Hungarians, encounter significant challenges in communication with one another. A substantial proportion of the priests are not proficient in German, and the mass is conducted in Latin. However, most of them employ their mother tongue in communication, albeit a distinct macaronic language has also emerged within the camp. The chapel serves as the primary locus for the expression of Catholicism's supranationality.

The presence of national differences is evident among the larger groups. The German priests, while confronting Hitler, did not relinquish their claim to leadership in Europe, a role they perceived as their responsibility to educate the populace. The Poles are characterised by their organisational pro-

470 István Eglis: *Keresztúton. Egy magyar pap Dachau poklában*. It is also true that the unwritten rule of the camp was that it was considered to be unethical to request a cigarette, on the grounds that it was considered too valuable to be given away as a gift." *Ibid.*, 65.

471 "The scene is set with a description of "bone-men, disgusting ulcerated arms and legs, scabby, rashy bodies" milling around in front of the tables. The clerks responsible for registering the new arrivals, including the protagonist, experience a sense of physical discomfort and proceed to complete the forms mechanically. *Ibid.*, 26.

472 *Ibid.*, 30.

473 *Ib.*

ess and tenacious defence of their positions. They harbour a particular animosity towards German priests, whom they perceive as representatives of the German Reich. The Italians, on the other hand, opt to retreat into their own community, engaging in shared meals, intermarrying among their own kind, and engaging in conflict.

When a pastor is physically assaulted, members of the other group refrain from offering assistance. The camp's most pernicious effect is the apathy and revulsion that pervades nearly everyone. However, many individuals develop a form of 'gallows humour', which is deemed essential for survival. Notably, all of the individuals in the camp are Christians, predominantly Roman Catholics. The novel's protagonist, Gábor, endeavours to facilitate the presence of a rabbi from Hungary within the barracks; however, this endeavour is thwarted by the authorities of the camp.

The novel poses a recurring question: namely, whether survival is worthwhile. Faced with the corpses of the deceased, the characters become as indifferent as the others – that is, if there is no friend or acquaintance among the dead. They impose cynicism on themselves; only prayers, masses, worship, hours of devotion and discussions about ethical issues protect them from having their personalities disintegrate. The most significant of these dialogues, that is, the discourse between Gabor, a worker priest, and the Belgian Jesuit spiritual director on “the failure of the priesthood in this or that age to walk the path of holiness”,⁴⁷⁴ is regrettably incomplete and truncated at the point in the manuscript where it is found.

The use of slang by the protagonist is consistent with the cultural context of the plague era, and while the text does not include profanity, the term “stupid” is frequently used. The setting of resistance, as depicted in the novel, naturally eclipses the ‘priestly’ attitude, behaviour and habits. The hero of the novel undergoes a frisk when he is apprehended by authorities. Despite his lack of weaponry, he does not rule out the possibility of self-defence, should the need arise. During his transport, when he is permitted to use the toilet at Komárom station, he contemplates an escape, envisioning a scenario in which he could shoot the armed guards. Ultimately, his decision to relinquish his attempt to escape is not driven by a sense of humanism, but rather by the realisation that, attired in a cassock and bearing a week-old beard, he would inevitably be apprehended by the authorities within a matter of minutes.

474 Ibid, 172.

Despite encountering moments of personal vulnerability, Gábor maintains a sense of solidarity, exhibiting a refusal to succumb to the forces that seek to divide him. He witnesses those who engage in trivial disputes, such as over a cigarette butt, with a mixture of horror and revulsion, while experiencing a sense of embarrassment for even considering the consumption of a chocolate bar. Despite his affluence relative to the prisoners in Dachau, he frequently experiences feelings of remorse when he consumes food, questioning whether he should allocate it to the more impoverished. However, as his Hungarian counterpart asserts, if they were to distribute all the food, the neediest would be deprived of their share by the stronger individuals, who would take it from them and even physically assault them.

The practice of sacrifice by priests continues to this day. In the course of their activities, they collect medicine, food, and financial contributions for the benefit of the less fortunate. It is a common misconception that priests give everything they have, yet in reality, they typically donate a significant portion of their resources.⁴⁷⁵ Many volunteer to be nurses among the typhoid sufferers, even though they are certain to catch the disease; Gabor also sneaks into the infected section to visit the Hungarian dying. In the interim period, the two protagonists ensure the survival of their companion by applying bites to his mouth, thus preventing him from becoming infected. The use of deception is employed to obtain blood samples from the companion voluntarily, with the assurance of a sugary rice pudding in compensation. Concurrently, over a hundred individuals per day are perishing and being conveyed to the crematorium. Four barracks situated outside the station are designated as medical facilities.

It is evident that a shared experience can also forge a sense of solidarity among the afflicted. Following the camp's liberation, the two priests became constituents of the Hungarian prisoner committee, a development attested to by their fellow communist prisoners, János Pécsi and Sándor Szegő, in Varga Hetényi's book and the afterword to Eglis's novel. These accounts highlight the benevolence and compassion exhibited by Eglis and Benkő, who were rightfully held in high esteem by their fellow prisoners. Eglis himself was known to abstain from discussing his experiences, even with his closest companions, perceiving no personal gain in doing so. However, his fellow captives attested to his popularity amongst his peers, irrespective of ideological differences, owing to his fundamental humanity, embodied by his compassionate nature as a shepherd and a source of

475 Ibid, 110.

solace to those around him. This sentiment is echoed in Eglis's obituary⁴⁷⁶, where he expresses his respect for this shared history, while also delineating the fundamental differences in their ideological perspectives, which led to a dispute with his former communist prisoner back home:

