

## **EFFORTS FOR RETAINING AND ESTABLISHING THE INSTITUTIONS OF THE REFORMED DIOCESE OF KIRÁLYHÁGOMELLEK (1920 – 1940)**

**Key-word:** Reformed Diocese of Királyhágómellék, Sulyok Istvan, Reformed Diocese of Tiszántúl, Committee, Synod, Institute for Pensions, Common Theology, Foundations, Appendix.

In formulating the concept of this thesis, the main consideration was that the inventory of the events of the past one hundred years of church history should aim to fill certain gaps. It is not a matter of reworking topics that have been written over and over again, but of bringing to light the content and spirit of archival documents that have been lying dormant in archives and have largely remained unprocessed. In addition to the processing, organisation and use of the archival material, the social, political and ecclesiastical context of the time was just as important in the preparation of the thesis.

If we search for the history of the Reformed Diocese of Királyhágómellék, the name of only three authors comes up: Béla Csernák<sup>1</sup>, János Molnár<sup>2</sup> and Etelka Rácz. However, much more modest events than the establishment and operation of a diocese receive more attention. These authors, in addition to their own concept, could only tangentially deal with situations outside their own subject, such as the conditions for maintaining institutions and creating new ones.

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to examine how the churches which had previously been separated from their central and regional institutions were able and willing to become institutionalised, and how they were or were not given the opportunity to become institutionalised. In the light of the above - see the lack of relevant works on church history and the subject of this essay - the writing of the following essay has relied mainly on reading, organising, interpreting and presenting archival documents. The term 'preservation' in the title of the essay precedes the term 'foundation'. The logical explanation for this is that in the part of the Reformed Diocese of Tiszántúl, which later became the Királyhágómellék, schools and religious institutions had to be maintained from Temesvár to Nagyvárad and Máramarossziget before new ones were founded. The earliest that new institutions could be founded was in the years after the mid-1920s.

The first years of the newly-formed diocese were a time when the new situation that had brought about its formation was only temporary. And temporary changes required temporary solutions. Temporary, ad hoc bodies, in this case committees of all kinds. These committees (solutions), which were intended to be temporary, did not become more developed over time.

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1 Béla CSERNÁK: Data on the History of the Reformed Diocese of Királyhágómellék (Oradea), Debrecen, (2007).

2 János MOLNÁR: The History of the Reformed Diocese of Királyhágómellék, 1920-1942, Oradea, (2001).

Even in their personal composition, they can only be linked to the same few people. However, time has been inexorable and the committees have become inadequate to the task for which they were set up on a provisional/temporary basis. At least six committees were created at the time of the formation of the Reformed Diocese of Királyhágómellék: the Inter-Denomination Committee, the Vote Resolution Committee, the Relief Committee, the Inner Mission Committee, the Twelve Committee, the Doctrinal Committee. After the creation of the temporary, transitional committees, the institutions that were essential to the functioning of the changed circumstances were set up. Thus were born: the Institute for Pensions, the Synod, the Supreme Court of the Church, the Women's Federation, the Common Theology, the Foreign Mission, the Foundations. Thus, as a second step in the development, the Reformed Church of Romania was established, comprising a common institutional system with the Transylvanian Reformed Church District. In the years of creating institutions, the Reformed Diocese of Királyhágómellék suffered losses in retaining them and, also, a change of direction. One such loss was the Máramarossziget Law Academy, which moved to Hódmezővásárhely in 1921. And a significant change of direction was in the establishment of the Pension Institute as an independent institution, which had been planned as a joint institution until the last minute, and the establishment of a synod instead of a convent.

