

The Concept of Mission in the Hungarian Reformed Church of Transylvania
1895–1950

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Foreword

Chapter One

Introduction

This thesis attempts to identify, clarify and evaluate the changing concept of missions in the Hungarian Reformed Church in Transylvania¹ with special reference to the modality/sodality models during the years 1895-1950. My first task is to define and explain the key terms in my title.

I will begin by explaining what I mean exactly by the name “Hungarian Reformed Church of Transylvania” as today Transylvania belongs politically and geographically to Romania, not Hungary. This will require a short presentation of the general history and the theological development of the Hungarian Reformed Church (HRC) in these two countries since the Reformation.

Currently the Hungarian Reformed Church is numerically the second largest denomination after the Roman Catholic Church in Hungary and the largest denomination among ethnic Hungarians in Romania. The Reformed Church in both countries shared a common history up until the end of the First World War and the Treaty of Trianon under which Transylvania was annexed to Romania. The church came into existence in the Hungarian nation and from the time of the historical Reformation in the 16th century up until Trianon, the HRC was undivided despite a frequently changing political and geographical context.

Historical background

Hungarian tribes migrating from Asia settled in Europe approximately eleven centuries ago. After the Christianization of these tribes with the help of German monks (the most famous being the martyred Saint Gellért), King Saint Stephen the First established the Hungarian “Christian” state; the bishopric (or District) of Transylvania dates from this time. In the 16th century due to German contacts,

¹ Through this thesis the terms, “The Hungarian Reformed Church in Transylvania” and the “Transylvanian Reformed Church” (TRC) will be used interchangeably.

the teachings of Luther reached the German burgher colonies situated in the Northern and the Eastern (Transylvania) parts of Hungary.

The first students from Hungary attending Wittenberg brought the Reformation back to the country as early as 1524. There were obviously Saxons (Germans) among the first disciples of Luther from Hungary and Transylvania. The national catastrophic defeat suffered at the hands of the Turks at Mohács in 1526 and the occupation of more than half of the country by the army of the Sultadn gave rise to an interpretation among the majority of Hungarians that God was punishing the country for the corruption of the church. Thus the ground was prepared for the Reformation of the church which took place primarily through preaching in the vernacular language by itinerant preachers who spoke in their sermons of the comforting message of the Gospel set against the nationwide disaster. The first most well-known of these preachers, following in the path of the Husite preachers² from a century before, were active as early as the 1530s and included Mátyás Dévai Bíró, Imre Ozorai, Mihály Sztárai, and others, many of whom were among the first martyrs of the Hungarian Reformation. But it was only at the Debrecen Synod of 1567 that the Hungarian Reformed Church adopted the Second Helvetic Confession which marked the establishment of the Calvinistic character of this Protestant church body. By that time, reformed Church Districts (Bishoprics) were being formed in the northern, eastern and western regions of the country, and also in Transylvania and other parts of the country occupied by the Turks. The Ottoman Empire notably showed more religious tolerance toward Protestants than Catholics, considering the latter to be “idol-worshippers.” It happened several times that in public debates between Catholics and Protestants supervised by the Turkish authorities, the Turks sided with the reformed churches. Thus, paradoxically, they helped the cause of the Reformation among the Hungarians, especially in the eastern territories, like Transylvania.

² The reformation of Jan Hus had come to Hungary a century earlier. Two of his followers worked in Transylvania, and later they took refuge in Moldavia. They also translated parts of the New Testament into Hungarian. The München codex of 1466 is famous for containing the four gospels in early Hungarian. The Husite movement sparked a peasant revolution in Eastern and Transylvanian parts of Hungary, under the leadership of the Husite peasant Antal Budai Nagy.

Among the many famous reformers, the best-known Transylvanian was Ferenc Dávid, a Saxon priest from Kolozsvár (Cluj)³, who became the first Lutheran bishop, then the first Reformed bishop and later, toward the end of his life, the first Unitarian (Anti-trinitarian) bishop. He played a key role both in the Saxon and Hungarian Reformation of the Transylvanian area as he spoke both the Hungarian and Saxon languages excellently, as well as classical Latin. Next to this controversial figure the most prominent reformers were the Luther-disciple Mát-yás Dévai Bíró and the Zwinglian Márton Sánta Kálmáncsehi, who was a popular itinerant preacher of the times. So too was Gál Huszár who was also a printer of influential books.⁴ There was also the great theologian, István Szegedi Kis, who wrote the first relevant dogmatics.⁵ The individual most responsible for organizing the church and developing its structure was the famous reformer and bishop of Debrecen, Péter Méliusz. In Transylvania, other key figures include Honterus from Brassó (Brasov), the “Saxon Luther” and Gáspár Heltai (“Heltau”) of Kolozsvár, who published many books in both the Saxon and Hungarian languages, thus exercising an enormous influence on the population and so playing a decisive role in turning them to the teachings of the Reformation. The Lutheran Church of Transylvania adopted Luther’s and Melanchthon’s doctrines and organized their church at the Synod of Erdőd, as early as 1545. Those of Helvetian or Calvinist persuasion, mostly Magyars/Hungarians organized their church at the Synod of Czenger in 1557. But by the 1560s, the majority, due to the overriding influence of the Swiss reformation (mostly through Bullinger, with whom they kept in touch and, later, Theodor Beza), turned to Calvinism; whereas the Saxons of Transylvania stayed loyal to their German-speaking Luther. Thus in the 1560s the Hungarian Reformed Church became organized separately. Doctrinally, they embraced the Heidelberg Catechism and the Second Helvetic Confession written by

³ Most places in Transylvania have distinct Hungarian and Romanian names. In this paper, Romanian names are given in parenthesis the first time the place name occurs.

⁴ Gál Huszár, who was considered “the Reformer of the Hungarian Highlands,” brought his printing-press to Debrecen, the “Hungarian Geneva” in 1561 which provided the opportunity for the many influential theological writings of Bishop Péter Méliusz Juhász to be printed there. Dozens of tracts, anti-Rome polemical books and confessions and church regulations, were published and put in the hands of lay people and the whole of church life in the city tried to follow the pattern that was seen as a model in Zürich and Geneva.

⁵ The ‘*Loci Communes*’ or ‘*Common places/loci*,’ it was published in Latin and was well-known in the West also and even put on the infamous Index of prohibited books by the pope.

Bullinger. Due to the greater influence of Bullinger rather than of Calvin, the Hungarian Calvinist Church's form of government and form of worship became established without the immediate impact of Calvinistic teaching. Ecclesiology and liturgical practice (the usage of antiphons, for example) showed more resemblance to the Roman Catholic and Lutheran Church, while omitting the mass, rather than to the Genevean orientation and practice. However, in any other "loci" or dogma, Calvinism prevailed. For example, at the General Synod of Marosvásárhely (Targu Mures) in 1559, the Reformed Church changed definitively its view from the Lutheran position to the Calvinist concerning the Lord's Supper. The other decisive factor in strengthening the Reformed Church was the translation of the complete Bible⁶ into Hungarian. Gáspár Károli, Reformed minister and Senior ("*esperes*") at Gönc in north-eastern Hungary, together with a number of co-workers, was responsible for this translation which was printed with the aid of rich and powerful magnates at Vizsoly (near Gönc) in 1590. This became, and remains still nowadays, a kind of "Authorized Version" among Hungarians, with only minor revisions throughout the centuries. Similarly, the Psalter, which was the work of Albert Szenczi Molnár and first printed in 1607, is still used and sung by reformed congregations today both in Hungary and in the dismembered parts of the "mother reformed church" spread throughout Romania, Slovakia, Croatia, Serbia, Carpatho-Ukraine, Austria and even among the Hungarian diaspora in America, Western Europe and Australia.

Hungary was one of the richest nations in Europe in the 15th century, but the disastrous defeat at Mohács in 1526 by the Turks left the country in poverty and misery. With the Reformation, a more balanced social, economical and political situation slowly emerged. In the century of the Reformation, town magistrates often took a stand for Protestantism and usually the aristocratic patrons protected their chaplains on their lands, so traveling preachers fleeing from the authorities often found refuge on a Protestant estate. In the 1530s a law was issued which condemned these preachers and the "Lutheran innovators of religion" in general to be burnt at the stake. But due to the general disarray after Mohács, this sentence was seldom enforced.

⁶ After many previous attempts and successes in translating the New Testament and other sections of the Bible.

In Debrecen and its environs, Bishop Méliusz Juhász tried to apply the fruits of Calvinism to public order, social life, law and order, education, and even to the physical welfare of the citizens, fighting against poverty and begging. Similar initiatives took place in Transylvania, first of all in the Lutheran cities, led by Honterus, where the Protestant work ethic produced a remarkable culture.

By the last decade of the 16th century, about 80% of the population, or approximately three and a half to four million people, were Protestants. However, the emerging Counter-reformation during the 17th century, ensured by the Catholic Austrian's driving the Turks out of the western part of the country, turned the tide. It was only in Transylvania, which enjoyed a relative independence through paying tribute to the Ottoman Empire, that Protestants could maintain a majority despite this political pressure. As early as 1606, when the successor of Ferdinand I and Maximilian II the Emperor of Austria, Rudolf II suppressed the religious liberty of Protestants, the Calvinist Prince (Governor) of Transylvania, István Bocskai made an alliance with the Turks and began a war against the Emperor. This resulted in autonomy for Transylvania and guaranteed religious freedom not just for Transylvania, but also for the rest of Hungary, although only briefly. The political independence of Transylvania lasted even when Hungary, including Budapest, was partially occupied by the Turks (a situation that prevailed for almost two centuries) and partially left under the control of the Austrians.

The 17th century was a time of persecution for the HRC. The Jesuit Archbishop, Péter Pázmány, launched a war against the 'Protestant heresy' with the support of the Habsburgs. With the help of King Ferdinand II, Pázmány succeeded in reconverting to Catholicism thirty noble families, with the aim of thus regaining the whole Protestant population. Once the nobles reverted to Catholicism, the peasants were forced to follow, supported by the regulation of "*cuius region, eius religio*/ who owns the region, owns the religion too." Many laws restricted Protestants, offering political, social or economical advantages to those who converted and discriminating against those who remained faithful. In 1673, pastors who resisted this overall attack were summoned before an extraordinary court at Pozsony. There, in the Hungarian Highlands, thirty three Protestant ministers were accused of revolting against the Catholic Church. One minister converted because a royal pardon was offered in return, but the rest chose to resign their ministry. This result encouraged the Catholics so much that more Protestant

ministers and schoolmasters were summoned from throughout Hungary. Two hundred men who refused to convert despite serious threats were imprisoned and sold as galley-slaves. Not until many years later did the Dutch Admiral, Michiel de Ruyter (1607-1676), set them free; of the original two hundred, just forty survived their terrible experience. Thus the so-called 'Decade of Mourning' (1671-1681) in the HRC's history came to an end.⁷

However, some degree of religious persecution lasted until the end of the 19th century; for example, even at the beginning of the 20th century it was not permitted for a Protestant Church to be built on a main street or to have a tower. For all the above reasons, the reformed churches became closely linked with Hungarian nationalism and with the struggle for religious and civil rights throughout the centuries. Thus the "Calvinist religion" was popularly identified as being *the* Hungarian religion, while a Calvinist was considered a true Hungarian. The revolution of 1848-1849, although crushed eventually by the Austrian absolutist power, for a brief two years achieved these civil and religious rights goals, and also once again the re-unification of Transylvania with Hungary. Though defeated by the Habsburgs, the uprising did force some compromises and concessions. Thus in 1867, after much negotiation, an accord was set up with Austria giving birth to the Austrian-Hungarian dualism, or dual monarchy which gave relative independence to Hungary with its own separate Parliamentary system.

Form of church government

The form of church government was very similar to the Lutheran Church, retaining the system of superintendents ("*esperes*") and Bishops. Basically, the consistorial and superintendent system accepted in Germany was followed in Transylvania and Hungary as well. The leading body of the 'consistorium' over church issues was retained the longest in Transylvania. This meant that in cities, the minister together with the magistrates governed the local congregation (a board chaired by the "noble patrons," the feudal landlords in both political and church

⁷ It was only with the dawning of the Enlightenment that a degree of tolerance emerged and the many persecutions eased up somewhat. But it remains a fact that the Hungarian Protestants were the last community in Europe who had to suffer violent persecution from the Roman Catholics even at the end of the 17th century.

issues); and in rural areas, the minister led the congregation together with the landlords. The Puritan and Presbyterian movements of the next (the 17th) century, which reached Hungary sporadically, did not have the same impact as in the Western sister churches, so although this hierarchy was challenged, the already rigidly established church structures remained unaltered. Over the local congregations Decanates (Seniorates or “*esperesség*”) were established as superior authorities, with Seniors or Deans (“*esperes*” or an elder/overseer minister) as their leaders. On the basis of political or geographical areas, or simply in place of former Roman Catholic Dioceses, these Superintendencies later came together and formed church districts or Bishoprics. The leading Superintendent or Senior was then called “Bishop” and his territory organized a General Assembly as their leading body. It was only during the course of the 18th century that, gradually and still with many controversies, the institution of elders (“*presbiter*”) was introduced in local congregations. Toward the end of the century, the elders acquired more representative power not just at a local-congregational level, but also in the Decanates and Bishoprics/Districts where they could be elected and have ruling power together with the “clergy.” Both the Decanates/Seniorates (which is similar to a Presbytery in the Presbyterian churches of the West) and the Districts met in their own synods of a particular area. But there were no national synods from 1646 up till 1881, when a nation-wide synod (or General Assembly) at last could be held. This failure to organize a nation-wide synod earlier was not the fault of the Reformed Church herself. Rather, the reasons were primarily political, due to the Counter-reformation which was supported and encouraged by the Austrian authorities upon the Hungarian nation and because of the limited religious rights of Protestants even in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Doctrinally the TRC stayed faithful to its standards from the time of the Reformation up until the age of Enlightenment. The church embraced the main ideas of the Enlightenment quickly with high hopes that if the religious tolerance of that movement prevailed in society, the Catholics would cease in their persecution. This prepared the way for the influence of Kantian rationalism in the 19th century and, as a result, liberal theology overwhelmingly prevailed toward the end of the century. The Standards were no longer binding and liberal theology gradually eradicated the importance of the Helvetic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism.

In 1622, Gábor Bethlen, the Calvinist prince of Transylvania, founded the Reformed Collegium Academicum in Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia). But in 1662 it was moved to Nagyenyed where it grew with the help and support of British churches. After the reunion of Transylvania with the Hungarian kingdom in 1848, plans were made to establish a university; this eventually opened in Kolozsvár in 1871 but there was no theological faculty. It was only in the 1890s that, in line with the proposal of bishop Domokos Szász, the General Assembly of the Transylvanian District decided to move the Seminary from Nagyenyed to Kolozsvár, the “capital” of Transylvania. Finally in 1895 a Theological Faculty was opened in Kolozsvár, and its five new professors changed the liberal orientation of the whole TRC. There, in the early 1930s, a Barthian orientation prevailed and endured even under the Communist regime. Within the post-World War I Romanian realm, a new church district came into being out of the territory that was transferred to Romania, having its centre in Nagyvárad (Oradea) in the most western part of Transylvania bordering Hungary. The other Transylvanian District retained its centre in Kolozsvár, extending to the centre and eastern parts of Transylvania, as well as to the Hungarian Diaspora churches in the rest of Romania, i.e., the old Romania, called the ‘regats’ (Moldavia, Vlahia, Oltenia)

The Treaty of Trianon after the end of the First World War reduced Hungary to one third of its original size and Transylvania was joined to Romania. The Hungarian Reformed Church was split by the new borders, and the Transylvanian body forced into a new political framework in the 1920s, was cut off both from the mother country and “mother church.” At the same time the church districts located in Slovakia, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, Carpatho-Ukraine and even Austria, were all forcibly separated from what was once a single unified Hungarian Reformed Church denomination.

A new wave of persecution hit the TRC when the Communists came to power. The church found itself in a double minority position, due to its confessional beliefs in the face of Marxist-atheistic ideology, and due to the fact that the vast majority of its members came from the Hungarian ethnic minority. Since the Reformation, the reformed church had maintained many hundreds of schools and ten middle-level institutions. Of these ten, seven were situated in the Transylvanian Church District and three in the Nagyvárad District. With the Communist takeover in the late 1940s, all church schools were nationalized. The TRC

lost more than 400 primary schools and sixteen Reformed Colleges and high schools. Mission organizations, societies, foundations and charity institutions, even the reformed hospital, were nationalized as well. Next, the governing Communist Party gradually but systematically forbade religious education in the existing state schools. Theological education in the Theological Seminary was compromised as the Seminary was drawn slowly under the surveillance of the secret police and state control. Professors who did not collaborate were forced to retire. The building had to be shared with two other Hungarian speaking Protestant churches: the Unitarian and Lutheran. For the TRC, this was a time of struggle for survival and many of its evangelistic and diaconal activity ceased or, at best, went underground. After the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, many ministers and theological professors, also many elders and other church members were imprisoned. Under the pretext that Hungarian reformed people from Romania sympathized with those in Hungary, they were given show trials and put in jail. Among these, because of their strong and non-compromised witness and stand, were members of the CE Union, that movement which, since its beginnings in 1895, channeled revival and missionary activity into the TRC.

Clarifying the rest of the terms

The next term that requires definition and discussion is that of “missions.” I am using the term “missions” interchangeably with that of “mission:” the plural form is more common with evangelicals and the singular more so in an ecumenical context.⁸ Most of the time I will use the singular form when referring to the mission of the Church in a broader sense, and the plural form when referring more to the mission work of the church as expressed primarily in evangelism linked with ministries of mercy, fuelled by a revivalist movement. The Transylvanian theologians in the researched period used the term to denote “home mission” and

⁸ Famous missiologists like Lesslie Newbigin and David Bosch, among others, use these terms in the context of an evangelical and ecumenical interpretation. See for example the consistent usage and interpretation of these terms in Bosch’s epoch-making work: David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission, Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991.

sometimes “foreign mission,” adopted more or less from the German usage of the words.⁹

On the one hand, according to Moreau, in the history of missions an “important development was the dropping of the ‘s’ from ‘missions’ to reflect the unity of the total biblical task of the church.” This kind of self-interpretation of the universal role and calling of the whole church could not be embraced without critical reflection on both evangelical and ecumenical sides. It became clear that “(w)ith the broadness of the term, our concept of the mission of the church will to a large degree depend on our theological orientation rather than an etymological analysis.” On the other hand it is also a historical fact that “(t)he dropping of the final ‘s’ was formalized in ecumenical discussion when the *International Review of Missions* became the *International Review of Mission* in 1970.”¹⁰ But as Moreau noticed, some evangelicals were concerned that dropping the ‘s’ might lead to the loss of commitment to, and action for, world evangelization and church planting.¹¹

It is not possible to speak of a clearly defined theology of missions to which the Reformed Church was committed, neither at a local level, nor in the broader spectrum of the worldwide Church. Nevertheless, I will examine how the varied ideas about missions within the Transylvanian Reformed Church during these years are related to the wider missiological developments in the West in the first half of the 20th century.

How did so many, sometimes, contradictory concepts about mission emerge in a denomination apparently committed to the teachings of the Reformers in its theological orientation? I will focus on why the church did not clarify and harmonize these varied ideas. At the time, they were widely used and put into practice

⁹ In the Hungarian language it was used only in the singular form and no etymological reference ever was ascribed to the differentiation. Meanwhile, I am aware that on the international level there was an historical development of these terms.

¹⁰ Moreau quotes the evangelical theologian George Peters, holding that mission in contrast to missions is “a comprehensive term including the upward, inward and outward ministries of the church.” Peters maintained that missions is the actual work and the practical realization of the mission of the church. See in Scott A. Moreau, ‘Mission and Missions’ in Scott A. Moreau; Harold Netland, and Charles Van Engen (eds.), *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books and, Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2000, pp.636-638. This work will heretofore be referred to as the *EDWM*.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

without clarification; thus later, when measured against the accepted standards and creeds of the Hungarian Reformed Church,¹² they proved vulnerable as few of these ideas and concepts had been assessed vigorously in the light of those reformed doctrines. My concern first of all, was how did traditional Calvinism and Protestant Rationalism, then later, in the early nineteen thirties, Barthianism, affect and shape these concepts? These are some of the questions which we need to investigate in a detailed study of the missiological background.

With these questions in mind, a survey of the dogmatic schools and the practical life of the Hungarian Reformed Church in Transylvania in the period is required; in addition, the political, economical, sociological and historical situation of the region needs to be appreciated in order to understand the theological and missiological trends of the period. This multidisciplinary approach allows me to gain varied perspectives on this complex issue.

From my research, I have discovered that ecclesiology was gradually separated from dogmatics and became a theological keystone for practical theology at the beginning of the 20th century in the theological thinking of the Hungarian Reformed Church in Transylvania. This was in sharp contrast with the position of the "mother church" in Hungary which viewed ecclesiology as the crown, rather than the foundation, of practical theology. This difference in viewpoint occurred when Transylvania was still part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, before its annexation to Romania after World War I.

The sharp divergence between the pre-Reformational versus the post-Reformational Church concept of ecclesiology as expressed in the standards of the Hungarian Reformed Church, distinguished between the *communio sanctorum* or *fidelium* percept, as marking the invisible church, and that of the *mater fidelium* (the mother of the believers).¹³ There is an interesting correspondence between the dogmatic concept of *mater fidelium* and the term *Anyá-szent-egyház* (Mother-holy-church) which is a common phrase used in Hungarian church life. As Dr.

¹² Since the Reformation, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Second Helvetic Confession are accepted as the official Reformed Church standards, not just in Romania, but in Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia, Serbia, Ukraine and all over the world where any outpost of the Hungarian Reformed Church exists.

¹³ On the aspect of the church as *mater fidelium*, or as the mother of believers, see Calvin's *Institutes: IV,1,4*.

János Victor, the famous theologian and missiologist of the researched period put it:

The Church as considered to be “the mother of believers” is a deeply rooted idea with us. The usual solemn expression used for naming the Church in our language is: “anyaszentegyház” which means “holy mother church.” Lately, however, some of us after restudying the Biblical teaching about the Church have come to feel that there is a consideredness in conceiving of the Church in this way which needs guarding against. It leads to a thinking about the Church according to which the Church seems to be something floating above the heads of the individual believers. The institutional aspect of the Church’s life receives thereby an undue stress at the expense of its personal aspect. This tendency can be traced clearly with us to the influences of Roman Catholicism. [*Italics, LH.*]¹⁴

Victor admitted (without explaining why this happened) that this tendency exists due to the influence of Roman Catholicism on the Hungarian Reformed Church and argued that it led to an “undue stress” on “the institutional aspect of the Church’s life.” He also stated that this phenomena prompted some of his contemporaries when “restudying the Biblical teaching about the Church” to guard and warn against such an interpretation of the Church. In other words, it became a challenge to the accepted ecclesiology in the reformed churches at the Eastern end of Europe, namely among the Hungarians. But I think less attention was given to the balanced view of Victor in his time as is seen in his further ruminations on this ecclesiological point:

The “motherly” character of the Church, i.e. the individual believer’s dependence on the Church’s life, is evidently a Biblical idea. (Although the wide use of the “mother” metaphor itself has only a very slight Biblical foundation.) But the teaching of the Bible seems to us to balance this idea with that of the Church’s dependence upon the life of the individual believers. It is the distinguishing mark of all organic life that the whole and the parts, the body and its members, are interdependent for their life.

¹⁴ See in: János Victor, *Answers to the Questionnaire concerning “The Nature of the Church” from the point of view of the Hungarian Reformed Church*, in: The Archives of the Hungarian Reformed Church, Trans-Danubian District, Ráday College, Budapest, File C/99., p.2. I found this manuscript in typewritten form, with no indication as to date or from where the Questionnaire had originated. The manuscript was written in English and is a careful and concise presentation of the Hungarian Reformed Church.

“It is in and through the Church that the individual is Christian” is a statement, the truth of which is made complete only by adding also that, “it is in and through the Christianity of its individual members that the Church is really the Church.” [Underline and quotation marks given by the author in the manuscript.]¹⁵

I will demonstrate later in this paper what an important impact the imbalanced and more institutional interpretation of the “holy Mother church” had on the Transylvanian concept of missions. However, later in the 19th century the concept of the *Volkskirche*¹⁶ (*Nominal Church or so called “Latitudinarian Church” intermingled with the “Confessional” Church*), was introduced and overrode the reformed concept or, more accurately, the concept as stated in the official standards and creeds of the Hungarian Reformed Church. Toward the end of the 19th century a gradual but increasing emphasis was placed on the concept of the Church as an external organization or institution.¹⁷ The significance of the invisible church vis-à-vis the visible/institutional one was not completely ignored, but it was given less due prominence. This did not represent a turning back to the Roman Catholic concept, yet it was a confusing compromise which led to many misunderstandings. It is not our task here to examine the history and process of this situation as it has been undertaken by many church historians.¹⁸ Our task is merely to focus on the shift in thought produced by such a view, especially as it related to the concept and practice of missions.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ It can be interpreted as *folk-church*, or *territorial church* (according to the old formula “*cuius regio, eius religio*”) which according to missiologists, like the German Gustav Warneck (1834-1910), is treated as the goal of all missionary work, although it would begin with individual conversions, even in his vision.

¹⁷ There was a National Synod held in 1881 and efforts were made to unite all of the bishoprics (or church Districts, as they are called in the Reformed Church) under one synod. Such a gathering had not been possible before as the privileged Roman Catholic Church, being a National Church, exercised a wide and major influence which prohibited many activities among Reformed believers.

¹⁸ There are many important works, most of which I will quote in the course of this dissertation and a fuller list provided in the Bibliography. The most important related works, however, were written by contemporaries among whom were Dr. Gyula Forgács, Dr. László Ravasz, Dr. Pál Podmaniczky, Dr. Alexander (Sándor) Czeglédy, Dr. Dezső László, Dr. Sándor Makkai, Dr. Lajos Imre, Dr. Jenő Horváth, Dr. Imre Révész, Dr. Béla Vasady, Dr. Géza Nagy. Among more recent authors see Dr. István Juhász, Dr. József Barcza, Dr. János Bütösi, Dr. Károly Fekete, Dr. A.M. Kool, Dr. Sándor Fazakas, Dr. István Bogárdi Szabó, and others.

The *Volkskirche* idea corresponds to some extent with the medieval concept of Christendom and will be explored later. In a post-Christendom world, the Transylvanian theologians tried to maintain the traditional concept of Christendom against the backdrop of a still very traditional and feudalistic structure. Due to this complex socio-historical reality, Gyula Forgács could state that the Hungarian interpretation of mission and, specifically, the concept of home mission, is radically different from both the Anglo-Saxon and German interpretation of the same idea. Forgács remarks, for example, that in the German Protestant churches mission work is conceived by the definition of Wichern, who declared that home mission serves in the area where official bodies of the church cannot reach. As a contrast to this, according to Forgács, the home mission in our church is the work of the church itself.¹⁹ Dr. Kool criticized this idea which, according to her study,²⁰ could lead to a broadening and vague interpretation of the concept of mission, especially in the works of the Transylvanian theologians, remarkably in the ecclesiology of Dr. Sándor Makkai. This problem will be discussed and evaluated later on in the course of the thesis.

The impetus to preserve the quasi-Catholic idea was fueled in part by the unchallenged traditional state of Romania, even after World War I. After the annexation of Transylvania by Romania, according to the terms of the Treaty of Trianon,²¹ the enormous responsibility of preserving the ethnic culture and Protestant heritage of the newly formed Hungarian minority, in what was now Romanian territory, fell upon the Hungarian Reformed Church in Transylvania almost as a moral *cathegoricus imperativus*. Alongside the Church's primary mandate of preaching the gospel, a new "missionary mandate" emerged which presented the safeguarding of Hungarian ethnic values as a God-given moral duty. Imperceptibly, the lines of demarcation between preservation of a historic

¹⁹ Gyula Forgács, *A református misszió irányelvei, Különös tekintettel a magyar református egyház jelenlegi helyzetére* (The Principles of Reformed Mission, in view of the present situation of the Hungarian Reformed Church), *Különlenyomat a "Reformáció" XI. Évf. 2-4. számából*, Nyomatott a ref. főiskola könyvnyomdájában, Sárospatak, 1931, pp.3-4.

²⁰ See in: A.M. Kool, *God Moves in a Mysterious way, The Hungarian Protestant Foreign Mission Movement (1756-1951)*. Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1993.

²¹ The Treaty of Trianon was signed on June 4th, 1920, to regulate the post-WWI situation of Hungary. By its terms, Hungary had to cede several territories to Romania, including Transylvania. For the politico-historical details, see also the Chronological History Map of Transylvania in the researched period in the Appendix.

Protestant tradition and an ethnic tradition became blurred; the result was a distorted concept of mission. The mandate of historical preservation of Hungarian Protestant culture and values overlapped with, and gradually even became a substitute for, the mandate expressed in the Great Commission.

Another important factor which played a decisive role in the formation of a somehow distorted mission concept in the thinking of the Transylvanian Reformed Church was a practical amnesia regarding the teaching of the Reformation concerning the *universal priesthood of all believers*. Against her own creeds and church standards, the Reformed Church tended to view the church as being more represented by its clergy rather than by its lay members. If we accept the classical formula of missiology, that the power of any effective mission work resides in its revival spirituality²² and lay involvement,²³ then clericalism must have been a hindrance in developing a possible missionary mindset in the Transylvanian Reformed Church.

The unsuccessful attempts for a Puritan breakthrough in the 17th century²⁴ in the Hungarian Reformed Church, compared with the relative success of Puritanism in the West, may also have contributed to the increasing notion that the church as a visible institution was somehow preeminent over the invisible aspect of the body of Christ. This was paralleled by the way in which the church was viewed primarily through its clergy rather than through its lay members.²⁵

²² See for example in Dr. J. Edwin Orr, *The Re-Study of Revival and Revivalism*. Pasadena, CA, USA: School of World Mission, and in the extensive research done by the Oxford Association for Research in Revival or Evangelical Awakening. According to the terminology accepted by these scholars, the term 'revival' was adopted for believers and "awakening" for community: "(a)s the sense of the word 'revival' suggests a renewal of life among those already possessing it, and the sense of the word 'awakening' suggests a coming alive to spirituality" for the whole community, even outside the church walls.

²³ Or, "theologically speaking," the whole body of Christ functioning and serving Christ.

²⁴ The rise and fall of Hungary's indigenous Puritan movement will be discussed briefly in chapter three.

²⁵ Yet, some Transylvanian Reformed theologians of the period, mostly from the revivalist wing, criticized this clergy-centered view of the church. They observed that, paradoxically, when the definition of the church is narrowed to mean only the clergy, the church becomes a *Volkskirche*, wide enough to include many with no real commitment or confessional adherence; while the broadening of the definition of the church to mean the universal priesthood of all believers, may result in a smaller church, numerically speaking, but a church that is made up of those personally committed to the faith.

Without the counter-check of the Puritan renewal or of any other major revivals later, the Church became strongly institutionalized. Before WWI, the influence of Pietism and several revival movements were widespread in Hungary, while they were only sporadic and even somewhat accidental in Transylvania. After the war, the minority position of Hungarians and the fact that the Church in Transylvania remained ethnically Hungarian, gave another impetus to the divergent development of the Reformed Church there compared with Hungary. One observes a slight return to the Roman Catholic Church's pre-Reformation identification of the Church with the Kingdom of God (stressed much more before the 2nd Vatican Council). If the Church is the Kingdom of God on earth, then the temptation is to view the visible church as somehow inseparable from a given ethnic group found in a given region where the church is. That has been the case for the Hungarian Reformed Church in Romania. The identification of the Church with the Kingdom of God stressed baptism, with a corresponding diminishment of teaching about regeneration. The shift from regeneration to baptism as a sure mark of belonging rather to the church, and less to the covenanted people of God, was not dictated by any church confession, but unconsciously, it acquired this meaning among ordinary church goers. To be Hungarian in Romania was emphasized by one's being born and baptized in the Hungarian Reformed Church in Transylvania. This emphasis on ethnic identity hindered an interest in missions; consequently, the Church became defensive, inward looking and with no room for revivals or the "home-mission movement," represented primarily by the rise and formation of the CE Associations. It took at least 30 years of struggle before Dr. Lajos Imre could "churchinize"²⁶ the home-mission movement and interest in

²⁶ Kool, following Ravasz, uses the term 'churchinize' to mean incorporation of the independent mission societies and their energies into the church. Bishop Dr. László Ravasz and, later, Dr. Sándor Makai tried to achieve this in Hungary; Professor Lajos Imre and, later, Dezső László tried the same in Transylvania (all four were Transylvanians, but first Ravasz in 1921, and then Makai in 1936 moved to Hungary). To understand their effort we are quoting Kool from p.306: "To further the cause of reviving the official church Ravasz laid down a program of church renewal as an attempt to bridging the existing gap and to 'indigenize' the work done by the home mission societies. The antagonism between the official church and the societies originated in mutual suspicion. The home mission societies were sharp in their criticism of the churches, in which they saw the greatest hindrance in their work. Ravasz felt on the other hand that they often "built the Kingdom of God in spite of the church." In this situation he laid down his program to "churchinize the Christians belonging to the societies by way of

missions could be domesticated. The shift took place but distorted the concept of a missiologically consistent model, as envisioned by Dr. István Kecskeméthy. This thesis will focus heavily on the work and thinking of Imre and Kecskeméthy, two of the main figures in the Transylvanian mission movement.

Nevertheless, the whole church was influenced positively (the task of “missionizing” the church was relatively achieved),²⁷ although it happened slowly. Unfortunately the Communist takeover of Romania after World War II made any legal and open missions activity of the Church impossible in the 1950s.

Aims of the thesis

Having defined key terms in my title, I now want to discuss my aims in researching this subject. My first aim is to examine and explore changing attitudes to mission in my church which is the Hungarian Reformed Church of the Transylvanian District in Romania. I am an ordained minister of this church and I belong to an ethnic and religious minority in that country. Given the fact that 85% of the Romanian population belongs to the Eastern Orthodox Church, as a Protestant, I consider myself a minority in a region (Transylvania) that was once Protestant and Reformed in majority. In 1993 I was charged by the Bishop of Transylvania to become a missionary pastor in the Transylvanian District, specializing in ministry to alcoholics and addicts of all kinds, so I established the Reformed Rescue Mission (*Református Mentő Misszió*) for addicts. This aroused my curiosity about the tradition of missions work of any type in the history of my church. I was also interested in exploring the concept of missions in my church from the earliest date possible and comparing this with missions concepts of other Protestant and Reformed churches world wide. Such research and evaluation of the data, both historically and in the present, was necessary in order to get a better perspective on my own day to day work.

evangelizing the church” (*az egyesületi keresztyénség egyháziasítását az egyház evangélizálása útján*). (cf. pp.306-307.)

²⁷ It was originally the ambitious program of the famous theological professor and later bishop, Dr. László Ravasz, to “missionize” the church and to churchinize missions.” A fuller account of what Ravasz meant by this and to what extent it was successful will be given later.

I grew up in the church and have some knowledge of the life of the underground Church as I was involved in youth work when it was still banned by the state authorities in Romania. In 1991, after the collapse of the Communist regime, some friends and I started a youth ministry which targeted university students. Today, this is known as the Genezius Association, the youth ministry of the revived CE Union, with headquarters in Kolozsvár, the largest university centre in the country, and operating in other cities in Transylvania also. That same year, with many of the same friends, I helped found Koinónia Publishing in order to reach out to intellectuals and to communicate the Gospel to them appropriately. In 1993, exactly 100 years after it was first founded, we restarted the *Kis Tükör*²⁸ family magazine of Dr. István Kecskeméthy, which is committed to Home and Foreign Mission work. I am still on the board of editors and involved in the publishing policy of the magazine and of the books. In 1996, I established the Bonus Pastor Foundation to support counseling and therapy work among alcoholics and addicts, and in order to build a Therapy and Rehabilitation Centre on the estate of a remote medieval chateau in the village of Ozd, a couple of hours drive from Kolozsvár. I am also involved in organizing the City Mission network in Transylvania as Romania was invited in 2005 to join the European Association of Urban Missions (EAUM).

My interest in academic research in missions work in Transylvania is also fuelled by the example of my late father, Dr. Jenő Horváth, a professor of Practical Theology who set up the first missiology department at the Theological Seminary of Kolozsvár from 1949 to 1959 when he was forcibly retired. He was a disciple of both Kecskeméthy and Imre, the two key figures of missiology in the arena of Transylvanian theological thinking in the first half of 20th century. As a student in Basel in 1936, he was also a disciple of Barth and Thurnaysen. He became

²⁸ A complete list of Hungarian periodicals referred to in the paper, and their English equivalent, is as follows: *Az Út* (The Way), *Egyház és misszió* (Church and Mission); *Egyházi Figyelő* (Church Observer), *Egyházi Újság* (Church News), *Erdélyi Figyelő* (Transylvanian Observer), *Erdélyi Protestáns Lap* (Transylvanian Protestant Paper), *Értesítő* (Herald), *Kálvinista Világ* (Calvinist World), *Kis Tükör* (Little Mirror), *Magyar Protestáns Almanach* (Hungarian Protestant Almanac), *Napsugár* (Sunshine), *Protestáns Egyházi és Iskolai Lap* (Protestant Church and School Paper), *Protestáns Közlöny* (Protestant Bulletin), *Protestáns Szemle* (Protestant Review), *Reformáció* (Reformation), *Református Lelkészek Lapja* (Journal of Reformed Ministers), *Református Szemle* (Reformed Review), *Református Világszemle* (Reformed World Review), *Theológiai Szemle* (Theological Review).

involved, not just in the theory, but in the practice of mission in the 1930s when he was the general secretary for Foreign Missions, supporting the ministry of his friend Rev. Sándor Babos, the only Transylvanian missionary of the Transylvanian Reformed Church to Manchuria between the two world wars. My father, together with six other ministers, some of whom later became well-known theologians and church leaders,²⁹ initiated the informal missions society of Transylvania, called the Friends of Foreign Missions.³⁰ Although this thesis will primarily focus on the thought and work of Imre and Kecskeméthy, the work of my father and two of his colleagues, Dr. Dezső László, the general secretary for missions after 1950, and Rev. Sándor Babos, the missionary to Manchuria, will also receive consideration.

My second aim in this dissertation is to explore how my church theologized concerning mission between 1895 and 1950. In exploring the various attempts to define mission work theologically and to understand changes in the concept of missions, and also paying attention to different interpretations of the missions concept, I am looking for ways to strengthen my church's work of mission both at

²⁹ They were nicknamed and known later as the "*Hetes Társaság*," the Society of Seven or Group of Seven. Four of them, Dezső László, Dániel Borbáth, Gyula Dávid and Jenő Horváth became doctors of theology and in the interbellum period Sándor Babos became the first Transylvanian foreign missionary. The other two ministers were Béla Bedő and József Bíró. They had a handwritten "*Vándorlevél*," a "Letter of Pilgrimage," which they started after graduating Seminary. They continued to pass it back and forth in their correspondence for years, adding to it turn by turn, resulting in a unique record of their exchanged ideas on theology, church life and missions. This document can be found in the family archives of Jenő Horváth's descendants (K/7).