“Following his departure, I provide him with long-term care and support. He embodies the qualities of a true man, dedicating himself selflessly to the public good, often neglecting his own personal interests. It is profoundly moving to consider the remarkable alignment between our social and philanthropic aspirations. However, it is equally lamentable to acknowledge the historical materialism that has been entrenched as a lamentable legacy of the previous century, persistently and obstinately carried forward by both individuals and societal movements. The question that arises is: for how much longer will this persist? Contemporary science is exploring alternative approaches, the Western workers' movements have acknowledged the transformative potential of the soul and spirit, and religion is undergoing a process of reorganization and development in Russia.⁴⁷⁷ We were the last feudalists in the world, so will we be the last materialists in years to come?”⁴⁷⁸

However, upon a second reading of the book, it becomes evident that the scenes that elicit a profound moral crisis are the most vividly remembered. In the face of imminent starvation, the barracks are fortified due to the frequent nocturnal thefts perpetrated by prisoners from neighbouring blocks. Gábor, the guard in charge, not only apprehends the unfortunate thief but also inflicts a severe beating upon him. This act, in itself, is a cause of puzzlement for Gábor, as he cannot comprehend how he could have committed such an act. In search of an explanation for this inexplicable sentiment, the following night he sought the counsel of the Belgian Jesuit spiritualist, who likened his sense of elation at capturing the thief to that experienced by a hunter and to sensual pleasure. The Belgian Pope concludes the dialogue with the following assertion:

“Eighty per cent of the camp's inhabitants become feral sadists, erupting as soon as they have power in their hands. If nothing else, this should convince everyone of what a hellish method Hitler is working. He has unleashed on this wretched world the devil of killing, torture and unbridled domination.

476 *A kis út. In memoriam István Eglis.* Vigilia, 1963, No. 3, 168.

477 This is presumably a reference to the fact that during the Patriotic War, the Soviet power eased its anti-clerical and anti-religious policies.

478 István Eglis: *Hangok a szakadék fölött. „Én a katolikus... ő a kommunista...”* Új Ember, 1946, No. 33, 13.

And when will there be peace?"⁴⁷⁹

It is evident that the Hungarian priests sought to provide this reassurance upon their return home. However, it is also apparent that the new authorities were keen to prevent them from doing so.

479 Ibid, 179.

ÉVA FRITZ BEKE⁴⁸⁰

GÁBOR SZTEHLO'S ROOTS IN UPPER HUNGARY

Introduction

2024 marks both the 80th anniversary of the Holocaust and the 50th anniversary of the death of Gábor Sztehlo. Sztehlo, a 35-year-old Lutheran pastor, is notable for his actions during the Second World War in rescuing Jews, despite the increasingly restrictive laws against them. He took the risk of hiding and rescuing Jews, and the most recent publication chronicling his lifesaving work is Lajos Kollár Kollár's *Sztehlo bárkái: a "magyar Schindler" története*, a novel published in May of 2024. Those versed in the life of the pastor, who saved the lives of the people, are aware that the family's roots lie in present-day Slovakia, specifically in Brezno. According to current research, the Stehlo house stood in the centre of the town in the 17th century. It is here that Mathias Stehlo, the rector of Upper Sava and later a preacher, may have started his journey. From that point until the present day, a period of 350 years, there have been pastors in almost every generation, and the following study will outline the life stories of these individuals.

The galleon ancestor

Although the Sztehlo dynasty of pastors begins with Mathias Stehlo, there is also a notable Gaelic descendant, János (Johannes) Simonides.

The Counter-Reformation was in full swing in the 17th century. In 1763, 33 Protestant ministers were summoned to appear before an extraordinary tribunal in Bratislava (Pressburg, Pozsony), headed by Archbishop Szelepcsényi of Esztergom. They were accused of insulting the Catholic Church and the king, as well as Jesus Christ and the saints, and conspiring with Thököly, in an attempt to explain the persecution of Protestants to the European public. They wanted to set an example by arresting Protestant church leaders – ministers, teachers – and then persuading the prisoners to renounce their religion and return to Roman Catholicism. All but one remained steadfast. Not content with this, the Catholic clergy summoned all

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Protestant ministers and schoolmasters to the Bratislava tribunal in 1674. Many did not appear, choosing instead to go into hiding. Those who had not signed the reversal were sentenced to death en masse on 4 April 1674, but the death penalty was not carried out, instead the unfortunate prisoners were tortured and tormented for months. On pages 75–80 of the *Historia Diplomatica de Statu religionis evangelicae in Hungaria* it is written that the ministers who refused to convert and were in captivity were beaten to a bloody pulp by Kollonics, the intellectual author of this cruel persecution, and by Szelepcsényi himself. They were sent to Naples under military supervision, against the royal order by falsifying it, and then sold on the slave market and put on a galley. Few survived this ordeal.⁴⁸¹

The galley slave rector of Brezno (Breznobánya), János Simonides – a descendant of Kornél Sztéhlo on his mother’s side, and his companion Tóbiás Masnitius (ancestor of Endre Masznyik, the theological director of Bratislava) – successfully escaped to Lysernia⁴⁸² in Italy, and on his return home he was the pastor of the Slovak-speaking Banská Bystrica until his death in 1708.⁴⁸³ But after this brief digression, we now turn to an introduction to the Sztéhlo pastors.