The section indicating the literature used refers to the relevant materials of the Archives of the Transylvanian Reformed Diocese and the relevant documents and archival fonds of the Archives of the Reformed Diocese of Tiszántúl. In the archives mentioned above, it was possible to find and read documents that were relevant to the subject of the thesis, together with many other documents of no historical significance, but which illustrate the routine or unpredictability of life at the time. The organisation of the archival material helped in the writing of this thesis, especially in the Archives of the Reformed Diocese of Tiszántúl, where the documents are sorted by subject and labelled accordingly. The markings after TtREL I.21 - a.1, b, c.1, c.2, d.1, d.2, i, f, h.1, h.2, l.1, p.1, p.4, p.7, p.8 - refer to a subject area and are mostly a guarantee that the archival material there belongs to the same subject area. These markings have also greatly facilitated the accurate footnoting of the documents included in this thesis, possibly allowing a document to be quickly retrieved.

The Appendix section of the essay contains important archival documents which, because of their content, uniqueness or period-specific thoughtfulness, form part of the essay as a whole. These documents have been included at the end of the essay as word-for-word typed versions of the originals, in Hungarian and Romanian, with their archival references. It has rarely been considered in the history of the Reformed Diocese of Királyhágómellék that, after its formal establishment until its reintegration into the Diocese of Tiszántúl on 1 January 1942, the Diocese had a bishop, a notary

and two archdeacons. This meant two long and difficult decades. During this period, the Reformed Diocese of Transylvania has had 3 bishops, 3 chief notaries and several archdeacons.

After reading through the archives, it is clear that from István Sulyok's status as the oldest bishop to his use of the episcopal title, which was often contested by the authorities, he always sought to cooperate with the Reformed (and not only Reformed) church leaders in Transylvania. He and Bishop Károly Nagy served together during the very difficult years between 1920 and 1926. The initial atmosphere of suspicion was counterbalanced by the two's skill and precision. Bishop Károly Nagy of Transylvania went above and beyond to support the dioceses, congregations and ecclesiastical institutions that turned to him for protection, even though they were cut off from the Tiszántúl region. But he never wanted to annex them to the diocese he led. And Sulyok understood that the southern and northern dioceses, which had been cut off from the Tiszántúl, and the educational institutions in their territories, had literally appealed under duress to the Transylvanian Reformed bishop, who was recognised in Romania and had a certain authority, and who was able to give an official voice to the protests of the Reformed Church in the Entities and in Transylvania at a time of serial violations, as opposed to Sulyok, who had been plunged and kept in a crisis of legitimacy. Sulyok's working relationship with Sándor Makkai, who served as bishop from 1926-1936, became cordial. The working relationship, which had a bourgeois upbringing, emphasised formalities and strived for gentility, became a brotherly, intimate, almost friendly relationship in the noble sense of the word. Despite the considerable age difference, Sándor Makkai soon found a common voice with his colleague from Nagyvárad. And Sulyok was not disappointed in the young Transylvanian bishop. Whether it was a matter of disputes with the Theology, scholarships, or the reformation of a mission, Sulyok could always count on Makkai to find a peaceful solution to the dispute.

After the forced departure of Sándor Makkai in May 1936, which was extremely unpleasant and unexpected for Sulyok, his relationship with the new Transylvanian bishop, János Vásárhelyi, was quite reserved. After what had happened to Makkai, this was somewhat understandable. No more common goals were formulated as during the ministry of Károly Nagy, nor were any major joint institutional initiatives undertaken as during the episcopate of Makkai. Moreover, the bishops of the two districts turned away from supporting foreign missionary work, and the annual meetings of the synod concerning both districts were regularly postponed<sup>3</sup>.

Sulyok celebrated the 50th anniversary of his pastoral ministry in 1935. He was fittingly welcomed by both the Theology<sup>4</sup> and the Transylvanian Board. Among the greeters were Sándor

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3 TtREL I.21.p.1. - "the Synod did not take an adjourning decision, but for certain reasons the meetings were postponed for several years, so that it is not a matter of a synodal proclamation, but of a fact, the reason for which I myself cannot explain sufficiently." Letter of Sulyok to János Vásárhelyi, Oradea, 3 September 1937.