³⁰ Kool, p. 452 *fn*, also p.453:

"However, this group of seven could be considered the core of the Foreign mission friends. In the summer of 1929 the group of seven gathered at their yearly meeting. Jenő Horváth planned to present a draft to establish a Mission Society, because he observed that hardly any initiative was taken by the church concerning mission. Sándor Babos recalled that even before Jenő Horváth could read the draft, Ottó M. Nagy, religious teacher of Zilah said: 'we act wrongly, because when we establish a Mission Society, the church would "wash her hands" and delegate the mission cause to others. We have to work, write and speak *within* the church till the church awakens to its true essence and calling.' Babos called back that the words of Ottó Nagy gripped them in such a way, that Jenő Horváth did not even read his draft aloud, but that they started to discuss, what should be done next. As graduates of IKE (*the initials for the YMCA in Transylvania, Ifjúsági Keresztény Egyesület=IKE; whereas Keresztén Ifjúsági Egyesület=KIE, the YMCA in Hungary*) they decided to ask Sándor Makkai, the bishop, to appoint a traveling secretary to revive the responsibility for missions in the congregations of Transylvania to encourage them to obey the Great Commission. [Italics mine, LH.]

home and abroad. Hopefully, the research may point to areas of application and reflection for the church's work regarding mission.

I also want to give my church a more global perspective on missions, tracing parallel developments in global missiology and possible interaction with it locally. This could revitalize the local missions activities of my church and give an impetus both to practice and study it more professionally in a broader context. I also wish to explore the tension between a pressing national self-identity and the mandate for a wider cross-cultural evangelism, a tension which is often further complicated by political ideologies which infiltrate the church.

Special attention will be given to both the hierarchical and the grass-roots initiated models of missions strategies which occurred in the life of the church in that period. We will also investigate the impact both models had on the practice of missions.

My third aim is to research an area where to date, little research has been undertaken. I hope that the gaps in my own research may be filled by other scholars in the future. While in Hungary itself, scholars have begun to delve into this subject, very few have examined the mission history or the missiology of the reformed church particularly in Transylvania. See the research done in this field in Hungary by Kool,³¹ Fekete,³² Fazakas,³³ and others.

The church history of the first world and recently, even of the third world, has been the subject of much academic research and analysis, but that of the second world, Eastern Europe, which is now becoming part of the EU, has been largely neglected. All major writings have tended to ignore the fact that

³¹ Kool, *op.cit.*

³² Ifj. Károly Fekete, jr. *Makkai Sándor gyakorlati teológiai munkássága (The Works of Sándor Makkai in Practical Theology)* Dissertationes Theologicae Nr. 3. Kiadja a Debreceni Református Kollégium, Debrecen, 1997. See also especially his recent article 'Makkai Sándor és Victor János misszió-értelmezésének összehasonlítása' (Comparison of the Mission-Interpretation of Sándor Makkai and János Victor) in: *En Christo, Tanulmányok a 85 éves Dr. Bütösi János tiszteletére (En Christo, Studies in Honour of the 85 Years Old Dr. János Bütösi)*, szerkesztette Gaál Sándor (ed.). Debrecen: Debreceni Református Hittudományi Egyetem, 2004, pp.104-128.

³³ Sándor Fazakas "Új egyház felé?" A második világháború utáni református egyházi megújulás ekkleziológiai konzekvenciái ("Toward a New Church?" The Ecclesiological Conclusions of the Church Renewal Movement in the Reformed Church After the Second World War) Dissertationes Theologicae Nr. 4. Debrecen: Debreceni Református Kollégium, 2000. See especially chapter III, Az egyház missziói munkája (The Mission Work of the Church.), pp.82-127.

Hungarians in the eastern part of Europe turned to embrace the Reformation at the same time as the West.³⁴ When Transylvania became part of Romania after the decisive year of 1918, its mixed and complex religious identity was obscured by the overwhelming majority image of the Eastern Orthodox Church. To this day, many visitors to the region are unaware that there exists in Transylvania a Calvinistic presence with a rich religious history. I agree with Graeme Murdock that "The history of Hungary, and indeed of all eastern Europe, has for too long been unjustly neglected by western writers." He attempts some explanation for this syndrome: "Political divisions in the 20th century restricted Europeans' vision of the breadth of their own continent but, as I hope this book shows, it has not always been so."³⁵

My fourth aim in this research is to stimulate the Transylvanian Reformed Church to debate further the theology of mission. The last serious theological debate on the subject occurred in the 1940s so the time for renewed discussion is overdue. I hope this thesis will stimulate scholarly written responses from within the TRC.

My research does not attempt to develop any theory of missions, nor do I intend to provide a history of missions, particularly of Transylvanian missions; rather it is but a probing of church-mission relation patterns and theories in order to understand better the process which existed in the first half of the 20th century in the Reformed Churches of Transylvania. However, this research may provide useful information for those engaged in missionary or evangelistic ministries or who are interested in developing new theories and putting them in practice.

The researched period has a definite and well justified time span in which to explore the missiological developments in the history of the Reformed Church of this area. The year 1895 was a milestone for the Reformed Church in Transylvania and thus it is chosen as the starting point for this study. That was the year the Theological Seminary of Transylvania was moved by the Bishop's Board of

³⁴ The most relevant book published recently in English on this hardly ever researched subject focusing on a forgotten world is that of Graeme Murdock, *Calvinism on the Frontier, 1600-1660, International Calvinism and the Reformed Church in Hungary and Transylvania*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000. But even this study focuses, of course, not on missiology but on church history.

³⁵ That is how he writes in the forefront of his work introducing his historical research. See *op. cit.*, quotations from the *Acknowledgements*.

Directors (primarily at the behest of the party of the energetic bishop Domokos Szász), from Nagyenyed to Kolozsvár, the cultural capital and university centre of Transylvania. With the opening of the new facility, five professors were appointed by Bishop Szász to run the faculty of Divinity. Two of them were from historical Hungary,³⁶ Dr. Béla Kenessey and Dr. István Kecskeméthy. Later they were known and even referred to as the “missionaries to Transylvania.” Kecskeméthy, especially, from the very first year was extremely keen and zealous for the revitalization of the traditional church through the introduction of revival and evangelical movements which were well known in the West, but which were completely absent in Transylvania up to this point. The following year, in 1896, we read that the Christian Federation (*Keresztyén Szövetség*), later the CE Union, combined with the Sunday School movement had already spread to many places through some of the local congregations of the region. Thus 1895 marks the beginning of a new

³⁶ While at times historical Hungary included Transylvania in its borders, at times it did not; this is why Kenessey and Kecskeméthy were considered as “missionaries” to Transylvania. Transylvania is a specific geographical entity, also a specific one in political terms. However, with regard to the relative independent history of Transylvania from that of Hungary, the “mother country,” and a short description of it as it could be characterized in the researched period, is better if we quote Dr. Géza Nagy’s (the ablest reformed church historian of those times) article from the 1930s, for a brief explanation to the reader:

“Transylvania is an area enclosed by the South-East Carpathian Mountains, the whole territory covering altogether 102,787 square kilometres. Until 1918 it belonged to Hungary; at present it is a part of Roumania. Its inhabitants are Hungarians, Roumanians and Germans belonging to very different denominations. The number of Protestants in Transylvania is 1,057,191, of whom 720,967 are Reformed (Hungarians), 264,224 are Lutherans (Hungarians and Germans), 72,000 Unitarians (Hungarians). The other part of the Hungarian population is Roman Catholic, the Roumanians belong to the Orthodox Greek and the United Greek Churches. So the Hungarian population, and among those the Reformed people, because of its number and political weight played here a prominent role. We can say that during the period in which Transylvania was an independent country (1542-1848) its whole policy was influenced by Reformed personalities and institutions (...) The Reformed Church on coming to Transylvania found here already a Christian life and civilization. The people of the country were Christianized by the great organizer of Hungarian Christianity, St. Stephen. This king having won the victory over the pagan elements of the Hungarian nation compelled the whole population to take up the Christian religion and founded the Transylvanian Bishopric (1005) in Gyulafehérvár. (...) After the great national tragedy in the battle of Mohács (1526) the Turkish power extended without any difficulty in the Hungarian lowland and *the development of the independent Transylvanian principality begun.*” (See on p.46. in: Géza Nagy, “The Influence of the Reformed Church On the Political History of Transylvania,” *The Evangelical Quarterly*, Vol. 5, Nr. 1 (January 1933): pp.46-60.

era, the era of the Home Mission Movement and missions in particular, in the history of the Reformed Church in the traditionally closed geographical and historical region of Transylvania. Although Transylvania was still part of Hungary at this point, it was not very open to outside influences, even from the rest of the then Austro-Hungarian Empire. The official acceptance of the Home Mission Movement (*belmisszió*) took at least three decades, corresponding to the acceptance of Barthian theology in the theological orientation of the church. This shift toward Barth and neo-orthodox theology in general was so strong and pervasive that Barthianism spread to the rest of Hungary from Transylvania,³⁷ influencing the seminaries there.

But the dichotomy between the mission movements of the sodalities and the missions work of the official church continued even after the eventual acceptance of these missions movements by the church due to the influence of Dr. Lajos Imre; the tension lasted also. This situation remained unsolved, with occasional attempts to resolve it in a somewhat different way to that of the solution offered and practiced in Hungary. After World War II and in the transitional time of the Communist takeover, that situation solidified, a situation which served the compromise made by the official church with the Communist authorities. After the decisive years of 1948 and 1949, when all mission societies and associations were banned by government authorities, the church was supposed to take up the task of missions. But she could not, and would not do it properly, and all evangelization and mission work went underground in the 1950s, continued only by a few ministers in great secrecy.³⁸ For this reason, 1950 was chosen as the closing date for my research.

I now want to outline the historical and theological background for encountering missions in Transylvania, including the major reasons leading to the establishment of the first mission movements in Transylvania.

Firstly, some in the Reformed Church became alarmed by the encroachment of theological liberalism, mainly due to German influence. If the church as a whole could not be kept from such trends in spite of her formal commitment to the historical creeds, then at least those who were concerned about the Christo-

³⁷ The influence of Barth "...reached Hungary mainly in an indirect way, through Transylvania." See Kool, p.297.

³⁸ I will expand on this underground activity later.

centric and living faith of its members could gather under one federation all who wished to embrace the historical-biblical faith. Secondly, they also sought to encompass those who had an evangelistic fervor to reach unbelievers³⁹ and to serve those people in their personal and social needs.⁴⁰ Thus the Christian Union or the CE/Christian Endeavour movement (*Keresztyén Szövetség*) was formed in 1896, with official recognition in 1903. Thirdly, the CE movement was introduced partly by Kecskeméthy and partly through the mediation of German Lutheran churches in Hungary and Transylvania; this CE movement was also influenced by the heritage of the Puritan movement, an event not forgotten by some Hungarians. However, to some extent it was the Pietistic movement which played a major role in shaping the evangelistic and missionary character of CE. Because of the broadness of the term, any concept of the mission of the church will depend to a large extent on her theological orientation rather than on an etymological or biblical analysis of the concept. That is true in the case of the Transylvanian Reformed Church. Yet many examples can be given of Transylvanian or Hungarian theologians doing mission with an orientation dependent on an etymological analysis. Few would challenge the need for clarity in definition, for, as Dyrness notes:

mission lies at the core of theology – within the character and action of God himself. There is an impulse to give and share that springs from the very nature of God and that therefore characterized all his works. So all that theologians call fundamental theology is mission theology.⁴¹

At the same time, the difficulty of defining mission cannot be overlooked or minimized. “Mission is never something self-evident, and nowhere – neither in the practice of mission nor in even our best theological reflections on mission, does

³⁹ As Richard D. Love rightly observes: “The relationship between conversion and mission is foundational to missiology, because the conversion of sinners is central to the fulfillment of the Great Commission.” (See the entry: ‘Conversion’ in the *EDWM*, p.231.)

⁴⁰ The missiologist, Timothy K. Beougher is right when he states: “It would not be an exaggeration to characterize the history of the modern missions movement as the story of revival. When genuine revival comes, believers are reawakened to their evangelistic and social obligations. Mission efforts are a natural fruit of revival.” (See his article under the entry on ‘Revival, Revivals’ in the *EDWM*, p.832.)

⁴¹ W. Dyrness, *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*. Minneapolis, MN: World Wide, 1974, p.11.

it succeed in removing all confusions, misunderstandings, enigmas and temptations.”⁴²

At this point I want to use the challenging questions posed by Moreau, applying them to the Transylvanian situation.⁴³ For example, does mission refer to the whole scope of God’s salvific purpose in the world (as Sándor Tavaszy, the systematic professor of Kolozsvár Seminary in the period stressed), or, more narrowly, is it the God-given missionary task of the church as was believed by many others at the time? Again, if our focus is on the task of the church, is mission limited to one core component of the church’s work or is it everything that the church does? This latter understanding of mission was maintained in the period by Makkai, the influential theologian and bishop of the Transylvanian church between 1926 and 1936. Is it, in fact, possible to determine a focus or priority for mission, and, if so, what should that be? What was the focus for the missiologists of that era in particular? How would they have argued in defending their interpretation?

The main questions I have posed regarding the mission theories and concepts held by competent and influential theologians in Transylvania during the period under examination were basically as follows:

1. Was there any theological effort made to describe and define missions in accordance with the church’s own creeds and doctrinal orientation, or were ideas about missions formulated simply as a response to pressing practical needs?
2. Can we identify and critically evaluate the main mission models which were implemented by several leading figures in the church during the researched period?
3. Was missions/evangelism understood as an inter-cultural activity or, at least, as an activity characterized by an effort to transcend boundaries, crossing those lines which separate cultural, ethnic, social and even religious entities?
4. Was there any reverse impact of mission activity on the sending body/environment/missionary organization?

⁴² Bosch, p.9.

⁴³ Cf.: (see especially on p. 636.) the *EDWM*, pp.636-638.

5. Can we trace the influence of the various strands of revivalist movements and all efforts at renewal that touched the church significantly in this period? If so, is there any way to discover what long-range impact they had, if any?
6. Is it possible to arrive at a well-scrutinized account of the impact of the mission movement on the Transylvanian Reformed Church as a visible institution; and in turn, of the impact of the Transylvanian Reformed Church on the mission movement itself? Is such an impact reflected somehow in modifications and innovations made by the mission movement in response to the cultural and ecclesiastical context?
7. How was the dialectical relationship between mission praxis and the biblical theological foundation of missions maintained?
8. How can the Transylvanian Reformed Church's vision of missions and the overall theological picture of missiology be put in a broader world context? Can the local understanding of mission theory and praxis on the one hand, and the global feature of God's mission to all people on the other hand, be brought together in a fruitful and dialectical exchange to produce a better understanding of what mission(s) is, or how it should best be carried out?

The problems or issues which produced tension were the following:

First, there was Church – Missions relations or, in other words, the *modality versus sodality* dilemma.⁴⁴ This included relational issues between the *church local* and the *church itinerant/missions*.

⁴⁴ I use the term 'modality' to refer to the church both in its general/universal and in its particular/denominational meaning. As such, most of the time in the case of the TRC it was identified with the 'ecclesia representativa,' with the reformed church represented by its denominational leadership, or officialdom, rather than with the whole church as seen in its totality of members. The TRC was regarded as a church by its leaders more in its clerical body and manifestation, rather than in its laity. The 'lay people,' even when they were active members, were called 'the worldly members' (*világi tagok*) in contrast with the clergy. This was true even when these same lay people were elected to high church leadership bodies alongside the bishop and in his Board of Counselors. In defining the terms 'modality' and 'sodality' I adopted the definitions used and highlighted recently by missiologist Ralph Winter. Karl Barth, the most influential theologian for the TRC, used these terms in the same sense during the time of the Transylvanian theologians of the researched period (see more details on the modality versus sodality issue in chapter two and chapter five of this paper). I use the term 'sodality' to refer to 'para-church' organizations, often interdenominational and serving

Secondly, how was the concept of mission understood by eminent reformed theologians of the church in this period and area under research? Was theirs really a *reformed understanding* of mission or something akin to it, or very different from it? According to reformed doctrine, the Scriptures have a *critical role* in *evaluating, guiding and orienting* both the practice of missions and the theory of missions itself, as it was formulated theologically.⁴⁵

Was the particular Protestant teaching of “the priesthood of all believers” a pivotal doctrine crucial in formulating the concept of mission, or were there several other doctrinal views which played a major role in the construction of a modern mission theory to the detriment of this important doctrine? If so, can we still speak of a reformed understanding of missions? Was the Medieval model⁴⁶ of a territorial church challenged as it was in the West or not?⁴⁷

In keeping with the dogmatical stand of the TRC it might be stated that mission can only be *Christ-centered* and yet *Church-focused*. I will ask in my thesis, if there was any other doctrinally⁴⁸ justifiable mission model which the TRC might have been willing to endorse, for example the opposite, church-centric, yet

for the modality as a channel of revival spirituality and missionary awareness. In the Transylvanian context, they functioned especially as a reminder of the church’s missionary task.

⁴⁵ As Johannes Verkuyl in his *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction* quotes Leslie Newbigin: “The Church must in every generation be ready to bring its tradition afresh under the light of the Word of God. But not only must we examine our methods. The structures of the congregations; the relations between Western churches and those in Asia, Africa, and Latin America; the nature of the (missions of the churches) today; and the plans for the future projects must also be (placed) under the examining light of God’s Word.” Johannes Verkuyl *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: 1978, p.5.

⁴⁶ The Medieval model of a territorial church as adopted unquestioningly even by Luther and as it appeared in the feudal society of Transylvania under the slogan, “cuius regio, eius religio,” the principle adopted by the nobility; the “whose is the region, his is the religion” concept determined what would be the religion of the peasants belonging to a certain landlord, whether Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Unitarian (The Anti-Trinitarian Hungarian Church) or Reformed.

⁴⁷ If it was never challenged, this could be a significant impetus for neglecting missions, something so generally characteristic for the Hungarian Reformed Churches.

⁴⁸ According to reformed dogmatics, the doctrine of the church (ecclesiology) is cautious and distinct in the way it teaches biblically concerning the essence and mandate of the church. There is a subtle, but relevant distinction in the biblical understanding of what the evangelistic ministry of the church must consist of, thus defining also that the church has an indispensable role in missions.

Christ-focused.⁴⁹ Would this not be a contradiction or even idolatrous?⁵⁰ Can this be maintained still as a reformed doctrine of the church? Is there any third option, perhaps Christ-centered and not church-focused at all, or rather an individual-focused model? In the light of the above, how can we characterize Transylvanian reformed theology and mission practice in that church?⁵¹ Was more emphasis given to clergy and clerical authority strife, or to the extension of God's Kingdom beyond the church walls in a missionary dynamism? That will partly explain and illustrate how missionary the church was or was able to be.

Thirdly, if the power of classical missions lay in their a) revival spirituality, and/or b) lay involvement, and/or c) organizational independence, then we must assess critically the church's attitude in Transylvania in this period. Did the TRC stay loyal or fall short concerning the putting into practice of these three crucial elements of effective mission work, when measured against her own doctrinal standards and creeds, and her theological orientation in the period?

Rev. Dr. Arthur K. Tompa, the general secretary of the CE Union of Romania in 1933, was invited to participate in the First Conference on Foreign Missions in Transylvania, a conference initiated on behalf of the bishop, with Jenő Horváth appointed as organizer. In reply to Horváth's letter of invitation, Tompa stated clearly that long before the official Church leadership initiated such a conference, the CE Union had already tried to organize a similar conference on foreign

⁴⁹ As a result of the above, was the "*Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*" ("the reformed church must continuously be reformed") principle omitted or was it still considered seriously regarding this issue? This might be another explanation for the state of the church since the Reformation.

⁵⁰ The avoidance of *ecclesio-latria* (idolatry/worship of the church herself) is a reformed principle since the time of the first reformers and is a well known *caveat* against the Roman Catholic interpretation of an institutionalized church.

⁵¹ According to reformed teaching, the church is **apostolic** in her *sent-ness* (i.e., in her mission!), and not in her *successiveness* ('*successio apostolica*'). This is, again, a principle which underscores a basic difference with the catholic teaching of Rome which sees the apostolic character guaranteed in the pope and clergy thus making the church structure a more static institution, then losing the dynamic of mission. The parish church is the place to which the people are coming; the church does not reach out to the people. We will examine how far the Transylvanian Reformed Church was able to remain a missionary/dynamic church. The church is **catholic** in her *universal extension*, rather than in her universal power given to her head and clergy, again different from the teaching of Rome. But to what extent have power games and a quest for power characterized the life of the Transylvanian Reformed Church remains to be examined here.

missions. He described how some time previously he had approached the Kolozsvár Hidelve congregation asking that church to help in organizing the event, but so far had received no answer from them. So he was surprised and pleased that Horváth was initiating this conference on behalf of the District. He welcomed such conferences as events from which perhaps “unforeseeable blessings might spring ... for both sides [i.e. for both the “official” church and CE]:”

I think perhaps you know that the CE “covenanters” (“szövetségesek”), and the Transylvanian Union of the Evangelical CE Workers (the national organ of the CE Union), were always the friends of foreign missions and were always prepared for any sacrifice for it; moreover, in Transylvania they were out-rightly pioneers of it [of missions]. And if there is at least one common platform where the CE “covenanters” and the church organs can come together in brotherly unified prayer and working together, that indeed is [the area of] foreign missions.⁵²

However, the historical reality of the reformed church’s life and practice from those times shows that mission activity as a proposed common ground (as seen above in the quotation) on which the modality (the church) and the sodalities (mission movement and societies) might join together in a working symbiosis, never became a reality; the persistent enmity between the revivalist and the so called ‘traditionalist’ wings of the church prevailed. Rather, it deepened the gap between them. The differing concepts of each regarding how this relationship could work in the practical carrying out of mission work made the two groups even more incompatible.

This dilemma persisted long before, as well as during and after Communism, almost independently of the various political regimes. The main points of the dilemma remained constant. Was the church the best organ for the carrying out of the mission task, both at home and abroad, or was this a task better left to separate and independent sodalities? If both modality and sodality were to be involved, who would orchestrate and lead the work, the modality or the sodality? It

⁵² In Hungarian it reads: “Hogy a CE szövetségesek és az Evangéliumi CE Munkások Erdélyi Szövetsége mint azok országos szerve a Külmiszióknak mindenkor legáldozatkészebb barátai sőt Erdélyben egyenesen úttörői voltak, azt hiszem tudod s ha van egy platform ahol CE szövetségesek és egyházi szervek testvéri közös imában és munkában összefoghatnak az épen a Külmiszió.” *Letter to Dr. Jenő Horváth*, from Kendilóna, 1st of August 1933, Personal unpublished archives of the family.

could have been a power game issue. The aim of this thesis is to describe the context, then critically analyze the various aspects of the dilemma.

I will not describe and evaluate the Transylvanian history of missions as such because it is a task outside the scope of this dissertation. However, I am confident that my research will contribute to a greater understanding of at least one period in that history.

I now turn in the next chapter to a consideration of two mission models in the Transylvanian Reformed Church, 1895–1950.

Chapter Two

Two Mission Models in the Transylvanian Reformed Church (1895-1950)

How did two very different, even opposing, models of missions emerge between 1895–1950 in the Transylvanian Reformed Church? It is this question which I intend to ask in this chapter.

Firstly, I will focus on whether or not the models that existed should be described as merely generally Christian in character or whether there was something about them that made them particularly reformed. Similarly, I endeavor to determine if a mission model was accepted by the official church, was it seen as “reformed” simply because it was legalized by the official leadership (whose endorsement may have had more to do with church politics than with church confessions); or because it was in genuine accordance with the reformed church's creeds and doctrinal standards? Approaching the issue from the opposite direction, I try to analyze whether those para-church groups which were labeled sectarian or pietistic or denounced as being not reformed, even though led by a thoroughly reformed professor, can in fact be regarded as reformed models of mission.

Secondly, I give special attention as to whether these models were really functional or if they were, in fact, a hindrance to their own declared purpose. My intent is to discover if the practical outworking of these models was in actual accordance with what their initiators intended.

The different paradigms of mission and the extent to which they were different can be best grasped and described if we focus on the activity of two major theologians of the period, men who exercised the most decisive influence upon the whole church in this matter of mission. These men were István Kecskeméthy and Lajos Imre, both of whom were considered to be the chief exponents and apostles of the missionary movement in the Transylvanian Reformed Church.

There are others who might be put forward as being important theologians and experts in the field on a par with Kecskeméthy and Imre, but these men were not as decisive in developing an original model of missions and they did not

contribute anything new to the thinking on the subject. These men can be understood as representing either the model of Kecskeméthy or the model of Imre, or even a combination of both. However, they did not offer a solution for reconciling the theological differences between the two key figures, nor did they offer a third option in missionary models. The following can be named as being among the successors of both: Dr. László Ravasz, bishop Dr. Béla Kenessey, Dr. Imre Révész, Dr. Sándor Makkai, Dr. Sándor Tavaszy, Dr. Jenő Horváth, Dr. Dániel Borbáth, Sándor Babos, Dezső László, Dr. Géza Nagy, Dr. Lajos Gönczy, Dr. András Mózes, Albert Juhász, Dr. László Muzsnai, János Vásárhelyi, Dr. Elek Máthé, Ottó M. Nagy, Mózes Biró and Dr. András Nagy. This list is not exhaustive, of course. Except for Kenessey, who was Kecskeméthy's colleague and co-worker for the cause of mission, as a professor of theology from the first year of their activity in Transylvania in 1895, all the rest of the men mentioned above were Kecskeméthy's students at the faculty.

Standing strongly on the anti-sodality side were some of Kecskeméthy's and Kenessey's colleagues and opponents, such as the liberal theological professor Károly Nagy, Albert Molnár and Bishop György Bartók. On the sodality side, we can mention the later Transylvanian CE Union general secretary, Dr. Arthur K. Tompa, and the fierce anti-episcopalian Dr. László Horváth, both later martyrs of the Transylvanian Reformed Church. Mention should also be made of the CE member, Mária Pilder, an autodidact/"self-educated" theologian who had a huge correspondence with Karl Barth and translated his *Kis Dogmatika* (Short Dogmatics) into Hungarian. She was active first in the home mission movement with CE, but then came alongside Bishop Makkai and Lajos Imre.

Our task will be to evaluate and compare the views of Kecskeméthy and Imre, then ask whether they were offering more or less the same mission model or different ones. Again, were their respective models reformed or only generally Christian in character? These are complex, delicate questions but neither of the two wrote a clear missiology or theology of missions. However, their overall *oeuvre* serves as a basic reference from which we can deduce their thinking concerning missions.

The general reformed view on missions, to which even the Transylvanian Reformed Church at that time was supposed to subscribe, always emphasized a *Christ-centered and church-focused* activity rather than the opposite, a *Christ-*

focused and church-centered activity. The latter could be a theological possibility but certainly not a *reformed theological* possibility.¹ For this comparison it is best to quote the contemporary theologians' reflections on the matter, as Imre declared: "The church in mission is not gathering members to herself but to Christ; not into her own earthly organization, but into the temple of God's Kingdom."² While Victor says:

We would object to any too simple statement concerning the relationship of the 'Church' and the 'Kingdom.' To identify the two would mean on the one hand a restriction of the sphere of the Kingdom which extends beyond the limits of the Church [*Italics, LH*] (the Kingdom involving also the exercise of the rule of God in Christ through the Church [underline by the author] over the life of the world) and on the other hand an obscuring of the eschatological aspect of the Kingdom. [*Italics, LH.*] A simple denial of the identification of 'Church' and 'Kingdom' however would

¹ Theologically, it is impossible to put the church in the center since the Reformers emphasized that Christ saves the sinner directly without the mediation of the Church. The Roman Catholic view would also claim Christ centeredness; yet because of the mediatory role of the church, practically still suggests a church centered view. Rather, it is a turning back to the Roman Catholic model and this must be noted because there were, and are, suggestions that the Transylvanian Reformed Church long after the Reformation and even today, still retains Roman Catholic elements in terms of church government. As stated above, it is possible to have a church-centered yet not a Christ-focused activity, but such a definition cannot be regarded as a mission model *per se*; it is a *contradictio in adiecto*. Such a model could be a "cultural mission," but by definition, not a Christian one. Similarly, is it possible to have a Christ-centered or, at least, a Christ-focused mission that is not also church-focused as well? This is not a *theological* possibility according to reformed theology, although it might occur as a paradoxical possibility in the practice of some other denominations or groups. But such a model could not be called a strictly Biblical model, according to the Transylvanian theologians. By definition, this could not be called reformed, although it could be a mission model for groups which minimize the relevance of the church's visible appearance. These are groups which overemphasize the invisible aspect of Christ's church on earth at the expense of the visible. I stated that, "it is not a theological possibility according to reformed theology" neither as a personal view nor as theological opinion on the matter, nor with a polemic tone against other denominations; but strictly based on a comparison between Hungarian Reformed Church reality and its official doctrinal standards, as these theologians claimed to believe it and as they interpreted it.

² See on pp.118-119, in: Lajos Imre, 'Egyházunk és a misszió' (Our Church and Mission), in: *Mi a külmiszió* (What Is Foreign Missions?) The Senior Class of the Young [Men's] Christian Association (eds.), Cluj-Kolozsvár: Ifjú Erdély Kiadása, 1930, pp.117-128.

militate against the fact that the 'Kingdom' in its most specific sense as *Regnum Christi* is a present reality in this world in the life of the Church.³

Similarly, Tavaszy, the leading dogmatician of the TRC in the period, emphasized:

(W)ithout the invisible church a community can be an excellent organization, judgment but cannot be a church. The invisible church is not just a life-condition, but also a on the church. Let us add that if it ceases to be a judgment, then the church is on its surest way to cease being the church.⁴

We have to check throughout this paper whether these mission models "were gathering members" to the church, to her "own earthly organization" or "to the temple of God's Kingdom" (Imre); whether "*a restriction of the sphere of the Kingdom*" occurred (Victor); whether the TRC's leadership intended the church visible merely to be "an excellent organization," and whether they allowed or refused the invisible church to be a judgment on the visible TRC (Tavaszy). These quotations above are enough to see the theological orientation and confessional stand. As a contrast to this, let us now turn (but briefly, as this will be discussed further later) to *the practical reality* in the Hungarian Reformed Churches, as characterized by Victor: "(T)he Church seems to be something floating above the heads of individual believers. (...) The institutional aspect of the Church's life receives thereby an undue emphasis at the expense of its personalistic aspect. This tendency can be traced clearly with us to the influences of Roman Catholicism."⁵

In order to compare Kecskeméthy's and Imre's ideas concerning the missionary model that the church should follow, and to investigate how reformed and Biblical these concepts were, I want now to provide a brief overview of their lives and work as necessary background for our detailed discussion of their models.

³ Victor, Answers to the Questionnaire concerning "The Nature of the Church," pp.2-3.

⁴ See on p. 83. in: Sándor Tavaszy, 'Az egyház református dogmatikai felfogása' (The Reformed Dogmatic Concept of Church) in: Sándor Tavaszy, *A Kijelentés feltétele alatt, Theológiai értekezések (Under the Condition of Revelation, Theological Studies)* Dolgozatok a református theologiai tudományok köréből, Kiadják az Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület kolozsvári theol. Fakultásának tanárai, Nr. 2., Cluj-Kolozsvár, 1929, pp.76-88. Compare this with the evaluation of the church concept in chapter five of this paper.

⁵ Victor, Answers to the Questionnaire concerning "The Nature of the Church," pp.2-3.

Dr. István Kecskeméthy (1864-1938)

István Kecskeméthy was born on January 31, 1864 in Paks, in the south west of Hungary. His father, János Kecskeméthy, was a post-office worker; his mother, Krisztina Újlaki, was the descendant of a once ancient noble family that had sunk into poverty. From 1880-1884 he studied at the Nagykőrös Reformed Gymnasium, where he was influenced spiritually and profoundly. According to the research of László Nagy,⁶ among his teachers the greatest impact on his life was exercised first of all by Lajos Filó,⁷ and then by Gerzson Ádám. Filó proclaimed as a theological principle that one has to become a Christian first and only then can one become a theologian.⁸ With this emphasis he meant that, in contrast with the liberal theologians, faith has to come before reasoning according to the Anselmian priority of theologizing embraced by all the Reformers. Kecskeméthy became a student at the Budapest Reformed Theological Faculty in the autumn of 1884 and graduated in 1888. Between September 1888 and October 1890 he served as a secretary for Bishop Károly Szász of the Trans-Danubian District (which included Budapest), where together with Aladár Szabó and Béla Kenessey, he became a leading figure of the pietistic revivalist and mission movement embodied by the CE. movement⁹ at that time. Although busy with many activities, he still found time to study at the philological faculty of the University of Budapest between 1888 and 1890, focusing on Latin Language and Literature, Greek Language and Literature, Hungarian Literature, German Literature, Indo-European Languages, Arabic Language and Literature, and Sanskrit. In May 1890 he received a

⁶ László Nagy 'Kecskeméthy István tanulóiévei' (The Academic Life of István Kecskeméthy) *Református Szemle* (1978): pp.135-143, especially pp.139-140.

⁷ Filó debated the ideas of rationalists in the church, such as Mór Ballagi, one of the most famous "free thinkers" of the time, who questioned not only many reformed doctrines but who also attacked even the validity of the resurrection and the ascension into heaven of Christ. Filó responded in a book, see Lajos Filó, *A keresztyén hit védelme a Krisztus feltámadása kérdésében* (*The Apology of Christian Faith Concerning Christ's Resurrection*) n. pub., Kecskemét, 1863.

⁸ Molnár also suggests the importance of Filó whose influence is obvious in the work of Kecskeméthy. See János Molnár's article, Kecskeméthy István, 1864-1938. In *Akik jó bizonyosságot nyertek, A Kolozsvári Református Teológiai tanárai 1895-1948* (*Those Who Have Gained a Good Testimony: the Professors of the Kolozsvár Reformed Theological Seminary 1895-1948*). Kolozsvár, 1996, p.67. This work shall henceforth be referred to as *Akik jó bizonyosságot nyertek...* (*Those Who Have Gained a Good Testimony...*)

⁹ For a more detailed account of the movement, see below.

doctorate in the comparative grammar of Eastern languages. He served as an associate minister in Buda between 1890 and 1894 and was so well-loved there that after leaving for Transylvania he was frequently invited back. In 1894 he married Irma Schodl; they had no children.

In 1895 he accepted the call of the Transylvanian Bishop Domokos Szász to the newly founded Kolozsvár Seminary,¹⁰ being appointed by Bishop Szász together with four other professors.¹¹ Kecskeméthy was the professor of Old Testament studies until he suffered a stroke in 1936; he also headed the New Testament studies department for a long period as well. Between 1912-1913 and 1919-1920 he was the dean of the Theological faculty. His teaching career in the Seminary amounts to more than 40 years; his teaching was as professional as it was confessional, with a conscious service of the cause of mission.¹²

It was as early as 1896 that he organized the first Christian Unions or Associations (*“Keresztyén Szövetség”*), which later came together under the name of the

¹⁰ The Kolozsvár Francis Joseph University of Sciences of Kolozsvár (*Ferenc József Tudományegyetem*) was founded on the 19th of October, 1872, an event which played a major role in the efforts of the bishop to bring the Seminary from Nagyenyed to Kolozsvár and join it as a Faculty of Divinity to the Royal University of Kolozsvár.

¹¹ There was another professor, also not a Transylvanian, the above mentioned Kenessey, with the same evangelical beliefs and the same commitment for the revival of the church and for the cause of missions. Later they were both called “the Evangelists to Transylvania, coming from the West.”

¹² Géza Nagy characterized him thus: “To the new Institute he brought his thorough knowledge, his zealous and arduous missionary faith, his golden good spirits, and his typically Hungarian folk wisdom. In this spirit he would edit the edifying *Kis Tükör* magazine and other tracts. (...) His conscience was the prisoner of God’s Word. (...) His interpretations of the Scriptures were practical, his preaching always revolved around the great facts of Christian life: the new birth, conversion etc. His rural origins and his practice as a pastor in a metropolis made him sensitive to the social movements. (...) He found an antidote to the materialistic movements of the masses in (the home) mission (movement) and in the protestant interpretation and practice of the universal priesthood of all believers.” (*“Az új intézetbe magával hozza alapos tudását, buzgó misszionálásra hevítő hitét, aranyos kedélyét, tipikus magyar népi bölcsességét. E szellemben szerkeszti a Kis Tükör c. építő lapot és traktátusait. (...) Az ő lelkiismerete pedig Isten Igéjének foglya. (...) Gyakorlati magyarázatai, igehirdetése azonban mindvégig a keresztyén élet nagy tényei, az újjászületés, megtérés, stb. körül forognak. Népi származása és világvárosi lelkesítő működése a szociális mozgalmakra hívják fel figyelmét (...) A materialista tömegmozgalom ellenzerét a belmisszióban, az egyetemes papság protestáns értelmezésében, megvalósításában találja fel.”*) See in Géza Nagy, *A Kolozsvári Református Teológiai Fakultás története* (*The History of the Kolozsvár Reformed Theological Faculty*). Kolozsvár: Az Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület kiadása, 1995, p.31.

CE or Bethany Movement, upon the latter's joining with the world wide Christian Endeavour Movement. Kecskeméthy founded the Transylvanian branch and brought the *Kis Tükör* magazine from Budapest to Kolozsvár. For decades, this was the famous organ of the missionary movement in Transylvania and Kecskeméthy remained its chief editor. *Kis Tükör* was the first family weekly magazine focused on the missionary and evangelization work of the church; it ceased publication in 1936, two years before his death.¹³ He also edited a children's magazine, *Napsugár* from 1903-1907 and then became the chief editor of the official organ of the *Református Lelkész Egyesület* (*Romanian Reformed Minister's Union*), the *Egyházi Figyelő*. In addition, he published many tracts, including a well-known series, *Koszorú* (*Crown*). From 1896 he was a member of the *Magyar Protestáns Irodalmi Társaság* (*Hungarian Protestant Literature Society*).

Between 1896 and 1907 Kecskeméthy planted a church on the outskirts of Kolozsvár, the Kolozsmonostor Reformed congregation, of which he was the first minister. In 1900 he founded the Transylvanian Association of Evangelical Workers¹⁴, the first Hungarian Christian non-ecclesiastical, non-profit organization accepted and registered by the Romanian government after the Romanian post-WWI takeover of Transylvania. He was a founder and chairman of the *Gazdák és Tanítók Bankja* (*Bank of Landlords and Teachers*). In 1906, he became a member of the Hungarian parliament after publishing a study on "The Impact of the Evangelical Spirit on the Life of the Nation."¹⁵ Interestingly, the "pietist" professor received a sharp criticism for this political activity from the more "secular" or "worldly oriented" Bishop Bartók the following year.

In 1931 the Scottish Bible Society published the New Testament translated afresh by Kecskeméthy (although the original intention had been that he merely revise it) in an attractive edition with colored pictures. Between 1912 (when he found time to visit the Holy Land) and 1933 he published several commentaries on the twelve Minor Prophets and on the Gospel of Mark as well as many other theological articles. Between 1929 and 1934 he translated the whole Old

¹³ The magazine was revived in 1993 by Koinónia Publishing in Kolozsvár, Romania.