An overview of the 350 years of travel

Mathias Stehlo, rector of Vyšná Slaná and Rejdová, and later, after his priestly exams, a pastor, was the first in the line of Sztéhlo ministers, whose descendants were pastors of the villages around Dobšiná. Later on, the Sztéhlo family served in the Slovak congregation of the Pilis village in Pest County, and then in the Slovak-speaking Lutheran congregation of Báčsky Petrovec (Petróc) – now Serbia, Vojvodina – in the southern part of the region. Their service took them from the South back to present-day Slovakia, where they served in Prešov, Dobšína, Lučenec and Banská Bystrica in the 19th century. By accepting the invitation of the Buda Evangelical congregation, András Sztéhlo, the Archdeacon of Lučenec, they settled in what is now Hungary, and his great-grandson is Gábor Sztéhlo, who later became a Jewish rescue pastor. Among the descendants of János Sztéhlo’s son, Gerő

481 Kornél Sztéhlo: *Kétszáznegyven esztendő az egyház szolgálatában: Művelődéstörténeti rajzok*. Budapest, Viktor Hornyánszky, 1908. 5–14. – digital publication. Available at: https://mandadb.hu/common/file-servlet/document/1072119/default/doc_url/966_OGYK_000243548_01263145lo_wm.pdf, downloaded on 27 September 2024.

482 It is highly probable that Kornél Sztéhlo meant the Italian town of Luserna.

483 Ibid: 15.

from Prešov, who served in smaller congregations before becoming pastor of Banská Bystrica for 36 years, are his grandson, Mátyás Sztehlo (1925–1996), who was pastor of the Slovak-speaking congregation of Samsonházi, and later of Bükk; and his great-grandson, Gábor Schermann (1970–), who is currently pastor of Tatabánya.

The founder of the pastoral dynasty, Mathias Stehlo⁴⁸⁴ (16?? – 1698)

The Sztehlo dynasty of Lutheran pastors commenced with the pastor Mathias Stehlo of Vyšná Slaná (Felsőszajó), although his year of birth remains unknown. The Counter-Reformation in the Gömör region also exerted its influence, resulting in the expulsion of Protestant pastors and the occupation of their churches. In 1674, ministers in the region were summoned to appear before the Extraordinary Tribunal in Bratislava, however, only Miklós (Pogány) Bugán, the pastor of Gemer (Sajógömör), attended. At the time, the Lutheran preacher in Vyšná Slaná was János Lányi, who was expelled from his post by the clergy in 1674 (he died in Leipzig in 1678).

During this period, the rectors were typically the pastors of the orphaned ecclesias, a practice that was also observed in Vyšná Slaná, where the rector, Mathias Stehlo, who had been expelled in 1674, led the members of the congregation in prayer instead of the preacher. Nine years later, in 1687, Stehlo completed his theological studies. He then served in Chyžné for a period of three years, after which he was invited to become the preacher of Vyšná Slaná and Rejdová. He died in 1698.

In 1744, the following record was written in the minutes begun by the pastor András Schmall of Vyšná Slaná: “XI. Mathias Stehlo. Tentobyl rodem z Brezna do cirkvi této za rektora povolán, po navraceni svobody roku 1683 do Chizneho na knezstvy posvezen a odtud pořádné povolány roku 1687 do cirkvi této prisel a potom zde roku 1698 zivot v. Panu dokonál”.⁴⁸⁵

484 “Mátyás Sztehló (Sztehló) and his son András received a charter of nobility from King Charles III on 6 June 1712. Most of the family members were Lutheran pastors. In the census of 1755 we find the names of János and Mátyás among the nobles of Gömör county.” – digital publication. Available at: https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/Borovszky_GomorKishont/?query=sztehlo+m%C3%A1ty%C3%A1s&pg=697&layout=s downloaded on 14 November 2024.

485 Ibid: “(Translation: Sztehlo Mátyás. He came from Breznóbánya and was called to this church as a rector, after the liberation (he means the Thököly movement and the 1681 Diet of Sopron) in 1683 he was ordained as a priest of Chizsnen and from there he was called to this church in 1687, and then he finished his life here in 1698.)” Ibid: 17.

According to a surviving record from 1699, the pastor's widow and her child petitioned the church leadership to obligate the Vyšná Slaná church to settle the arrears owed to her late husband. However, this request proved to be of little avail, as the serfs were living in hard times themselves and the landlords only supported the churches on their estates on an arbitrary basis.⁴⁸⁶

The genealogical study of the Sztehlo family reveals a complex web of familial relationships and historical circumstances that have contributed to the evolution of the family over time. The eldest son of Mathias Stehlo, Mátyás, subsequently had a son named János with his wife, Zsuzsanna Bolbier. However, Mátyás Sztehlo lost his first wife to the plague in 1710, and subsequently entered into matrimony with Mária Urbányi, the widow of András Sebők, who was several years his senior.⁴⁸⁷ The offspring of this union was named András. Mátyás Sztehlo was honoured with a title of nobility in recognition of his loyalty to the king, and as the “judex castellanus” of the Csetnek estate⁴⁸⁸, he was held in high public esteem. He passed away in 1741.

The younger son of Mathias Stehlo, János, was embroiled in a scandalous affair and faced allegations of bigamy. The case was initially handled by the clergy, who detained János in the Krásna Hôrka Castle prison for several weeks. However, it was subsequently referred to the secular court, as the clergy deemed the charge to be unsubstantiated. The county magistrates, upon further examination, concurred with this assessment, resulting in the case's return to the ecclesiastical court for a definitive resolution. However, the Eparchial Assembly concurred with the county magistrates' decision, resulting in the case being dismissed.⁴⁸⁹

It is highly probable that the son of this János Sztehlo, who was accused of bigamy due to his marriage to Julianna Salus, was indeed János Sztehlo (1695–

486 Ibid: 21-22

487 The title of nobility was not bestowed upon János, born of the first marriage, who, according to the records, may have been a bachelor postman in Gömör County. Ibid: 29.