4 "I have received the minutes of the meeting of the Honorable Board of Directors of last month 26th, in your

Makkai, who was still bishop at the time, and János Vásárhelyi, who was the chief notary and deputy bishop. The age difference between Sulyok and Makkai was 31 years. The age difference between Sulyok and János Vásárhelyi was 29 years. It would have been difficult to explain the difference in the intensity and empathy of the Sulyok-Makkai, Sulyok-Vásárhelyi relationship by age gap. It is probable that we could rather look for the reasons for the qualitatively different relationship in the personalities of the bishops Makkai and Vásárhelyi and their correspondence with the personality of Sulyok.

The institutionalisation examined in this thesis did not mean the institutionalisation of the Reformed Diocese of Királyhágómellék alone, despite the not insignificant personal conditions mentioned above. For, as mentioned earlier, this period saw the birth of an institution that did not exist before: the Hungarian Reformed Church of Romania. During the organisation and formation of the synod, instead of the formation of the Convent, bishop Sándor Makkai and his colleagues spoke about the union of the two dioceses. By this they did not mean an organisational merger, but the creation of a common framework that would allow joint institutional action to remedy the violations of rights suffered. At the same time, the institutionalisation of the Reformed Diocese of Királyhágómellék (schools, retirement institute) was accompanied by the institutionalisation of the synod, the institutionalisation of the Inner Mission, the Foreign Mission, the training of pastors and the common theology. In other words, a parallel institutionalisation to that of the Királyhágómellék was taking place in the Transylvanian Reformed Diocese. This essay has also tried to explore and briefly outline the personal, inter-ethnic, theological and political-administrative aspects of all these. To this end, the method has sought to reflect not only the institutional history in its narrow sense, but also the changes in the personal, political and economic situation of the historical period.

What still needed to be mentioned - in the light of the archival documents - is the fate of church foundations. In 1930 Sulyok was involved with two foundations, both of which he had already been aware of - the salt foundation set up by Mihály Apaffy I. and the Baldácsy foundation. He was unsuccessful with the first, but the Baron Baldácsy Foundation provided his district with financial resources. This was a diplomatic action by Sulyok, which caused the Reformed Church leaders in the mainland to relax their previous dismissive attitude. The Hungarian Reformed dioceses that had split off beyond Hungary's northern border became independent under the names of the Hungarian Reformed Church of Czechoslovakia, the Szlovenszko Hungarian Reformed Church of Bratislava and Tiszáninnen, and the Reformed Church District of Zakarpattia, while the Hungarian Reformed dioceses that had split off into the Kingdom of Yugoslavia - beyond Hungary's southern border -

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esteemed transcript No. 5261/1936-III, and from them I have noted with deep emotion the completed fact of the resignation of the Most Reverend and Worshipful Bishop Dr. Sándor Makkai from the episcopal ministry, after the news which at first seemed incredible". EREL I.12/1920. (Archives of the Transylvanian Reformed Diocese: Archives of the Board of Directors, "On the affairs of churches and schools belonging to other dioceses under Romanian occupation").

became independent under the name of the Hungarian Reformed Church of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The leaders of three of the newly created dioceses (with the exception of the one in Bratislava) inquired of Sulyok how they could obtain their hoped-for share from the foundation of Baron Baldácsy<sup>5</sup>.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that by the time the Reformed Diocese of Királyhágómellék had been recognised and institutionalised - by 1939 - the period of its history between the two world wars, which is the subject of this essay, had come to an end.

Following a legislative decision of the Universal Convent and the Hungarian Parliament, the Reformed Diocese of Királyhágómellék was merged back into the Reformed Diocese of Tiszántúl on 1 January 1942. This state of affairs, which lasted for five years, meant, apart from the joy of returning home, another forced resignation of the hard-established tether, this time in a double direction: south of Nagyszalonta the dioceses and congregations of the diocese belonged to the Kingdom of Romania, while the territories to the north were returned to the Hungarian kingdom. The political reality between the two kingdoms, regarding Reformed Diocese of Királyhágómellék, could therefore be described as a partial reintegration. The history of the parts north of Nagyszalonta is more or less known, but the fate of the dioceses and congregations south of Nagyszalonta in the years 1940-1946 still needs to be elaborated in detail.