¹⁴ In Hungarian: *Evangéliumi Munkások Erdélyi Szövetsége* or sometimes also called *Evangéliumi CE Munkások Erdélyi Szövetsége*. It functioned as an officially registered Romanian civil society that represented the CE separated from the sister CE in Hungary with the annexation of Transylvania by Romania.

¹⁵ Az evangéliumos szellem hatása a nemzeti életre, Karcag, 1904.

Testament into Hungarian and then began again on yet another translation of the New Testament, until he was forcibly halted at Romans 1:9 by his stroke. Since the Hungarian Reformation and the 1590 translation of Gáspár Károli,¹⁶ no one had ever managed to translate the entire Bible into Hungarian as Kecskeméthy had done. Certainly no one had ever done such a translation completely by themselves.¹⁷ He died on May 10, 1938 at the age of 74 having remained a leader of the CE Union all of his working life.

János Molnár, in his essay on Kecskeméthy,¹⁸ summarized his program and concept of mission by placing it in three major categories:

Firstly, the *preaching of the Word*. The indispensable place for this is first and foremost the church, but stepping out of the church building it can also occur both at **home (the family)** and through the (home) **mission society** as well;

Secondly, the *practice of merciful love (or “ministries of mercy”)*. This **Diaconal work** targeted children, the sick, prostitutes (founding the “White Cross” society for fallen women), the homeless, and addicts (founding the Hungarian “Blue Cross” society for the recovery of alcoholics and joining the world wide

¹⁶ According to Oliver, “(t)wo of his [John Hus’] Hungarian followers produced the first Hungarian translation of the Bible. His teachings helped to prepare the way for the later Hungarian Reformation.” However, only the Four Gospels in the München Codex (1466) were preserved. The Hungarian Reformation started as early as the 1520s. “From the 1520s there were Lutheran preachers from Wittenberg active in Poland, Bohemia and Hungary.” Between 1522 and 1530 twenty Hungarian students matriculated in Wittemberg. The great champion of Reformation, Mátyás Dévai Bíró, lived in Luther’s house before he returned to Hungary in 1531. But there was a turning to the Helvetic (Calvinist) reformation beginning with the Synod of Erdőd in Transylvania in 1545, with the Twelve Articles reflecting the distinctive Calvinist teaching on the Lord’s Supper, “but adding that in other matters they still agreed with the Lutheran Augsburg Confession” (Oliver). In 1559 there was a Synod held in Marosvásárhely, Transylvania, where again the Swiss line prevailed against Wittemberg. At last in the 1567 Synod of Debrecen, they accepted the Second Helvetic Confession as the official standard of the Reformed Church of Hungary. See in: Robert Oliver, ‘The Reformation in Eastern Europe; Progress and Decline’ in: *Advancing in Adversity, Papers read at the 1991 Westminster Conference*. Published by the Westminster Conference, 1991, pp.47-63. Károli completed and published the whole Bible’s translation into Hungarian in 1590 at Vizsoly (in the North-Eastern part of Hungary today).

¹⁷ Even Károli worked together with a whole team of ministers. Kecskeméthy’s manuscript was almost destroyed under the Communists but finally, in 2002, his translation of the entire Bible was published by Koinónia Publishing in Kolozsvár, as a joint project with the Transylvanian District of the Reformed Church.

¹⁸ Molnár, p.73.

temperance movement). Kecskeméthy also established the first Hungarian YMCA group in Transylvania among theological students.

Thirdly, the *practice of saving love*. **Spiritual counseling** was regarded by him as the primary tool accompanied by regular *home visits*.

As early as November and December 1895, immediately after his arrival in Kolozsvár, Kecskeméthy organized weekly “reading evenings” at the Seminary on issues of faith, and this event was open to the public. This type of *evangelization* meeting, to my knowledge, had never been practiced before. Just a year later, a fierce attack was made on the representatives of the Home Mission Movement in the *Protestáns Közlöny*,¹⁹ charging them, and especially the young theological professor, with Nazarenism²⁰ and socialism.²¹ Kecskeméthy replied in the *Protestáns Egyházi és Iskolai Lap* with a phrase which later became famous and much quoted: “He who fights against evangelism fights against his own church.”

Dr. Lajos Imre (1888-1974)

The great-grandson of four reformed ministers, Lajos Imre was born in Hódmezővásárhely in eastern Hungary on November 4, 1888 but yet became a “missionary of all in Transylvania.”²² His father, Lajos Imre senior, was a famous

¹⁹ See the documents in the Appendices.

²⁰ “Nazarenism” here refers to the Church of the Nazarene, the evangelical denomination in the Wesleyan ‘holiness’ tradition which was Methodist in doctrine. In Hungary there was also established a Methodist church, but never in Transylvania. Kecskeméthy was labeled and attacked because evangelization was only practiced by these new groups and was unusual in the mainline churches. It is significant that Lajos Imre in his article: *‘A munka irányító gondolatai’* (*The Guiding Principles of the Work*) still considered the Methodist and Brethren Churches and the Salvation Army cults, even as late as 1915. See in: *Az Út*, (1915-16): pp. 49-53

²¹ In the feudalist society of Transylvania at the time, such an epitaph was almost like calling someone an anarchist or a communist, and in a church where lay leaders and patrons came from the noble classes, such a charge was injurious for Kecskeméthy.

²² Cf. “He was regarded as such a missionary of the Transylvanian Reformed Church and as a commonly respected leader of whom everybody felt he was as his fellow-minister. He was active as the home mission commissioner of the Transylvanian District between 1924 and 1944. There could be found almost no congregation where his name was not known. Intrinsically he shared himself to full consummation in the ministry.” (*“Az Erdélyi Református Egyház misszionáriusának és olyan köztisztviselőnek álló elöljárónak is tekintették, akit mindenki szolgatársának érzett. 1924 és 1944 között működött az Erdélyi Egyházkerület belmissziói előadójaként. Szinte nincsen olyan gyülekezet, ahol ne ismerték volna a nevét. Valóságga*

pedagogue, in keeping with family tradition, and director of the local secondary school. His mother, Janka Fazakas, was also gifted in education. Lajos was the first-born son of ten, five of whom died. He attended school in Hódmezővásárhely and started his theological studies in Kolozsvár in September 1906 where his grandfather, Sándor Imre, was a professor at the University. In his second year he wrote an important essay in Biblical Theology for Kecskeméthy, who noticed and expressed appreciation for the skills of the young student. In the same year, László Ravasz became his professor in Practical Theology and quickly recognized and encouraged Imre's abilities. While still a student, Imre committed himself to Practical Theology, especially to pastoral counseling²³ and the catechism; Ravasz exercised a great influence on the younger man. In addition to his theological studies, Imre also attended courses in philosophy given by the famous neo-Kantian philosopher Károly Böhm (1846-1911), and courses in pedagogy given by the pedagogue István Schneller (1847-1939), both Protestant professors at the *Ferenc József Tudományegyetem* (Ferenc József University of Sciences).

In 1909, Imre encountered another man who was to influence his future ministry greatly. John Raleigh Mott (1865-1955) was an American (Primitive) Methodist missionary promoter (an Arminian in his theological orientation), converted during his student days who dedicated himself to work for world-evangelization and mission in general.²⁴ He traveled to Hungary and in 1909 visited the Kolozsvár Theological Seminary, accompanied by Dr. János Victor who translated his powerful messages. Victor also translated and published his book, *The Decisive Hour of Christian Missions* (*A keresztyén missziók döntő órája*). This visit had a lasting impact on both seminary professors and students, including Imre, and gave an

szétoztotta magát a szolgálatban.”) See Zoltán Adorjáni's introductory article in Lajos Imre, *Önéletírása* (*Autobiography*). Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Református Egyháztörténeti Füzetek 2., 1999, p.11.

²³ The coined word for the discipline was *poimenics*, based on the Greek for shepherd, poimen.

²⁴ From 1888-1915 he was secretary of the YMCA and between 1888-1920 co-founder and president of the Student Volunteer Movement. He established the World Student Christian Federation in 1895 and in 1910 he became the chairman of the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh. He was also the chairman of the International Missionary Council between 1921-1941, and led the Jerusalem Missionary Conference in 1928. In 1946 he received the Nobel Peace Prize and in 1948 he was named as the honorary president of the World Council of Churches, established in Amsterdam.

impetus to youth work and missionary awareness, both of which had been virtually nonexistent before. Imre remembered Mott's visit with much satisfaction:

John Mott's visit in May of 1909 gave a new impulse to our lives and our work. (...) Naturally, just like others, I too, was overwhelmed with his lecture. I listened to it with a secret satisfaction hoping that such a lecture, free of pietistic commonplaces, will convince our teachers and our fellow students of the importance and seriousness of the work that a few of us have already begun.²⁵

It happened as Imre secretly hoped. One of his young teachers present there, Ravasz, wrote afterwards in the official magazine of the TRC, *Református Szemle*:

And he talked with such great power, such logical and rhetorical truth, such fascinating authority of his personality and conviction, that the hundreds of students of every kind who came to listen to the lecture listened to him with bated breath. I never met a man who could arouse my interest as well as he did. His speech was free of commonplaces, adornments and pathos. Every sentence was meant and simple. He was quite imposing in burning the truth he declared into the souls of his listeners. When he is writing he does not use a pen, but a chisel. What he says is valid for a lifetime... All his words reflect the seriousness of a last will. One cannot forget them even if one wants to... His speech lacks theoretical height and dogmatic depth. All his sentences are simple and natural as the truth itself, they deeply move the soul, because they are truth itself. (...) He is the champion of the new Reformation of Protestantism, of the trend that has practical Christianity as its motto.²⁶

Kenessey who was the Bishop of the Transylvanian District at the time of Mott's visit, had a similarly highly positive reaction in his Annual Report to the Assembly: "John Mott is the powerful champion of practical Christianity, of the trend that urges and works on gaining souls for Protestantism and making them prisoners of Christ, i.e. Protestantism should form Christian religious characters."²⁷

It is interesting to observe that Mott was accepted by both the 'revivalist-pietistic' and the 'traditionalist' sides in the TRC and that his influence went unchallenged despite his Arminian/non-Calvinist orientation and despite the fact that he clearly believed that unity was more important than doctrine. The fact

²⁵ See in his *Önéletírás* (Autobiography), op. cit., p.77.

²⁶ László Ravasz, 'Mott János' (John Mott), *Református Szemle* (1909): pp.249-252.

²⁷ Béla Kenessey, 'Püspöki évi jelentés' (Annual Report of the Bishop to the General Assembly'), *Református Szemle* (1909): pp.788-791.

that Mott recognized and expressed the priority of experience over doctrine went unnoticed by, or at least drew no comments from, both Calvinist and liberal professors. They, standing on the neo-Kantian ground proposed by their Hungarian mentor, the philosopher Károly Böhm, emphasized that the common religious experience of the church serves as a foundation to the ideal of the church.²⁸ Similarly, the whole controversy around Mott's Student Voluntary Movement, was not an issue in the Hungarian context. The TRC never participated in these debates and never really questioned the doctrinal impact of his work. Perhaps this was due in part to the relative isolation of the TRC from the West. Ende observed that Mott's impact was important primarily for how it opened up the possibility of acceptance for the home mission movement:

Within the Theological Seminary the authority of Mott's personality gave the needed impulse to home mission, which the small group [i.e. the group around Kecskeméthy] with their previous initiatives for home mission had been unable to do so far.²⁹

Ende also noticed a change in Ravasz, who has been very "critical of the youth-evangelization before ...Mott's lecture gained him over to the revivalism of the youth movement."³⁰ In my view this was the milestone for Ravasz, as he was gained for the mission movement and subsequently became the leader of the student mission work between 1908 and 1911 in Transylvania. Ravasz still favored the exclusive modality model against the sodalities in the mission movement, in apparent disagreement with Mott's position. Nevertheless, there is ample evidence to suggest (first of all in Ravasz's own articles written in praise of Mott in *Református Szemle*) that without the direct influence of Mott, Ravasz would probably not have been positive years later about the mission activity of the sodalities represented by Victor.³¹ For the same reason also, Ravasz may not have been so eager in "churchinizing missions and missionizing the church," as worded in his

²⁸ See more on the evaluation of this neo-Kantian background in chapter three.

²⁹ Magda van der Ende, *Imre Lajos élete és teológiai munkássága* (*The Life and Theological Work of Lajos Imre*) PhD Paper in Theology, presented at Egyetemi Fokú Egységes Protestáns Teológiai Intézet, Kolozsvár/ Cluj-Napoca, 1982. Budapest: Ráday College Press, 1990, p.29.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See his own reflections on his theological development in László Ravasz, *Emlékezéseim* (*My Memoirs*). Budapest: Református Egyház Zsinati Irodájának Sajtóosztálya, 1992.

declared program when he was Bishop of the Trans-Danubian District in Budapest. The student mission work was organized under the name of *Bethlen Gábor Kör* (*Bethlen Gábor Circle*), and Imre became involved as an active member. This typically Transylvanian society became a sister-organization to the *Magyar Evangéliumi Keresztény Diákszövetség* or MEKDSz (*Hungarian Evangelical Christian Student Union*) and Imre participated at the latter's conference in Balatonalmádi as a representative of the Transylvanian group. From this time, his realization of the need for evangelical revival and for practical Christianity began to grow gradually. Although at first he distanced himself from unhealthy "pietism,"³² he himself was later criticized for becoming a "pietist," although he rejected the charge. Mott's influence and his slogan of "the evangelization of the world in this generation" gained ground even in Transylvania during these years.³³

³² "This conference was very important to me. I did not sympathize either with the strict Pietists who believed in instant conversion and proved to be anti-cultural and narrow-minded, or with people like Tarnóczy who little valued the movement. I returned from the conference with the impression that these people talk about serious matters and about a deeper view of life, but it was impossible for me to accept their pietistic spirituality." Imre, *Önéletírás* (*Autobiography*), p.11, p.75.

³³ It is interesting how some CE Union members remembered the lasting influence of Mott and still continued in the 1930s to follow his vision in their evangelizing strategy. For further study see, for example, some issues of *Kis Tükör* below. Mott's program was echoed in the call of the CE Union with the slogan: "For the evangelization of Transylvania in this generation!" There were repeated callings for prayer and the organization of a geographical prayer chain of concentrated prayer weeks for the evangelization of Transylvania. See especially the emphasis on prayer at the November 1930 CE conference in Marosvásárhely, as we read in *Kis Tükör* Vol. 20, Nr. 46 (November 15, 1930): pp.181-183: "Those present are invited for the battle with the weapons of the Word and Spirit, 'For the evangelization of Transylvania in this generation.'" (*Az Ige és Lélek fegyvereivel való harcra hívta föl a jelenlevőket "Erdély evangélizálásáért ebben a nemzedékben!"*)

In *Kis Tükör* Vol. 20, Nr. 19 (May, 1930): p.73, there is an important article: '*Erdély Evangélizálásáért*' ('For the Evangelization of Transylvania') describing the history of EMESz (Transylvanian Association of Evangelical Workers), penned by "Alfa-Tau" (a pseudonym of Kecskeméthy's):

"This year, on the day of Saint István [August 20th, St. Stephen's day, the first Hungarian King] will be the 12th anniversary since those who became convinced about the will of God for the Evangelization of Transylvania and felt vividly their own responsibility in this regard, founded with Christian brotherly cooperation the Transylvanian Association of Evangelical Workers (EMESz), [back in 1918, the year of the annexation of Transylvania to Romania]. They established the organization whose aim across Transylvania is the spread of the gospel and promotion of new life in Christ. To this end they offered their voluntary and free service in

After a short period as an associate minister in the Torda congregation from October 1910 to June 1911, Imre traveled abroad and studied at the Theological Faculty of Aberdeen. Observing the model of the Scottish Church, he consciously strove for a unity of church and missions.³⁴ He could envisage mission work only as part of the church and not as something taking place through independent societies. His strategic vision for the future of the Transylvanian Reformed Church was that Home mission needed to grow and be carried on in and by the church.³⁵ As a result of his studies and experiences in Scotland, he later sought on his church's behalf to make links with the Reformed World Alliance (which had its headquarters in Scotland), and also with the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and with the Sunday School Society. In 1911 he was an associate minister in the congregation planted by Kecskeméthy in Kolozsvár. The following year he worked in the field of religious education, also in Kolozsvár. On July 18, 1913 he presented his doctoral dissertation in Practical Theology, with the title *The Religion of the Child*.

His second study period abroad was between October 1912 and March 1913 in Heidelberg. There he prepared his doctoral dissertation in pedagogy, attending the courses of the famous liberal theologian Friedrich Niebergall. Niebergall was considered the reformer of catechism and counseling, as he turned against both the rationalist and orthodox orientation in theology. The two became friends and as a result Niebergall, at Imre's invitation, visited Transylvania a few years later to lecture. In November 1913, Imre defended his doctoral thesis before Schneller with the title *The Relation of Moral Education to Religion*. It was in this period that he gradually turned his back on theological liberalism. Yet in his critique of István B. Pap's 1912 book on missions,³⁶ he protested against the fact that home mission in combination with orthodox pietism can become an equivalent and rival to

each local denomination of Christ's church, which welcomed this supporting ministry in their spiritual work."

³⁴ Imre, *ibid.* p.290: "We emphasized and practiced the view that this work belongs to the church."

³⁵ *Ibid.* "Two important principles were respected in the organizing [of mission work] from the beginning all the way through; 1) mission work is the work of the church, it is in the care of the church and is supervised by the church (unlike the practice of the sects); 2) the supervision by the church does not mean that mission work will fall prey to administrative bureaucracy; on the contrary, every branch will have freedom of action.(...)" p. 284.

³⁶ István B. Pap, *A belmisszió hősei* (The Heroes of Inner Missions).Budapest: 1912.

Practical Theology, as Géza Nagy accurately noticed. Curiously Nagy's evaluation of Imre's critique has a rationalistic, post-Enlightenment tone:

[Imre] sees clearly that in the fight between home mission and church both are guilty, because the former is often a fuller of intellectual darkness, blind fanaticism and superstition, while the church wants to be a goal in itself instead of being an educating tool toward a Christian personality. It becomes a judicial institution, an indolent rigid opposition which is often only bewailing the deterioration [of Christianity].³⁷

Imre also complained that the Transylvanian mission movement, represented by the CE Union and led by Kecskeméthy, was not a genuine practice of a reformed Practical Theology in the life of the church:

The representatives of the Transylvanian pietistic movement regarded mission work as their specialty and they watched suspiciously and distrustfully how the church is starting work as well. They looked down on this work and regarded it only as 'official work'.³⁸

From 1913–1914 Imre was a religious teacher in Marosvásárhely before becoming the minister of the Kolozskara congregation, a position he held until 1921. Throughout those years he was preoccupied with the Boy Scout movement. He sought to transplant the same principles of youth work that could be found in that movement and in the YMCA to Transylvania and became more and more involved in the home missionary movement, although he was not in agreement with Kecskeméthy.³⁹ In 1921 he accepted the chair of Practical Theology at the Kolozsvár Theological Faculty, holding the position from 1921 to 1948. He became the third editor of *Az Út*, a magazine founded by László Ravasz and Sándor

³⁷ See Nagy, *A Kolozsvári Református Teológiai Fakultás története* (The History of the Kolozsvár Reformed Theological Faculty), p81. In Hungarian it reads:

“Világosan látja, hogy a belmisszió és az egyház közti küzdelemben mindkettő hibás, mert előbbi sokszor a szellemi sötétség, vakbuzgóság és babona táplálója, az egyház pedig öncél akar lenni keresztyén személyiségre nevelő eszköz helyett. Jogi szervezetté válik, ahol sokszor az indolens merev opposzió csak sópánkodik a romlások felett.”

³⁸ In Imre, *Önéletírás* (Autobiography), p.290. See his oft published ideas and criticism concerning this in his many articles published in the church periodicals, *Az Út* and *Református Szemle*.

³⁹ *Ibid.* p.194: “He [Kecskeméthy] distrusted the constructive home mission we later started in the church. He doubted we did it out of faith.”

Makkai for ministers; this magazine focused on the discipline of Practical Theology in order to revive the church and Imre was a major contributor to it for many years. He was forced to retire by the Communist government on July 1st, 1948 and was refused permission to continue teaching either at the Seminary or at the Faculty of Education of the University, being regarded as a subversive. This effectively silenced him as a public figure; his only surviving child, a daughter, spent several years in a Communist prison, further darkening this period of his life. In the early 1960s he wrote his autobiography and some Bible commentaries; all of these were left in manuscript form as there was less and less opportunity to publish books during this time. When he died on March 8th, 1974, his obituary quoted from 2 Samuel 3:38: “there is... a great man fallen this day in Israel.”

Without Imre, says Adorjáni, the mission work of our church, which already has an eighty year old history, is unimaginable.⁴⁰

Comparison of the two models represented by Kecskeméthy and Imre

In the Hungarian Reformed Church, this was basically a period of struggle between theological Rationalism on one side and traditional-historical Calvinism with its somewhat dead Orthodoxy on the other hand. In the end, Neo-Orthodoxy prevailed in the early 1930s; Imre together with his friend and mentor in Systematics, Sándor Tavaszy, became a loyal adherent of dialectical theology.⁴¹ Even the revivalist wing seemed to embrace that teaching, as being better than any rational and liberal theology. Tavaszy observed as early as 1925 that rationalism cannot be the foundation of any theology; he fully realized that the way in which one

⁴⁰ See Zoltán Adorjáni's article on Lajos Imre in *Akik jó bizonytságot nyertek...* (Those Who Have Gained a Good Testimony...) p.237.

⁴¹ In the English-speaking world the term “neo-Orthodoxy” is most commonly used to indicate this theological school or orientation. In Transylvania they preferred the term “dialectical theology,” or sometimes “new-Reformational theology,” or simply “reformational theology” or even “theology of the Word.” These expressions mainly referred to the new theological trend represented by the Swiss theologians such as Karl Barth and Emil Brunner. See more on this in chapter four, where Dezső László's analysis of the usage of these words in the Transylvanian interpretation will be discussed in more detail.

systematizes the different theological disciplines will have a decisive effect on theoretical conclusions.⁴²

Dr. Sándor Tavaszy (1888-1951), one of the best disciples of Böhm and a member of the neo-Kantian philosophy school of Kolozsvár, beginning in the 1920s, played a major role in the dogmatic orientation of the Transylvanian Reformed Church. A professor of Systematic Theology at Kolozsvár Seminary and one of Imre's best friends, he first fought for scientific and academic accuracy and later abandoned his liberal leanings, embracing Barth's theology. From 1930 onwards, the church as a whole turned to Neo-Orthodoxy as a result of his influence. Seminaries all over Hungary were strongly influenced by Tavaszy's writings so that in less than a decade the whole Reformed Church on both sides of the Hungarian-Romanian border became apparently Barthian. In 1932 he published his *Református keresztyén dogmatika (Reformed Christian Dogmatics)* which served as a textbook for the church. He published *Az Út*, a magazine for ministers, together with Ravasz, Imre, and Makkai and later was the chief editor of the journal *Kálvinista Világ*. Through both these publications, as well as many articles published elsewhere, his influence radiated far beyond Transylvania.

Tavaszy declared, "*Confessional consciousness, missionary ardor and general scientific preparation* are univocally constitutive principals of a serious theology."⁴³ Tavaszy makes it clear that confessional commitment is more important than any objectivity. One can surmise that this was due to his existentialist orientation. He was a reader of Kierkegaard and Heidegger, philosophers who emphasized the primacy of the subject against scientific objectivism. He would fight

⁴² Sándor Tavaszy, *A tudományok rendszere, A theologiai tudomány helye a tudományok mai rendszerében* (The System of Sciences: the Place of Theological Science in the Contemporary System of Sciences). Cluj-Kolozsvár: Minerva irodalmi és nyomdai mű intézet, 1925.

⁴³ See the whole reasoning of Tavaszy, as it reads in Hungarian, *ibid.* p.28: "...a teológiára vonatkoztatottan azt mondhatjuk, hogy a vallásnak és specialiter a keresztyénségnek a megértése első sorban nem a felkutatott történeti és filozófiai adatoknak a tényleges megismerésén alapul, hanem annak a személyes életünkbe való felvételén és elsajátításán, és azon praktikus érdeken, amely a szívéünkben, a felismert konfesszionális értékrendszerrel szemben missziói kötelezettséget ébreszt. A theologia tudományos művelése tehát mindenekelőtt valamely keresztyén egyházi közösséggel való lelki szolidaritáson és másodsorban az egyetemes vallástudománnyal való komoly kontaktuson alapul. A konfesszionális tudat, a missziói hév és az általános tudományos készség egyformán konstitutív elvei a komoly teológiának."

against positivist rationalism by stressing personal involvement, which in turn, according to his understanding, is a missionary commitment to the denomination. In Tavaszy's concept of mission, being a missionary is equivalent to propagating one's confessional beliefs, rather than propagating the gospel. Imre was a close friend of Tavaszy, viewing him as a lifelong mentor in systematic theology, but Imre had a slightly different view of what it meant to be a missionary and to do mission work.⁴⁴ The third person belonging to their circle was Professor Sándor Makkai, who became the Bishop of Transylvania between 1926 and 1936 before emigrating to Hungary. With minor differences, Tavaszy, Imre and Makkai agreed in their ecclesiology and the mission model which follows from it. What Tavaszy suggests in Transylvania can be put in parallel with what Jenő Sebestyén⁴⁵ tried to prove to János Victor⁴⁶ in Hungary. Sebestyén criticized what he saw as the non-Calvinistic and general, shallow Christian character of the

⁴⁴ Cf. for example in Imre's *Önéletírás (Autobiography)*, pp.291-292.

"Sándor Tavaszy's clear views, his thorough theological and philosophical points-of-view, were of great help in grounding the issue from a theoretical and a theological point-of-view. Still, he had a flaw that made working with him difficult. He quite one-sidedly supported ideas that were mainly issues of foreign theology and which in Transylvania were not critical matters worthy of opposition, e.g. he justly opposed (especially reacting to the Kuyper-studies) the so called 'Christianity based on experience' or 'general Christianity,' which became excessive abroad. Still I had the feeling that we needed more 'experience based Christians' and fewer rationalists. I remember cases when he protested against 'romantic friendships' or against incorrect practice of prayer meetings. His statements regarding these issues were correct in general and only misplaced at the moment. It was a phenomena quickly passing away and often useful, because it made us look into the matter and clear it up." And yet Imre stressed in conclusion: "I am convinced that without Sándor Tavaszy's help, our mission work would have turned the wrong way on both sides."

⁴⁵ Jenő Sebestyén was a professor of Systematic Theology in Budapest who was greatly influenced by Abraham Kuyper and by Dutch strict reformed theology in general. He was the leader of the movement *Soli Deo Gloria* and wanted to achieve a historical Calvinist line in the church. He resisted Barthianism in many of his writings. On the other hand, he rejected the revivalist movements, labeling them as unhealthy pietism.

⁴⁶ János Victor was a professor of Systematic Theology and a key leader of the revivalist movement in Hungary. His father and grandfather were very active both in the Scottish Mission to the Jews in Budapest and in the British and Foreign Bible Society. He became the founder of the Hungarian Student Christian Movement (MEKDSz) in 1904. He was a member of the CE Movement as well and a friend of John R. Mott. He also played a key role in establishing the Hungarian Christian Mission Society (later, the Hungarian Christian Reformed Mission Society) in 1913.

home mission movement and of the para-church societies, most of which were founded and run by Victor. Tavaszy and Imre similarly criticized the societies and even the bare existence of sodalities against the modality.⁴⁷ Victor answered these challenges in a series of articles with the title 'Kálvinista belmisszió' ('Calvinist Home Mission') appearing in the journal *Reformáció* in 1922-1923 where he tried to reconcile the two notions. Victor maintained that "general Christianity," the tag with which the home mission movement was pejoratively labeled, could be defined thus:

Until the human soul experiences the "general Christian" truths, truths which cannot yet be stamped as Calvinist, there is no way it [the soul] can reach a developed type of Calvinist Christianity either ... every birth in faith begins with a primitive stage in which it is in vain to try to stamp that soul as either Calvinistic or anything else. He will not take a stand, he will remain a "general," "colorless" Christian. So the home mission movement's call and task is that these first stages, without which everything else would be anchorless, would be put in motion in as many human hearts as possible.⁴⁸

Victor's position here is a reasonable, possibly wise approach which allows people to accept and understand Calvinistic theology in terms of a process but the aim was still to lead people on to a mature understanding of theology, namely, Calvinism.

However, Kecskeméthy complained against the same charges in Transylvania:

⁴⁷ Strangely, in this regard Tavaszy and his followers were not in agreement with Barth who in talking about mission although even criticized the sodalities, nevertheless acknowledged their important role in carrying out the mission of the church, i.e. of the "modality." See for example: "Secondly, the community itself and as such is the acting subject in foreign missions too, or else it is not the Christian community. That in practice there may be definite circles or unions or societies which initiate missions corresponds to the practical discharge of many other ministries in the Church." Cf. Barth, Karl *Church Dogmatics*, IV/3/2, p.875.

⁴⁸ János Victor, *Térj magadhoz drága Sion!* Budapest: 1930, pp.82-83. See also the articles previously published in *Reformáció* (the 1922-23 issues) under the title 'Kálvinista belmisszió' (Calvinist home mission). A recent evaluation of the Sebestyén-Victor debate can be found in an article by Károly Fekete under the title 'Makkai Sándor és Victor János misszióértelmezésének összehasonlítása' in *En Christo, Tanulmányok a 85 éves Dr. Bütösi János tiszteletére*, szerk. Gaál Sándor. Debrecen: 2004, cf. especially pp.107-110.

I am with full appreciation toward the home mission work started [officially by the church leadership] with such an élan in the reformed church, but I would have wished (...) that they would have not mocked the *universal Christianity* as “*general Christianity*” and would have not started with this label an annihilating war against it [the independent home mission work which was thus labeled]. [Bold, LH.]⁴⁹

For Victor, it is wrong to expect from the home mission movement those things which are the tasks of the church because, “the home mission movements are running a dynamic guerrilla war that they might win as many people as possible as prey for Christ.”⁵⁰ This use of a military metaphor was not intended to imply aggressiveness but rather to stress the real purpose of the home mission movement of gaining outsiders from outside the church rather than strengthening the Calvinism of the insiders. People first must be won over to become Christians and only afterwards Calvinists. This is in line with what Kecskeméthy proposed in Transylvania during his early years of activity:

All in all, the main goals of the Evangelical Union are such that they are impossible for any established church anywhere to fulfill on its own. For the synod can pass as many laws as it pleases commanding that everybody leads holy lives, spread the Gospel, etc., but what will become of it? That is, just because there is nothing wrong with the main artery of a person, it will not do to plug up his capillary vessels just to prevent them from possibly rebelling and declaring themselves arteries. So, raise high the banner of the Evangelical Union! [i.e., CE]⁵¹

What both Victor and Kecskeméthy are suggesting is that without the preliminary pioneering work of home mission in the task of gaining people for the church, they cannot be won for Calvinism either. And declarations and regulations can do nothing unless people are first committed to Christ in a “general Christianity” type of conduct, which is in fact the universal Christianity lived out by any Christian anywhere who accepts Jesus as Saviour and Lord. According to these protagonists of the mission movement, for people to be gained to Christianity, they first had to accept Christ as their personal Lord and Saviour which means they would

⁴⁹ See Kecskeméthy's article 'A pünköszt lélek' (The Spirit of Pentecost) on the “general Christianity” problem in: *Kis Tükör* Vol. 21, Nr. 21 (May 23, 1931): pp.81-82.

⁵⁰ Victor, Térj magadhoz drága Sion!, p. 87.

⁵¹ Kecskeméthy, István, 'Az evangéliumi szövetségről' (On the Evangelical Union) *Protestáns Egyházi és Iskolai Lap* Vol. 39, Nr. 36 (September 6, 1896): p.563.

become Christ-centered. Only after this can they be expected to become church-focused as well in a denominational and Calvinistic sense. The protagonists of the officially centralized mission movement, in contrast, would start with a strengthening of the confessional commitment of the people whom they tried to gain over to Christianity. The most important theologians in Transylvania following this pattern were Tavaszy and Imre. But the overall picture was not so black and white, because it is fair to affirm that Tavaszy, for example, at least in theory, would reject church-centeredness. Yet he demands a mission movement that produces primarily Calvinistic converts, and any such mission effort if enforced rigidly to the utmost limits could not but result in a church-centered model. The criticism of Harold Fuller is relevant here, with his assertion that *presence* might replace *proclamation*. Evangelism might be hindered by a church-centered view.⁵² Clearly, the preliminary doctrine on the nature of the church dictates a very specific view of missions as well.

The dilemma in choosing one or the other of the models persists even when someone raises and clarifies the which-comes-first conundrum, either a Christ-centered and church-focused or a Christ-focused and church-centered mission model. In fact, in essence there was a total and formal agreement in choosing the first option on all sides. The real question is, how did these differing models serve what they all in agreement formally declared and attested to? To what extent were they in reality both Christ-centered and church-focused?

⁵² W. Harold Fuller, *Mission-Church Dynamics, How to change bicultural tensions into dynamic missionary outreach*. Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1980, p.76.

"A church-centered view can be essentially a holistic view, which has its advantages and its disadvantages. If the church is God's central purpose, and if in order to fulfill God's purpose it should be organizationally one, then there is no need for separate mission organizations within or outside it. This can give rise to the concept that "all is mission" - with the danger that "nothing is mission" because it is no one's special concern. (A holistic view would be in keeping with oriental thought patterns.)"

Fuller formulates the same dilemma from a different approach on the same page:

"A logical conclusion in an extreme church-centric outlook is to give evangelism the nasty name of proselytizing and call for a ban on it. (...) If 'all is mission' then there is no need for specific evangelism. 'Presence' replaces 'proclamation.' "

Imre's Proposed Model

On November 17th, 1922 Imre issued a petition to the Executive Council of the Transylvanian Church District. This was the first time that a request was made in an official petition for the organization and coordination of the church's home mission activity, suggesting that it could, and should, be orchestrated at an official level. The petition (No.764./1922)⁵³ was accepted and put forward to solicit the opinions of the Presbyteries belonging to the Transylvanian District, led by Dr. Károly Nagy, Bishop of the District of Transylvania from 1918 to 1926. Imre was aware that there was already a wide variety of evangelistic and Christian social activities being carried out by different church and para-church organizations/sodalities since the second half of the 19th century in the area of the so-called “inner mission or home mission” as a direct influence of the German and Scottish missionary societies (such as the Scottish Mission to the Jews in Hungary).⁵⁴ He also knew that these activities were regarded by the official church with suspicion and misunderstanding because they were labeled as being hostile to the very nature and welfare of the church. So in the introduction to his proposal, we read:

The activities encompassed in the notion of “home mission” today are evidently the hardest and the most critical problem for our Church District. This problem is caused by the following. Our church District, moreover, our whole official Hungarian Reformed Church, took a stand of resistance against the rise of the home mission movement, which sprung up and spread in our land mostly from German, but also from Scottish sources; as well as from founding associations serving to strengthen different branches of the work. This oppositional stance which was taken by the official church was motivated -- and at that time, justly praised by

⁵³ ‘Proposal for Organization and Coordination of the Home Mission Cause on Both Church District and Presbytery Level,’ submitted by Dr. Lajos Imre (*“Javaslat a belmisszió ügyének egyházkerületi és egyházmegyei szervezése tárgyában”*), in: Archives of the Transylvanian Reformed District: Minutes of the Executive Council's Sessions Nr. 764/1922.

⁵⁴ See, for example, the excellent works on the history of the Scottish Mission to the Jews in Hungary written recently by Ábrahám Kovács, *The Origin of the Scottish-Hungarian Church Relations: The Settlement and the First Years of the Scottish Mission in the 1840s*. Baráth L. Béla – Barcza József (eds.), a D. Dr. Harsányi András Alapítvány Kiadványai, IV. Debrecen, 2001. And similarly, Ábrahám Kovács, *A Budapesti Ev. Ref. Németajkú Leányegyház eredete és története, 1858-1869*, a D. Dr. Harsányi András Alapítvány Kiadványai, 10, Debrecen, 2004.

everybody -- by the fact that together with these works, an alien spirit, or an intransigent theological view could have been introduced. In such a way radicalism could have entered, something not palatable to the official church as it might have encouraged an antagonistic grouping against her. The movement started in our country began to take such a shape that it might have led to the estrangement of believers from the church itself...⁵⁵

One cannot help observing the criticism of the sodality mission model, basically carried out by the revivalist movement of Kecskeméthy (and professor Kenessey too), since 1895 and centered especially around the CE Movement.

In an attempt to summarize the failings and hardships of the past, Dr. Imre enumerated several reasons, at least one of which is relevant to our study. It points to the fact that even if a work was started by the official church itself, it could not succeed without the support and participation of local congregations: "[the second] reason for the lack of success [in the previous missionary work] was that these ministries were not initiated from or by the local congregations, but rather they were ordered from above, from the church leaders and officials of the District..."⁵⁶

Dr. Imre argued that this would not be a tragedy if the Hungarian Reformed Church was still under the Hungarian government! However, the annexation of Transylvania by Romania in 1918, resulting in severe restrictions of human and minority rights of Hungarians living in Transylvania (for example, the Romanian authorities harassing and even closing some Calvinist Primary and High Schools), meant, said Imre, that the time had come for the official church to take over the planning of the home mission movement. This way, the church could better harmonize activities, planning a complete strategy for all of the ministries toward the aim of the Christian education of church members, both children and adults. "It is time now that we take in our hands the task of the education of our people"⁵⁷ at every level..."⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Imre, 'Proposal for Organization and Coordination of the Home Mission Cause...'

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ He refers to the Hungarians *per definitionem*, because the Hungarian Reformed Church consisted of only ethnic Hungarians at that time.

⁵⁸ Imre, 'Proposal for Organization and Coordination of the Home Mission Cause...'

It is clear that Lajos Imre, a gifted pedagogue whose main concern throughout his whole life was the Christian education of all believers, especially children and the youth, understood mission first and foremost as being concerned with the ongoing education of church members within a Calvinistic framework. His later works reflect this view, many of them linking, for example, the doctrine of predestination with education,⁵⁹ or connecting the practice of the church, the *Ecclesiastica*,⁶⁰ to the doctrine of the church, Ecclesiology, one of his major concerns.⁶¹ Imre's concept of mission was somehow reduced to the building up and defense (even in political terms) of the existing church from the inside, rather than the responsibility of the church for outreach and expansion as given in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19, 20:

“(T)hese activities - what we call with a summing up notion, home mission⁶² - have got as their foundation the faithful pastoral ministry, the pastoral counseling of the youth and the well grounded religious education of children and adults.”⁶³

Now Lajos Imre was proposing an integration of all the home mission work in the church⁶⁴ with the idea that it should be monitored, conducted and orchestrated by the General Assembly and by the Executive Council of the Transylvanian District led by the Bishop. In reading his motion, one can see how carefully he tried to avoid two opposite dangers. On the one hand, he did not want the work to be led by church governors who might be too busy or too far removed

⁵⁹ Cf. Lajos Imre, 'A predestináció tana a missziói munkában' (The Doctrine of Predestination in Missionary Work), in: *Theológiai Tanulmányok, Kecskeméthy emlékkönyv*. Kolozsvár, é.n. (n.d.), p.135.