488 “The powers of this office included the performance of judicial functions within the landed gentry. It is important to note that, given the absence of a separation of administration from the exercise of judicial power at the time, the aforementioned powers also encompassed numerous administrative tasks.” Ibid: 33.

489 Ibid: 26-28.

1744)⁴⁹⁰, the schoolmaster of Vyšná Slaná and Rejdová, who married Judit Váradi in 1718. The couple had eight children, six of whom reached adulthood.

From Csetnek to Pilis

The eldest son of János Sztehlo and Judit Váradi, András (1718 Csetnek/Štít-nik/-1775 Pilis) after completing his secondary education in Dobšiná, visited the noble families of the region to collect donations, and from 1742 he was able to deepen his knowledge in Wittenberg. After spending a year at home, he was appointed 'Rector-Academician' in Vyšná Slaná. In 1746, he started a family.⁴⁹¹ From 1747, he taught in Kameňany for five years, and in 1751, he was ordained as a priest in Kraskovo, where he served as a parish priest for two years. From 1753 to 1757, he was in Drienčany, and from there, he moved to Pilis in Pest County, where, after the Turkish occupation, Slovak evangelicals from Nógrád County in present-day Slovakia had founded a parish in 1721.⁴⁹² In addition to his pastoral duties, András Sztehlo was elected dean of the Pest-Békés diocese, which stretched from the Great Hungarian Plain to the Turkish border. The main patron of the Pilis church was Count Miklós Beleznay⁴⁹³ – one of Maria Theresa's benefactors and Reformed chief curator, and it is certainly thanks to him that the Pilis pastor was not harassed, and that the Lutheran congregation of almost 4,000 souls was even able to build a stone church during the time of András Sztehlo's ministry.⁴⁹⁴ András Sztehlo died in Pilis in 1775.

490 Ibid: "János Sztehlo served as the rector of Felsősjó from 1729 to 1744, and subsequently held the position of headmaster from 1929 until his demise in 1729. The register of Felsősjó chronicles his death as having occurred in a manner characterised by considerable suffering. His widow is believed to have remarried, as no record of her death has been found in the register. However, it is documented that she died on 20 December 1757.: "Sepulta est honesta matrona Juditha Bartholomaeides olim Sztehlo." Ibid: 47.

491 "On 12 June 1746, András Sztehlo married Juditha Simonides, the daughter of the Padar priest Simonides, in Felsősjó. According to the records of the Bács-Serem diocese, this Judith was the granddaughter of János Simonides, a galley-keeper. The blood of the martyr of the Protestant Church therefore ran in the veins of the Stehlos family." Ibid: 55

492 Ibid: 50-55.

493 The tomb of the reformed Beleznay family can still be found in the Lutheran church in Pilis. This is the second stone church of the parish, as the first one proved to be too small and was demolished. The present church was consecrated in the Advent of 1784. Miklós Beleznay, who died on 19 January 1787, was buried in the crypt of the church. Gábor Merényi-Metzger.

494 Ibid: 60.

From Pilis to the Southern land (Délvidék)

András Sztehlo Jr was born in Kraszko in 1752, but he began his primary education in Pilis. As his family spoke Slovak at home, the language of instruction at the school in Pilis was Slovak, and after completing the second grade, his parents sent András to Padarovce for 3 years to learn Hungarian alongside his grandfather, János Simonides.

In 1763, he enrolled at the grammar school in Dobšina and after a year, continued his secondary education in Bratislava. From there he went to Sopron and then to Jena, where he studied theology. After the death of his father in 1779, he returned to his widowed mother and visited his sister in Tiszaföldvár. He then spent some time with Samuel Tessedik in Szarvas. He was 31 years old when János Csernyánszky, the superintendent of the church in Selmecbánya, appointed him pastor. Following the proclamation of the Decree of Toleration, a Slovak-speaking Lutheran congregation was established in Petróc (Bácsky Petrovec) in the southern Bačka district of Vojvodina, now part of Serbia, where, on the recommendation of Superintendent Csernyánszky, he was appointed pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Szekszárd in the year of his appointment. András Sztehlo was elected pastor. He was the very first Slovak-speaking Lutheran pastor in the southern part of the region around Petróc, and his he had a significant influence on the Slovak Lutherans living there. In October 1791, he founded the Bács-Szerém diocese. He married Zsuzsanna Dedinszky in 1784. They had ten children, one of whom, János, chose the priesthood.⁴⁹⁵

In the Southern land (Délvidék)

János Sztehlo was born in Petróc in 1787. He was educated at home by a tutor until the age of 12. He then improved his knowledge in Győr and Mezőberény. He studied theology in Bratislava (1805-1809), after which he went to Wittenberg. In 1811, he was called to the ministry in Banská Bystrica by Superintendent Kristóf Lyci. He served as his father's assistant and then spent three years in Nagylajosfalva (Padina) in Vojvodina. After his father's death, the congregation of Petrograd unanimously elected him as pastor and he took office in March 1818.⁴⁹⁶ Construction of the church began in

495 Jančovič Ján: Apoštolská misia Stehlovcov medzi dolnozemskými Slovákmi, in: Evanjelický posol spod Tatier, 27. júl 2011. ročník: 101. č. 31. 11.