⁶⁰ In fact this was *Ecclesiology* rolled under the theological discipline of Practical Theology.

⁶¹ Cf. the main works of Dr. Lajos Imre related to Ecclesiastics and Mission:

A belmisszió problémája (The Problem of Home Mission), 1923; A belmisszió tartalmának összefoglalása (The Concluding of the Content of Home Mission), 1923; A belmisszió és az egyház (Home Mission and the Church), 1929; 'Az ekkléziasztika, mint gyakorlati teológiai diszciplína' (Ecclesiastics, as a Practical Theology Discipline), In: *És lőn világosság...* Budapest: 1941, pp.333–352; *Ekkléziasztika* (Ecclesiastics), 1942.

⁶² The Hungarian word for *home mission*, “*belmisszió*,” more closely resembles the German term, “*innere mission*” (“*bel*”: “inside,” “in,” “into,” “intern,” “within,” “inward,” “interior,” “internal”). For *foreign mission* we use the word *külmisszió*, where the word “*kül*” has the opposite meaning, such as “outside,” “outward,” “exterior,” “external,” etc.

⁶³ Imre, op.cit.

⁶⁴ This practically meant under the control of the official leadership of the whole denomination.

from the task, not to mention the possible dangers of episcopalian rule from the top. He tactfully wanted *integration*, but *not centralization*. On the other hand, he wanted to get the whole church, both the representative “official” church, and the grassroots church consisting of the ordinary members of local congregations, involved in home mission. His view was a strategic one; he wanted the work to be orchestrated from an official level and yet wished to avoid the temptation of a centralization which could totally hinder the cause with an inappropriate organizational and administrative bureaucracy.

With these dangers in mind, Imre proposed a plan for a statute for home mission activity to be included later in the Canons of Church Government:

(1.) Our Church District [General Assembly], recognizing the importance of the pastoral and educational activities summarized in and enrolled under the term ‘home mission,’ will create the Church District’s Home Mission Committee, similar to the model already offered by the District’s Educational Committee, so that these activities should be led, supported and controlled by it.[Underline by the author.]⁶⁵

For Imre, the Scottish example must have been decisive. He had witnessed that model in Scottish Presbyterian church structures as a young student in the United Free Church College in Aberdeen. This influence is suggested in this extract:

(T)he solution will be either that we help ourselves by organs of society;⁶⁶ or we are going to create such an official organ of which the primary task would be to solve these questions within the church, such as we see in the foreign churches, especially in the case of the Scottish and the American models where they are trying to resolve these problems with the church as a whole.⁶⁷

The second point of Imre's proposal considers the selection of the members of the Home Mission Committee. He wanted to welcome to the Committee board all the professors of the Theological Seminary in Kolozsvár;⁶⁸ the Honorary President would be the Bishop and the Deputy President, the Deputy Bishop. The number of people serving on the Committee was to be decided by the District's Executive Council and elected by the General Assembly. The District's Executive

⁶⁵ Imre, ‘Proposal for Organization and Coordination of the Home Mission Cause...’

⁶⁶ Or sodalities, which is not an option, as explained by Imre later.

⁶⁷ Imre, ‘Proposal for Organization and Coordination of the Home Mission Cause...’

⁶⁸ Some later attacked this proposal.

Council was to appoint three ministers and three lay members as committee members. Under his second point, Dr. Imre argued that the Committee should be a reporting and recommending body which would make regular reports on the missionary work to the District's General Assembly and to the Executive Council of the Church District. That body would also control, coordinate and lead every activity that fitted into the missionary activities of the Church.⁶⁹ Under his third point, Imre suggested that every Presbytery should elect its own home mission secretary from among its pastors as a missionary agent. Two of these elected agents would serve as fulltime traveling secretaries on behalf of the whole District. They were to visit the congregations and the "colleges" (Primary and Secondary church schools, and the Theological Seminary) and to organize youth associations such as the Young Christian's Association, linked with the international YMCA,⁷⁰ and the Scouting Associations.⁷¹ Imre concluded his petition by repeating the main goal for proposing and setting up this Committee. "I want to stress that I see the main goal of the work of this Home Mission Committee as being to give support and advice, rather than severely controlling..."⁷²

It is interesting to see the archive records of the opinions collected from several Presbyteries within a year after this proposal. For example, the Nagyszeben Presbytery pleaded that this cause should not result in more administration: "Souls should move there, hearts should beat together, rather than a new administrative body be added to our lives."⁷³ The Nagyenyed Presbytery also stressed the importance of the spiritual attitude of those who would be involved in the work:

⁶⁹ Imre instituted the following activities: pastoral counseling, youth work, children's religious education outside the school, ministries of mercy to orphans, the poor, the sick, and the elderly, and all the education of the people except for the organized church school system which had its own department (or Church Committee). There was no mention of foreign missions.

⁷⁰ They called it '*Ifjúsági Keresztyén Egyesület*' (IKE) ('Youth Men's Union') in Transylvania; and *Keresztyén Ifjúsági Egyesület* (KIE) (Christian Youth Union) in Hungary. IKE had been started by Kecskeméthy but later others, led by Imre, took it over. These included the Group of Seven, who after their graduation organized the Senior Class of the IKE for members who were no longer students, yet still continued to support the work.

⁷¹ This was led and developed by Imre based partly on the model he saw in Scotland. He also attempted to set up the Boy's brigade and Girl's Brigade, etc.

⁷² Imre, 'Proposal for Organization and Coordination of the Home Mission Cause...'

⁷³ Minutes of the Executive Council of the Transylvanian Church District, in Archives of the Transylvanian Church District, Nr. 38.

From among the practicing ministers today, those who have the charisma for home mission work, they would act out of spiritual motivation, and out of love for the cause. Those who lack this charisma will hardly ever become good home missionaries. We ask the professors of the theological faculty, that they strive to educate the pastors of the future so that every young minister will step into church life as a home missionary. The directive will be filled with life only in this way. Only in this way will the emptied church building be filled with believers and self-sacrificing members will come around the church and school, and so our mother church will blossom once more.⁷⁴

Imre had similar views, fearing the institutionalization of the mission work itself, as we see, for example, in his remarks on the *methods* of missionary work in his writings and in his autobiography:

We had many fights to fight also regarding the method of mission. Our first thought was that *mission work can be done only voluntarily and one needs the urge of the Spirit of the Lord* in order to do mission among children or youth. *Mission work cannot be a demand.* There was a zealous dean [or ‘superintendent,’ the Hungarian ‘esperes’ means chief minister of a Presbytery] who thought that mission work could be founded with the help of administrative work. Hearing this, I and others also were desperate, because that solution would have meant the end of mission. Makkai formulated the thought that one can expect those theologians who participated while children at Sunday schools and in Bible study groups and who practiced Sunday school teaching while theology students, to also do this work in their congregations as pastors. This is how *every branch of mission work became part of the paragraph enumerating pastoral duties. I still think this to have been an incorrect decision.* The

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* In Hungarian it reads: Nagyenyedí református egyházmegye: “Megjegyzí azonban, hogy a mai gyakorló papok közül azok, akiknek a belmissziói munka charismája adatott, lelki kényszerből, úgyszeretettől végzik ezt a munkát; akiknél ez a charisma hiányzik, azok nehezen lesznek jó belmisszionáriusok. Kérjük a theol. fakultás tanári karát, igyekezzék a jövő papságát úgy nevelni, hogy minden ifjú pap belmisszionáriusként lépjen ki egyházába, mert csak így fog étellett megtelni a szabályrendelet, hívő lelkekkel a kiürült templom; és áldozatkész tagok így fognak tömörülni templom és iskola körül, s csak így virágzik fel anyaszentegyházunk.” Vö: Igazgatótanács: 7613./1922.sz. körlevele, (cf. *Református Szemle* (1923): p.149.)

pastoral reports were filled with data about non-existent Sunday schools or Christian youth unions, successful gatherings and vast meetings of the women's unions.⁷⁵

Concluding our research on Imre's initiation and vision of a church-centered mission model, we can make the following observations:

First of all, Imre started his proposal by criticizing the previous working model of the sodalities. Although he did not explicitly mention Kecskeméthy or the CE-Bethanist movement, the implication was obvious for everybody to recognize.

Secondly, when criticizing the "Scottish and German sources" of the previous mission movement, he dismissed them as being dangerous for the church and even went so far as to label them heretical: "the fact that together with these works, an alien spirit, or *an intransigent theological view* could have been introduced" (italics LH). This was not just an attempt to churchinize mission, but it represented a refusal to recognize any mission activity outside the control of the official church.⁷⁶ Speaking of the dangers, he even asserts, "in such a way radicalism could have entered, something not palatable to the official church as it might

⁷⁵ Imre, *Önéletírás (Autobiography)*, p 291. Imre continued with sharp criticism, attacking the bishop's strategy because he questioned the legitimacy of an initiation from "above," i.e., from the high church leadership. Imre believed that organizing mission work from "the grass-root level" was more effective:

"In order of their formation, the latest branches in the mission work of the Reformed Church were the Women's Association and the Men's Association. With their formation, the organization of the domains of the church according to age-groups came to an end. Unlike in the case of the other branches, these two Associations were formed *because of the initiative of the church leadership and not of the people*. The idea of their formation came from Makkai and Vásárhelyi and they were formed in every congregation by the decree of the governing board. Of course *the result was the creation of many inactive and fictional associations*. The main leadership was too numerous, the program did not aim at the spiritual growth of the people, but collecting for causes assigned by the leadership. The collection program did have laudable results (bed-clothes for the Reformed Hospital, feeding poor students, recitation contests to make Hungarian poetry widely known, etc.), but spiritually it had minimal effects. It aimed to activate people and not to help their spiritual growth. (...)

As a mission lecturer *I did not agree with this method*, still I supported them in all their plans." (pp.282–283.) [Italics, LH.]

⁷⁶ It is strange for he says quite the opposite at times. "At least we still ask with reverence: Since when is it normal to confuse the holy church – the dear mother [of believers] – with the high church leadership? We all are just servants..." ("Annyit azonban mégis tisztelettel megkérdeünk: Mióta szokás összetéveszteni az anyaszentegyházat – az édes anyát – a fő hatósággal? Valamennyien csak szolgák vagyunk..."), see in: *Egyházi Figyelő* Vol. 2, Nr. 1. (January 5, 1921).

have enforced an antagonistic stream against her. The movement started in our country began to take such a shape that it might have led to the estrangement of believers from the church itself..." But then could the official leadership of the Transylvanian church have been regarded as an infallible body capable of guaranteeing "the pure reformed character" of missions, when the same leadership was also a bedrock of questionable church politics and power games, often more interested in nurturing episcopalian tendencies rather than working for the purity of the church.

Thirdly, Imre was clear in opposing the sodalities, in spite of the Barthian position he shared with his friend and mentor Sándor Tavaszy. But the debate about the modality and sodality question was not to be so easily won at an official level. For example, another famous contemporary theologian, Dr. László Musnai, had a completely different view on the issue, asserting,

(T)he union is a free association of the watchmen of the church and because its goals are identical with the goals of the historical church, though more free, so it will not work bound to historical forms and frames. It is normal, though, that it should stay in the closest agreement with the church.⁷⁷

Fourthly, Imre looked back on his modality run mission model in his autobiography from a distance of 40 years; he commented here on his work and vision as having fallen prey to the criticism of the Bishop himself. Was this model in the end functional or not? What was supposed to be an integration of mission work in the church, or rather, under the official church's leadership and authority, ended up tragically being centralized by it then gradually phased out of the church by the pressure of the Communist regime. Makkai went through the same disillusionment in Hungary, as observed by Fekete, following Kool. Here are Imre's own reflections on the subject in the 1960s:

⁷⁷ In Hungarian it reads:

"Az egyesület célja a Krisztus evangéliumának diadalra juttatása első sorban önmagunkban, másodsorban gyülekezeteinkben, s ami ezt nem munkálja, vagy elő nem segíti, az nem tartozhatik az egyesület munkái közé. Az egyesület az egyház őrállóinak szabad társasága s mivel céljai azonosak a történelmi egyház céljaival, csak hogy szabadabban, mert történelmi formák és keretek által meg nem kötve munkálkodik, természetes, hogy az egyházzal a legszorosabb egyetértésben kell lennie." See his article, 'Egyesületünkéről' (On Our Union), in: *Egyházi Figyelő*, Vol. 2, Nr. 5, (December 1, 1921): p.1.

In this totally new world I can understand even Bishop Vásárhelyi who ten years ago [this would have been in 1953 as Imre was writing in 1963] declared our mission work to be useless and leading to damnation and who accused Sándor Tavaszy, Lajos Gönczy and me of corrupting a whole generation of the Transylvanian church district by the views and work we have confessed and done, since the Lord condemned our work and it came to nothing. That is all right. Greater men than we experienced the same thing and were judged in the same way. The Lord sees and knows what happened. Let me mention here the fact that we started dealing with mission also after the Second World War. I came to the conclusion that mission is not a separate, self-sufficient theological discipline, but it is a demand that must be met by every pastor in his activities. It is what reminds the church and the pastor to perform the duties of their calling so as to preach the Word of God as an institution or as a person and to do that faithfully and with a sense of responsibility toward God.⁷⁸

We will turn shortly to the concept and mission model embraced and developed by Kecskeméthy as reflected in his writings. But first I deem it important to examine the two theologians whose ideas had the strongest influence on Imre, namely Forgács and Ravasz.

The Influence of Forgács and Ravasz on Imre's Mission Model

We need to understand what led to Imre's ultimate model which Kecskeméthy so fiercely opposed from the very beginning. Interestingly, László Ravasz and Gyula Forgács were the two theologians whose ideas most decisively shaped Imre's views. Ravasz at first opposed the revivalist and pietistic approach, but then he gradually and visibly moved closer to them after Mott's visit in 1909.⁷⁹ Forgács came from the opposite direction, being a member of CE. Yet, as a co-editor of Ravasz's pastoral journal, *Az Út* - Imre became an important contributor as well,

⁷⁸ Imre's *Önéletírása* (Autobiography), p.293.

⁷⁹ See his article on Mott's visit and the repeated reports of Bishop Kenessey in *Református Szemle*, the official periodical of the church, as well as Kenessey's reports to the General Assembly. Ravasz even claimed that the readers would hear Mott's name again and again from this time, "it is worth while memorizing it," because Mott would surely make history in the near future. He proved to be right as Mott was later awarded the Nobel Prize and was an honorary president at the Amsterdam meeting of the World Council of Churches in 1948.

as noted earlier - Forgács was probably concerned with building a sound compromise from which to define what mission should be.

The difference between Forgács and Kecskeméthy in how they tried to define home mission is interesting. Forgács did not live in Transylvania but worked more in Budapest and the surrounding area. Yet his famous and pioneering book⁸⁰ appeared in every Transylvanian manse library, and he achieved a regular presence in Transylvania by writing frequent articles about mission and pastoral care in *Az Út*, thus having a great influence on the contemporary understanding of mission. It is important, therefore, to fully understand his view on missions, as we try to achieve a wider picture of the theological thinking of the period.

Kool observes that Forgács rejected the definition of Wichern⁸¹ who limited home mission to the work which “the official organs of the Christian church are *not* capable of reaching.”⁸² Forgács’ proposal is to include these ‘official organs’ in mission work also. I am not suggesting that Forgács did not consider the institutional and, to some extent “Episcopalian” legacy of the Reformed Church as the primary obstacle in her becoming a missionary church, but certainly his and Ravasz’s emphasis differ from that of Kecskeméthy’s.

The mission model represented first by Forgács, and later by Imre⁸³ is in direct lineage with the one that both Makkai and Ravasz, (as Bishops of the

⁸⁰ Gyula Forgács, *A belmisszió és cura pastoralis kézikönyve*, (The Handbook of Home Mission and Cura Pastoralis). Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Református Parochiális Könyvtár, 1925. Originally it was published under the title *A misszió elmélete, Practica theológiai tanulmány* (The Theory of Mission, A Study in Practical Theology).

⁸¹ Ravasz did the same, although declaring the opposite, that he would use the concept of “home mission” consistent with Wichern’s usage, as we will see later.

⁸² Forgács, *A belmisszió és cura pastoralis kézikönyve*, (The Handbook of Home Mission and Cura Pastoralis), p. 29.

⁸³ It is important to mention here that Imre was inclined to see his mission model as an extension of religious education in the church. I will elaborate on this in chapters five and six. Kool observed in Forgács’ interpretation of the Great Commandment the roots of a repeated emphasis on catechism and teaching conceived as the core of mission. See Kool, pp.301-302: “(...) although this element of ‘discipling,’ of educating the congregation is included in the Great Commandment, in this way Forgács isolated the commandment of ‘teaching’ from its broader context. Matthew 28:19 contains only one commandment (aor. imp.), ‘disciple all nations’ (matheteusate panta ta ethne), which clause is dependent on the aor. part. ‘going’ (poreuthentes). Thus the main stress is on: by going... you have to disciple all nations. This commandment is specified by two participles ‘baptizing’ (baptizontes) and ‘teaching to observe’ (didaskontes terein), namely ‘all that I commanded you’ (panta hosa enetei lamen

Transylvanian District, with its centre in Kolozsvár, and of the Trans-Danubian District, with its centre in Budapest, respectively), tried to put into practice using their highly influential position in the church. Imre, a companion of both Makkai and Ravasz, never deviated significantly from their position in the early years. For this reason it is necessary to examine László Ravasz's retrospective thoughts on mission strategy as he reflected in his memoirs, *Emlékezéseim*:

Due to the influence, example and even the support of foreign churches and of universal evangelical Christianity in our country, one by one the evangelistic work has been started by showing the wonderful examples of enormous human efforts and sacrificial dedications of life and (evidently) were boasting with the manifest gift of the Holy Spirit. But they were in no living relationship with the historical form of Christ's church: with the Hungarian reformed church. (...) ⁸⁴

With this diagnosis, Ravasz tried to describe the overall picture of the Hungarian Reformed Church and its relationship to the sodalities in the pre-Trianon scenario at the turn of the last century. He was very concerned about the dichotomy between the modality and the sodalities; in fact, with a benevolent attitude and an irenic spirit, he searched for a way in which to reconcile the two sides. He continued to enlist the guilt of the sodalities in this matter, and yet did not ignore the guilt of the church, either:

The biggest problem was that the official church remained alienated from this work, because they tasted either a German or Anglo-Saxon flavor in it, or they considered

humin). Forgács thus makes the subclause 'teaching them to observe' independent of its main clause 'by going ... disciple all nations.' One of the practical consequences of the isolation of this 'teaching' element in the Great Commandment was a tendency in his theology to limit the scope of (home) missions to the 'walls of the church' and its working area to the boundaries of the covenant." [Italics, LH].

⁸⁴ In Hungarian it reads:

"A külföldi egyházak, az egyetemes evangéliumi keresztyénség hatására, példájára, vagy éppen támogatásával hazánkban is egyre-másra indultak evangéliumi munkák, amelyek az emberi erőfeszítés és áldozatos élettékozlás nagyszerű példáját mutatták s a Szentlélek nyilvánvaló ajándékával dicsekedtek, de nem voltak élő kapcsolatban Krisztus egyházának történeti formájával: a magyar református egyházzal" (...). See in: Ravasz, *Emlékezéseim* (My Memoirs), p.182. See especially the chapter on 'Belmisszió. Élő egyház' (Home Mission. The Living Church), on pp.182-188.

it sectarian or, at the least, they considered it to not be a Hungarian type of home mission. Still, the associations enjoyed their golden age of freedom.⁸⁵

What is disturbing, is that Ravasz gives only one explanation for the difficult and complicated relationship of the societies to the church, reducing the whole explanation of the crises to a simplistic and popular argument, that the revivalist movements embodied in the societies were at fault because they were not Hungarian enough, i.e., they were alien to the “natives.” However, if the mission work and ministry of the sodalities had ever been officially accepted into and endorsed by the Hungarian Reformed Church, could these now “official” sodalities have not been accused of the same fault within a foreign missionary field context? There, for sure, they could never be “native” at all. Or is this lack of incarnational sensitivity on their behalf when trying to fit in the Hungarian culture really the problem? Before we try to answer this question let us review the other arguments Ravasz put forward in making this diagnosis.

“They practiced a sharp criticism of the church, they saw in it the greatest hindrance of their work and in many cases ‘they have built the Kingdom of God in spite of the church.’”⁸⁶ At the end of the day, it was not an alien spirit within the Hungarian context which disturbed the church, but a lack both of flexibility and biblical understanding. Moreover, there was a lack of interest toward the cause of mission, the church’s basic duty, and also a lack of that self-reflection and that ability to be self-critical which, according to the Reformed theologians of the times, serves as the “nervous system” of every sound church representing the Body of Christ. It is not the sodalities but the modality which is called to become the first and utmost “sign of the Kingdom,” and the best promoter of it on earth. However, when the church tends to identify herself with the Kingdom (as certainly happened in the case of the Hungarian Reformed Church despite her best intentions), and yet is reluctant to spread the Kingdom of God, then it unavoidably becomes a hindrance to the expansion of God’s Kingdom, especially when this

⁸⁵ In Hungarian it reads: “Legnagyobb baj azonban az volt, hogy a hivatalos egyház idegenkedett ettől a munkától, mert német vagy angolszász izt érzett benne s vagy szektásklodónak vagy legalább nem magyarnak tartott minden belmissziót. Viszont az egyesületek élvezték arany szabadságukat (...).” Ibid. p.182.

⁸⁶ In Hungarian it reads: “Az egyházzal szemben éles kritikát gyakoroltak, munkájuk legfőbb akadályát benne látták s igen sok esetben az “egyház dacára építették Isten országát.” (...) Ibid. p.182-183.

reluctance is verbalized by influential church leaders and leading theologians, as Ravasz himself admits: “Lajos Novák called home mission the greatest enemy of the church; Albert Kováts just waved his hands and said: brain-syphilis.”⁸⁷

Faced with this situation of a church blind to her own essential nature, i.e. to her missionary calling and supreme duty, it seems a praiseworthy effort on the part of Ravasz, when, as early as the beginning of his ministry as a Bishop, he tried to set as his “episcopal program” the revitalization of the church through the mission movements represented by the societies. His idea was that these societies would evangelize and missionize the church and, in turn, the mission societies would be churchinized. It appears almost an impossible task and it was very ambitious also. “In such circumstances I had to fulfill my episcopal program: churchinizing the Christianity encompassed in the societies by evangelizing the church.”⁸⁸ Ravasz envisaged the necessity of three steps in achieving his noble goal and I am going to comment on each of them in turn:

The first task was *to clarify concepts and to have the right use of notions*. And because home mission was a well-defined historical concept, I have used it only in its Wichernian meaning. Unfortunately, I had to use it in a way that it points only to a transitional phenomena of the work itself. This home mission is done by volunteers individually or corporately to lead those souls to Christ who cannot be reached by the church through its official organs.⁸⁹ But because the church is built on Christ's mission Command: go, and make disciples of every nation, baptizing them... and teaching them... (Mt 28, 19): *hence every work of the church is mission*, whether that is preaching, teaching or pastoral care. The work will differ only according to the group among whom you are doing it. (...) [Italics, LH]⁹⁰

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* p.183.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Obviously, when Ravasz speaks of the transitional situation, he is thinking of the fact that right now the church cannot reach the people, but once the church fully assumes responsibility for doing home mission, this transitional period would end and so the Wichernian definition becomes void. One can also notice the neo-Kantian terminology used here, such as, transitional *phenomena* which points to Ravasz's rather philosophical approach of the matter.

⁹⁰ In Hungarian it reads: “...Novák Lajos a belmissziót az egyház legfőbb ellenségének nevezte, Kováts Albert pedig csak a kezével legyintett s azt mondta: agyszifilisz. Ilyen körülmények között kellett végrehajtani püspöki programomat: az egyesületi keresztyénség egyháziasítását az egyház evangélizálása útján.

The first step of clarifying the terms *mission* and *home mission* is a necessary and helpful 'task.' However, ecclesiological presuppositions⁹¹ dominate his arguments and these are fully elaborated in his earlier and important book on practical theology;⁹² where the theological premises leading to the *predicabilia* (what we state) are not Biblically justified. In Ravasz's view, these premises had their starting point in the definition of what the church is from a practical theological angle or more precisely from a practical interest theoretically envisioned for the life of the church, rather than from a Biblical one. This apparent lack of a biblical foundation for understanding what mission is, and the favoring of an alternative and a more pragmatic view of the church, was reiterated and accepted with very little challenge in the works of the most important Transylvanian missiologists, men such as Sándor Makkai, Lajos Imre and later on Dezső László and Jenő Horváth. Yet what is interesting is to Ravasz's determination to use the home mission concept always and precisely as Wichern⁹³ used it. However, despite this theological

Az első volt a fogalmak tisztázása és a helyes szóhasználat. Mivel a belmisszió határozott történelmi fogalom volt: csak a wicherni értelemben használtam erre a sajnos – s csak átmenetileg érthető – munkára, amelyet önkéntes vállalkozók végeznek egyénileg vagy testületben olyan lelkek Krisztushoz vezetésére, akiket az egyház hivatalos szerveivel nem ér el. De mivel az egyház a Krisztus missziói parancsán épül fel: menjete el, tegyetek tanítványokká minden népeket, megkeresztelvén... és tanítván őket... (Máté 28, 19): ennél fogva az egyház minden munkája misszió, az igehirdetés, a tanítás, a pásztori gondozás. A munka aszerint különbözik, hogy kik között végezzük (...)." Ibid. p.183.

⁹¹ Based on a neo-Kantian foundation and definitely not on theological presuppositions.

⁹² See in László Ravasz Bevezetés a gyakorlati teológiába (Introduction to Practical Theology) Kolozsvár: 1907.

⁹³ Johann Heinrich Wichern (1808-1881) was a great pioneer of the German home mission movement and well-known on the continent as one of the first representatives of the sodality model of work. He was disappointed in his expectation of support from the official church, at least at the beginning of his ministry, and was forced to initiate sodality work instead of a modality approach when it became apparent that the mission work could only be carried out through the coming together of committed people into independent societies. In 1848 he called the nation to meet the growing spiritual and social needs of the uprooted classes. His vision was to initiate the "Inner Mission," consisting in evangelistic and pastoral care and charity work. Thus, the evangelistic branch of Inner Mission was typically called "Volksmission." His strategy for Inner Mission was for it to carry out its work in close cooperation with the church authorities, while retaining its independence. Strangely, although well-known in both Germany and Hungary (all the Transylvanian missiologists and theologians quoted him frequently, although often critically), I could not find any entry for his name (he is not included among important missiologists or missionaries such as, for example, Gustave Warneck, who is honored by being oft mentioned and quoted), either in the *EDWM*,

precision and rigor in using the concept, Ravasz concluded from the Great Commission that everything the church does is mission. The issue at stake is well presented in Kool's work.⁹⁴ **Panmissionism**, according to Ravasz, is concluded as the church's overall work, reaching its apex in "preaching, teaching and pastoral care." But these tasks are the duty of the ministers only, and so we are back again to the clericalism so often overemphasized in the life of the Transylvanian Reformed Church. I regard this argument of Ravasz's to be a *petitio principii*,⁹⁵ a closed circle argumentation which is invalid and so results in a false conclusion.

The next step, perhaps, would be that the slowly revitalized church should take over the work of the Christianity encompassed in the societies, thereby taking responsibility for it too, serving it and supporting it on every level. But this must be done by drawing the workers into its own confessional life, thus making the work a truly reformed one. Wherever possible, she [the church] would do the work with the same people who have done it beforehand; and yet they will get their order of commission not from a free society, but from the Church of Christ in Hungary.⁹⁶

The difficulty with this reasoning is that although it seems attractive, it remains idealistic,⁹⁷ and could hardly ever work in the reality of the church's life. A closer examination of Ravasz's argument will confirm our doubts. First of all, what is the guarantee that a church leadership which is not yet revitalized can be revitalized and put in charge of leading the revitalizing evangelization of the rest of the church? What if this does not happen and the leadership is not keen on evangelism? Is it still right to centralize all mission work under a questionable leadership which may not have been evangelized itself and might not be sensitive to the

or in Gerald H. Anderson (ed.), *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*. New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1998. (This last title will heretofore be referred to as the *BDCM*.)

⁹⁴ See Kool, cf. on pp.296-349 and pp.555-558.

⁹⁵ A logical fallacy resulting in a conclusion which is contained in a major or minor premise.

⁹⁶ In Hungarian it reads:

"A következő (esetleg párhuzamos) lépés az, hogy a lassan megelevenedő egyház vegye át az egyesületi keresztyénség munkáját, azáltal, hogy felelősséget vállal érte, szolgál neki és segíti minden téren, de bevonja a munkásokat a saját hitvallásos életébe és a munkát valóban reformátussá teszi. Ahol csak lehet, ugyanazokkal végezteti a munkát, akik eddig végezték; de megbízólevelüket nem egy szabad egyesülettől, hanem a Krisztus magyarországi egyházától nyerik." Ravasz, *Emlékezéseim* (My Memoirs), p.183.

⁹⁷ Concerning neo-Kantian idealism and its influence on Ravasz's thinking, see the critical evaluation presented in this paper, especially in chapter three.

ministries undertaken by the different societies? Such a scenario may happen with disastrous effects even though Ravasz is very careful, using the word “perhaps,” when pointing to the aim to be achieved. By this “perhaps” he himself admits that the idealism of “the slowly revitalized church” might never occur.

Second, there is a difficulty with the notion of a church which is described phenomenally as being somehow not yet evangelized. How can such a church be given the huge responsibility and authority of controlling the work of the sodalities which, presumably, have already been evangelized? Third, how can these societies (run by confessional members and, in some instances, theologians of the Church) be less confessional and reformed than the not yet evangelized church? How can these societies be introduced to a more rigorous confessionalism by those who are not yet even evangelized in the church? It is difficult to reconcile these antinomies and we must ask Ravasz what he means by the term church when he asserts that the church leadership is in itself the church, rather than the confessionally committed people in the different societies who are the ones evangelizing the nominal members. This question cannot be avoided. But before pursuing the matter further, we need to look at the bishop's program as envisioned in his third step above.

The third step was to set up a unified church commission in order to handle these topics, breaking them down into several departments and working areas, so as to harmonize, control, coordinate, lead, check and encourage the whole mission work and several ministries of the church. The entire program looks too easy and idealistic. One cannot avoid the suspicion that this kind of integration of the mission work into the church is no more than its integration under the church's hierarchy, without the check of the Reformer's theology. This only leads to an unhealthy centralization and the mission work runs the risk of being vulnerable and defenceless in the face of church politics and power games. Not only is there the risk that it may become gradually distorted from its original intention, but it may even be abolished if seems to be endangering the *status quo*.

Kecskeméthy's Model of Mission

Kecskeméthy has a more sophisticated approach and his position is closer to that of Wichern as he observes:

Contrary to this, the Calvin Union has made as the basis of its work the only correct Christian principle, that of self-sacrifice: one can solve social problems only on this basis. However, some state this to be *the responsibility of the church and that there is no need for unions and associations outside the church*. Even István Hamar accepts this when he writes in the *Protestáns Egyetemi Ifjúsági Lap* (The Protestant University Youth Paper) that if the church would fulfill its social duty, then *there would indeed be no need of special associations*. [Italics, LH].⁹⁸

Kecskeméthy's argument begins with an identification with the opposing argument in order to make his argumentation clearer for an objective observer. He takes a totally unexpected turn in his next step:

But for Heaven's sake, Sirs, where are those "special" associations, where are the unions "outside the church?" The Turkish king or the rabbi should work in the Calvin Union? Or maybe the church consists only of Lajos Novák and István Tüdős and maybe of Ferenc Morvay *and everyone else is outside the church*? We protest against such a distorted understanding of the matters that the church consists only of the "modern" pastors and all the rest are dark-willed outsiders, an opinion which is more and more popular nowadays. We are the church, we, the assembly of the people who believe in Christ, and *what we do is done by the church*. I would really like to know how the church would perform its social obligations if its members would only enjoy beautiful talks about what wonderful social obligations the church has got, but would do nothing to fulfill those obligations, but would say: let the church do it, it is her duty. [Italics, LH].⁹⁹

This view that the sodality *is* the modality and that the modality *is* the sodality, had never appeared before in the literature of the debate in this way; at least, I have not been able to trace it, even in the contemporary debate concerning modality and sodality issues.¹⁰⁰ In my view, Kecskeméthy could reconcile the role of the sodalities both inside and outside of the modality without harming their independence. He kept their church-focused role by emphasizing their organic unity with the church, a unity obviously not dictated from above, but from a grass-

⁹⁸ István Kecskeméthy, 'A Kálvin Szövetségről' (On the Calvin Union), *Kis Tükör* Vol. 14, Nr. 21 (May 26, 1906): p.164.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ I will elaborate on this in more detail in chapter five when analyzing the Ralph Winter versus Bruce Camp debate on the theological justification for the modality – sodality issue. (See chapter five, *Modality versus Sodality*.)

roots level. Such a unity lies in the normal differentiation of the gifts and charismas within the church. “Yes, it is the duty of the church, but where are the hands and feet it can act with? The hands and feet of the church are its members, they are the ones who need to act. Because if they do not act, we will have only words and we will have no progress.”¹⁰¹

Kecskeméthy was expressing his fears of identifying the church with either the “clergy” or with the “official organs” of the church. He believed that mission, or genuine Christian charity work or any evangelical social action, is carried out by all its members and not just by those who are officially representing it. He also believed that the church’s members are doing missionary work better if it begins at a grass-roots level. He was very much aware of the fact that mission work cannot be “ordered from above;” it cannot be done by the automatic inclusion of “the official organs” in the work, as Forgács suggested. Thus Kecskeméthy is sharpening the dilemma:

But if the aim of the Evangelical Union¹⁰² is exactly the same as the official aim of the church, why do we need it? This question has also been asked many times, and it has been instantly answered just as many times: we do not. Nevertheless we do, desperately. Even churches whose members are not bound to their church only by the membership roll book and the yearly dues but by life, even these vaunt the benefits of such an organization. How much more, then, does our church need such an organization.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ István Kecskeméthy, *Ibid.*

¹⁰² The Evangelical Union (or CE Union, or CE Bethany Association) established by Kecskeméthy in 1895, although being broad enough as was fitting for a para-church association or (home) missionary agent, its members were basically from the Reformed Church and only a few came from the other Protestant body, the Lutheran Church of Transylvania. In those years the Baptist, the Nazarene and other smaller Protestant denominations were so new in the country that they were officially regarded as “sects” or “cults,” disturbed and persecuted even by the political authorities, encountering difficulty with their legal registration. The registration of organizations like the Evangelical Union in the realm of the Austrian Empire was also not without problems, as the Empire was rooted in the Roman Catholic tradition ... it opposed any Protestant influence or quest for independence, reflected more specifically in an independent society.

¹⁰³ István Kecskeméthy, ‘Az evangéliumi szövetségről’ (On the Evangelical Union), *Protestáns Egyházi és Iskolai Lap*, Vol. 39, Nr. 36 (September 6, 1896): pp.561–563.

Kecskeméthy first refers to the few volunteer-type Protestant churches, in contrast to the Established Churches; it is a comparison of the volunteer society versus Establishment. If even those denominations which are based on volunteerism need a society of volunteers, how much more is this necessary for the Transylvanian Reformed Church?¹⁰⁴ To give weight to the argument, he uses an illustration:

Look at politics. Is there any politician who would say that we do not need societal life besides even a flourishing political life; that we do not need social co-operation, social union as well as government? Is there any legislation or government in the world that can exhaust and control and fulfill all aspects of life to such an extent that there is no need for social activity? This has been imputed only to the legislation and government of the Hungarian Reformed Church. But who believes it?¹⁰⁵

Kecskeméthy, after using this remarkable illustration from the political life of a given human society to emphasize his point, went on to stress the voluntary principle of any mission work and the difficulties when the church does not accept this. His views are very similar to the Kuyperian idea of the “sovereign dominions” in the world falling under the Lordship of Christ,¹⁰⁶ which cannot be confused with the Headship of His Church.

Kecskeméthy had good reasons for promoting the cause of voluntary societies and unions working as the church's out stretched arms toward the outside world. He could see the advantages of these sodalities over the modality, because their structure was *open* in terms of their membership. *Lay people* were as much involved as ministers, and the same membership felt *responsibility* for the association and *contributed* generously to its support. This is why he was critical of the *Vécsi Szövetség* (*The Vécs Union*), of which Imre, Tavaszy and Makkai were founders and later leading figures. Kecskeméthy criticized it not just for setting aims

¹⁰⁴ He used an argument similar to that of Jesus: “The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!” (See in Mt 6:22-23). This is an argument *from the lesser to the greater*; in our case the argument is reversed, *from the greater to the lesser* (i.e., from the significantly volunteer based denominations to those which lack a volunteer base). Cf. William Hendricksen, on p. 352 of his New Testament Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, where he highlights both style of arguments as being familiar in the words of Jesus.

¹⁰⁵ Kecskeméthy, *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁶ See more on Kuyper's ideas in the Hungarian context evaluated in chapter five.

similar to those CE had set decades before when introducing the mission movement to the church; but because its structure was *closed* in its membership.¹⁰⁷ To all intent, it excluded the *laity*, focusing more on the *clergy*, retaining the major *responsibilities* for them. Kecskeméthy's view on openness and on involvement of the laity embodied in CE and in opposition to the practice of the 'Vécs Union,' was in total accord with the observations of Dr. János Victor, who characterized in a similar way both the general situation and recent developments in Hungary: "(N)owdays an increasing emphasis is placed upon the need of the laymen's participation in all kinds of church activity, even in the pastoral care exercised through visitation of church-members."¹⁰⁸ After noting this encouraging development, Victor is still very critical about the lasting stereotypes in the reformed church regarding clerical thinking: "As the nomenclature of 'clergy' and 'laity,' taken over from the Roman Catholic Church, *is in use in spite of what has been stated above*, the 'elders' are being regarded as belonging to the 'laity.' [Italics, LH]."¹⁰⁹

Lajos Tarnóczi in an article written in the *Egyházi Figyelő*, the official bulletin of the *Református Lelkészi Egyesület* (Union of Reformed Ministers), described how Kecskeméthy spoke at the minister's congress about the "new slogan" of home missions in the early 1920s. Kecskeméthy, in a reaction to what József Tóthfalusi said about the home mission movement, responded that he regarded the innovation of the so-called "home mission" as something which would phase out and lead to the cessation of evangelism, especially the evangelization work of ministers. Tarnóczi asserted:

Twenty five to thirty years ago when he [Kecskeméthy] and his companions wanted a genuine life of faith to be [practiced] in the reformed church, the official church in order to discredit their activity, responded with [the introduction of] the home mission movement. [But] according to him, every such kind of activity [naturally]

¹⁰⁷ See the debate on this begun in *Egyházi Figyelő* Vol. 3, Nr. 2 (February 1, 1922): p.1, (István Kecskeméthy, 'Ugarszántás') and the responses in *Egyházi Figyelő* Vol. 3, Nr.3-4 (March 1 1922): pp.3-4, (István Csíky, 'Helyreigazítás', and 'Szerk. Kommentár'). Another response appeared in *Református Szemle* (March 1, 1922): pp.70-71, (János Vásárhelyi, 'Válasz az "Ugarszántás"-ra'), and then again in *Egyházi Figyelő* Vol. 3, Nr. 5 (April 1, 1922): pp.1-5, ('Szerk.: Vihar az „Ugarszántás” körül').

¹⁰⁸ Victor, Answers to the Questionnaire concerning "The Nature of the Church," p.5.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

flows from the gospel. Those who live and act according to the gospel and Christ are already carrying out the home mission work. The soul of every mission is the gospel. The appointed tools of home mission (play performances, lectures, associations, providing lodging for maids) are worth something only if through them a knowledge, love and following of the gospel happen.¹¹⁰

This observation is consistent with the remarks of contemporary missiologist Richard D. Love who observes, “The relationship between conversion and mission is foundational to missiology, because the conversion of sinners is central to the fulfillment of the Great Commission.”¹¹¹ The same emphasis on a direct link between gospel and mission was also usual for Kecskeméthy, who stressed the point continually in his many writings as seen in the foregoing quotations. Gospel-centeredness and an evangelistic demand for conversion as a basic motivating principle for doing missions was so decisive in Kecskeméthy’s circle, that the church-centered view which Imre’s circle entertained in contrast demands a more thorough, in-depth analysis.¹¹² We need to explore both the theological convictions and also the philosophical stimuli behind their views to see what premises prompted them to hold such convictions theologically, especially in their ecclesiological and missiological thinking. My intention, therefore, is to evaluate the Neo-Kantian and Barthian backgrounds to their thinking in the next chapter.

¹¹⁰ In Hungarian it reads:

“...a belmissziót tulajdonképpen a lelkeszi evangélizáció megszüntetésére találták ki. Amikor 25-30 esztendővel ő és társai valódi hitéletet akartak a református egyházban, működésük hitelvesztésére a hivatalos egyház a belmissziói mozgalommal felelt. Ő szerinte minden ilyen tevékenykedés az evangyéliumból folyik. Aki az evangyélium és Krisztus szerint él és cselekszik, az ezzel már elvégzi a belmissziói munkát. Minden missziónak lelke az evangyélium. A belmisszió felhozott eszközei (szindarabok, előadások, egyesületek, cselédek elhelyezése) csak akkor érnek valamit, ha általuk az evangyélium ösmerete, szeretete és követése terjed.” See Lajos Tarnóczi, ‘A tordai kongresszus’ (The Congress of Torda), in: Erdélyi Figyelő (August 1, 1923): p.8.

¹¹¹ The *EDWM*, p.231. See the entry: ‘Conversion’ quoting from the article of Richard D. Love.

¹¹² In an ‘*Excursus*’ joined to this chapter, but included in the Appendices, I summarize the reasons which led to two different mission models in the practice of the Transylvanian Reformed Church in the researched period, comparing these models both with each other and with those functioning in Hungary.

Chapter Three

The Quest for an Incarnational Model: The Philosophical and Theological Background

The Socio-Political and Ethno-Cultural Captivity of the Transylvanian Church

Why should theologians be interested in defining the term mission? Will attempts to define the term only promote endless theologizing and controversy with little effect on the practice of a given church? This is possible if a church or denomination is insensitive to change and unwilling to re-evaluate critically her previous thinking on the matter, or is uninterested in what shifts may have occurred in other churches' attitudes towards mission, as was so in the case of the TRC.

Defining the term mission biblically and defining what the mission of a particular denominational church is, then comparing these two definitions can be helpful to a church, including the TRC. I suggest it is important for a church to compare its own definition of its mission with what it actually does in practice. Friedrich Schleiermacher, was highly regarded by the Transylvanian theologians beginning with Ravasz and later, especially, by Tavaszy. Schleiermacher defined the task of theology as "Church Statistics" and Schleiermacher meant by this a comparison of the historical account of what happened in the early period of the church with the empirical and phenomenological account of what is happening in the church today. Then, and as a result of following the conclusions of this careful comparison, the church is offered a perspective of what should be done from

now on. This procedure is highlighted in the works of Ravasz¹ and was followed by all his disciples in Hungarian reformed circles. According to this neo-Kantian interpretation any officially accepted definition can produce a far reaching effect on practice; further actions in mission will probably be subsumed under a church's initial definition of how it actually understands and interprets the concept of mission. Then, an overall attitude toward, and any action as a whole of the church in mission, i.e. the missiological trend of that church, can be anticipated. I am not suggesting that theology can predict what a particular church or denomination can or will do in the future or whether it will be right or wrong. Rather, I am suggesting that how close or far a concept is from its biblical one will have a far-reaching effect on the church's life and determine decisively the future attitude of that particular church to mission in general and its practice.

Imre's group in their criticisms of the church simply targeted the mission emphases and practices of the TRC and this proved mostly ineffective in accomplishing any change in the church. In contrast, the recognition that we need to define a church's mission and criticize the already accepted official definition biblically was the motivation of Kecskeméthy and his circle when faced with the condition of their church which they felt was adrift in a sea of theological and missiological confusion.² The only way in which they could choose and offer an incarnational model of mission to the church, was "to incarnate" that model by first evangelizing the members of the TRC. This was not an easy task, given the fact that they first had to face the resisting liberal theological pattern and practice of their own church, a church which at that time was antagonistic to new ideas,

¹ See his *Bevezetés a gyakorlati teológiába* (Introduction to Practical Theology). See also Friedrich Schleiermacher, *A Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study*, Terrence N. Tice (translated and ed.). Lewiston, Queenstone, Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 1990, pp.117-126.

² The systematic task of historical theology requires judgments that are not only historical but dogmatic as well. In that sense, it is not just *descriptive* but it has a *proscriptive* task also. This task was remembered and practically applied only by Kecskeméthy's circle. . (It does not follow, however, that Imre's circle by contrast would practice a mere *prescriptive* task.) Refusing the task of giving a bare positivistic description of what the church was at her birth or what it is now, or what results from a comparison of the two, they had the theological courage to radically reject as false claimants for the church's allegiance anything which was incompatible with the Scriptures, rather than simply criticizing, yet adjusting themselves to these ecclesiastical abnormalities as others did. The mission movement of Kecskeméthy could not be regarded as acceptable by the theological trend dominating the Transylvanian church; the circle of Imre could not regard the same mission movement as acceptable to the academia.

preferring to preserve the *status quo* against any “innovations.”³ They believed that only once the church accepted the mission movement, could there be a prospect for the church to follow a genuine incarnational model.⁴

When we speak of the incarnational model we refer to the divine “risk of the incarnation,” known in Dogmatics as the *condescension of God* or the *accommodatio Dei*. Even the expression *missio Dei* itself is part of that divine accommodation to human nature. The *accommodatio Dei* concept brings to the surface the huge dilemma of ecclesiology, even in the basic question of how we understand the essential meaning of the church. The concept of the church which would consider mission merely as a particular *function* of the church rather than the very *nature* of it, as the Transylvanians believed, issued a permanent dilemma. This long persisting dilemma is the problem on which I now focus in order to grasp the inherent contradictions of the ecclesiology which were built upon it, and to expound the reasons why this kind of theology was unable to motivate the church for mission. If we accept the thesis of Darrel L. Guder concerning the cultural captivity of the North American church,⁵ then we can also speak of the *ethno-cultural (and perhaps political) captivity* of the Transylvanian Reformed Church or the Hungarian Reformed Church in Romania. The charge of Guder applies to the TRC

³ In the Neo-Kantian inspired and Neo-orthodox orientation theology inherited and accepted by Imre's circle the parameters of criticism were restricted to the comparison of the phenomena and the numena of the church reality, and the latter was regarded as being presented by Revelation itself. However, under the influence of the Hungarian neo-Kantian philosopher, Károly Böhm the phenomena-numena distinction of Kant was partly or relatively refused and this refusal appeared in a peculiar way. The phenomena could be denied as non-existent altogether when the biblical model of the church was compared with the empirical church. The empirical of course did not match the ideal, i.e., the biblical pattern. As a conclusion they refused the reality of the empirical despising it as being only as some part of the phenomenal approach. They criticized the acceptance of the empirica when rendering it to the realm of the phenomena. Any significant reformation of the church could not issue from this denial of the real in the name of a vague idealism.

⁴ As we will see, it is important to distinguish between a genuine incarnational model and a counterfeit one. As happened in their time and since, the model of a self-defending church is sometimes confused with the incarnational model, but to do so is to confuse and even to replace a perhaps legitimate motivation of self-protection with the true, God-given mission of the church.

⁵ See Darrel L. Guder's critique of this problem, especially in his famous book *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA/ Cambridge, UK: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000.

as well when we consider the cultural engraving in society of that church. The only difference is in time and in the characteristics of the political situation which are not significant for our discussion here.

The Transylvanian Reformed Church's missionary model was an *incarnational* one; however, she was tempted to dilute the gospel of God's kingdom to a manageable "Hungarian-Calvinist religion." Her increasing concern became how to survive in the new reality of the Romanian state after the 1920s, when Transylvania and its indigenous Hungarian Reformed congregations were separated from Hungary, the "mother country;" and especially how to survive in a new situation where the Eastern Orthodox Church was the declared national church of the new political realm, with Eastern Orthodox believers forming an obvious majority over the newly "orphaned" Hungarian Reformed believers. When it is asserted, that the missionary model of the church was an *incarnational* one, I refer to the not necessarily theologically "conscious" movement towards a *modus vivendi* of the church which took place in that period. It was not primarily a theological motivation which created this type of "incarnational model" as some missiologists like Norman Thomas assume.⁶ In defending its traditions and the Hungarian as well as the Protestant character of the established Reformed Church against the many challenges of the new socio-political reality, it did not necessarily *intend* to embrace such an incarnational missionary model for the sake of carrying out the mission task of the church. It was not a consciously or deliberately chosen way of being, but rather it seemed to be the only possible way of survival for the church. There was an element of self-dependence as a motif beside the missionary motif, even if the former was not a primary, overwhelming motif.⁷ This involuntary, unconscious element in the decision toward an incarnational model is often overlooked when this way of institutional life is elevated or even justified as a *missional status*. For this reason I am uneasy when some missiologists, like Norman E. Thomas, are rushing to generalize, declaring that *mission through identification* takes place whenever *identification* occurs. It is misleading to assume that accepting any supposed political or social responsibility as the

⁶ See later in this chapter.

⁷ This self-dependence was prompted by the historical situation created by and due to the Treaty of Trianon when the TRC was left by its own, being cut off politically from the mother church and mother country.

main task of the church by exercising a self-commissioned mandate through identification can be regarded *sui ipsius* as exercising a mission mandate (or even *the* mission mandate) through identification. And in turn, it is misleading also, to assume that such acceptance of responsibility as the main task of the church can be viewed automatically as an example of following an incarnational model in mission. There is a difference between an unintended, coerced action, springing from motives of self-defense, and the chosen, Word-motivated mission undertaken by the church, both biblically and theologically. I suggest that only the latter deserves acceptance as being the church's proper mission on the basis of the reformed faith.

For one reason, there is a huge difference theologically between a self-imposed "mission" of the church, encouraged only by thoughts of self-protection and then a God-given one "from outside or from above"⁸ and urged by obedience to his Word for the church. I regard the phase "reasserting ... communal selfhood" as being at least ambiguous and one which cannot be considered as a mission model, however close it might appear to being an incarnational model. According to reformed creeds, the *Sola Scriptura* principle cannot be overwritten by any authority of a "reasserting communal selfhood" or by the culturally bound identity of a church. Thus I am more cautious than Norman Thomas who uses Eastern European examples to illustrate his theory:

A second type of mission through identification takes place as peoples reassert their communal selfhood. Consider, for example, the link between the Roman Catholic Church and ethnic resurgence in Eastern Europe. Historically in Poland, Slovakia, and Croatia ethnic and religious identities were the same and reinforced each other. By contrast, in predominantly Orthodox Romania, almost all Roman Catholics are from the minority Hungarian or German communities. As a result, under communist dominance, the church found its mission as an advocate for suppressed nationalities – in Croatia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Poland, Romania, Lithuania, and the

⁸ I refer to the biblical revelation here (which is "outside and above of" any human self-imposing principle, or commissioning of church members by the church to any task, as an immanent mandate) as a theologically binding transcendent reality and authority for the church according to the reformed faith.

Ukraine. Wherever the church encouraged opposition to political authority, the fusion of religious affiliation and nationality increased.”⁹

The problem arises when this “fusion of religious affiliation and nationality” increases to the level of a nationalist, self-commissioned mandate towards a self-protective fight for the rights and survival of a distinct group, and when this mandate suddenly takes on the form of mission. Paradoxically, what I personally regard biblically as mission is avoided because of the church’s “own mission” to defend its ethnic identity. But this question does not occur to Thomas; the symbiosis of Christianity and nationalism in Eastern Europe has taken many forms, according to Thomas.¹⁰ But can this form of symbiosis be called or assumed to be a genuine incarnational model?

The incarnational model itself has not been clearly defined by any missiologists so far, despite its frequent use, but the clever pattern developed by David Augsburger¹¹ can be used helpfully as a three-fold attempt to describe what is understood by it. The following three stages are needed in our response to people in other cultures, whether they are people of other faiths or no faith at all. The first is *Sympathy*, when we look at others but our view is colored by our own frame of reference. Secondly, there is *Empathy*, when we view things just as they, that is, the people in other cultures, see them, but our view is still dominated by our own conceptual framework. A third stage, what Augsburger calls “*interpathy*,” is reached when we look at others and see things just as they see them, stepping out of our own frame, coming as close as is humanly possible to identifying with them and feeling what they feel. It is only then we can begin to share our faith in Christ with other people. Determined by any of these three stages, mission at its best in Reformed theology has always had the two foci of proclamation of the gospel and ministry to human need.¹² If one calls ‘mission’ ‘home mission’ then a problem arises. How can a local ethnic church turn and respond to itself as it would

⁹ Thomas, Norman E. ‘Church–State Relations and Mission,’ in: James Phillips and Robert T. Coote (eds.), *Toward the 21st Century in Christian Mission*, Essays in honor of Gerald H. Anderson. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993, 1998, p.366.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ See David W. Augsberger, *Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures*. Philadelphia, USA: Westminster Press, 1986.

¹² Keith R. Crim, ‘North America,’ in: Phillips, *Toward the 21st Century in Christian Mission*, p.105.

respond to a different culture? Further, how can an ethnic church practice *sympathy*, *empathy* and *interpathy* toward itself? Is this the best fulfillment of the Great Commission where Jesus ordered his church to: “go into all the world,” “go to every nation and proclaim to them the gospel,” - and not just to one's own group or nation? Again, following Crim's dictum above, if “mission at its best has always had the two foci of proclamation of the gospel and ministry to human need,” how can we as an ethnic-centered nation avoid ministering mostly to the human needs of our own group and neglecting the cross-cultural task, without harming or at least ignoring the primary world mission mandate of the Church of Christ? Was the ethnic Hungarian TRC able to practice this kind of mission attitude towards the Romanian (in majority Eastern Orthodox, in minority Roman or Greek Catholic) Saxon (Lutheran) or Roma (sometimes with no church connection at all) population, as she lived among them since the time of the 16th century Hungarian Reformation? Only then can we affirm or deny whether their self-interpreted identity as a church and self-protection for that identity, can genuinely be called an incarnational model.

Norman E. Thomas argues for different paradigms in order to respond to the church-state relations of these churches in mission. This is explicitly a response to three emerging political realities, namely, communal democracy, nation-states, and international orders.¹³ I suspect that Thomas may characterize the situation in Transylvania as being a minority identity situation against the nation-state of Romania. The Hungarians in Romania and, more particularly, the Hungarian Reformed Church in Romania based primarily in the region of Transylvania, are an ethnic entity of people who are constantly reasserting their communal identity. Thomas has coined the term “the Mission of Identification” and raises, in my view, an overly-dramatic question: “With whom shall the church identify in a liberation or human rights struggle?” I can accept the identification of the church with liberation or human rights activism, and the fact that an ethnic church may decide to fight for the minority rights of their ethnic community. However, I question whether this kind of activity can be called mission when mission per se biblically includes a cross-cultural element, a going beyond the communal self-hood and a reaching out to a different nation or culture. Returning to

¹³ Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 364.

Thomas, I agree that sometimes church-state relations may involve a struggle for political and economic power, so Thomas writes:

Often the church's leadership, and much of its financial support, comes from those holding political and economic power. The result may be a struggle for identification in which the church's understanding of its mission is honed as by fire and anvil.¹⁴

But how can a church identify itself with a given social strata of her own members, for example, the poor, when the church leadership itself might be characterized by a hierarchical, class conscious power structure, as in the case of Transylvania? Thomas gives a different historical illustration: "One type of mission through identification takes place if the church sides with the poor and oppressed in their struggle for liberation. (...) "There (in Brazil) the church became the voice for the voiceless."¹⁵ He foresees the future in these terms: "It is to be expected that such missionary responses will be part of the witness of the churches in the coming century. The challenge for the churches in mission to identify themselves with the poor and oppressed will increase in coming years."¹⁶ But could this happen in the case of an over-institutionalized church such as the TRC was? The process of institutionalization is not a singular one in the wider and general history of the Christian church; it has happened many times and in many places across the centuries of Christian history. As Guder observes:

Across Christian history the challenge has been to form the church's institution to serve its mission, and the problem has been the ways in which the institution has taken over and shaped the mission. That institutional takeover has invariably been reductionistic of the gospel and the church's missional vocation.¹⁷

But how has the specific institutionalization process of the Reformed Church taken over and shaped the church's self-understanding and mission in Transylvania? In what ways has this development proved to be reductionist in terms of the historic gospel and the Reformed Church's missionary vocation? In order to explore these questions relating to the distinctive Transylvanian situation, we must

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.* pp.365-366.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p.365.

¹⁷ Guder, p.182.

understand, first of all, the roots of the missionary movement and awakening in this part of the former Hungary. From the beginning, we need to be alert to the historical factors, paying attention to the differences between the mother country of Hungary and the geographically and historically different entity called Transylvania.

One remarkable difference is that the wider, and more influential, spiritual revivals and evangelical movements in Europe have had little or no effect in Transylvania, at least in the early period of the so-called “*home-mission*” movement which started in the 1890s. As early as the second half of the 19th century, a great impact was felt in Budapest and elsewhere, mostly in Western Hungary and around Debrecen (the Southern part of the Great Plains) from the revival which sprang from the fellowship concentrated in Hold utca (“Moon” Street), in Budapest. This was the base from which the Scottish Mission Station worked for the evangelization of the Jews in Hungary. The Transylvanian born, and later famous reformed Bishop of Budapest (of the “Dunamellék” District), Dr. László Ravasz, considered the home mission forces which were marshaled by these revivals, as being “the yeast of life” of the Protestant Churches. In the context of the church in Hungary, the program of Ravasz as cited by Dr. A. M. Kool¹⁸ is significant: “We must evangelize the church herself, in order that she may absorb the independent home-missionary agencies and movements.” In contrast, the position of the Transylvanian Reformed Church was officially to orchestrate the home-mission movement, *without* demanding that the church be evangelized first, “in order that she may absorb the independent home-missionary agencies and movements.” This resulted in a strong prejudice against such agencies on the part of the church leadership and among the authoritative representatives of the hierarchy, the so-called “official church.” As described in chapter two, the official policy of the church pronounced in favor of the home-mission movement and denounced the independent agencies which were only promoters of foreign missions. Ravasz’s view can be called an *inclusive* view as it emphasized the preparation of the church, through evangelism, for a wider acceptance and “absorption” of mission thinking and

¹⁸ Kool, cf. pp.306-311 on Ravasz’s missiology. See also on p.682. where she references Ravasz: “when Dr. László Ravasz became bishop he had pointed to ‘the healthy way’ of the development of the church: ‘the associations should be integrated into the church, and the church must be changed to be the carrier of mission’”.

motivation. Ravasz's championing of this position explains why the inclusive view was accepted in Hungary, but could not completely gain ground in Transylvania, as we will see later. Only in the 1920s, was the home-missionary movement in Transylvania "domesticated officially."¹⁹ The church seemingly took an inclusive attitude toward the movement, in contrast with the previous *exclusivist* and prejudiced, or even *pejorative*, attitude of the years spanning 1895-1922; but she still remained in an exclusivist position toward the missionary agencies, even though these agencies were led by reformed *clerics*, that is, famous ministers and even some theological professors,²⁰ rather than "merely" *lay* people.

One cannot avoid the impression that the over-institutionalized character of the missionary model followed by the church in these circumstances, or even the over-institutionalized character of the church itself, was predisposed towards the hindering of any mission work as such and was negative in terms of the outcome of the missionary engagements of the mission church. In trying to analyze the "over-institutionalized" character of the TRC, it is helpful to start with a secular sociologist's view of the problem. This is important because some theologians have a tendency to rush and affirm the institutionalized form of their church, quickly enforcing the status quo and thereby possibly enforcing the inclination to deify the church. Unintentionally, they assume because of the ever applied metaphor, that the church being the Body of Christ makes her somehow equivalent with Christ Himself.

Berger and Luckmann use the following starting point: "Men's self-production is always, and of necessity, a social enterprise. Men *together* produce a human environment, with the totality of its socio-cultural and psychological formations."²¹ They further declare that "man's specific humanity and his sociality are inextricably intertwined. *Homo sapiens* is always, and in the same measure, *homo socius*." This *homo socius* aspect is always accountable for the formation of

¹⁹ See Imre's proposal to the General Assembly in the previous chapter, footnote 106 and following.

²⁰ The most important among many others were Dr. Aladár Szabó, Dr. Béla Kenessey, Dr. István Kecskeméthy, Dr. Arthur K. Tompa, Dr. Mózes Bíró, and Dr. Adolf Klein; the first three were theological professors, the latter two ministers, and the last a lay evangelist.

²¹ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1966. and London: Harmondsworth, 1967, 1971. Cf. ff. pp.51-55 and pp.59-61.

an institutionalized *co-habitat*. As the authors argue, this is an anthropological necessity and is distinct from those posited by biological factors and cravings. Thus to understand this sociological drive, they tried to undertake “an analysis that eventuates in a theory of institutionalization.” What is useful here is the fact that although “the anthropological necessity of an institutionalized cohabitat” is distinct from “those posited by biological factors and cravings,” yet they are not necessarily and automatically spiritual, and as such, per se divine. When this is unclear, the unqualified divinization process of a community starts without control and ends in self-justification of the church’s institution as in itself God-given and so sacred. The criticism of the over-institutionalization process as idolatry which hinders mission (and here I am merely echoing the theological critique often repeated in those times by the Transylvanian theologians) is well justified theologically and yet can still be an over-simplification of the issue.

My starting point was to examine the period from a theologically reformed perspective, the common ground for all church theologians in the TRC. As stated earlier, the emphasized need for a Christ-centered and church-focused view of mission was more in keeping with the reformed position rather than the practice of the TRC, which suggested a Church-centered and Christ-focused view. In the works of most theologians in the TRC there are serious criticisms of the church structures as running the risk of sometimes becoming idolatrous,²² and yet few of

²² Although I do not give quotations here because of lack of space, I can state that outstanding examples of this criticism can be found in the many writings of Tavaszy and Imre. For example, there is Tavaszy’s analysis in his study on ‘The Reformed Dogmatic Concept of the Church’ in which he warns about the danger of the deification of the church which happens, in his opinion, in both the theological concept and practice of the Roman Catholic Church; he refuses this tendency and ever present inclination, arguing from a reformed standpoint. See on p.82, in: Tavaszy, *A Kijelentés feltétele alatt, Theologiai értekezések (Under the Condition of Revelation, Theological Studies) op. cit.*, pp.76-88., as cited above. I can point also to the many works of Makkai, especially to his chapter on ‘The Church’ in one of his most famous books, *Öntudatos kálvinizmus, A református magyar intelligencia számára (Self-Conscious Calvinism, To the Hungarian Reformed Intellectuals)*. Cluj-Kolozsvár: “Az Út” kiadása, 1926, pp.35-52. It is also of great importance to note how Makkai appreciated and at the same time criticized the home mission movement in this same chapter. He stated that when the official church was unable to convert its own unbelieving members, and “the church herself became a mission field” (p.49.) then “there is a need for volunteering workers, lay Christians” who would bring back to the church these lost souls “for the church”, but “independently from the church” and with the aid of “free organizations who are independent from the church.” After his positive appreciation Makkai declared that “with everything they [the workers of home mission] did,

them maintained a consistent critique of the status quo. However, whether consistent or sporadic in their criticisms, most theologians tried to avoid the oversimplification of seeing this institutional reality always and exclusively as idolatry.

Hence, we must be cautious in drawing any early conclusions here, as Dr. Goheen similarly observes in evaluating the position of Guder above and others.²³ Goheen, in a subtitle, calls his approach, *An Appreciative Critique of Missional Church*.²⁴ His critique is an open appreciation of the way in which missiologists of the GOCN movement are criticizing the institutional ineffectiveness of many churches in fulfilling their mission task, in their referring back to an antiquated idea of Christendom and to an anachronistic establishment in the cultural and socio-political milieu. But Goheen also warns against a kind of one-sidedness:

It is clear that the antithetical posture of the church was compromised by its established position in the Christendom arrangement; the tension between the gospel and idolatrous culture was slackened. Kraemer continues: "The symphonia, to use the official orthodox theological term, of faith and empire, of Church and State... when put in the light of the prophetic message of Biblical revelation, it is a surrender of the tension inherent and necessary in the relation of the Christian faith and

they just made more evident that this work should have been done and must be done by *the church itself*, as this is her holiest, most specific task, most inside focused calling." Then Makkai stated with a neo-Kantian idealism that "for this sake and for nothing else exists and stands the whole organization of the church and all its institutions" (pp.49-50). My criticism is that the bare declaration of the "ought to be" is again mistaken with the "it is," thus running the risk of by-passing reality without changing it; so any criticism of the church will only have a theoretical impact on the state of the church. Thus the idolatrous elements of the church's structures cannot be challenged significantly.

²³ In the Gospel and Our Culture Network (GOCN) movement in North America as represented in their critical approach to the churches in post-modern society. They one-sidedly blame the institutionalized character of churches for the lack of their missionary perspective and mobility, without a fair appreciation of the value of work and the useful traditions preserved by the institutional forms.

²⁴ Michael W. Goheen, 'The Missional Church: Ecclesiological Discussion in the Gospel and Our Culture Network in North America', in: Dr. A. M Kool et al., *Egyház és misszió a szekularizált magyar társadalomban (Church and Mission in Secular Hungarian Society)*. *Pápai missziológiai szimpózium, 2001. április 26–28* (Missziológiai Füzetek 1.). Budapest: Protestáns Missziói Tanulmányi Intézet, 2002, p.58.

world...' At the same time the church was right to take responsibility for the formation of culture during the Christendom era.²⁵

Goheen's point here is relevant to our analysis. He balances the two main arguments without relativizing either as he goes on to contrast the views represented by Hauerwas and O'Donovan:

Hauverwas and the authors of *Missional Church* have offered a forceful critique of the dangers of a Christendom arrangement that can ease the tension between the church and the idolatry of its culture. This leads to accommodation and domestication that deeply compromises the church's mission. Against this cultural assimilation the critical and antithetical stance of the church must be accented.²⁶

This is the danger that dominated the Transylvanian Reformed Church during the first half of the 20th century, yet, Goheen's analysis helps us to keep a balanced view here. We need to follow his argument:

However, mission involves stressing *both sides* of the church's *one* cultural task [*italics added*]; solidarity and separation; affirmative involvement and critical challenge; cultural development and antithesis. The authors of *Missional Church* highlight the second in each of these pairs; they tend to label any attempt at exercising culturally formative power as 'functional Christendom' (quoting Guder²⁷). Strong statements on the church as alternative community stress the prophetic task of the church to stand against the idolatrous twisting of cultural formation *but offer little guidance for the positive participation of the church in cultural development* [*italics added*].²⁸

What is characteristic of the long-established Reformed Church in Transylvania is in reality a kind of preservation of the Christendom idea from the early reformation times. But it would be hard to call it a well-meant effort to "use the incarnational model," as some suggest. Rather, it is a given historical development, which assumes a certain Christendom pattern in society. From as early as the Reformation, the Reformed Church in Transylvania was a kind of national church. In modern Romania where 42% of the Hungarian people are Roman

²⁵ Goheen, quoting the Dutch missiologist Henrik Kraemer, in *op. cit.*, p.59.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Darrell Guder, et al., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998, p.116.

²⁸ Goheen, pp.60-61.

Catholics, the Hungarians belonging to the Reformed Church still outnumber the (Hungarian) Catholics even today. However, they no longer outnumber Romanian Orthodox believers, due in part to the handover of Transylvania from Hungary to Romania after 1918.²⁹

It is important to note that in Transylvania the Christendom idea has dominated society and church relations much more than it did in the West. There was a more conventional system at both political and church levels, resulting, for example, in the fact that a feudalistic system survived right up to the beginning of the 20th century in Transylvania. This Christendom idea was not challenged with such a frequency as it could be in the West by successive revivals which usually questioned if society in itself can be Christian when most of the individuals are only nominally linked with the church. For a more effective comparison let us turn again to Goheen, as he makes his concluding observations:

This positive legacy does not find expression in *Missional Church*. Re-visioning the church in a new context will require drawing on the resources from the past. Much that is valuable from the Christendom period will not be taken up into missional church of postmodernity if this positive legacy is ignored.³⁰

The participation of the church in cultural development, the “positive legacy” mentioned above, is in fact the very essence of the *incarnational* model. It is revealing to turn to the debates at the end of the 19th century in Transylvania and discover what theologians and Christian leaders in key positions were saying about these issues. As we saw in the previous chapter, Kecskeméthy, the leading figure of the evangelical revival in the Transylvanian Reformed Church, was sharply critical of traditional Hungarian and Protestant culture, refusing to call it

²⁹ As a comparison, see what Oliver, *op. cit.*, says on p.57 about the percentage of Protestants in Hungary after the Reformation:

“By 1585 the Papal *nuncio*, Lippomano, considered that the cause of Rome in Hungary was lost. He reported that the population was 85% Protestant, 10% Orthodox and 5% Roman Catholic.” It can only be imagined what could produce later the Austrian rule-secured Counter-Reformation and partly the Turkish invasion from both sides among the population. Also we should bear in mind that in the time of Cromwell, who sought to build up an alliance with the Calvinist Governor of independent Transylvania, Gábor Bethlen (d. in 1629), the population of the country was still the same size as England. At that time Buda[pest], and the Hungarian Midlands were under Turkish, Western Hungary under Austrian rule.

³⁰ Goheen, p. 63.

or identify it as “Christian.” As early as the 1890s, he had started a massive mission movement in Transylvania. He evaluated the situation and criticized the confusion of leaders and ministers in the church as follows:

We do not have a governing principle. We cannot call the Hungarian identity and patriotism that one can hear about over and over again our particular governing principle and we cannot declare the restoring of crumbling church-towers to be our only aim in life.³¹

It can be seen in the writings of Kecskeméthy that the Kingdom of God is the aim whereas culture is understood to be the means for that end. The reverse happened in the church. Hungarian culture became the entire aim of the church and the Kingdom of God was only a means of serving that aim.

But in the meantime we have almost totally forgotten our initial aim, the kingdom of God, and that culture should have been just a means to this kingdom. Thus our Church has been reduced in the eyes of many of its secularized leaders merely to a corporation for maintaining schools and to a cultural association that has some political importance. Every slogan which we had has faded; there is nothing left to strengthen us, but the glory of the past, which is precious but not enough for starving souls.³²

Kecskeméthy is aware of the danger of the church becoming a culture serving institution.

There is another important theological work on missions by Dr. Sándor Tavaszy, the Systematic Theology professor of the Kolozsvár Reformed Theological Seminary, written as early as 1929. Tavaszy had a challenging way of speaking about missions. His starting point is confessional as he asks, “Does God have a world encompassing aim and plan with Calvinism?” His answer was radical, given the fact that it was completely new in the context of theological thinking at that time:

In its roots, Christian life is mission and commission. In its roots, the Christian Church is a missionary church. In its roots, Christian theology is the science of missions. Christian life, Christian church and Christian theology were vested with the

³¹ István Kecskeméthy, ‘On the Twelfth Hour’ (A tizenkettedik órában), in: *Protestáns Egyházi és Iskolai Lap* Vol. 39, Nr. 27, (July 5, 1896): pp.417-419.

³² *Ibid.*

mission that all personal energy, all collective effort and all scientific truths, as the fountains of true authority, all must be placed in the service of His kingdom.³³

In the understanding of Tavaszy all has to serve God's kingdom so even Calvinism cannot be an aim in itself. Rightly understood, Calvinism must serve the Kingdom of God rather than even the Calvinistic church. Clearly, both theologically and historically, Calvinism makes God's Kingdom the aim and the church the means toward the realization of that aim. In addition to these important insights, Tavaszy is undoubtedly decades ahead of his contemporaries in his thinking. He states in advance what later worldwide missiologists would consider a revolutionary thought: "the Christian Church is a missionary church." He declared this long before similar slogans were invented and launched on a world wide level in missiology, or even long before Moltmann started to build on this addenda: "Mission does not come from the church; it is from mission and in the light of mission that the church has to be understood."³⁴ However, even as early as 1948, bishop Newbigin had already declared: "(...) a Church which is not a mission is not a Church."³⁵ And then, again in 1958: "(T)he fundamental question is whether the church as such is mission."³⁶ In his epoch making book, Bosch challenges us in this same direction more than sixty years after Tavaszy. Bosch's observation serves as a decisive paradigm shift in missiology patterns:

In the emerging ecclesiology, the church is seen as essentially missionary. (...) ("The pilgrim church is missionary by its very nature.") (...) Here the church is not the sender but the one sent. (...) Its mission (its "being sent") is not secondary to its being; the church exists in being sent and in building up itself for the sake of its mission (...). Ecclesiology therefore does not precede missiology (...) The question, "Why still mission?" evokes a further question, "Why still church?" (...) Without mission, the church cannot be called catholic, etc.³⁷

³³ Tavaszy, A kálvinizmus világmissziója ('The World Mission of Calvinism'), pp.6 and 8.

³⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*. New York: Harper and Row, 1977, p.10.

³⁵ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Reunion of the Church: A Defense of the South India Scheme*. London: SCM, 1948, p.11.

³⁶ Lesslie Newbigin, *One Body, One Gospel, One World: The Christian Mission Today*. London and New York: International Missionary Council, 1958, p.18.

³⁷ Bosch, pp.368-389.

However, this challenge from Tavaszy never achieved widespread acceptance in the theological thinking of the Reformed Church; it did not produce a “paradigm shift,” at least within ecclesiology. Mission basically remained a function of the church amongst many others, and so as a particular and secondary activity it was left at the periphery of the other duties and pastoral, cultural engagements, of the church. The understanding of the church would neither come from mission nor in the light of mission, but in fact, the opposite happened: *mission was interpreted in the light of a particular ecclesiology*. This resulted in a similarly opposite tendency in the mindset of the theologians of the period. They did not act in line with the dictum of Tavaszy when he asserted, “*In its roots Christian theology is the science of missions.*” Rather, the vocal majority of this generation of theologians (except from the circle of Kecskeméthy) was convinced that, at its very roots, Christian theology is the science of ecclesiology, or as they coined it, “ecclesiastica” (in Hungarian, “*ekkléziasztika*”). It is strikingly surprising that the same Tavaszy just three years later published his great dogmatic work, *Reformed Christian Dogmatics*;³⁸ without ever mentioning missions;³⁹ or at least, ever operating at all with these normative theological insights and recognitions what we have seen emphasized by him above. Probably due to his influential *Dogmatics* the vocal majority of theologians considered theology to be the *science of ecclesiology* rather than the *science of missions*.

Being concerned with the pragmatic demands of church life, they argued, (beginning with László Ravasz and then, following in his footsteps, the more mission-oriented theologians like Sándor Makkai, Lajos Imre, and later Dezső

³⁸ Sándor Tavaszy, *Református keresztyén Dogmatika* (Reformed Christian Dogmatics). Kolozsvár: 1932.

³⁹ Only Jenő Horváth observed this lack of interest in missions and in theology of missions as an abnormal lack in the TRC, quoting first Makkai’s overview of the last 75 years of theologizing (Cf. Sándor Makkai, *Az erdélyi református egyházi irodalom 1850-től napjainkig*. Kolozsvár: 1925, on p.55. Quoted in Jenő Horváth, *A külmiszió lényege, A külmiszió református teológiai alapvetése* (*The Essence of Foreign Mission, The Reformed Theological Foundation of Foreign Missions*). *Teológiai Tanulmányok*, 47. szám, Különlenyomat a *Teológiai Szemle* XII. évfolyamának 177-283. lapjáról, Debrecen, 1936, p.199.

Then, again in a footnote Horváth noticed that the latest and epoch-making Hungarian Reformed Dogmatics did not even touch the question of missions. See p.199, footnote nr.109: “*Tetézi ezt a szükségét, hogy a legújabb s egyenesen korszakalkotó jelentőségű magyar református dogmatika, a Tavaszy Sándoré ... a külmiszió kérdését nem is érinti.*”

László), that the *loci* of ecclesiology cannot be just one *loci* of the whole “*loci communes*,” (i.e. of the whole Dogmatics), but that what is needed is a practical theology approach to systematic theology as being the theology of the church. They called this overarching and systematic new theological discipline which focused on the life of the church “*ekkléziasztika*” which can be better translated “*ecclesiastica*,” instead of *ecclesiology*. In the Kolozsvár Seminary, “*ekkléziasztika*” was taught as an independent discipline, more linked with Practical Theology than with Systematics or Dogmatics. There are several reasons for this usage of the word “*ekkléziasztika*”, and the practice of teaching it as an independent discipline at the seminary (and yet all of those reasons are from a German theological influence, preferable to Ravasz); but the most important of all was because Ravasz founded his Practical Theology (1907) more on a philosophical (neo-Kantian, as we will see later in this chapter) rather than on a theological ground and thus tearing away ecclesiology from its traditional place in dogmatics. Due to the challenge of dialectical theology in the early 1930s, the place of the discipline called “*ekkléziasztika*” was questioned, but not its theological foundation. This is rather strange given that Dezső László criticized Ravasz for his neo-Kantian grounding and wrote a new modern Practical Theology in 1938 aiming openly to root it in the findings of dialectical theology. This will be evaluated in more detail in chapter four.