496 Kornél Sztehlo: Two hundred and forty years in the service of the Church ... 74.

1821 and was completed in 1823. In his diary, he noted that in the early days of his ministry, thanks to the education of András Sztehlo, the people led a virtuous and industrious life and were very attached to their country. As the years went by, however, the morals of the people began to deteriorate: public taverns were frequented and morals deteriorated further as church discipline was relaxed. Half of school-age children were not attending school. A new school building and a new schoolmaster were needed, but the faithful would not even contribute financially. By 1824, prosperity, pleasure, games, Gypsy music and merrymaking had become important, and the people were impoverished. Spiritual salvation and morality were no longer important. Smallpox took its toll in 1830, followed by cholera in 1831. The pastor's wife, Emília Weinrich, died at the same time, leaving eight orphans. Three days later, the minister's mother, Zsuzsanna Dedinszky, the widow of András Sztehlo, also contracted the disease and died that evening. In November 1831, János Sztehlo was elected head of the Bács-Szerém diocese (where he was the deacon for 21 years). In 1832 he remarried, marrying the sister of the parish priest of Gložan, Ludovika Rohonyi.⁴⁹⁷

János Sztehlo spoke several languages and was a good orator. On the one hand, he fought against old, established folk customs, but on the other, he considered it important to educate the people: he took great care to preserve health and protect against natural disasters. He organised collections and, when necessary, granted loans from the church treasury. He always had the interests of the poor at heart. He founded the Anti-Alcoholic Society and supported the establishment of a Sunday school. In addition to all this, he carried out the ministry of the church⁴⁹⁸, and the burden of his family – educating five sons and caring for seven other family members – rested solely on his shoulders. He spoke several languages and had a reputation as an excellent orator. Between 1818 and 1862, he wrote mainly in Latin. In the early 1840s, Pan-Slavic aspirations were gaining ground. János Sztehlo was a simple, modest village minister who was closer to Ján Kollár in educational matters than to P. J. Šafárik, who was based in the nearby town of

497 Ibid: 80–87.

498 E.g. “In 1838, on the feast of St Stephen the Martyr and the Sunday before, he gave communion to 1500 people. In 1839 he baptised 285 children, conducted 256 funerals, baptised 75 couples and confirmed 128 children. Add to this a ten-day coleda*, with visits to 826 homes, and a special winter period for visiting the sick, and you have about 800 functions a year, not counting communion. And all of this is done by the parish priest alone.” Ibid: 94. (*At Christmas and New Year, they go from house to house singing and collecting donations. – author's note)

Nový Sad.⁴⁹⁹ It never occurred to him to publicly defend the Slovak language in various forums. He used Slovak to communicate, while writing official documents, minutes and even private letters in Latin. Like the Pan-Slavic aspirations, he was not happy with the Magyarisation. When he spoke out against the forced Magyarisation on behalf of ordinary Slovak-speaking Evangelicals, the lawyers in Pest waged a real battle against him – accusing him of creating an anti-Hungarian opposition. In June 1842, János Sztéhlo wrote a letter to Kossuth asking that the petition of the Slovak Evangelicals of Bács County to the king be published in full in the *Pesti Hírlap*.⁵⁰⁰ He insisted on his demand that parish and diocesan minutes, and other official correspondence should continue to be written by Lutherans in Latin, as they were of no use to them in Hungarian. His statement, that if the authorities did not comply with this request, the Lutherans would not attend meetings or pay district dues, was considered an anti-national act and he was formally reprimanded. The nationalistic disputes and intrigues continued. The pastor denounced all forms of national fanaticism.

However, in his study of the Sztéhlo family, Ján Jančovič believes that János Sztéhlo was hurt that he did not preserve the family tradition, and that his children became hungarianised, although his grandchildren chose Slovak husbands. According to data published in Kornél Sztéhlo: *Kétszáznegyven esztendő az egyház szolgálatában*, it can be concluded that the Sztéhlo family, which was diverse and lived on the territory of Hungary at the time, was fully affected by assimilation.⁵⁰¹

After the defeat of the Hungarian Revolution, János Sztéhlo was tried for sedition by a military tribunal in Timișoara (Temesvár), but was acquitted. His opponents plotted against him until he was dismissed as deacon. He was completely reconciled to these events. In the last years of his life, his only regret was that none of his three sons, who had entered the priesthood, would take over the Petrine Congregation on a permanent basis.⁵⁰² As we shall see below, two of the three sons – András, János and József – served with their father in the Petrovác (Petróc) congregation: József for two years,

499 Ibid: Jančovič Ján: Apoštolská misia Stehlovcov – EPST–27. júl 2011. č. 31. ročník: 101. 16.

500 “...May Your Imperial Majesty most graciously decree that the non-Hungarian peoples in the country shall no longer be hindered in the use of their hitherto fashionable language, and shall no longer be compelled to use the Hungarian language, except in diplomatic communications, for it is only in a known language that everyone can educate himself morally and present his affairs truly and purposefully. Written in January 1842.” Ibid: 100.

501 Jančovič Ján: Apoštolská misia Stehlovcov, in: –EPST–10 August 2011. č. 32. ročník: 101.8.

502 Ibid: 110–130.

and János for a month and a half. The eldest of the three, “András, writes in his notes that János and József would have liked to stay with their father in the church founded by the Sztehlók a century earlier, but their stepmother prevented them from doing so, as she had other plans for the parish. His wish was not granted. In the meantime, the Patent Movement⁵⁰³ came, and the church, which had been reorganised by its chaplains, accepted the chaplain György Mrva as its administrator by order of the Patent Superintendent Kuzmányi while János Sztehlo was still alive, and who after his death was elected pastor”.⁵⁰⁴

From Petróc to Dobšiná, via Lučenec to Buda

András (1816–1899), the eldest son of János Sztehlo, the Archdeacon of Petróc was now the third András in the family to enter the pastoral profession. He was born in Lajosfalva, attended the Slovak elementary school in Petróc and studied Hungarian in Újverbász, where he lived for a year with the Reformed pastor. He completed his secondary education in Újverbász, Mezőberény, and Banská Štiavnica. He continued his studies in Prešov (Eperjes) and later in Bratislava.