In 1942 there was a debate between Dezső László and Lajos Imre over the place of *ecclesiastica*, whether they should teach it to first year students as providing a theological foundation, or leave it to the last year of training and teach it as the crowning element and summing up of theological studies. It is ironic that the Transylvanian Reformed Church became isolated from the rest of the world shortly before the beginning of World War II, an isolation which increased even more after the war because of Communist rule. As a result, worldwide developments in missiological thinking could not have any influence on, or challenge, the theological concepts emerging in Transylvania. It is curious that at the time of the 1938 Tambaram conference of the International Missionary Council (IMC) on missions there was neither a Hungarian/Transylvanian participant sent, nor was there much theological reflection (not even in the church magazines or

theological journals of the period, apart from a few theologically insignificant articles⁴⁰) about what took place there. This lack of awareness of what was happening theologically elsewhere occurred in spite of the conspicuous fact that in the relatively short time between 1936 and 1938, three major works were published on the concept of mission in Transylvania. The first, written by Dr. Jenő Horváth, was *The Essence of Foreign Missions (A külmiszió lényege)*, published in 1936. In 1938, two other major works appeared, *The Life and the Ministry of the Holy Church (Az Anyaszentegyház élete és szolgálata)* by Dr. Dezső László, and *The Mission of the Church (Az egyház misziója)* by the Transylvanian bishop, Dr. Sándor Makkai.⁴¹ It is important to note that these latter two massive works - church-centered though mission-related - were published in the same year that a huge paradigm shift *from a church-centered view of the mission to the mission-centered view of the church itself* occurred at the Tambaram meeting of the IMC. Tambaram also marked a turning point in ecumenical thinking on mission; it was at Tambaram that a genuine missionary ecclesiology began to develop. The great challenge was given by one of the famous missiologists of the time, Hendrik Kraemer, the author of *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*.⁴²

Tavaszy declared, "(i)n its roots, Christian theology is the science of missions," and yet the practice of most theologians of his generation was that Christian theology is *the science of the church* rather than that of missions. This kind of

⁴⁰ The essay of Dr. Jenő Horváth, *The World Mission of the Church*, *The World Conference of Foreign Missions in Tambaram (Az Egyház világmissziója, A tambarami külmisziói világkonferencia)*, *Élő Könyvek*, 30. szám, Ifjú Erdély kiadása, 1940; is written in a popular tract form and gives information on the event rather than being an evaluation of it from a theological perspective.

⁴¹ He was bishop from 1926-1936, when he left for Hungary, disappointing the many who cleaved to the Transylvanian homeland. This place loyalty was defined by a strong cultural and political identity for the Hungarians and served as an ideology for staying on in Transylvania, despite the disadvantages and the oppression faced by Hungarians in the new state. Makkai was among those leading intellectual personalities who created this movement, called by the cultural and artistic elite, "transszilvanianizmus" (Transylvanianism). On Makkai, see also the *BDCM*, p.429. Later in the course of this thesis we will come back to review some of his ideas and thoughts on ecclesiology and missions, especially as reflected in his debate with the other famous theologian of missions, Dr. János Victor.

⁴² Kraemer raised the question, what is the essential nature of the church? And what is its duty in the world? See also the remarks of Bosch on this in his book (quoted above): especially on p.370 and p.509.

ambiguous process took place, apparently confirming the caveat of Goheen as being practically true. This can be illustrated in the history of the TRC at the time. There was a danger of staying in solidarity with the culture but not serving as an antithesis to it, as would have been the case if implementing a real incarnational model, tested by the world-wide community of the churches:

Faithful contextualization requires a dialogue that moves beyond cultural boundaries. This dialogue must be “open to the witness of churches in all other places, and thus saved from absorption into the culture of that place and enabled to represent to that place the universality, the catholicity of God’s purpose of grace and judgment for all humanity.” **There is a danger that any one local contextualization will be absorbed into the culture of that place;** if it is to be challengingly relevant then a dialog must take place among all believers from every culture.⁴³ [Bold, LH.]

It is also fair to say that even Tavaszy himself did not notice how far his declaration would lead if he had held consistently to it. His works basically fell in line with the churchism of the representatives of the “ecclesiastica” theological constellation:

I want to define the concept of *home mission* like this: *the church’s home mission*. Another form of home mission is also possible, but with regard to Hungarian Protestantism only the *church’s* home mission can possess a real life power; [italics of the author] *and any other forms of home mission are illusory* in regard with it. [Italics, LH] ⁴⁴

The Historical Roots of Theological Foundations in the TRC

Why did this situation emerge in the TRC? Was the almost univocal theological development in the Hungarian Reformed Church in Transylvania, which was so different from what happened in the rest of the world, solely because of her politico-geographical isolation? This is possible, of course, but would not explain the whole situation. There were deeper inner roots and theological motivations

⁴³ Michael W. Goheen, “As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You:” J. E. Lesslie Newbigin’s Missionary Ecclesiology. Zoetermeer, The Netherlands: Boekencentrum Publishing House, 2000, p.361.

⁴⁴ Sándor Tavaszy, ‘A belmisszió egyéni és intézményes módszere’ (The Individual and Institutional Method of Home Mission), *Az Út* Vol. 6, Nr. 1 (1924): p.12.

behind this development. I want now to investigate the factors which may have led to the theological situation as it actually developed.

First of all, the first half of the 20th century in Transylvania can be characterized by the theological and practical attempts of reformed theologians to articulate an ecclesiology (or “ecclesiastica”) linked to missiological demands *in the context of a still assumed Christendom*, represented by the established churches, as already observed. The church was still understood as being an organization, both an institutional and organic representation of Christ’s visible Body in the particular geographical and ethno-cultural realities of the region. This was in marked contrast to the situation in the West. In Transylvania, society was still quite feudalistic and hierarchical in character,⁴⁵ so the still assumed understanding of Christendom had a stronger impact on the socio-political realm, compared with the West where the secularization process took place earlier.

Second, and as a consequence of the former, the church was seen as an entity which increasingly admitted that it had a mission task as well. However, that mission task was perceived more as a *function of the church* or as one *mandate* among others, sometimes more important, mandates; (more precisely, it was perceived as one particular mandate, sometimes being confused or substituted with the typically “self-defensive” Hungarian-Protestant ethno-cultural mandate) of the church rather, than the very *nature* of it. This situation remained unchallenged even into the second half of the century, from the 1950s onward, when the Communist regime overtook the country, and, concomitantly the whole Eastern block of Europe. That explains, at least partly, why the church, though linking itself with the World Council of Churches from the very beginning, was not influenced as a whole by the movement in the late 1950s or by the agenda of the International Missionary Council (IMC) to work out the structures of a missionary ecclesiology. It is no surprise that there has still been no attempt since the collapse of the Communist regime in this region to articulate - as for example the GOCN movement in North America - a missionary ecclesiology *in the context of a crumbling*

⁴⁵ See more on this in Oliver, *ibid.* pp.47-49. See also other sources in English, such as Géza Nagy, ‘The Influence of the Reformed Church On the Political History of Transylvania,’ *op. cit.*, pp.46-60, etc.

Christendom.⁴⁶ The problem is that the ethno-cultural and politico-social mandate of the Transylvanian Reformed Church is viewed more and more as the immediate missionary task of the church today. As a result, it could be that the missionary (overseas, in particular) calling is totally ignored at the beginning of the 21st century, though it did not lack inclusion in the many *functions* of the church in the 1930s.

The third major factor we see as playing a major role in this situation, is the lack of any “Second Reformation” in the history of the Hungarian Reformed Churches.⁴⁷ Transylvania was not an exception to this, rather the reverse, having a famous bishop in the 17th century, István Geleji Katona, who fiercely and with great success opposed the Puritan and the anti–prelacy movement.⁴⁸ Since the

⁴⁶ See the evaluation of Goheen in his above quoted critical study on the GOCN, ‘The Missional Church: Ecclesiological Discussion in the Gospel and Our Culture Network in North America.’

⁴⁷ See more on the historical developments in Transylvania in: Oliver, *ibid.* pp.47–63. Another important historical source in English written by a Hungarian Protestant minister is (George) György Bauhofer, *History of the Protestant Church in Hungary from the Beginning of the Reformation to 1850*. London: 1854. See also: Ernest (Imre) Révész, J. S. Kováts and László Ravasz’s *Hungarian Protestantism*. Budapest: 1927. Imre Révész, ‘Hungarian Reformed Christianity and Calvinism,’ in: *The Evangelical Quarterly* Vol. 6, Nr. 4 (October 15, 1934): pp.398–421. Géza Nagy, ‘The Influence of the Reformed Church On the Political History of Transylvania’, *op. cit.*

⁴⁸ However, to balance any possible one-sidedness, we must note that in Transylvania, especially between the Reformation and Geleji’s time, there was an unusual tolerance in religious matters, in contrast to the situation in the rest of Europe. The religious toleration in the Principality of Transylvania between 1526 and 1660 is very significant, as Dr. József Barcza noticed:

“because at that time religious toleration in Transylvania was unique in Europe. There were parliamentary decisions made against forced conversions (usually characteristic of dominant religions), the occupation of churches, and even against the rights of landowners. For example, in 1568 there was a decision made in Torda (Turda), by which preachers were allowed to preach the gospel according to their own interpretation, and the parishes were entitled to choose their own preachers. The Kolozsvár diet of 1615 reinforced a previous decision: “in the villages and towns with a population with different denominations the churches shall be in the possession of the major pars, but before taking possession of it they shall build a chapel for the minor pars.” The code of 1653 affirmed the right to change religion freely. All these laws also served the union of the different nationalities in Transylvania.” József Barcza, ‘Peregrináció, vallási türelem’ (On Students “Wandering” and Religious Toleration), in István Rácz (ed.), *Tanulmányok Erdély történetéről (Studies in the History of Transylvania), Szakmai konferencia Debrecenben*. Debrecen: Csokonai Kiadó, 1988, p.275.

time of its reformation, no consistent revolt against the “prelates” took place, such as happened in Holland (“*Nadere Reformatie*”),⁴⁹ Scotland, or in the “English Puritan Reformation.”⁵⁰ The long lived antagonism (long compared to similar struggles in the West) against the introduction of any Presbyterian system or easing off of the Episcopalian system in the 16th century made the church structure, the ecclesiastical structure, counter-productive for missionary or revivalist movements in the Hungarian Reformed Church, even after the slow introduction of Presbyterian structures, a process which would be concluded only in the beginning of

Another historical remark as a comparison is what Dr. Nagy observed: “In the second half of the 16th century, in 1550, in this country there was no privileged or state-religion. (...) This decision acknowledging the equal rights of Romish and Lutheran Churches at this time (1550) was unprecedented in the history of Europe.” See Géza Nagy, “The Influence of the Reformed Church On the Political History of Transylvania,” *op. cit.*, p.47.

⁴⁹ It is remarkable that one of the most famous representatives of the Second Reformation in Holland is the influential theologian, Gisbertus (Gisbert) Voetius (1588–1676) who was the first Protestant missiologist, too. He was an active member of the Synod of Dord (1618-1619), and a chief proponent of Calvinist theology, considered by many to be the most influential theologian of the 17th century in the Netherlands. There is ample evidence that he was in constant touch with the English Puritans and contributed to the emerging mission-oriented revival of his age in Holland. He welcomed many Hungarian students, some of whom, after becoming his disciples, returned to their homeland with Puritan insights and mission-mindedness. Voetius worked on the definition of the biblical concept of mission and his contribution had far reaching effects ahead of his time, being quite different from the general views of his age. In Voetius’ interpretation the foundation of mission has to be primarily theological, and thus rightly he is considered the first exponent of the view that mission is, first of all, the *missio Dei*. See the work of Jan A.B. Jongeneel, “The missiology of Gisbertus Voetius: the first comprehensive Protestant theology of missions,” in: *Calvin Theological Journal*, (1991): 53ff. See also, T. H Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960, p.155; D. Bosch, *Witness to the World: The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective*. London: Marshalls, 1980, pp.126-127; and Verkuyl, *Contemporary Missiology: An Introduction*, p.21.

⁵⁰ “Reformation was looked on as completed as regards the confession. The law of 1570 forbade heresy; a later one declares with respect to ‘innovation’ that the *introducing of new doctrines is allowed only with the permission of the Synod*. (emphasis by the author) These laws were carried out by the Reformed Princes. So the Unitarians were forced by Prince Rákóczy I. in 1638 to abide by their confession made in 1579. The same happened with the innovators of the Reformed Church. Ministers who brought Puritan ideas from Cambridge, Heidelberg and Holland were imprisoned or exiled, although at the same time the General Synod accepted many of the ideas of Puritanism.”

(See Géza Nagy, “The Influence of the Reformed Church On the Political History of Transylvania,” *op. cit.*, pp.53-54.)

the 19th century.⁵¹ That the Puritan movement was an important influence on the missionary engagements of the Protestant churches is clear even from the conclusions of Bosch:

The decisive factors were theological as well as socio-political. As regards the latter, Holland and England, both strongholds of Calvinism, belonged to the rising maritime powers with numerous overseas colonies. In itself, however, this was not enough to enkindle an interest in missions. An important theological factor therefore has to be taken into account as well – the crucial role played by the “Second Reformation” (Nadere Reformatie) in Holland and by Puritanism in England, Scotland, and the American colonies.⁵²

We can add that the Second Reformation was a *direct* catalyst to the reformed churches in the Western World which produced a more engraved missionary mindedness in Calvinist and Lutheran churches all over the world. Then, *indirectly*, it was a significant challenge to the Episcopalian structures of the churches.⁵³ It played a decisive role in the abolition of those kinds of structures, or at least, the weakening of that institutional centralism which could serve as a hindrance to missionary engagement. This happened because of a historical burden imposed on the church as early as the 1640s after the Reformation. The 1646 Synod of Szatmár-Németi (Satu-Mare) which crippled the spread of any “Second Reformation” or “Puritan” influence in the Hungarian Reformed Church was summoned almost at the same time as the Westminster Assembly in the British Isles,

⁵¹ See for example the important historical article of Dr. Alexander Czeplédy, ‘The Hungarian Puritans,’ *The Evangelical Quarterly* Vol. 7, Nr. 1. (January 15, 1935): pp.62-81.

⁵² Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p.256.

⁵³ I cannot agree with Oliver in his belief that John a Lasco (1499-1560), the famous Polish reformer accepted “consecration as the bishop of Veszprém in Hungary in 1529,” primarily because “he believed that the church could be reformed from within” (See Oliver, Robert, *op. cit.*, p. 54.). I don't think this was Lasco's main motivation for two reasons: 1. both Luther and Calvin believed, at least up to the time of the Council of Trent, that the split in the Church was temporary and that the Catholic Church could be reformed from within; 2. Not only in Hungary, but even in the West, the offices of prelate, bishop, etc. were only gradually abolished a century later, during and due to the Second Reformation. This did not happen in the Hungarian Reformed Church, although there were efforts there too on behalf of the Hungarian Puritans to abolish episcopalianism. The hypothesis that the reformers (like Lasco) were clearly against prelacy does not hold and cannot be generalized back to the 16th century anywhere in Europe; although sometimes they may have accepted prelacy with the hope of reforming the church from within.

which resulted in quite opposite historical developments for the Anglo–Saxon reformed churches.

“The name Puritan is scandalous, shameful and leads to slander and therefore is despicable to us. Nobody from among us should use it in a careless manner.” (Decree Nr. XXIV. of the National Synod of the Reformed Churches of Hungary and Transylvania held in Szatmár–Németi in the year 1646.)⁵⁴

It is not the institutional form, *per se*, which hinders mission, but the way that it works or gives room for abuse because of the thirst for power of those who hold key positions. It is important however, that one has a clear understanding of the historical and ecclesiological effects produced by the withholding and refusal of the Puritan-Presbyterian renewal of the institutionally fossilized church, in contrast with what took place in the Western Reformed world. Dr. Imre Révész, a Transylvanian professor and close friend of Lajos Imre's, who was also a church historian of considerable merit and later a bishop in Debrecen, Hungary, gave a clear description of the situation which emerged, when speaking of the success of church discipline exercised in those times in the Hungarian Reformed Church:

Even a Roman Catholic priestly church historian of the last decades had to recognize the difference between the moral standard of Hungarian Reformed and non-Reformed towns and cities of olden times, altogether in favor of the former. However, we must admit that this successful and energetic maintenance of discipline was due to the moral energy and authority of individual ministers, or perhaps of some prominent laymen (chiefly the members of the City Council), and *not to the autonomous and conscious activity of the congregation, this “chosen generation” and “holy nation.”*⁵⁵

These observations by Révész are crucial in highlighting the lack of emphasis on the priesthood of the laity which was due to the lack of a Second Reformation-

⁵⁴ Quoting the original text: “A Puritán név mint botrányos, gyalázatos és rágalmakra vezető, mi előttünk egészen gyűlöletes: annál fogva közülünk senki által meggondolatlanul ne használtassék.” (XXIV. VÉGZÉS.)

See in: ed. Kálmán Kiss, and translated by Áron Kiss (from latin) Geleji Katona István Egyházi Kánonai és A Szatmár–Németiben 1646. évben tartott Nemzeti Zsinat végzései (“The Statutes of the Church Collected and Revised by Bishop István Geleji Katona and The Decrees of the National Synod Held in Szatmár–Németi in the Year 1646, Szatmári Református Egyházmegye kiadása, Kecskemét, 1875, p. 96.

⁵⁵ See Imre Révész, ‘Hungarian Reformed Christianity and Calvinism’ *op. cit.*, p.412

type church renewal. As a long-term result, it also hindered the missionary vision of grass roots groups striving as “autonomous and conscious” initiators of mission which was so necessary and essential for the arousal of the modern missionary enterprise in the Anglo-Saxon, Dutch, etc. reformed churches in the West, but was totally missing in the East, in Hungarian Calvinism. Révész, continuing his argument, becomes very explicit about this, expressing his regret for the circumstances and factors which hindered the full blossoming of this movement in the country:

Even the Puritan-Presbyterian reform movement was unable, owing to the coincidence of many adverse circumstances, to develop sufficiently this self-expression of the congregation, whereas, apart from the transformation of church polity, this movement aimed especially at this.⁵⁶

Révész concludes by pointing to the lasting effect of this situation up to his time, reinforcing our thesis that these factors contributed to the lack of a missional aspect and nature in the TRC, with tragic consequences for the fulfillment of the Great Commission: “The lack of this conscious and autonomous activity is still felt in the Hungarian Reformed congregations as a challenge for the future.”⁵⁷

Recently, Grahame Murdock in his, *Calvinism on the Frontier 1600-1660* described thoroughly the historical background of the formative factors. I quote from his study to clarify the orientation that the church took in Transylvania.

Basire later presided over the 1656 Transylvanian synod, defending the existing clergy hierarchy of what he described as a ‘Catholic-Reformed’ church. Basire claimed that episcopacy was divinely established and that magistrates held authority to protect and champion the church by divine right. Basire identified ‘covenanters’ as the chief opponents of true religion, who at first favored Presbyterian government but then later became Independents, and in a letter of April 1656 Basire recounted to Charles II his battles in Transylvania against ‘Independency and presbytery (flown over here from England).’⁵⁸

But Révész discovered that historical factors played a decisive role even as early as the 1560s when two synods were held, one in the north of Hungary in 1562, the

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 412-413.

⁵⁸ Murdock, pp.193-194.

other in Transylvania in 1563. The church then adopted a version of Theodor Beza's Confession in a distinctive and selective way. Révész noticed a curiosity:

It is remarkable, however, that only the strictly theological portions of this purely Calvinistic document were taken over bodily by the Hungarians, while the articles dealing with church polity were considerably abbreviated and even these abbreviated portions were remodeled, so that this Hungarian adoption of Beza's work does not give at all a clear picture of the Genevean-Huguenot church government drawn in the original.⁵⁹

In another work on the church government of the reformed church,⁶⁰ Révész stated that we cannot conclude or even assume that if a thorough investigation was undertaken, that "the Statute of our church really would prove Presbyterian in its roots." He provides examples from more historical sources, like the other confessional Standards accepted in the church's early days, as an explanation for the emerging and distinct state of the Hungarian Calvinistic Church compared with her Western sister churches:

Then we take the ancient creeds and confessional writings of the Hungarian Reformed Church – many of which are published in older or more recent foreign collections – and we shall be amazed to find that the influence of the specifically Calvinistic theological ideas and systematizing principles is very little in evidence.⁶¹

The persistent problem of a gap between the clergy and laity as a major hindrance to the missionary's self-understanding of the church was, and still is, controversial in Western Calvinism. But the problem of Hungarian Calvinistic Churches is even more serious as this situation has never been confronted, at least as a theological challenge, from the very beginning. Révész gives a characteristic example of the treatment given to Beza's document by those fathers gathered at the synod:

It is characteristic that paragraph 23 of Chapter V is reduced to an insignificant and short article, the very essence of it being left out: i.e. the enumeration of the church offices in the New Testament, according to Calvin's interpretation, furthermore, the

⁵⁹ Révész, *ibid.* p.401.

⁶⁰ Imre Révész, 'Presbiteri rendszerű-e a magyar református egyház?' (Has the Hungarian Reformed Church a Presbyterian System?), in: *"Tegnap és ma és örökké..." Révész Imre összegyűjtött tanulmányai az egyház múltjából és jelenéből.* Debrecen: 1944, pp.298-310.

⁶¹ Révész, 'Hungarian Reformed Christianity and Calvinism,' *op. cit.* p.399.

protest against the distinction between the ecclesiastics and the laity and against the application of the word "*clerus*" to ministers, is eliminated. (...) These deliberate omissions indicate a conscious attitude on the part of the Hungarians...⁶²

The synodical resolutions of the reformation century itself can be held accountable for the continuing emphasis on the clergy within the church as a whole throughout the centuries, as Révész points to this contradiction:

These synodical resolutions convey the impression of a Church governed exclusively by the clergy, in fact, some of these synodical canons apply the word "*sacerdos*" to ministers, and "*clerus*" to the body of ministers in an utterly anti-Calvinistic fashion.⁶³

For these same reasons, Professor Victor, when describing the Calvinist principle of universal priesthood prevailing in the theology of the Hungarian reformed churches, had to admit that in practice this was not yet a reality:

(N)owdays⁶⁴ an increasing emphasis is placed upon the need of the laymen's participation in all kinds of church activity, even in the pastoral care exercised through visitation of church-members.

As the nomenclature of "clergy" and "laity," taken over from the Roman Catholic Church, is in use in spite of what has been stated above, **the "elders" are being regarded as belonging to the "laity."** [Bold, LH.]⁶⁵

That explains why even centuries later in Transylvania, in the inter-bellum period, the decisive momentum of domesticating the home mission movement could take place only at the expense of removing all mission activity from the control and orchestration of the laity and why so much energy was put into theological investigation, with repeated debates focusing on the church and on the peculiar philosophy of *ecclesiastica* ("*ekkléziasztika*"). This effort on the part of

⁶² *Ibid.* p.401.

⁶³ *Ibid.* p.402.

⁶⁴ János Victor evidently refers to the first decades of the 20th century. However, his manuscript, written originally in English which I found in the Church Archives (see footnote below), is unfortunately without dates. On Dr. Victor, the famous Hungarian theologian and significant missiologist, see the entrance in the *BDCM*, p.702. Later in the course of this thesis we will review some of his ideas and thoughts on ecclesiology and missions, especially as reflected in his debate with the other famous theologian of missions, Dr. Sándor Makkai.

⁶⁵ Victor, Answers to the Questionnaire concerning "The Nature of the Church," p. 5.

theologians was an understandable reaction to the tension created by unworkable structures which had hindered the mission movements from their beginnings in the 1890s.

The Philosophical Background Shaping the Theology of the Transylvanian Reformed Church

There were two major influences that made a lasting mark on the theological spectrum of the Reformed Church between 1895 and 1950. The first was the neo-Kantian philosophy represented by Böhm⁶⁶ and his circle which had an overwhelming impact on almost all the theologians of Transylvania between 1895 and 1930. Beginning gradually in the 1920s, and gaining in momentum after the famous Nagyenyed debate of 1930,⁶⁷ the influence of Existentialist Philosophy had a transitional effect. Simultaneously, from the 1920s onward the so-called Theology of Crises or Dialectical Theology, represented first of all by Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, both of whom perhaps exercised the greatest influence on the Transylvanians in the period, prevailed⁶⁸ and became the official and dominant

⁶⁶ See below.

⁶⁷ This marked the theological turning point for the TRC, when neo-orthodoxy was finally embraced and became the official theological trend of the church. See more on the debate later in my evaluation of the influence of Barthian theology upon the Transylvanians. My presentation of the debate and the issuing theological spectrum is based on the many articles written by the most important theologians following the debate in the early 1930s, as will be cited in this section of my dissertation.

⁶⁸ See the analysis of Dezső László, *Az Anyaszentegyház élete és szolgálata, A teológiának mint gyakorlati teológiának alapkérdései* (The Life and Ministry of the Holy and Mother Church, The Fundamental Questions of Theology, As Practical Theology). Cluj: Gloria könyvnyomda, 1938. For the names given to the theological school or Neo-orthodox orientation embraced by the Transylvanians see pp.15-20.

László declared in introducing his analysis: "If we want to give a precise conceptual definition of Dialectical Theology we will face the biggest hardships..." (p.15.) László successively gives the names and their interpretation as follows: Dialectical Theology, Reformational Theology, Existential Theology, Transcendental Theology, Theology of Crisis, Barthianism, The Theology of the Word, Theology of the Church (*cf.* the 'Church Dogmatics' of Barth), Theology of Eschatological Dualism. But the Transylvanians never called it neo-orthodoxy, as it was called and is still called in the Anglo-Saxon theological world. László then committed himself in the footsteps of and together with Lajos Imre for naming it simply Reformational Theology (*"reformátori teológia"*). Some of his contemporaries would call it New-Reformational

theological orientation of the Transylvanian Reformed Church. This change of direction from a neo-Kantian theological framework swept throughout Transylvania with little or no opposition, and went on to dominate theological thinking in the Reformed Churches of Hungary and beyond. This latter impact was encouraged by a variety of new theological works coming out of Transylvania at that time, including Tavaszy's *Reformed Christian Dogmatics*⁶⁹ in 1932, resulting in the relative unity of neo-Orthodox doctrinal orientation in all the Hungarian Churches situated in, and outside of, the Mother-country.

First of all, I want to analyze the neo-Kantian influence bearing in mind what effect this could have had on the formation of a specific ecclesiology, which in turn would also influence the concept of mission. Then, as we critically evaluate the emerging neo-Kantian theological enterprise, we also have to look to the theological transformation which was produced and marked by the way in which Barth and Brunner were embraced in Transylvania,⁷⁰ especially after the 1930 Nagyenyed debate. We will investigate whether it was a total turnabout, as that generation of theologians believed, or whether a trace of neo-Kantian presuppositions underlay the biblical foundations of the new orientation, especially with regard to ecclesiology and missiology. Our research must be restricted to these two specific areas in which we are especially interested, so a complete overview of the entire theological spectrum is outside the scope of this thesis. Then, in the next chapter, as a result of these philosophical and theological insights, we will look more closely at the emerging ecclesiological works in the field and test their

Theology ("újreformátori teológia"), a name that László would refuse. In my opinion, this was probably due to the same ground on which he attacked the missiology of Jenő Horváth when the latter urged for the new reformation as the TRC was standing in need of an extensive renewal of the church. Cf. Dezső László's critique, on Jenő Horváth's work, 'A belmisszió alapkérdései' (The Basic Questions of Home Mission) *Református Szemle* (September 15, 1949): pp.461-465 and then again, 'A belmisszió alaphivatásai' (The Basic Callings of Home Mission) in *Református Szemle* (September 30, 1949): pp.500-505. His critique will be evaluated in chapter six.

⁶⁹ Tavaszy, *Református keresztyén Dogmatika* ('Reformed Christian Dogmatics'), op. cit.

⁷⁰ It might be worthwhile to note here that both of them were invited to and visited the Kolozsvár Seminary during the 1930s and stayed in touch with many theological professors and church leaders, among them Tavaszy, who cultivated a close friendship with Barth, etc. This relationship with the Swiss theologians requires further study, but is beyond the aims and limits of this present dissertation.

definitions and concepts which played such a serious role in the church's interpretation of what mission is and how it should be carried out.

It is critical that we understand the Neo-Kantian background of the theologians of the period under research. To know what questions ought to be asked presupposes a range of efforts in giving theological answers; it almost assumes an already given and constructed theology or some sort of a critical philosophy.⁷¹ This will be enough to both interpret them from their own inherent mindset and also to critically understand them.⁷² One adds that there cannot be any pre-supposition-less questions posed on our behalf.⁷³

Károly Böhm and his Neo-Kantian School

Károly Böhm (1846-1911) was the first Hungarian philosopher to create a comprehensive philosophical system in the Hungarian language. A whole philosophical school developed in Transylvania through his disciples, the Neo-Kantian Circle of Kolozsvár.⁷⁴ The school was frequently compared to the German school of Baden Neo-Kantians⁷⁵ and among the disciples were famous philosophers and

⁷¹ An overall reading of the prolific theological works of the period convinced me not to address any other questions to these men but the ones they themselves posed or could have posed to each other.

⁷² As their chief mentor Kant pointed out, it is possible to understand a philosopher better than he understands himself; the same might be said when studying these notable theologians. Cf., Immanuel Kant *Critique of Pure Reason*, (trans. by Norman Kemp Smith). London: Macmillan, 1933, p.314.

⁷³ Still, in an effort to avoid that and being conscious of the relative success of such an approach, we will choose the following method. First it will be necessary to explain why the ecclesiology and missiology of these Transylvanian theologians inspired by the neo-Kantian Hungarian Böhm, and then shaped by Barth cannot be accepted on their own terms. Then it will be argued in what way these theologians can still be accepted on terms consistent with a missiological definition of the church.

⁷⁴ In 1913 the Károly Böhm Society (*Böhm Károly Társaság*) was created in Kolozsvár. But very soon, due to the outbreak of the First World War, and of the Romanian takeover of Transylvania after the war its activities were basically interrupted.

⁷⁵ Cf. Sándor Kibédi Varga, Magyar és német filozófia. Az erdélyi és a badeni iskola (Hungarian and German Philosophy. The Philosophical School of Transylvania and of Baden), in Sándor Kibédi Varga, *A szellem hatalma (The Power of the Geist)*. München: Aurora, 1980.

theologians.⁷⁶ Böhm's epoch-making book, *Man and his World*, is a six volume foundation of value-appraisal philosophy, often simply called "axiology" (a word which appears in the title of *Volume III*),⁷⁷ or commonly referred to as the philosophical doctrine of values and value-appraisal; a work which primarily emphasized the value-centered world view of his philosophical idealism.⁷⁸ In his biography of Böhm, Kajlós observed that as a young man of twenty, he had already confidently put down his intellectual *thelos*: "I want to work. May Hungary also have an independent philosophical system, of which a lack has been felt so far."⁷⁹

How could the neo-Kantian philosophy of Böhm attract the theological students to such an extent that they all consciously followed his orientation, when their mentor, Immanuel Kant was, and can be considered a deist?⁸⁰ Being theologians, how could they accept the dichotomy in Kant which influenced to a significant extent both the theological and the philosophical thinking of the 19th century when he asserts, "It is very necessary that one should be convinced of God's existence; but not so necessary that one should prove it."⁸¹ One possible explanation can be found in that the official theological orientation of the TRC, which

⁷⁶ Among the most important philosophers we can mention: György Bartók Jr, Sándor Tavaszy, Béla Tankó, Béla Varga, etc. The theologians were almost everybody under his influence at the Reformed Seminary of Kolozsvár, also taught by him at the University, exception can be only István Kecskeméthy and Béla Kenessey.

⁷⁷ The volumes are I. *Dialektika vagy alapphilosophia* (Dialectics or Foundational Philosophy), 1883; II. *A szellem élete* (The Life of the Geist), 1892; III. *Axiológia vagy értéktan* (Axiology or the Doctrine of Values), 1906; IV. *A logikai érték tana* (The Doctrine of the Logical Value), 1912, V. *Az erkölcsi érték tana* (The Doctrine of the Moral Value), 1928, 6. *Az esztétikai érték tana* (The Doctrine of the Esthetical Value), 1942. The latest three were edited and published posthumously by his successor György Bartók Jr.

⁷⁸ It is fundamentally a synthesis of the 19th century Neo-Kantian school and of the positivist, scientific school of his contemporary world.

⁷⁹ Imre Kajlós (ed.), *Dr. Böhm Károly élete és munkássága* (The Life and Work of Dr. Károly Böhm), vol I. *Besztercebánya*: 1913, p.78.

⁸⁰ See for example Robert Whittemore's study on Kant: 'The Metaphysics of the Seven Formulations of the Moral Argument' in *A Symposium on Kant*, Tulane Studies in Philosophy, vol. III. New Orleans: Tulane University, 1954, pp.133-161.
"As regards his religious position, Kant is usually classified as a deist, and, I think, rightly so." (Cf. p. 161.)

⁸¹ Immanuel Kant, *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseins Gottes*, Translated and quoted by C. C. J. Webb, *Kant's Philosophy of Religion*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1926, p.34.

was deeply liberal in nature⁸² and influenced mostly by the theology of the German scholar, Schleiermacher,⁸³ prevailed among theologians with virtually no dissent. In contrast, while in the Reformed Churches of the West there was likewise a spread of liberal theology, a significant opposition and rebuttal of it was present also. Abraham Kuiper in the Dutch Reformed Church, Schaeder in the German, Benjamin B. Warfield in America, and others in the Anglo-Saxon theology of the same period, can all be cited as examples of those Calvinists who vociferously opposed this post-Enlightenment thinking. The whole Kantian and neo-Kantian position of epistemology, as reflected in the above quotation, was not rejected with the same acerbity in the Hungarian theological world as it was, for example, by Warfield. The famous Princeton professor, Benjamin B. Warfield (1851-1921), an able theologian in criticizing Kant and his loyal successors in theology, summarized their ideas on faith and belief as follows: “‘Faith,’ ‘belief,’ it is said (e.g. by Kant), is conviction founded on evidence which is subjectively adequate. ‘Knowledge’ is conviction founded on evidence which is objectively adequate.”⁸⁴ His answer to this interpretation is rooted in the Augustinian-Calvinist oriented tradition of thought:

That ‘faith’ and ‘knowledge’ do differ from one another, we all doubtless feel; but it is not easy to believe that their specific difference is found in this formula. It is of course plain enough that every act of ‘faith,’ ‘belief’ rests on evidence which is subjectively adequate. But it is far from plain that this evidence must be objectively inadequate on pain of the mental response ceasing to be ‘faith,’ ‘belief’ and becoming ‘knowledge.’⁸⁵

⁸² The only exceptions to be found among the professors of the Kolozsvár Seminary are Kecskeméthy and Kenessey. Their position was probably due to the fact that they represented a more confessional and evangelical approach in their antagonism towards the liberal and rationalist theology fashionable at the time.

⁸³ Most of the Transylvanians would accept Schleiermacher, who critically synthesized all the insights of Kant into an exhaustively theological framework, and was considered the greatest liberal theologian of the 19th century.

⁸⁴ Benjamin B. Warfield, ‘On Faith in Its Psychological Aspects,’ in Samuel G. Craig (ed.), *Biblical and Theological Studies*. Philadelphia, PA: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1952, pp.380-381.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p.381.

But the Augustinian idea of faith requires the possession of certain, reliable criteria,

on the basis of which he could confidently assert truth. (...) He (e.g., Augustine) was tempted to declare that nothing resting on less cogent grounds is known, *or can be known, at all*. (italics mine, to emphasize the reference on the possibility of knowledge)⁸⁶

So Warfield had in mind these Augustinian-Calvinist demands in opposition to any irrational acceptance of uncertain grounds which are often called, and mistakenly thought of as, 'faith' by many:

Are all 'beliefs,' 'faiths,' specifically such, in their very nature inadequately established convictions; convictions, indeed – matters of which we feel sure – but of which we feel sure on inadequate grounds – grounds either consciously recognized by us as inadequate, or, if supposed by us to be adequate, yet really inadequate? (...) To believe on grounds of the inadequacy of which we are conscious, is on the face of it an impossibility. The moment we perceive the objective inadequacy of the grounds on which we pronounce the reality of anything, they become subjectively inadequate also.⁸⁷

After demonstrating Augustine's opposing views to the Academics (see his '*Contra Academicos*') about the meaning of '*verisimile*' or '*probabile*' viz., the '*verum*' which is a '*signum*' of certainty, Warfield was concerned over the difficulties raised by Augustine whom he considers as going too far in applying "the *signum* mechanically to every sphere of truth alike..."⁸⁸ Thus Warfield searched for a balanced solution to the epistemological question:

On the basis of this *signum* we may obtain in every sphere at least the *verisimile*, the *probabile* – a sufficient approach to truth to serve all practical purposes; or rather truth itself though not truth in its purity, free from all admixture of error.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Benjamin B. Warfield, 'Augustine's Doctrine of Knowledge and Authority,' in Samuel G. Craig (ed.), *Calvin and Augustine*. Philadelphia, PA: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1956, pp.316-317.

⁸⁷ Warfield, 'On Faith in Its Psychological Aspects,' p. 381.

⁸⁸ Warfield, 'Augustine's Doctrine of Knowledge and Authority,' p. 389.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

We see exactly the same criticism of Augustine in the work of the Hungarian Neo-Kantian philosopher, Ákos Pauler⁹⁰ who even criticized his master, Károly Böhm, arguing that one cannot automatically apply the criteria of validity to every sphere of truth alike.

Pauler is important to us for at least three reasons. First, he was a disciple of Böhm and succeeded Böhm in his chair at the University. Second, the Transylvanian professor of theology, missiologist, and bishop, Sándor Makkai,⁹¹ wrote his dissertation under Pauler's supervision, and other theologians also studied with him. Third, Pauler's critique of Böhm was not considered and taken into account by men like Ravasz when grounding the new theology, especially ecclesiology, on some of the aspects of Böhm's system.⁹² As happened with Augustine, Böhm made a generalization from validity toward the ontological, confounding the psychologically true with the logically true.

The Augustinian starting point for the grounding of epistemology is complex; it focuses in a balanced way on both the biblical teaching of the *noetic* effect of sin, and the illuminating potential of a possible progressive knowledge by *grace*. This balanced complexity was abused by Descartes and then by the rationalism of the Enlightenment's "mega-narrative," achieving its apex in Kant. Theologians of the theology of Crisis, in reaction, tried to cure the situation by going to the other extreme. They made the *noetic* effect of sin so radical as to lead to the breaking up of the *imago Dei* in man to such a devastating degree that it eliminated any possible knowledge of God. Warfield rejected such thinking, asserting that the inexcusability of humanity, that we read about in Romans Chapter I, cannot be maintained, unless there is a minimal possibility left to man of knowing God from

⁹⁰ I am relying on his critique of Böhm in the following evaluation as one can see that in his book: Ákos Pauler, *Bevezetés a filozófiába (Introduction to Philosophy)*. Budapest: Pantheon Irodalmi Részvénytársaság kiadása, 1921. See especially pp.308-315.

⁹¹ For Dr. Sándor Makkai, his significance as a Transylvanian reformed theologian, churchman, and missiologist, see the entry in the *BDCM*, p.429. Later in the course of this thesis we will come back to review some of his ideas and thoughts on ecclesiology and missions, especially reflected in his debate with the other famous theologian of missions, Dr. János Victor.

⁹² Pauler's critique consists in the discerning of the ontological aspect and the probabilist aspect of the same truth. He insisted that the *probability* does not necessarily imply *being* itself. When we state something's validity as being true just because it is true logically, this will not automatically guarantee its existence. The *valid*, the *operative* (logically) carries only a possibility of being and not a justification of that being.

creation, as Calvin argued. In a peculiar way, the Barthian epistemology is an unconscious return to the agnostic Kantian dictum. Ultimately, it makes grace empty (at least in this sense) by encapsulating human responsibility into an immanent knowledge of God, compelling man to make efforts on his own instead of turning to the supernatural grace of a transcendent God. In fact, Barth was restricted by his own epistemological uncertainty laced, to some extent, with post-Kantian agnostic tendencies which apparently contradicted the declared Barthian transcendentalism of God's Word and grace, forcing him into the Kantian corset: "(T)rue religion is to consist not in the knowing or considering of what God does or has done for our salvation but in what we must do to become worthy of it."⁹³ Kant, in the *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*, undertakes to distinguish between hypothetical and categorical imperatives. The hypothetical imperative tells us that we ought to do something because we wish for something else.

In his so-called moral argument for God's existence in the *Critique of Practical Reason* he (Kant) attempted to see in their unity the solution of the apparent discrepancy between that which is and that which ought to be: the 'ought' of the moral law guaranteeing the actuality of a being capable of realizing its demands by ordering the natural world in accordance therewith. In the *Critique of Judgment* he suggested the profounder thought that only the recognition of the absolute value of the morally goodwill can provide a firm basis for any theology, by giving us an adequate end of the existence of the world and all that is in it...⁹⁴

Similarly, Böhm in his axiology stressed the tension created between the ontological and deontological worlds (between the *being* and the *ought to be* worlds). The Hungarian school of Böhm considered the whole world of objects to be the unconscious product of the Ego. In *Volume I* of his great opus,⁹⁵ Böhm laid down the foundation of his system along the following lines. It is necessary to distinguish between two kind of functions in our *Weltgeist*: first the mechanism of being, which sets reality before us, and secondly the mechanism of knowing, which is a conscious work of the thinking subject.

⁹³ Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, (Greene and Hudson translation). Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1934, p.123.

⁹⁴ C. C. J Webb., *Kant's Philosophy of Religion*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1926, p.176.

⁹⁵ Károly Böhm, *Az Ember és Világa, Dialektika vagy alapphilosophia*, I. kötet. Budapest: 1883.

Pauler pointed to the failure of psychologism in this kind of subjective idealism. According to him, even the system of Böhm regards the truth only as a product of human thinking; this is derived not from logic, but from the assumptions of psychology. The valuable, valuability, and the value itself are independent of being. This position was held not just by Pauler but by most of Böhm's disciples. The relation between value and being is not that the precondition of value is being, but quite the opposite, *value is the precondition of a valuable being*.⁹⁶ This, being valid for every single being, applies even to the ontological Absolute (*absolutum*); a thesis is true not because God thought it; rather, God thought it because it is true, concludes Pauler, leaning on Plato's understanding.⁹⁷ Thus value is the most fundamental precondition, the presupposition even of being itself.⁹⁸ The Greek concept of good, *agathon*, meant something more general than the Latin *bonus*. Good comes before being, as Plato observed, it is beyond existing.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ This, of course, was the common view not just among the neo-Kantian school of Kolozsvár, but among many Western thinkers at the end of the 19th century.

⁹⁷ Likewise, this is true also with the *good* and the *beautiful* (i.e., the idea of the *esthetical absolute*, of course, conceived of in a Platonic manner). These are standing above every being, so even the Absolute will fit itself to these, will accommodate itself to these, and will think, do and contemplate the things of absolute value. Since the idea of value has no existence, the absolute being's activity is not limited by anything. The circle of value is wider than the circle of being. In addition, Pauler sharply distinguished between a logically valid thing and an existing thing as being part of the truth, or of the reality. According to his criticism, the logically true will not necessarily be conditioned to exist, just because it has validity in absoluteness of its existence. Any tendency of Psychologism must be excluded in reasoning, he warned us.

⁹⁸ Consequently, as Pauler argues, it cannot be defined, cannot be deduced from other terms and notions; it can only be discovered during the process of reduction. Real values can be discovered and known with a species of the Platonic anamnesis. The logical clarification of the notion of value can be achieved only by drawing a line marking it off from our other notions. Valuability then will be that aspect of a thing according to that which it becomes prior to anything else. (The) value itself is that conception of value according to which that thing is made prior to others. This observation or discovery of the true values will be achieved not by emotions but by "dia-crisis," by judgement.

⁹⁹ Unfortunately the ontological viewpoint gradually swallowed the value-oriented viewpoint in the Middle Ages, specifically among scholars like Thomas Aquinas, as observed by Pauler.

The logical priority over against the temporal, the introduction of the *a priori* by Kant to mark off from the temporal priority, made it possible for the concept of good to become again foundational in opposition to being.¹⁰⁰

Ravasz, the first theologian in the footsteps of Böhm, was influenced by Lotze and by W. Windelband as well as Böhm. Because *critique* and not the *stating of facts* is the task of philosophy, its specific task is the world of values and not that of being. Due to the influence of Brentano (*Vom Ursprung sittlicher Erkenntnis*, 1889) who wrote a subtle essay on the origins of moral knowledge and whose research of the psychological aspects of moral attitudes pointed to the world of values, modern psychological research at the end of the 19th century tended to confuse psychologism with philosophical research. In Hungarian circles, as noted, Dr. Károly Böhm, lecturer in philosophy at Kolozsvár University, was the leading figure in this tendency. Ravasz was not aware of the dangers of this possible confusion, although another Böhm-disciple and colleague, Dr. Ákos Pauler warned against it.¹⁰¹ One can see that tendency in the Böhm's own writings, as he comprehends the metaphysics of the self-projection of the Ego:

Over against "the being," (*to on*) there arises the "ought to be" (*to deon*), as a factor with equal rights in the human world. These two, *together only, they constitute a whole human world*. (...) So the two metaphysics can be united into a one hyper-metaphysic concept: in the concept of the self-stating of the Ego, *in the concept of (Self-) projection*. On this point is dependent the two distinct half-spheres of philosophy: the picture of the existing world (*ontology*) and the ideal of the ought to be world (*deontology*).¹⁰²

In Pauler's analysis, according to Böhm, value appraisal starts when we go beyond ontological judgments. Value appraisal is possible only when we accept that something can be and is valuable in itself, or, in other words, that something is

¹⁰⁰ For Kant, as for Pauler, the absolute possessed the will of good, or good will, or morality, which has a dignity (*Würde*), but not a price (*Preis*). He makes moral value independent from reality, ethics from experience. The moral imperative conceived as *cathegoricus imperativus* has the same idea at its base because the Good stays above being, the moral demand can remain the same, unchangeably independent from the life situations or concrete circumstances of an individual.

¹⁰¹ Pauler, pp.308-315.

¹⁰² Károly Böhm, *Az Ember és Világa, Axiológia vagy értéktan*, vol. III. Kötet. Budapest: 1906, pp.vi-vii.

valuable in an absolute way; only then are we able to compare anything to it. The absolute value has to be valuable in regard to itself, as well. The absolutely valuable must be as such conscious of itself, or rather, must be conscious of its own value. So the final problem of the doctrine of value is the question: what does it mean to be valuable in itself when there is an absolute value appraisal? The absolute value gets its *expression* in its self-love. That is its phenomenal being. But its root stays in its self-conscious quality, and this is the noumenon. In other words, the absolutely valuable loves itself, because it is valuable, rather than being valuable because it loves itself.¹⁰³

The value theory of Böhm is a corollary outcome of his subjective idealism. At the very root of this view, according to Pauler, as we have seen, there is the psychologism.¹⁰⁴ But psychologism makes logical references, the relations of mere validity, to become acts of the mind, and so transforms them into psychic realities. This recognition of Pauler can be paralleled with the postmodern insights and critique of Derrida and others when they call the realism of the dominant Western intellectual tradition a “metaphysics of presence.”¹⁰⁵

The Derridan school is more radical. The essence of their critique and attack on these assumptions questions whether or not what is claimed to be present might, in fact, be absent. And if what is claimed to be present is really absent then

¹⁰³ Böhm distinguishes *three* successive levels in value appraisal: the value appraisal of *hedonism*, the value appraisal of utilitarianism, and the value appraisal of *idealism* (or the *noble appraisal*). The idealistic value appraisal at its foundation can be found in an isolating, compacting, and compressing contemplation, and in an intuitive concept.

¹⁰⁴ Pauler, p.314.

¹⁰⁵ The *imitative* theory of truth (called *mimetic*) is usually fiercely attacked by postmodern deconstructionism, due to (a Kantian-inspired) assumption that there must be a substantial convergence between reality and the description of reality. The “metaphysics of presence” means, in fact, that what is assumed to *be present* in our conceptual system of truth is viewed as a *reality*, as a *real given*, which we can appropriately and adequately grasp by reasoning and, successively, by language. But it has to be remarked here that such grasped thought is not prior to that given reality. In other words, it is the supposed presence of it which exists prior to both language and thought. That is, the Neo-Kantian tradition developed and formulated by Böhm claims to depict and reflect reality with such a positivistic precision that it simply mirrors the way things are. Now, both Pauler to some extent, and Derrida to the extreme, are saying the same. What they assert is the following: we can never get to a prelinguistic “reality” or preconceptual “reality.” That is just a psychologism making inroads into the system of transcendental subjectivity. As Pauler insists, a “thought something” merely by being valid and logically true, does not automatically guarantee its own existence.

the given¹⁰⁶ in itself is also nothing else than a construction of “human discourse.” Through such an analysis, this postmodern critical method strives for the dismantling of the given; and then we are “disabused of our reifications.”¹⁰⁷ This will later be of enormous importance for our subject. We will see the conceptualization of a typical ecclesiology “produced” by theologians who founded their Church concept on Böhm’s philosophical assumptions (as was admitted by Ravasz who did not even consider the critical remarks of Pauler) rather than on biblical-theological grounds and, as a result, their “product,” the *given* became so real that it overwrote and abolished any alternative concept. In fact, it was authoritatively imposed upon everybody in the church, declared as the official theology of the church; and with this step every possible critical or prophetic challenge was *ab ovo* silenced or labeled as either heretical or “pietistic.” They could take the right to magisterially pronounce on the truth or falsity of other views in regard to ecclesiology, missiology and even the modality versus sodality issue from the same preconditions. They certainly became part of the *reality* that they constructed and then called it *the Church*. We will be interested later on in how much this may have helped hinder the perception that mission is the very essence of the church, not just a noble function of it.

Returning to the evaluation of the philosophical background to summarize our investigation, we can conclude that, according to Pauler’s critique of Böhm, at the base of psychologism there is the confounding of Being with Validity; the mixing up of *the thought one* with the truth, *the real one*. “The doctrine of value appraisal of Károly Böhm, in spite of its many depths; fell prey to this same illusion, in the form of a theory of values.”¹⁰⁸

According to Pauler’s critique, the failure in Böhm’s teaching was in confounding thought with the valuable, making them identical, as if there were no difference between the valuability and the value appraisal. Pauler illustrated this

¹⁰⁶ This is understood in Derridan terms.

¹⁰⁷ Berger and Luckmann give a definition of what this reification means: “(T)he apprehension of the products of human activity *as if* they were something else than human products – such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will. Reification implies that man is capable of forgetting his own authorship of the human world, and further, that the dialectic between man, the producer, and his products is lost to consciousness.” (Berger & Luckmann, Thomas, *op. cit.*, cff.)

¹⁰⁸ Pauler, p. 314.

confusion on the part of Augustine who demanded a degree of certainty in a mathematical equation like $7 + 3 = 10$, arguing that this was so regardless of space and time, everywhere and anytime; out of which Augustine deduced the absoluteness, universality and eternity of truth.¹⁰⁹ For all kind of truths in every sphere, i.e., the apodeictic certitude being/ serving the argument for the truth eternal which can be asserted and dwells in God, - Pauler's criticism consists in the discerning of the ontological aspect and the probabilistic aspect of the same truth. He insisted that the *probability* does not necessarily imply the *being* itself. Although it does not appear as a contradiction, our answer might be, the *possibility* of truth remains valid and together with the *factual* ground gives us the certitude required. It is better to speak of the *validity* of truth which covers both aspects and is very similar to Warfield's conclusion at least: "The possession of a criterion gives validity to the *verisimile*; for who can declare that anything is like the truth unless he has the truth itself in mind with which to compare it and by which to judge it?"¹¹⁰

With this we have arrived at a basic question focusing on the problematical stand-point of neo-Orthodoxy. For a better understanding and for a clearer evaluation of this point, we will again quote Warfield in order to see the differences which resulted in divergent conclusions between Augustine-orthodox and Kantian (based, at least in this regard) neo-orthodox views: "It was the personal Logos that he [i.e. Augustine] had in mind, through whose immanent working all things that exist exist, all things that live live, all things that understand understand."¹¹¹

We can also quote Cornelius Van Til's remarks on Brunner's views opposing orthodoxy, when Van Til characterized the concept of the Theology of Crisis as dealing with an adequately impersonal Logos, and consequently the wholly impersonal realm of the phenomenal. Brunner, although often insisting on the personal character of the Logos, ended up defeating his own intentions; in the end he "is compelled to make the person of man the final reference point."¹¹² To

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* pp.90-93.

¹¹⁰ Warfield, 'Augustine's Doctrine of Knowledge and Authority' in: *Calvin and Augustine*, p.389.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Cf. Cornelius Van Til, 'Introduction' to Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, ed. by Samuel G. Craig. London: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1951, p.65 ff. For the insight elaborated here see Warfield's remark in his essay on 'Augustine' in *Calvin and Augustine*, *op. cit.*, p.317, where he observes:

illustrate the danger of making man the final reference point instead of a self-revealing God, it is helpful to continue quoting Warfield¹¹³ on Augustine:

Surely if it be true even of the body that in Him we live and move and have our being, it must much more be true of the mind, which, having been made in His likeness, lives and moves and has its being in Him in some more excellent, but of course not visible but intelligible way, so that our spiritual illumination comes from the Word of God (...) We perceive that the outcome of this conception is that the condition of all knowledge is revelation.¹¹⁴

Warfield in his conclusion renounces Western rationalist arrogance (so this renouncement did not start with post-modern thinkers, but with Warfield; i.e., this kind of criticism of the “Western rationalistic arrogance!”) in his understanding of an epistemology which can work for a genuine and humble biblical theology:

In order that we may apprehend Augustine’s thought we must therefore attend to his doctrine of mystery as lying at the heart of all our knowledge; to his doctrine of authority as the necessary pedagogue to knowledge; and to his doctrine revelation as the palliative, and of grace as the cure, of the noetic effects of sin.¹¹⁵

The ethical condition for obtaining higher knowledge thus is a biblical demand; this was almost forgotten in the theological history of the West due to the influence of the rise of rationalism.¹¹⁶ By contrast, according to Augustine, “to attain

“Even the famous ontological argument for the being of God, and, indeed, the very *cogito ergo sum* of Descartes, have not merely their material but their formal pre-formation in him.”

Compare this with what for example Van Til states on p.25 of his essay, on the epistemological foundations in diverging results:

“Both Descartes and Calvin believed in some form of innateness of ideas, yet the former made man and the latter made God the final reference point in human thought.”

¹¹³ It has to be made clear that Warfield offered three corollaries which flow from Augustine’s concept and epistemology:

the human mind, being finite, cannot hope to attain to absolute perfect knowledge;

the human soul being subject to development, can hope to attain to anything like adequate knowledge only by a slow process, and by means of aid from without;

the human soul being sinful in its *post lapsum* (after the Fall) state:

“there is a clog upon it in its aspiration to knowledge which it can never in its own strength overcome.” (See, ‘Augustine’s Doctrine of Knowledge and Authority,’ *op. cit.*, p. 404

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* pp.398-399.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* p.404.

¹¹⁶ This in turn, through the authority of the Enlightenment’s forceful meta-narrative, overwrote even the theological clichés of epistemology.

the knowledge of God, (...) stands at the apex of achievement, [and] demands therefore a very special purgation.”¹¹⁷ In other words, “what Augustine is really teaching is that the ethical state of the soul conditions knowledge” and therefore Augustine,

insists that God accords the truth only to those who seek it *pie, caste et diligenter*, and urges therefore to a strenuous and devout pursuit of it, because it is only those who seek whom God aids, and the vision of the truth belongs only to those who live well, pray well, and labor well. (...) Drawing near to Him does not mean journeying through space, for He is everywhere; it means entering into that purity and virtue in which He dwells.¹¹⁸

Aid is supposed to be given from outside which confirms the theistic supernatural reality (and the need for a transcendental theology!) that is needed after the Fall of the human race into sin. Revelation must work hand in hand with grace.¹¹⁹ “The underlying concept here is the very fruitful one that knowledge is not a function of the intellect merely but involves the whole man.”¹²⁰ So the whole man, the whole person must be cured by grace: “If the noetic effects of sin might be neutralized by divine revelation, sin itself might be removed by divine grace.”¹²¹

We will come back to this idea when analyzing the Barthianism of the Transylvanian theologians, and the way they built on this in their argument for a peculiar ecclesiology of their own.

¹¹⁷ Warfield, *ibid*, p.403.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*.

¹¹⁹ We will discuss more on this later in the next chapter dealing with Barth’s teaching on revelation and the resulting Transylvanian debates on it; then on the rather selective “Barthianism” which became the official doctrinal standard of the TRC since the 1930s.

¹²⁰ Warfield, *ibid*, p.402.

¹²¹ *Ibid*. p.411.

Concluding Observations

Imre Ungvári-Zrínyi, a Transylvanian philosopher and specialist on Böhm, remarks that the subject of philosophy can be defined according to Böhm only as it is suggested in the title of his grand oeuvre: *the men - and his world*.

But this approach – if we exchange the construction of metaphysical Subject (subjectum) with the individual and concrete Subjects - continually will carry within itself a danger, i.e., that these Subjects might not be saved from solipsism. Thus man and his world will maybe fall apart into the individuals and their worlds being in a relationship of constant competition with each other. This falling apart will be basically falling into alternatives of the non-relational, of the utter loneliness of concrete individuals.¹²²

What Ungvári-Zrínyi suggests here is the problematic assumption of the a priori assumed inter-subjectivity. Not necessarily in the sense of Schopenhauer who declared that solipsism as a serious conviction can be found only in the psychiatric hospitals, but in the sense that theoretical egoism, according to which exclusively the Ego of oneself (and its self-consciousness process) exists, can lead to a certain vicious circle. I mean by this that it is useful but not enough to make a comparison of the historical account of what happened in the early period of the church with the empirical and phenomenological account of what is happening in the church today. According to this view, as a result of following the conclusions of this careful comparison, the church is offered a perspective of what should be done henceforth. It is not enough, as I stated before, because that might not be considered a valid self-consciousness of the church. Theoretically this subjective idealism would still prove weak at rejecting the false image of the church, the non-biblical ecclesiology, in order to work out the inter-subjectivity which is assumed as *a priori*, according to this philosophical approach. Like his contemporary and basic source, Wilhelm Wundt, Böhm suggested the method of *introspection* as an experimental psychological method put on a positive, scientific foundation. He also believed in two things: a belief in the unity of the logical principles and an inter-subjectivity based on comparison of intuitive similarities.

¹²² See the comprehensive study of Imre Ungvári-Zrínyi 'Ki a filozófus?' in: *Mi a filozófia (What is Philosophy?)*. Kolozsvár (Cluj): Diotima Baráti Társaság, 1996. Cf. on pp.3-13.

The intuitive similarity between ourselves and another individual's psychological processes cannot be handled as a factual proof for the foundation of inter-subjectivity (i.e., the theoretical validity) because even this recognition of similarity is not founded methodologically. As a result, the böhmian – as well as that of every Subject philosophy's exclusive methodological foundation is assured by the unity of the logical principles (which were assumed taken by granted).¹²³

This same world-view helped Sándor Reményik, a popular Transylvanian poet of the times to embrace the so-called Transylvanian ideology, *Transylvanianism* ("transzilvanizmus") a political ideology of inter-subjectivity, with its demand of keeping faithful by staying in a country as a minority. In response to the famous article of Makkai, in which the latter stated the impossibility ("*Nem lehet*") of staying in Transylvania under an alien authority, Reményik's reaction was, "*Lehet, mert kell*": "*It is possible because it is ought to be.*"¹²⁴ Politicizing the ontological (being) and the deontological (ought to be) demands of an ethnic group and thus

¹²³ *Ibid.* p. 7-8.

¹²⁴ For a full elaboration of this issue, see the vast bibliography and analysis on the debate prompted by Bishop Makkai's departure to Hungary in:

Károly Veress, *Egy létparadoxon színe és visszája, Hermeneutikai kísérlet a nem lehet-probléma magnitására* (The Face and the Back Side of A Paradox of Being; A Hermeneutical Attempt of Opening Up the Not Possible-Problem), Műhely, IX., Kolozsvár: Pro Philosophia Kiadó, 2003.

The most important collected source-book and historical analysis of this debate can be found in Péter Cseke, *Lehet – nem lehet? Kisebbségi létértelmezések (1937-1987)*..Marosvásárhely: Mentor, 1995.

See also Éva Gyimesi's works on Makkai:

Éva Cs. Gyimesi, *Gyöngy és homok, Ideológiai értékjelképek az erdélyi Magyar irodalomban*. Bukarest: Kriterion Könyvkiadó, 1992.

-----, 'Menni vagy maradni? Avagy: az öngazolás természete,' in *Diakónia*, Evangélikus Szemle Vol. 14, Nr.4 (1992).

-----, 'A drámaíró történelem' in Éva Cs. Gyimesi, *Honvágy a hazában*, Cikkek, tanulmányok, esszék. Budapest: Pesti Szalon Könyvkiadó, 1993.

-----, 'A másként gondolkodó Makkai,' in Éva Cs. Gyimesi, *Colloquium Transylvanicum, Értelmiségi önreflexiók*. Marosvásárhely: Mentor Kiadó, 1998.

Károly Fekete, ifj. 'Egyház és nemzet Makkai Sándor tanulmányaiban,' *Theologiai Szemle* vol. 37, Nr. 1 (1995).

Károly Fekete, ifj. 'A kisebbségi létparadoxon tusája Makkai Sándornál. Pályakép,' in Sándor Makkai, *Magunk revíziója*. Csíkszereda: Pro-Print Könyvkiadó, 1998.

Ernő Gáll, 'Önrevízió és felelősség. (A "Makkai-dosszié" viszontagságai),' in: Ernő Gáll, *A felelősség új határai*. Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 1999.

searching for a resulting moral *categoricus imperativus* proved to be a failure when the solipsism is recognized. Theologizing the neo-Kantian idea could not serve ecclesiology any better. It was a critical effort but remained a theoretical speculation and could not change the rigid *status quo* of the church toward a more dynamic missional church structure in essence.

As Kant shared the false presumption of rationalism that only science can serve us with true and reliable knowledge; so these theologians did not realize that the scientific knowledge is not unconditional, it is conditioning and assuming even the non scientific knowledge as well. The mathematical knowledge is a sure and necessary knowledge; you cannot think of a future experience which can hurt that, says Kant.¹²⁵ Nevertheless, the failure of Kant's system built on this assumed mathematical assurance, can be seen in one of his examples, when he founded his system on the truth of two times two being four (See his *Prolegomena*, 5.&.). Also when asserting that the pure geometrical thesis according to which between two dots the straightest line is the shortest (in the world view of Euclid), Kant sustains that this truth or judgement is synthetic and universal, and as such is a priori. Thus the concept of a straight line involves according to Kant only the meaning of quality and not of length, too. He adds this view to the concept.¹²⁶ Also he set the problem as follows: the only relevant and knowledge-increasing universal view cannot be based on abstraction, nor on the perception of the outside world, but on the admittance of the necessities of reasoning. Kant called this kind of ability of reasoning with a priori and synthetic judgement, the Kopernican change in the classical paradigm shifts of reasoning.¹²⁷ This means that the a priori,

¹²⁵ He tried to find the universal and a priori judgements in mathematics and physics. These synthetic and a priori judgements increase our knowledge and as such they can be seen as universal judgements. The specific mathematical judgements are a priori judgements because they are joined with a necessity which can never be derived from experience, from the empiria.

¹²⁶ But since then the Transylvanian Bolyai, and later Einstein, proved that the geometry of Euclid is only valid in bordering cases, extreme cases, and so is not and cannot be regarded any longer as being universal, and can be applied to reality only relatively and approximately. Kant wrestled with the problem that the a priori judgement can be derived from empirical experiences after all or can be separated in a higher view, or synthetic judgement as an a priori opinion.

¹²⁷ I owe these illuminating insights to John Frame, and his many in-depth analyses on Kant: "In other words," - says John Frame, - "Kant made the modern secular man 'epistemologically self-conscious.' If the modern man is not to bow to God, he must bow before himself; to that extent

the synthetic judgement does not refer to the “thing in itself,” but to the “image” or “idea” created in me, so in fact, it refers to “the thing as it appears to me,” to the appearance, or “phenomena” of that thing. In this way the metaphysics according to the system of Christian Wolff who classified it special and general metaphysics; Kant qualified the special metaphysics into theoretical metaphysics. The Hungarian neo-Kantian theologians tried to build their ecclesiology on such philosophical foundations, beginning with Ravasz up to Makkai, Imre and Tavaszy.

In this chapter I first pointed to the political and socio-cultural captivity of the TRC, searching for the historical roots of this condition. I then elaborated on the Kantian-Böhmian-Paulerian roots of the theology and the emerging ecclesiology of the Transylvanian theologians. But before pointing to the resulting contradictions between their views on ecclesiology and on missiology in the setting of this philosophical background, I now have to evaluate the important theological influence exerted by Barth, and by the neo-orthodox orientation in general, on the Transylvanians. This I will do in the next chapter, focusing on the influence of Barth on the formation of their ecclesiology and theology of missions.

at least, he must be a Kantian.” (Cf. John M Frame, *Cornelius Van Til, An Analysis of His Thought*. New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company, 1995, p.46.)

Chapter Four

The Barthian Influence and Its Effects: Ecclesiology/ Missiology

Tavaszy and dialectical theology in Transylvania

Dr. Sándor Tavaszy, one of the finest disciples of Böhm and who was at first a liberal theologian, regarded his own shift from the neo-Kantian founded value-centric theology to dialectical theology as a change from an immanent theology to a transcendental one.¹ He summarized what was happening in general across the theological spectrum of his days as follows: “Nowadays in Protestant theology, the objective and fully reformational spirit-oriented transcendental theology is prevailing more and more gloriously against the still dominant liberal and immanent theology.”² But Tavaszy’s main concern was with the experience of faith, due to the Pietistic mission movement in Transylvania. This can be clearly seen as he continues the above description of the theological milieu, emphasizing primarily the problem of experience:

Looking through this later [transcendental] theology’s viewpoint, it became more and more clear and convincing that human “experience” and divine “revelation” are the two foci around which the two spheres and the two greatest theological

¹ Although in my opinion his “transcendental” theology is closer to the Kantian *transcendental idealism* than to a theology built on transcendental foundations, as in the case for example of the authority and sufficiency of the Scriptures playing a role in reformational theology. In this regard, Barth also is closer to Kant rather than to the reformers, as one might expect, and as I will elaborate later in this chapter. One can see this happening in the peculiar agnosticism of the synthesis of the Leibniz-Wolffian rationalism and the Humean skepticism of Kant (what he coined as his basic insight into epistemology as “the Copernican revolution in philosophy”) and that kind of neo-Kantian synthesis persists even in 20th century theology, appearing as a kind of skeptical fideism in theology, of which Barth’s system was often criticized.

² Tavaszy, A Kijelentés feltétele alatt, *Theológiai értekezések* (Under the Condition of Revelation, Theological Studies), op. cit., p.5. The full elaboration of the theme can be found in the essay: The human experience and the divine revelation, see pp.5-29.

orientations are revolving. Two diametrically opposing worlds are speaking through “experience” and through “revelation.” Today, increasingly, we are getting over that Liberal uncertainty which confused these two concepts, and the two factual manifestations expressed by them; this Liberal theology used these two concepts, disguising them by substituting one meaning for the other.³

In an editorial article written for the *Kis Tükör* of September 18th, 1926, Kecskeméthy argued with the same vehemence against the *experience-centeredness* and *false pietism* of some people as opposed to the real Calvinist character of believers:

It is a pity that nowadays the piety of some people is more than half a vacuous sort of pietism. Moreover, sometimes even the whole is that. If a “tough Calvinist heart” starts to open up and turns to his Lord, for sure there would appear around him “believers” who are fishing in the fog, and with serious sanctimony they immediately want to show the seeker “the way of truth.” Then start the pious groaning and the holy moaning, the unceasing “oh”s and “Oh Lords,” followed by the meticulous wisdom spitting, sanctimonious snuffling and the Bible explanations about baptism, about [Saturday being the real] Sabbath, about eating blood, pork and other vacuousnesses of piety.⁴

Because of such distortions of false piety in some people's lives, Tavaszy rejected the role of experiences all together and warned against them as evident signs of heresy in a movement, labelling the whole movement as dangerous. Kecskeméthy, by contrast, points in a balanced way to the double danger of going astray on both sides of a genuine, pious Calvinism, both being fake resemblances of the narrow path of healthy Christianity. But he would never deny that genuine Calvinism does have an important experimental dimension:

And this will have two fatal consequences. The first is that the stiff-necked Calvinist, having seen this, will reject any piety and will be of the opinion that it is only for friars, nuns or for the “cults,” or at least just for old ladies with a shady past. We arrive on the path to the situation where the famous Calvinist Puritanism gradually becomes cold, unhappy, devotionless and flat morality. The other, even more dangerous consequence is that all the graces, beauty and sweet happiness of piety is lost. Either it is sunk in the vacuous worries of the Scribes about what we still need

³ Ibid. p.5.

⁴ István Kecskeméthy, ‘Bárgyú kegyesség’ (Vacuous Piety), *Kis Tükör* Vol. 15, Nr. 26 (September 18, 1926).

to do or forsake in order to merit God's pleasure; or it sinks in the vacuous arrogance of the Pharisee that he is better than others. But to the Calvinist character, piety is very appropriate. Because the Calvinist character is pure and tough as is a diamond. And piety is the ardent sparkling of God's love shining on it.⁵

Tavaszy wrote a similar article in order to criticise sharply the pietists of the mission movement of CE.⁶ In his fierce attack, he also criticized the other extreme, the free thinkers of Liberal Theology in the church. Yet strangely, in his critique of Protestant Liberalism, he here seems to endorse the same experiences that he criticized before: "Though (Liberalism) could notice the 'great truths' of Christianity, but it did not strive or endeavor to the acquisition of the irrational contents of 'great *experiences*,' [of Christianity] or strive for others to do so" (italics, LH).⁷ It is somewhat strange that he is for the subjective and the "irrational content of great experiences" while denouncing them as going against the objectivity of revelation. It is also even more strange that he would, at the same time, stigmatize the Pietism of the mission movement: "up till today it carries the stamp of *the subjective experience* of justification by faith (italics, LH).⁸ It is remarkable too that he maintains in a very narrow-minded, stereotyped way that the same factors which brought Pietism into being also brought about the birth of the sects and cults. *In a typically neo-Kantian style*, he says that the only reason for their existence can be found in the tension which exists between the factual state of the church and the ideal of the same church.⁹ According to Tavaszy, the pietists believed that in their fellowships they had realized this ideal.

In contrast, it is worth noticing that Kecskeméthy could be harsher in criticizing the false pietism and experience-centered subjectivism of some in the CE movement, even though he was doing it as someone within that movement. Secondly, Kecskeméthy would never be so exclusivist and disloyal concerning the movement as a whole, as were Tavaszy, Imre and their circle. Though able to be critical of his own circle, he would not succumb to that stereotyping prejudice

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Tavaszy, Sándor: 'Mi a pietizmus és mi nem pietizmus?' (What is Pietism and What Not is Pietism?), *Az Út* Vol. 5, Nr. 5 (1923): pp.123-127 and Vol. 5, Nr. 6-7 (1923): pp.171-174.

⁷ Tavaszy, *op. cit.*, p.173.

⁸ Tavaszy, *op. cit.*, p.124.

⁹ Ibid.

which served as a pretext for not just criticizing, but also for excluding the mission movement from the church, labelling it as an alien body within the reformed church. That kind of prejudice justified and caused Tavaszy to despise with an intellectual arrogance the Pietism of the movement as something suitable solely and only for primitive people, like those Asian and African pagans to whom mission ministers:

(A) *general Christianity* can fit well the African and Asian natives (and only that can), but is not suitable for the more differentiated European nations who have a historical consciousness. Pietism was born from missions, so it brought from there [those fields] a “general” Christianity which better suits the less differentiated and those with a lack of historical consciousness such as primitive souls.¹⁰

On our part, it is enough to wonder why this same article by Tavaszy continually judges the Pietists as being arrogant people who despised everyone else? Why was the honest self-criticism of the movement, done by its leader, Kecskeméthy, not enough for Tavaszy and others? Why did the outside critics of this self-critical movement refuse to come alongside such a movement and instead insist on trying to exclude them, questioning their genuineness as part of the same church? These are questions to which this researcher has not hitherto been able to find answers.

Returning to Tavaszy's contrast of experience with revelation,¹¹ he asserts that the increasingly historicizing and psychologizing Liberal theology was guilty of giving preeminence to the concept of experience and gave an impetus to the development of the sciences of philosophy of religion and psychology of religion. But at the same time it forgot, and almost totally eliminated, the importance of revelation as being a central concern of theology. Thus the gospel became more and more regarded as simply being part of the web of immanent human experience while the divine side of religion was ignored as being insignificant. “We had arrived right away to the point where modern religiosity increasingly had only human experience at its core and it started to lose, almost completely, the

¹⁰ Tavaszy, ‘Mi a pietizmus és mi nem pietizmus?’ (What is Pietism and What Not is Pietism?), *op.cit.*, p.171.

¹¹ The essay: The human experience and the divine revelation, see in: Tavaszy, *Kijelentés feltétele alatt, Theologiai értekezések* (Under the Condition of Revelation, Theological Studies), *op. cit.*, pp.5-29

judgment, forgiveness, the word of a command giving God and his objective revelation.”¹² Without actually naming Ravasz, who was a devoted disciple of the psychology of religion, Tavaszy criticized his school¹³ and influence.¹⁴ He did the same with Sándor Makkai, his colleague and friend, by then bishop of Transylvania, who was a devoted disciple of the philosophy of religion school with its emphasis on the importance of experience. In 1930, at the Nagyenyed debate on the acceptance of Barthianism and dialectical theology, despite his openness toward and even relative acceptance of “crisis theology,” Makkai commented that the truth of this new theological orientation would be proved by its practical implications for the life of the church. Dezső László remembered a similar comment by Makkai targeting the discipline of Practical Theology and argued that with this the representatives of the dialectical theology are still indebted to the contemporary church. “Dr. Sándor Makkai in one of his free lectures said: the value of dialectical theology will be tested by whether it can create a Practical Theology or not.”¹⁵

This demand was a “natural instinct” for a philosopher like Makkai. *Testing by the empiria* – this is at the background of his thinking, and the same demand can be found in every disciple of Böhm, including Tavaszy himself. Moreover, Tavaszy's vehement criticism of what he called “experience” is an effort to remove the rational inheritance which began with Wolff and was subsequently

¹² Ibid.

¹³ The famous disciple of Böhm and successor of his cathedra in philosophy, Pauler Ákos, as we saw previously, criticized the psychologizing tendency of the Neo-Kantian school of Kolozsvár, though he himself was a Neo-Kantian. Ravasz, in his Böhm-inspired philosophical ecclesiology and Practical Theology, ignored this and, under the influence of the German Lotze, pressed forward with an experience-centered orientation and even validation of faith in the community of the church. Makkai, in his footsteps, believed that he could find the justification and validation of faith in the same search for experience in his planned Prolegomena of an “ultimate” *Religionsgeschichte*, and of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion.

¹⁴ Ravasz, in line with his value-appraisal theology, demanded “practical dogmatics” and a “value-system of homiletics.” See László Ravasz, *Homiletika (Homiletics)*. Pápa: Református Egyházi Könyvtár, 1915, part III, especially &. 27.

¹⁵ László, *Az Anyaszentegyház élete és szolgálata (The Life and Ministry of the Holy and Mother Church)*. p.21. In Hungarian it reads, “Dr. Makkai Sándor egyik szabad előadásában azt mondotta, hogy a dialektikai theologia értékét az fogja eldönteni, hogy tud-e gyakorlati theológiát alkotni, vagy sem?” See also, ff. also his evaluation of the problem of why dialectical theology does not yet have a Practical Theology, like that given of Liberal theology.

channeled by Kant and then Böhm, thus dominating the late 19th century. One example will suffice here. In the basic work of Tavaszy's mentor, Károly Böhm, *What is Philosophy*, we read:

The greatest change was created by criticism (...) Already, Christian Wolff would keep only those disciplines in (the system of) philosophy which can be proved, stating: "a philosopher is one who can give you *reasons* for what exists or is possible" ("philosophus est, qui *rationem* reddere potest eorum, que sunt vel esse possunt" *Philos. Rat.* §.46.); and for this reason he would render beside every philosophical discipline (*rationalis*) an empirical one (*empirica*). As a result, there is a *theologia rationalis* and *experimentalis*; there is a *psychologia rationalis* and *empirica*; there is a *cosmologia* or *physica rationalis* and *empirica*.¹⁶

If we try to understand why Tavaszy was so dominated by the problem of experience versus revelation as his first concern, it is not enough to assume that this was only due to Barth's influence. While it is true that the stimulus came from Barth, I suggest that Tavaszy, paradoxically, had found in Barth a new way of expressing the Kantian-Böhmian *supremacy* of "pure reason" over "empirica." In fact, he remained on the ground of Neo-Kantian thought¹⁷ and it is not difficult to prove my

¹⁶ See the study of Károly Böhm, 'Mi a filozófia' (published first after his death in 1915) in a recently published volume of his selected writings: *Mi a filozófia (What is Philosophy?)*. Kolozsvár (Cluj): Diotima Baráti Társaság, 1996, selected and with a brilliant introduction by Imre Ungvári-Zrínyi, p.20.

¹⁷ A recent study on Tavaszy's idealism and existentialist philosophy suggests the same: Cf. Márton Tonk, *Idealizmus és egzisztenciafilozófia Tavaszy Sándor gondolkodásában* ('Idealism and Existential Philosophy in the Thinking of Sándor Tavaszy'). A magyar nyelvű filozófiai irodalom forrásai, Monográfiák V. Kolozsvár-Szeged: Pro Philosophia, 2002. On p.38. we read:

"All these are demonstrating clearly that in the life opus of Tavaszy there is no turning against the line of Kantian epistemology. His existentialism did not turn against idealism, but it seems that the foundational epistemology reoriented him toward ontology. It was not about a turnabout, but rather we can speak about a kind of an ontological *elongation*. It is remarkable that Tavaszy never speaks about the full rejection of idealism or criticism, only of its occasional insufficiencies. He regards his existentialism not as a replacement for the epistemological standpoint, but merely *correction* of it. Similarly, we cannot accept that in the different periods of his work Tavaszy would have revised his views."