After graduating, he continued his theological studies in Vienna and then in Jena. Upon returning home, he lived with his father for a year until János Szeberényi, the pastor of Banská Štiavnica and the superintendent of the mining district, took András on as a chaplain and ordained him as a priest in 1841. A year later, he became assistant pastor to Mór Kolbenheyer in Prešov, where the witty young man made valuable friends among the town’s highly educated society. In 1844, he accepted an invitation from the parish of Dobšiná. The following year, he married Aurelia Sárkány. According to the records, the new pastor had to make a great effort to regain his ‘priestly authority’.⁵⁰⁵ During the War of Independence, he fought for the Hungarian cause and preached from the pulpit. When the Austrian troops occupied the town, András Sztehlo was forced to flee to the forest. During his service in Dobšiná, thanks to his intercession, the folk school was reorganised in 1849.

503 See also: Pál Szontagh: A Bach-rendszer elleni tevőleges ellenállás első megnyilvánulása: a protestáns pátensmozgalom. In: Credo. Evangélikus Műhely. A Magyarországi Evangélikus Egyház folyóirata. 3 (1997) 1–2. sz.

504 Ibid: 129.

505 Of those who got married, the groom arrived at the altar heavily intoxicated, the men (mostly slightly drunk) entered the parish with their hats on to conduct their business, the churchwarden treated the pastor like a servant.

In 1852, he introduced a new hymnal (much to the dissatisfaction of the parishioners)... He founded a reading society, which increased the literacy levels in the local population. The kindergarten founded by the parish priest in 1853 was a great improvement for the mining and metallurgical families.⁵⁰⁶ The 1855 fire was probably the biggest in the town's history. The destruction was particularly severe in areas where there were wooden houses, including the site of the current town square. The nearby Lutheran church also caught fire and burned down, including the tower. The bells melted.⁵⁰⁷ The parish priest also took part in the reconstruction of the school building and the church. János Sztehlo, a forester, the grandson of the former archdeacon of Prešov, János Sztehlo, and son of the late pastor Gerő Sztehlo of Oláhpaták, Revúca (Róce) and later Banská Bystrica, writes about the latter in the foreword to the photo albums and text collections he made for his sons: "The Sztehlo family is connected with the old Dobsina, because my paternal grandfather's brother, András Sztehlo (who later became a pastor of Buda), was a pastor here from 1844 to 1857 and got married here. [...] It was during his time here that the church baptistry was built, and which is still called as the Sztehlo boat. [...] Dobsina, winter 1966–67".⁵⁰⁸

András Sztehlo was elected to Lučenec in 1857. His first task was to solve the financial problems of the poor parish: he collected donations from abroad and from the wealthier members of his parish. But in 1859 the church tower was struck by lightning and burnt down. The parish had a big problem getting a new roof. András Sztehlo founded the Men's and Women's Relief Society and also established contact with the Adolf Gustáv Association⁵⁰⁹, regularly attending its annual meetings. As in Dobšiná, he developed the community in Lučenec, enlarging the parish and making education his heart's work. The parishioners in Dobšiná pleaded in vain for András Sztehlo to return after the death of their parish priest, but he stayed in Lučenec. He also tried to maintain good relations with the pastors of other denomi-

506 Ibid: 162.

507 *Dobšiná – 100 rokov požiarnej ochrany 1875–1975*. Vydal MsNV v Dobšinej pre Dobrovoľný požiarň zbor v Dobšinej pri príležitosti 100 výročia organizovanej dobrovoľnej požiarnej ochrany. Len pre internú potrebu. 25.

508 János Sztehlo: *Dobsina és Vidéke képekben és költeményekben*. Manuscript: winter 1963–64. Volume 1. 1.

509 An association founded in Germany in the 19th century to support Protestant (Calvinist and Lutheran) congregations – digital publication, available at: <https://www.arcenum.com/hu/online-kiadvanyok/Lexikonok-a-pallas-nagy-lexikona-2/g-A5BD/gusztav-alf-egyesulet-B50D/>, downloaded 22 November 2024.

nations. In 1864, he was elected archdeacon of Nógrád County. At this time, Pan-Slavic tendencies were also emerging in Nógrád, which he was able to suppress even in their chirality.

In 1865, he accepted an invitation from the Buda Evangelicals, who were founded in 1844.⁵¹⁰ At that time (1865), the majority of the Lutherans in Buda were German-speaking, so the services were held in that language.

Hungarian sermons were preached every fourth Sunday and the day after major holidays. András Sztehlo began his ministry in Buda, as in other places, by reviving neglected education, and the Buda Lutheran Primary School soon became a model educational institution. Of course, the Adolf Gustáv Association, from which the pastor received considerable support for Buda, played a major role in this - and further improving the financial situation of the congregation. In 1873, he resigned from his post, citing health problems and declaring that he had 'had enough of preaching'. However, he remained in contact with the Adolf Gustáv Association until 1884, distributing the aid he had received from them. However, when he learnt that some bishops did not approve of a non-clergyman handling the aid, he resigned from this post as well.⁵¹¹ After his retirement, András Sztehlo worked as a writer. His son Kornél Sztehlo, the author of the family history, highlights his work "Evangelical Christian Doctrine of Religion", which appeared in the 1850s and was published in nine editions until 1906. "After the death of Sz. A., the family donated the work to the András Sztehlo Foundation, which was administered by the Buda Evangelical Church and established by the family. The proceeds of the last two editions were donated to the foundation. The purpose of the foundation is to cultivate the faith of children attending confirmation classes by distributing religious books and to clothe poor confirmands".⁵¹²

The retired pastor lived and worked with his family for another 26 years and celebrated his golden wedding anniversary with Aurelia Sárkány in 1895. He was 83 when he had an accident and broke his leg. The operation, which the doctors deemed necessary, took its toll on the old man's frail body, and he died in October 1899.⁵¹³

510 Kornél Sztehlo: *Kétszáznegyven esztendő...* Ibid: 165–171.

511 Ibid: 172–173.

512 Ibid: 179.

513 Ibid: 190.

The dynasty continues

Kornél Sztéhlo documented the history of the family until the death of his father, András Sztéhlo, in October 1899. None of the Buda priest's children or grandchildren entered the priesthood. Only the third generation, Gábor, born in 1909, chose the priesthood.

We now know that the pastoral dynasty founded by Mathias Stehlo in the seventeenth century did not end in October 1899.

The family tree shows that András Sztéhlo had no pastors among his six children or grandchildren. In 1909, the grandson of Kornél Sztéhlo – the author of *Two Hundred and Forty Years in the Service of the Church* –, Gábor, the pastor who saved Jews, was born.

Gábor Győző, the fourth child of Kornél Sztéhlo's eldest son Aladár and his wife Márta Haggemacher, was registered as Jenő Béla. In 1938, Aladár Sztéhlo was promoted to the rank of soldier and had to hungarianise his surname, so the whole family adopted the name Szenczy. In 1940, Gábor and his younger brother Aladár were adopted by their uncle Dezső Sztéhlo, thus regaining the name Sztéhlo.

As the present study is about Gábor Sztéhlo's ancestors, we will not go into detail about his work as a Jewish saviour.

The Side Branch of the Sztéhlo Pastors

Of the three sons of Archdeacon János Sztéhlo of Petrograd, András is a direct descendant of Gábor, who saved nearly 2,000 Jews from certain death in 1944.

In addition to András, two younger brothers – József and János – also chose the priesthood.

From Petrőc to Dunagálos

József (1828–1897) was the youngest. He was educated in Petrőc, Vrbas (Serbia, Vojvodina) and then studied law and theology in Bratislava. After a short period as a chaplain, he studied at the universities of Vienna, and Greifswald in Germany, in 1851. He returned home unwell. After Greifswald, his chronic laryngeal problems could not be cured in Pest, Vienna or Prague. This made him want to give up the priesthood and look for a political job,

but his 'suspicious'⁵¹⁴ behaviour prevented him from being employed anywhere. Seeing his excellent academic results, the Lyceum in Sopron offered him a job, but he declined because of his illness, and from 1853, when his voice had somewhat improved, he taught in Banská Štiavnica for two years. Having recovered his voice, he entered the priesthood and was elected administrator of his native village alongside his father. However, after two years, much to his father's regret, he accepted an invitation from the parish of Dunagálos (Glozsán, Serbia, Vojvodina), located 10 km from Petróc. He soon married Jozefa Mokry. They had four daughters. He was also highly respected in public life – he was elected to Parliament in 1861 – but a lack of family and homesickness prevented him from settling in Pest and he resigned his seat. He himself voted against Pentecost, but the Evangelical Church, thanks to the work of Pan-Slavic agitators, accepted it in 1865. This decision made József Sztehlo ill, and it was only after a year of medical treatment that he returned to the ministry. He was elected archdeacon of the Bács-Szerém diocese, but the ethnic strife there caused him to relapse into depression and he resigned after two years of service. It was not until 1870 that the church authorities accepted his resignation. From then on he was constantly ill and died on 30 July 1897 in Zombor (Sombor, Serbia, Vojvodina).⁵¹⁵

From Petróc to Prešov

János, the middle child of András Sztehlo, was born in 1824. After his school days in Újverbás, he studied at the lyceum in Sopron and then at the college in Prešov. He began his pastoral career in Petróc, but after only one and a half months of service he was called to Prešov to replace Mór Kolbenheyer. He served in this town in eastern Slovakia for 50 years. From 1864 to 1895, he was also an archdeacon. He was particularly concerned with the guardianship of children and was appointed president of the diocesan guardianship office. When the need arose, after the death of Superintendent Czékus, he led the bishop's office in an exemplary manner for four months. "János Sztehlo was also considered for the episcopal election, but the bad trait of the Sztehlo family, that of not being able to assert themselves due

⁵¹⁴ In 1849, during the War of Independence, when Mór Perczel, who was occupying the parish of Petróc, needed a reliable courier, the parish priest recommended his 20 year old son, who was returning home at the time, and he successfully fulfilled the order. Ibid: 138-139.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid: 140-141.

to their excessive modesty, despite their intrinsic value and vocation, was more pronounced in him, and the district elected Paul Zelenka as bishop.”⁵¹⁶ The death of his beloved wife, Matild Kéler, in 1894 devastated him, and he retired in 1896 after 50 years of service. He spent his old age with his children in Banská Bystrica. He died in 1912.⁵¹⁷

Gerő Sztéhlo (1865–1942)

The following was written with the great help of Gerő Sztéhlo’s grandson, Ákos Schermann, who still resides in Hungary, and who provided me not only with the data but also with Árpád Markó’s memoirs.⁵¹⁸ The author of the 1959 manuscript is Gerő Sztéhlo’s nephew. Gerő, born in 1865, was one of the children of János Sztéhlo, pastor and archdeacon of Prešov. After finishing secondary school, Gerő studied theology in Prešov and then in Halle. Upon returning to Hungary, he worked alongside his father in the parish of Prešov for a while. During this time, he was also an assistant pastor in Lőcse (Levoča). In 1890, the young pastor, who spoke three languages – Hungarian, German and Slovak – and was familiar with the Slovak liturgy, which differed slightly from the Hungarian version, was elected to Oláhpaták (Vlachovo) and its neighbouring Gočovo. He married Klára Szontagh in 1891.⁵¹⁹ They had two children – János and Éva – during their ministry there, but the little girl died at the age of 10 months. Gerő Sztéhlo worked in Oláhpaták for seven years, building a new school, among other things. In 1897, when the pastorate in Banská Bystrica became vacant, the highly capable pastor from Oláhpaták applied for the position and was appointed. The Sztéhlo family lived in one wing of the one-storey parsonage, and two more daughters, Rózsa (1898) and Borbála (1901), were born during their time there.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid: 142.

⁵¹⁷ “Our Faculty was deeply saddened to hear the sad news of the death of retired Archdeacon Pastor János Sztéhlo on 26 March. The Faculty has cherished the glorious memory of this man of great spirituality and his merits in the pastoral care of our church and school for more than half a century.” – read in the 2011/12 Bulletin of the Eperjesi Ágostai Hitvallású Elemi Nép- és Polgári Leányiskola – digital publication, available at https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/Eperjes_07843_07852_1911/?query=id.+sztehlo+J%C3%A1nos+-+hal%C3%A1a&pg=40&layout=s . Retrieved 21 November 2024 from .

⁵¹⁸ Árpád Markó (1885–1966), colonel, military historian, grandson of János Sztéhlo, archdeacon of Eperje. His parents were Sándor Markó, a lawyer and notary from Roszno, and Anna Sztéhlo (Ákos Schermann)

⁵¹⁹ Daughter of Márton Szontagh, the owner of the mine in Dobsina.

The young pastor slowly began to flourish. He preached in Hungarian, German and Slovak. He founded the Bethlen Gábor Association, a Protestant society for literary and cultural events, and soon they had their own building. A bust of Gábor Bethlen was placed above the gate of the one-storey house on the main street. In the summer of 1898, the flag of the society was unfurled in a ceremony. The Hungarian magazine *Magyarország* reported on the event, noting that the church was filled to capacity for the unusual occasion.⁵²⁰

During his 36 years in ministry, he became a respected figure in Banská Bystrica, and a respected member of the Lutheran clergy in Felvidék (Upper Hungary). During the First World War, he and his wife became involved in the work of the Red Cross. In addition to providing spiritual support, they also provided financial assistance to the families of those killed at the front. During the First Czechoslovak Republic, Gerő Sztehlo remained at the head of his congregation. Because he spoke perfect Slovak, he was loved by the Slovak-sensitive population of the town, but he was also an exemplary member of the Hungarian community. He retired in 1933. Ákos Schermann keeps a photo of his grandfather's memorial service held in Banská Bystrica, which commemorates the death of the beloved pastor, 91 years later. The retired pastor spent his days in Dobšiná, in the family nest called Zott, while taking care of the affairs of the local Hungarian Evangelical congregation. His death in 1942 was regarded by the Szlovenszkói Magyar Evangélikus Szövetség as its greatest loss.

⁵²⁰ The Archbishop and Deputy Archbishop of the county, the Archdeacon and members of Parliament also attended the event. The wife of the patron of the association, Tódor Stadler, was the flag bearer, accompanied by 55 bridesmaids and groomsmen in festive costumes. Pastor Gerő Sztehlo, president of the association, gave the keynote speech. The gold embroidered flag was unveiled by the Evangelist Pastor Samuel Mikler and the speech of thanks was given by the Vice-President of the Association, Károly Benyáts. The church ceremony was followed by a lunch for 300 people in the large hall of the Savings Bank. In the evening, the Association's singing group serenaded the flag mothers and 250 couples danced the quadrille in the main hall of the Savings Bank – the flag-raising ceremony ended with a ball. In: *Magyarország*, 23 August 1898, Volume 5, Number 233. 8 – digital publication, available at: https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/Magyarorszag_1898_08/?query=sztehlo+Ger%C5%91&pg=335&layout=s. downloaded 25 November 2024.

The new generation

In addition to Gábor, the Saviour of the Jews, there were two other pastors in the Sztéhlo family. One of them was Gerő Sztéhlo's grandson: Mátyás (1925–1996), the eldest son of János, a forestry engineer born in Oláhpartak, who in 1959, as Árpád Markó remembers, was the pastor of the Slovak-speaking Lutheran parish of Sámsonháza near Salgótarján, thanks to his knowledge of Slovak.

Even today, we can trace the descendants of Sztéhlo: the grandson of Schermann Szilárdné Borbála (Gerő Sztéhlo's daughter), Gábor Schermann (1970–) is the pastor of the Lutheran congregation in Tatabánya.

Epilogue

Above, we have presented the lives and works of the ancestors of Gábor Sztéhlo, the pastor Saviour of the Jews. Over the past 350 years, the descendants of the Brezno family have followed an interesting path that eventually led them to Hungary. It is also worth mentioning that Mátyás Sztéhlo (1925–1996), a pastor from Bükk, and his brothers, who were university graduates, stayed in Slovakia with their families.

When we look back at the work of the Sztéhlo pastors, we can say that in every age they fulfilled the tasks of their vocation. They built schools and churches, educated and trained people, and although they were present in public life, they never sought fame. Such were the ancestors of Gábor Sztéhlo, whose philanthropic deeds make him stand out among the members of the pastoral dynasty. May his memory be blessed.

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