In Hungarian it reads:

"Mindezek tehát egyértelműen mutatják, hogy Tavaszy életművében szó sincs (...) a kantiánus ismeretelméleti vonallal való szembefordulásról. Egzisztencializmusa (...) nem fordult szembe az idealizmussal, hanem úgy tűnik, hogy a megalapozó ismeretelmélet az ontológia

point by simply continuing the above quotation of his master, who goes on to rely on Kant for further explanations:

And although it is impossible to keep this border-line [*i.e., between the rationalis and the empirica, see the quotation above, explanation mine*], yet you still can find this difference in Kant too. “Alle Philosophie aber ist entweder Erkenntniß aus reiner Vernunft, oder Vfterk. aus empirischen Principien. Die erste heisst *reine*, die zweite *empirische* Philosophie.” (*Kr. D. r. Vft.* p.553. S. W. III. Hart.).¹⁸ Neglecting the later, Kant thinks that the philosophy of pure reason is either propaedeutic (critic-al), or it is the system of pure reason (metaphysics), though “this name (*i.e., metaphysics*) may (however) be also given to the whole system of pure philosophy, critical philosophy included...” As a result, metaphysics equals philosophy; and if it is about the theoretical or practical usage, metaphysics can be either the metaphysics of nature or metaphysics of morals (= *reine Moral*).¹⁹

Imre agreed with his mentor and good friend, Tavaszy, but not without a slight criticism, as was already pointed out above:

Sándor Tavaszy’s clear views, thorough theological and philosophical points-of-view were of great help in grounding the issue from a theoretical and a theological point-of-view. *Still he had a flaw that made working with him difficult: he quite one-sidedly supported ideas that were mainly issues of foreign theology and in Transylvania were not dangerous matters worthy of opposition* (italics, LH). E.g., he justly opposed (especially reacting to the Kuyper-studies) the so called “Christianity based on experience” or “general Christianity,” which did become excessive abroad. Still, I had the feeling that we needed more “experience based Christians” and fewer rationalists. I remember cases when he protested against “romantic friendships” or

irányába tereli. Nem fordulatról, hanem egyfajta ontológiai *meghosszabbításról* van tehát szó. Figyelemreméltó az is, hogy Tavaszy sohasem beszél az idealizmus vagy kriticizmus teljes elvetéséről, hanem csupán annak esetleges elégtelenségeiről. Egzisztencializmusát nem az ismeretelméleti álláspont felváltásaként, hanem *korrekciójaként* fogja fel. Ugyanakkor (...) azt (...) sem tudjuk elfogadni, hogy (...) a különböző alkotói periódusokban Tavaszy revideálta volna nézeteit.”

¹⁸ “But all philosophy is either cognition on the basis of pure reason, or the cognition of reason on the basis of empirical principles. The former is termed pure, the latter empirical philosophy.” (Cf. for the English translation: Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by J. M. D Meiklejohn.)

¹⁹ Böhm, ‘Mi a filozófia’ in *Mi a filozófia (What is Philosophy?)*, pp.20–21.

against incorrect practice of prayer meetings. His statements regarding these issues were correct in general, only misplaced at the moment.²⁰

After admitting that even his great companion, Tavaszy, was prejudiced against “Christianity based on experience,” it is more surprising and puzzling in light of the above quoted and analyzed texts of Tavaszy and Imre that Imre could state in his memoirs that the theologians of his circle were more eager to fight back or separate themselves from the mission work of the “Pietists” of the mission movement (and that of the circle of Kecskeméthy) rather than being eager, first of all, to define theologically what mission is and in what respect it is the task of the church. Imre admitted that neither Tavaszy, nor Makkai²¹ nor he had ever done that job:

In fact, we never defined mission and home mission scientifically or theologically. We were more concerned with the practical aspects of this work, distancing ourselves from views that were inconsistent with the Reformed confession of faith and with the Bible, firstly from the Pietistic trend represented by the Christian Union and the Transylvanian Association of the Evangelistic Workers (Evangéliumi Munkások Erdélyi Szövetsége). We emphasized and practiced the view that this work belongs to the church. At the same time, we distanced ourselves also from the liberal and the rationalistic point-of-view. In this respect, Sándor Tavaszy’s article entitled *What Is Pietism and What Is Not Pietism?* was of crucial importance.²²

According to Ravasz’s thinking, practical theology is nothing more than the philosophy of the life of the church,²³ so it is *philosophy*²⁴ says László, and refers to Ravasz’s *Introduction to Practical Theology*. László also points to the fact that the clearest evaluation of the relation of the psychology of religions to practical

²⁰ Imre, *Önéletírás* (Autobiography), pp.291-292.

²¹ We will see later on in this thesis what a tragic consequence it was that even Makkai could write a book on the church’s mission work without attempting a proper definition and biblico-theological interpretation of what mission is, or what the mission of the church should be. His debate with Victor will show that, as both agreed, that such a definition should have been a priority in any theological reasoning.

²² Cf. Imre, *ibid.* p.290.

²³ See this cf. as the general standpoint expressed throughout his important book on grounding Practical Theology and Ecclesiology, *Bevezetés a gyakorlati teológiába* (*Introduction to Practical Theology*).

²⁴ László, *Az Anyaszentegyház élete és szolgálata* (The Life and Ministry of the Holy and Mother Church). p.170.

theology can be found in the works of Niebergall and Ravasz.²⁵ In this regard and before moving on, it is helpful now to examine Ravasz's deontological approach in his *ecclesiastica*, inspired by the psychology of religions and the axiology of Böhm, in the mirror of the precise analysis of László:

In the approach of Ravasz, the correct knowledge of the psychological process of the want; then of the fulfillment; and lastly, of the satisfaction, composes the foundation of church work. In his view can be seen more clearly the threefold role of the psychology of religions: it makes me familiar with the one whom I serve, with the value that I have to hand over in ministry, and with the method according to which my ministry can be the most successful.²⁶

A closer look at Ravasz shows that he interprets the biblical *religious value* as being nothing else than *the objective precipitation* of religious experiences. And this objective condensation of experiences is called *the Word*. So the psychology of religions can teach us to distinguish what are the objective values in the Bible which, by the ministry of the church, can become again subjective experiences in the life of its members. In his *Introduction to Practical Theology* he argues for the role both of preaching and of the church as a community in fulfilling this kind of need in the human soul. That explains the role of a more philosophical as opposed to theological grounding of practical theology in his thinking.

In contrast, according to Tavasz, the relationship of philosophy to theology is only, and can only be, a formal one.²⁷ László assumes, based on this, that the same can be asserted when looking at the relationship of philosophy to the discipline within theology called Practical Theology. In contrast to Ravasz, he would not give any other role for philosophy except a formal one, as a tool.

According to the concept of *Ravasz*, the relationship of practical theology to philosophy is more foundational, because practical theology is the philosophy of the church's life. He deduced completely philosophically the reality and order of service of the church from the reality of religion; and not just in form, but also in its content. In addition, both he and *Niebergall* imputed a specific importance to philosophy in defining what the church should preach about. *Niebergall* in practical dogmatics,

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 171.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Tavasz, *Református Keresztyén Dogmatika* (Reformed Christian Dogmatics), p. 8.

Ravasz in the system of values of homiletics will indicate (taking into account the value theory of the philosophical idealismus): what is that religious value which has to be transformed by proclamation into the subjective experience of the members of the congregation.²⁸

It is useful to see the criticism of Ravasz's school by Dezső László, who admittedly built up his critical evaluation based on the recognitions and thought patterns of dialectical theology. First, László defines the Word of God in Barthian terms against the "old Liberal" and Neo-Kantian theological school represented by Ravasz:

What is the *fault* of this thinking from a theological viewpoint? First of all, the Word of God cannot be viewed as (a set of) objective values hidden in the Scriptures which, through the church's ministry, will be subjectivized by the church-members. The Word of God, according to the reformed concept,²⁹ is nothing else than the speaking person of God. I do not have a philosophical standard by which to determine the reality of the Word. Even with my theological work I can only refer to what is the Word. And if I am doing this referring to the Word—ministry in obedience, I can have the hope that God according to His promise, will give His testimony to me, He Himself, of what the [His] Word is.³⁰

László then turns to a closer examination of what the philosophical category of value would be when we have to preach the word, and how this affects the ministry of the church:

The value, as a category belongs fully to human speech and to its philosophical form, and not just in content, but not even in a formal way is amenable for expressing the reality and truth of the Word. This happens because the Word is never a theoretically knowledgeable value, but always a living word motivating a new and personal

²⁸ László, *ibid.* p.172.

²⁹ We should bear in mind that in the interpretation of professor László, the notion "reformed" (or "reformational," in Hungarian: "*református*") meant not just the historical-reformational view, but was identical with the "dialectical theology" (of Barth, first of all), as we saw above. The differences in the minds of most of the Transylvanian theologians were insignificant. This was probably true because of how Wilhelm Niesel mediated Barthian theology. His *Calvin's Theology*, in which he tentatively minimalizes the differences between Calvin and Barth, was among the first books about Barthianism's influence on Calvin to be translated into Hungarian. See more on this below.

³⁰ László, *ibid.* see the full argument on p. 177.

decision, a personal address. God by his own Spirit, freely, and by his own grace makes our preaching to become his Word and the bearer of his Word. This is his free grace.³¹

One detects a contradiction here. Previously László had declared, quoting and agreeing with Tavaszy, that philosophy is related only formally to practical theology or theology in general (see above). But here he states that it “not even in a formal way is amenable for expressing the reality and truth of the Word.” Is that a sustainable statement? Let him himself answer this question as he goes on to define the main difference:

With value one can abolish the absence. But the effect of God’s Word consists in the fact that it does not abolish human need, but makes it even deeper. It makes the true need of man and his distance from God a reality. In this deepening of the human need, the gospel of forgiveness and justification can be heard only through faith; according to which the solution for our needs is not to be found in ourselves, but outside of ourselves, in Christ.³²

But is László’s answer adequate? I do not think so. First, even Barth uses theological definitions as formal operating categories. Otherwise no theologizing would be possible, even that which refuses the idea that philosophy can be related formally to theology. Second, László confuses the use of philosophy in theology as a significant tool and as such as a formal method with the rigidity of theological methodism when the abstract theological principle replaces the truth of the Word. Third, although he rightly thought that value as a human category is merely the image of reality as we can perceive it and, as such, is incomplete to express the reality and truth of the Word; he mistakenly concluded that value being insufficient to express the reality, it is not needed at all or can be bypassed. He thought that value as it appears in our mind is a phenomenon which has to be rejected as being an incomplete vehicle of expressing reality, and as such it is something that we totally have to ignore. But will that guarantee the *numena*? Ignoring even in a formal sense the phenomena does not achieve the avoidance of it and the finding of reality by itself. This quick and somehow cautionless

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid. p.177.

assumption of László's points to vulnerable aspects in his reasoning which lay themselves open to criticism.

Bromiley, in his critical study of Barth's theology (included in the volume of the translated *Church Dogmatics*),³³ and based also on the collected findings of Barth's many critics, gives a concise evaluation, pointing both to "the major achievements" of Barth's theology and to "those aspects of it which lay themselves open to criticism." Even among his critics, there is no doubt about the greatness of Barth as a theologian, says Bromiley, but we have to deal now with those aspects of his thoughts which are vulnerable to criticism in order to compare them with László's ecclesiology which was based on Barth's dogmatics.

Bromiley first of all positively assessed Barth's theology and gave him credit:

Barth has restored theology to its place in the Church and thereby has saved it from remaining, as in the last two or three centuries, a science cut off from the life of the Church and thus in danger of losing sight of its proper object... Making theology once more a function of the Church, he transformed it into a powerful instrument of the Church which on account of the constant mutual relationship between Church and theology will vitalize both of them and enable them to be open to continual reformation.³⁴

This is an important appraisal in view of what we saw above. Theology becoming once more, through Barth's influence, *the function of the Church* prompts the further question: where is the place of missions? Can it still be regarded just as a function of the church given the fact that theology as a self-reflective function of the same church has to pose questions as to the very essence and nature of the church? "Again," writes Bromiley, "he has revolutionized the theological climate that prevailed since the Reformation by making once more God and not man the starting point, centre and goal of theological thought."³⁵

This is evidenced in László's approach in his practical theology and ecclesiology. Yet, the Barthians in Transylvania failed to make God and not man *and* the church the starting point, centre and goal of theological thought in thinking

³³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, trans. Bromiley, G. W., (eds.) G. W. Bromiley, and T. F. Torrance. Edinburgh: T&T. Clark, 1975.

³⁴ Bromiley, An Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth, from *Church Dogmatics* above, p. 180.

³⁵ *Ibid.* pp.180-181.

about mission as it is related to ecclesiology! Jenő Horváth, in comparison with other Transylvanian missiologists and theologians, reformulated missiology as a whole according to the insights of Barth in a detailed, comprehensive, and very consistent way in his two major works on the *essence of foreign mission* (1936) and *on the essence of home mission* (1948). But his reformulation of the relation between mission and church, concerning the harmonization of the sodalities with the modality as Barth advocated, failed.³⁶ He kept to a church-centered view, although always hesitant to take a determined and exclusive stance against the sodalities, unlike many of his peers who subserviently backed church policy in that regard.

Meanwhile we can add that what Dezső László said about the Word of God being not just a set of biblical values as in the Liberal and Neo-Kantian school of theology is also supported by the evaluation of Bromiley:

Thus theology has once more been established on the firm foundation of the Word of God, thereby enabling the preacher to proclaim this Word and not his own; and this means that the attention of theology has once more been focused on the Bible as the witness to that Word. At the same time philosophy has thereby been removed from the judgment-seat usurped by it and assigned the relative position of help-mate of theology.³⁷

Ravasz and his followers were not aware of what was only gradually recognized later by the scholars of the new theological orientation. It was a striking fact that they almost unanimously idolized contemporary philosophical trends when formulating theology. Thus it was quite shocking for them that Barth “delivered theology from the shackles of rigidly defined abstract and neutral philosophical concepts.”³⁸ The argument of the inner consistency of this kind of church concept based on a neo-Kantian philosophical background, as it is suggested by these church centered Transylvanian theologians, breaks down where the bare criticism of the empirical church, i.e., the visible church, is thought to be enough for restoring the church. Such an approach ignores the fact that criticism might not touch the very core or root of the problem. It is not just about the abstract

³⁶ See Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV, book 3, 2nd half, pp.873-79.

³⁷ Bromiley, *An Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth*, p.181.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

theoretical discussion about the ontological and deontological state of the church, but it is about the ambiguous optimism of the value-centered appraisal which implies that a complete definition of the concept of the church in itself might be efficacious in changing the real condition of the church and answering all the main problems. Although we can agree with S. C. Neill's observation below, it is not adequate, especially in the Transylvanian context.

(T)he problem of mission cannot be discussed *in abstracto*; it becomes intelligible only as the mission of the Church. Given a satisfactory ecclesiology, a satisfactory definition of the Church, the answer to all the main problems arising out of the Christian mission should lie ready to hand.³⁹

In my view, it is more important and helpful here to quote Timothy Yates whose comments in linking ecclesiology with the communication of the gospel *in concreto*⁴⁰ are particularly relevant with regard to problems in the Transylvanian church:

(I)t is impossible to avoid ecclesiology in the communication of the gospel, for the gospel does not come as pure message but issues from, and gives rise to, specific communities; and such communities will adopt certain characteristics which they believe express the gospel in churchly form.⁴¹

There are mistakes committed on both sides; many individuals and organizations have done mission work without any reference to the Church, and the Church has often been reluctant to be involved in God's mission. For an objective observer, this seems to be an accurate picture of the situation in Transylvania. The CE movement is vulnerable to the criticism of possibly having done mission without any reference to the Church, while the Church can also be criticized as having been hesitant in being involved in mission. But it is not enough to understand that the church's very nature and essence is mission. There is also a need for the church to discover this in a dynamic way, in order that theological insights might be put into practice. As Ken Gnanakan stated, there is "a need for the Church to

³⁹ S. C. Neill, *The Church and Christian Union*. London: 1968, p. 319.

⁴⁰ In my opinion, ecclesiology cannot be separated from the other loci of dogmatics and especially not from *theologia crucis* emphasized in Luther's theology at the very beginning of the reformation. See chapter 6 where I develop this matter further.

⁴¹ Timothy Yates, *Christian Mission in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.127.

discover its missiological essence. It is not something forced on to it from the outside, but something that belongs to the very nature of the Church.”⁴² He also stated that, “we today have missed out on the very essence of the Church” although, “we cannot say that no attempts have been made to discover *this inner rationale of the Church* (italics, LH).”⁴³ In contrast, the TRC in the first half of the 20th century had sadly “missed out on the very essence of the Church” and certainly no attempts have been made since even “to discover the inner rationale of the Church” embodied in the Transylvanian reformed congregations. The discovery and recognition of the truth that the church does not *make* mission, but that the church comes into being from and by mission, rather than by institutionalized organization embodied in the maintenance of the liturgy, administration, and exercising the power of the clergy over the membership, was tragically slow in coming.⁴⁴ The problem in the TRC in the 20th century was similar to what Gnanakan describes as a general problem within Protestantism throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. “The enigmatic absence of any concept of mission and the missionary obligation of the Church even developed into a theological prejudice that has hindered missionary activity.”⁴⁵ The process of developing “a theological prejudice” has to be held responsible for the lack of any serious mission enterprise in the life of the TRC. One concern of this research is with the reasons

⁴² Ken R. Gnanakan, *Kingdom Concerns, A Biblical Exploration Towards a Theology of Mission*. Bangalore, India: Theological Book Trust, 1989, see especially the chapter ‘The Church and God’s Mission Today,’ pp.189-208.

⁴³ Gnanakan, *ibid.* p.190.

⁴⁴ Although theologians like János Victor would warn, “That kind of church whose institutional order is an untouchable sacrament could no longer be a church in the sense with which the Word of God speaks of the church. The other thing on which this previous issue stands or falls is the relationship between the static organization and the dynamic life lived by the organism as they face each other in the life of the church. There is ‘organization’ in the church and there is ‘movement’ in the church as well. But which serves the other among the two? It is evident that the former must be the means in the service of the latter. At this point, our customary alteration from the Biblical church concept is demonstrated in the clearest way. It was not a problem that we regarded the institutional organization, which was passed down in the church from one generation to another, with great love and piety and loyalty; but that we lost ourselves in it to such an extent as if it were the main thing, as if it were the church itself. (...) *The ‘institutional’ element is there in the church so that the ‘movement’ characteristic might better prevail.*” János Victor, *Egyházi életünk válsága (The Crisis of Our Church’s Life)*. Budapest: Református Traktátus Vállalat Kiadása, n.d., pp.18-19.

⁴⁵ Gnanakan, p. 191.

for, and the debates around, that theological prejudice which, in my view is linked with the peculiar prejudice developed against the CE movement, a movement often labeled as being too “pietistic,” too “sectarian,” and “not reformed,” all said in a pejorative sense. The fact that in the 1930s there was a significant change and one missionary, although not a lay person, was sent to Manchuria in the person of Babos, was not enough of an impetus for a radical shift to take place either in the ecclesiology or the missiology of that time. In spite of the efforts of Babos himself and a few others to justify it theologically, as we will see in our analysis of his writings later on, foreign mission was undertaken on account of any mandate of the church. We can agree again with Gnanaken when he declares:

It is obvious that unless the church sees mission as being essential to its nature, no amount of challenge from the outside will arouse a concern for missionary activity. One will note, therefore, that it is only when theology has strongly undergirded missiology that mission has been at its highest.⁴⁶

To its own misfortune, the TRC was caught up both theologically and politically with the fixation and preoccupation of sustaining her own traditions and existence. “Unless and until we are able to discover mission in the very essence of the Church, all of the reminders of the missionary mandate will only fall on deaf ears.”⁴⁷

Stanley Jones was quite popular in Transylvania from time to time; in fact, Dezső László even translated one of his books.⁴⁸ So that it is puzzling, for example, that Stanley’s sharp criticism of the ecclesio-centric views on mission to the point of absolutizing the church to the detriment of the greater reality of the Kingdom of God,⁴⁹ was not heard or even dealt with by the Transylvanians.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p.196.

⁴⁸ László translated this book together with the CE leader, Richard Biberauer Dr. E. Stanley Jones, *Krisztus India országútján (The Christ of the Indian Road)*. Budapest: Magyar Evangéliumi Keresztény Diákszövetség Kiadása, 1931.

⁴⁹ Bosch remarks, writing about Tambaram, on the position of E. Stanley Jones: “For the first time the recognition that church and mission belong together indissolubly began to dawn in a way that could no longer be overlooked. And even if the famous E. Stanley Jones said that Tambaram had missed the way because it had used the church instead of the kingdom of God as its starting point, it cannot be denied that Tambaram registered a significant advance over earlier positions.” (Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p.370.)

(A)s we explore the variety of images used to depict the people of God we will discover more and more the reality of a church in worship, living out its essence as a people in witness. It is this missionary character of the Church that needs to be restored.⁵⁰

According to Gnanaken, the manifold biblical description of what the Church is and should be can be summed up in and reduced to two basic aspects: “the life within the Church itself and the witness outside of the Church.” He then summarized his findings as follows:

All that occurs within the church could be referred to as worship, in the sense of the submission of the people of God to its Lord and Master, and all that occurs outside the church could be seen as the witness of the Church. The true Church then is the people of God in worship and witness.⁵¹

Kecskeméthy versus Tavaszy/Barthianism

The basic and recent postmodern attack on the literary text conceived as being sufficient in itself to convey a meaning – the so-called “textual sufficiency” – is clear in such authors as Jacques Derrida and others, for example, Stanley Fish, who speak of the text as being in the centre of a reader-response interpretation. The deconstructionist view of Derrida called into question whether the text can be considered a stable entity, so that it can never be regarded as an entity sufficient in itself for its meaning. Because of textual insufficiency, these postmodern thinkers render a supplement to the text; specifically, Fish will supplement it with what he calls the *interpretive community*. If the postmodern critics are right, the classical reformed claim for the particular sufficiency of the Holy Writ, fails.⁵² Since Scripture is a text, and there is no longer textual sufficiency as such, the Scriptures are no longer sufficient. The reformed teaching on scriptural sufficiency, perspicuity, and clarity, as the specific attributes of Scriptures, apparently cannot be held anymore in the light of this new thinking. This logic is obvious and immediately evident for anybody who has tried to face the postmodern challenge.

⁵⁰ Gnanakan, p. 196-197.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* p.192-193.

⁵² I am grateful to Tim Ward for drawing my attention to this and will follow up some of his thoughts in my further analysis. See later his arguments presented, or cited below.

To accept the textual insufficiency of the Biblical texts as might be the case with any other text, is an option only if we speak of an inherent possibility of revelation inherent in the text. But the reformers had a different notion to point to that; they called it illumination. Trying to give sufficient relevance to the scriptural text regarded as insufficient in *eo ipso*, Barth would argue that the Bible is not, but it rather *becomes*, the revelation by the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit.

Both Barth and his Transylvanian followers seemed unable to avoid the trap of confusing revelation with illumination; this is a major problem, noticed by many critics. We will focus on two: László Horváth, one of the very few Transylvanian theologians contemporary with those who could not accept the dialectical theology of Barth and who also gave a remarkable critique of it in his well argued book; and Timothy Ward, a theologian from Scotland, whose detailed study on the matter serves us as a starting point.

László Horváth⁵³ was a Transylvanian theologian who was later martyred in the Communist prisons because of his faith and his criticism of the episcopalian centralism in the church which was used by the Communists to manipulate the church. He saw clearly the problem of confusing revelation with illumination in the works of Tavaszy and others. In this, to my best knowledge, he stood alone⁵⁴ in that time when the acceptance of Barth's theology was at its most enthusiastic, except for Kecskeméthy (whose criticism of Barthianism, occasionally presented in small articles, was not fully developed) and Géza Nagy.⁵⁵ Yet, historical Reformed theology from the very beginning had a clear systematic distinction

⁵³ László Horváth, *A Kálvinizmus és a dogma (Calvinism and Dogma)*. Hódmezővásárhely: Törekvés Nyomda, 1931.

⁵⁴ I am of course talking exclusively about the Hungarian reformed theologians from *Transylvania*, and not including here those from *Hungary*, among whom the fiercest opponent of Barth and the Dialectical Theology in general, was Dr. Jenő Sebestyén. His great work, *Reformed Dogmatics*, is a clear refutation of Barth's views and remains faithful to the historical and (mostly Dutch) reformed position of the orthodoxy of the reformed Creeds.

⁵⁵ Nagy criticized Barth on less orthodox reformed ground, on the ground of a relatively scientific-Liberal and flexible theological position, in a book which appeared, not accidentally, a year after the Nagyenyed debate where the acceptance of Barthianism in the Transylvanian Reformed Church took place (1930) and in the same year when the critique of Horváth appeared (1931!). See his work, Géza Nagy, *Barth thológiájának előzményei, kritikája és jelentősége (The Preludes, Criticism and Significance of Barth's Theology)*. Debrecen: Theológiai Tanulmányok, Különlönyomat, 12. szám, 1931.

between revelation and illumination. The Reformers have set both Scripture (revelation) and its interpretation (illumination) in a unique and permanent relationship to God, emphasizing the role of the Holy Spirit in both areas. They organically linked both the inspiration of the Bible and soteriology with pneumatology.

Horváth criticized Barth from an historical reformed perspective, inspired by Abraham Kuyper and his theological school at the turn of the century.⁵⁶ Referring to some of the recent books of Tavaszy, he argued against the elimination of the clarity, perspicuity and organic authority of the Scriptures as maintained by the reformational Creeds. First he stated that a genuine and classical reformed theology identifies the Scriptures with revelation.⁵⁷ But he is cautious, adding that he would place some restrictions on this statement to avoid any misinterpretation of his meaning. Thus he comes back to the problem and makes it clearer for the reader:

The *revelatio specialis* is identical with Scriptures, though not *ad Deum*, but *ad nos*. Because if it would have been *ad Deum*, then this would mean that God, the Redeemer, the eternal Savior God can be closed in the Bible! But this idea is far removed from Calvinism (...) ⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) was a very gifted and influential Dutch Calvinist theologian who, trusting the all encompassing authority and lordship of Christ over the whole world (and not just the Headship of his Church), tried to influence with a Calvinist world view every area of life. For this reason, he even engaged himself in the social and political struggles of his country, becoming the leader of a conservative Calvinist party; he was later elected prime minister of Holland, from 1901-1905. In 1880 he founded the Free University of Amsterdam. During his first pastorate, in Beesd, he moved from theological liberalism to orthodox Calvinism. Kuyper also influenced missiological thinking by a theological emphasis that divine sovereignty must be exercised in three realms: state, society and church.

⁵⁷ That is true, at least in the context of the reformed Creeds and in the interpretation of the historical Reformation. For his position, and also for a new word coined to express it ("*Szentíráskijelentés*" = "Scripture-revelation"), see László Horváth, pp.13-19.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* pp.23-24. Horváth also speaks about the narrowing down of revelation when given in the Scriptures, admitting that there is a wider Revelation which is behind and prior to its appearance in front of us as it is found in the Bible, as it appears in the written form of it. This is to admit that the Bible is not sufficient in regard to the possible richness of Revelation. Yet, what is there, is *sufficient* for our salvation. This has to be made clear when we are concerned with the possible (allegedly) insufficiency of the (Biblical) text, as (probably) the post-modernists (see Derrida, et alii) might view it.

This certainly was an important remark, because it was exactly on such a false assumption Barth and others could attack the “old reformed orthodoxy,” or by assuming that those who did not accept their theological view on the Scriptures, must stand on such a ridiculous ground. He could see the far reaching effect of eventually giving up this attribute (self-sufficiency) of the Holy Writ, especially warning against any acceptance of the notion of textual insufficiency, seeing it as an unfortunate relativization of the biblical text:

The *organic view* means that the whole comes first and then the partial; and the whole stands in relation with the partial. Theologically speaking, (...) Calvinistic theology believes that God is “Wholeness,” i.e., *totalitas absoluta*; and the *creation* as the work of His hand is *similitudo totalitas relative*. The *totalitas* in God cannot be regarded as the composition of the divine qualities (because the *qualitates Dei* are un-divisional and are identical with each other), but are absolute (in themselves), which we hardly can express in our human concepts. We can only comprehend it as a *totalitas absoluta* (...) which includes the *massivitas* and the *intensitas* (of God).⁵⁹

So the *revelatio generalis* and the *revelatio specialis* are essentially a different yet one reality standing in relation with each other. Horváth refers here to Calvin and points to the fact that the Logos through whom everything was created, is the same one by whom the cosmos, falling into sin after the Fall, was *re-created*.⁶⁰ As a result, Calvinism teaches the relation between God and cosmos not only in creation, but in re-creation, too. Horváth would compare the historicity of revelation with the repetition of sin in time, and not just a one time occurrence at the Fall. Similarly, he continues, in this organic unity of a reality ruled by the absolute sovereignty of God, there is a relation between *God* and His *Scripture-revelation* as well. Quoting Ridderbos, he argues in this context for “a predestinated Bible,” and as such the Scriptures are bound to be supernatural in origin and in authority. This will not exclude the other equally important aspect of the Bible as being also natural; it is at one and the same time *supernatural* and *natural*, *divine* and yet very *human*, holds Horváth.⁶¹ He rejects several theories of inspiration, any **mechanical** concept of even the *theopneusthia*, like the *inspiratio punctuali*, also the

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p.17.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p.18.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* p.19.

verbal inspiration (*inspiratio verbalis*), or the *inspiratio realis*, or the *inspiratio fundamentalis*, even the *inspiratio personalis*, calling the Calvinist doctrine in relation to the organic view of Scriptures, **organic** inspiration.⁶² Horváth criticizes Tavaszky⁶³ on three points: he tears Revelation from the Word of God; the Word of God from the Holy Scripture; and with all this, he would tear away the Word, which means the Bible, from holiness on every level.⁶⁴ Obviously, his criticism is compelled by the need to safeguard the Bible's authority, because Tavaszky in his interpretation makes the sovereign divinity of the Scriptures hypothetical and thus degrades it to a relativized authority. Although it goes beyond the limits of our paper, we have to mention that between pages 83 and 103 Horváth provides a fully developed criticism of Tavaszky's antithesis of revelation versus experience. It is noteworthy that especially on pages 94 and 95, his criticism involves also a criticism of the neo-Kantian trend in Schleiermacher's theology. Unfortunately, he would not realize that the same trend influenced the Transylvanian theologians, Tavaszky most of all.

Let turn now our attention to the debatable shift in Barth's teaching, which was embraced subserviently in the official re-orientation of the TRC due to Tavaszky's intermediating influence. First of all, Barth places Scriptures on the same level as that of the Church:

Church proclamation is talk, speech. So is Holy Scripture. So even is revelation in itself and as such. If we stay with God's Word in the three forms in which it is actually heard in the Church... we have no reason not to take the concept of God's Word primarily in its literal sense. God's Word means that God speaks. Speaking is not a "symbol".⁶⁵

The "speaking is not a symbol" sentence is problematic, as many others have noticed, including Paul Tillich and, more recently, Timothy Ward in his helpful essay

⁶² *Ibid.* pp.22-23.

⁶³ In his critique, he refers to two books written by Tavaszky and previously cited in this paper, *A Kijelentés feltétele alatt, Theologiai értekezések* (Under the Condition of Revelation, Theological Studies), and *A Dialektikai Theologia problémája és problémái, A Dialektikai Theologia kritikai ismertetése* (The Problem and Problems of Dialectical Theology, The Critical Appraisal of Dialectical Theology).

⁶⁴ László Horváth, *op. cit.*, p.24.

⁶⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1 pp.132-133.

on the topic.⁶⁶ On the one hand, Barth asserts that all these three forms, speech, Holy Scripture, and revelation, are to be considered as God's Word in a literal sense.⁶⁷ On the other hand, he emphasizes the identity of the Word of God with God Himself, in accord with the Johannine Prologue. Thus, it is hard not to assume that the identification is implicitly equating the three forms with God Himself, as Barth understands the Word of God: "(i)n its identity with God Himself. God's revelation is Jesus Christ, the Son of God."⁶⁸ Then Barth pushes further, in the footsteps of Kierkegaard and in accord with the philosophical trend of Personalism at the time, represented best by the famous Martin Buber, for the keeping in mind of the Word of God as being personalized in Jesus and not just verbalized:

The personalising of the concept of the Word of God, which we cannot avoid when we remember that Jesus Christ is the Word of God, does not mean its deverbalising. But it (naturally) means awareness that it is person rather than thing or object even if and in so far as it is word, word of Scripture and word of preaching.⁶⁹

According to Ward, Barth never clarified "the way in which the personal Word becomes the verbal word and is conveyed linguistically, how the two 'words' are related, so that human knowledge of and response to God's saving action in Christ are possible."

On the one hand, this is curious, as Barth still insists that human-divine interaction is rational, not irrational, so the divine "speaking" is literal and is not a "symbol." On the other hand, he also insists that revelation is the form which underlies the other two: the spoken and the written Word. Ward points to the "picture theory" of the early Wittgenstein, according to which all the elements of language stand for objects in the world. We may add here that this was precisely the view of Böhm also, concerning the projected pictures of the Self. It might well be that the Austrian Wittgenstein was still influenced by the same Neo-Kantian

⁶⁶ Timothy Ward, *The Sufficiency of Scripture*, paper read at the Dogmatic conference held in Edinburgh, at Rutherford House, 1997, pp.1-27.

⁶⁷ As Ward observes: "...very quickly Barth's strong commitment to the irreducible personal aspect of the Word of God re-asserts itself to such an extent that he reverts to conceiving of the Word in exclusively personalist terms."

⁶⁸ Barth, *ibid*, p.137.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*. p.138.

thinking which inspired Böhm in the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy. This needs further research, but it is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

The reason Barth was prompted to keep emphasizing that the Word of God is personalized not just verbalized, is the well-grounded protest against the way that rationalist theology tried to make the concept of God and of the Word of God into a researchable 'scientific object.'⁷⁰ The safeguarding of the Word of God from a bare humanistic and rational scrutiny was the point *forte* of Barth. The Neo-Kantian theologians of Transylvania welcomed Barth on the same ground, realizing how dangerous it was to reduce and to abstract to a positivist researched topic the revelation of God. One thing is clear: if we accept Ward's alternative suggestion of solving the problem posed by Barth, an alternative solution compared to that somehow ambiguous solution of Barth himself,⁷¹ then we have to accept also Ward's argument in favor of the vulnerable character of God's Word toward any objectification. Barth tried to protect the Word of the living God from becoming an object and thus being submitted to our rational criticism which uses fallible human criteria. This was a noble endeavor, yet he went too far. He denied even the *possibility* that this could happen and paradoxically, in constructing a theological protection for the Scriptures, he ended up denying the self-sufficient authority of the Word of God to protect and explain itself. By contrast, we think, together with Ward, that "personal action does not make 'possession' impossible."

⁷⁰ See Ward's comment: "He argued that the personalizing of the concept of the word of God, 'even if and in so far as it is word,' means 'awareness that it is person rather than *thing or object*.'" Later he adds: "...we may indeed sympathies with Barth's rejection of the view that the living, active God would ever identify himself with a static thing or object in the world", etc. This is clearly a thought inspired and developed further by Barth from Kierkegaard. Especially important here is the reference made by Ward to Kevin Vanhoozer in whom he finds a different way of defending the Word from being objectified. Ward argued, based on J. L. Austin and Vanhoozer that "the primary function of language is not to refer," but to be a "medium for personal communicative action."

⁷¹ Cf. p. 5.: "This allows us to construe the Word of God in its verbal form as the communicative action of God; with Barth we will still distinguish between the Word of God in its personal and verbal forms, but now not in a dichotomous way (person vs. thing or object), but in a way which more naturally relates the two: person and personal communicative action. This might point the way toward answering one of Barth's over-riding and admirable concerns: that God's revelation never be construed such that human beings could 'possess' it. His fear is that in the process of biblical interpretation we grapple with words, syntax and semantics so as to understand, and by understanding to 'own,' what we read. However, when God comes to act in salvation the reverse must be true: we are always possessed by him."

We also declare, based on this vulnerability of the Word, that idolatry of the concept of the Word is a possibility in handling it as an object. Barth, in his devoted and praiseworthy effort to eliminate the objectification of the personalized character of the Word, tried to exclude even the danger of it, as if to choose a theological theory which might protect the Word itself. But although ‘possessing’ the Word is, according to Ward, an immoral and dehumanizing act, it is sure that the Word in verbalized form yet remains “susceptible to human attempts to possess it.”⁷² What disturbs me about the way in which Barthian theology became so quickly accepted as the official and unquestionable mainline theology in Transylvania and, via Transylvania, in the whole Hungarian reformed church including Hungary, is the fact that Barthianism had such a huge and far reaching effect on the ecclesiology of the reformed church in this part of the world as well. This in turn hindered the turning toward the missional church idea or even the embracing of a sodality affirming mission model by the modality.

The insufficiency of the Scriptures, allegedly derived from the insufficiency of any text, whether in Derridan or Barthian terms, motivated Derrida to supplement it with his concept of the “realm of textuality,” and motivated Barth to supplement the text with his concept of the event of revelation. But in classical reformational thinking, it is rather an act of illumination which supplements the revelation already revealed and sufficient in the Scriptures only at the receiver’s end. Clearly, as we have stated before with Horváth and with Ward, Barth seems unable to avoid the trap of confusing revelation and illumination. There are two problems facing us here. The first concerns the self-sufficiency of the biblical text as it was asserted classically by the reformers as we discussed above. The second is the

⁷² *Ibid.* p.6.

hermeneutical challenge;⁷³ it was assumed already by the reformers that Scripture is never to be subsumed by the Church and its theology.⁷⁴

What Barth did in his zeal to protect the Word from becoming just a subordinated object to human wisdom and scientific research was to try and protect the Word by a mere theological formulation. This formulation, which James Barr successfully attacked as an unsustainable speculation, resembled the Neo-Kantian framework of Böhm. If the idea of God's Word is protected by a formulation of how it "ought to be," that distinction in itself will guarantee that the "reality" is not accepted, but it will be overwritten by the declared value-appraisal. This led the Transylvanians to use the same method in formulating what is the church. If we follow the neo-Kantian theological framework of observing the church from a critical and empirical point of view in order to arrive at a definition of the ideal of

⁷³ There is a thorough study on this problem, though from a different perspective, but certainly from a missiological point of view in the book of Peter Back, *Ethnotheology in the Light of the Authority of Scripture and Linguistic Relevance Theory*, Monograph 5, Church and Mission: Building the Kingdom. United Kingdom: Tentmaker Publications, 1999. Back is concerned with the trend of *ethnotheology* in contemporary missiology, which has to do with the adaptation of Christian beliefs to a particular ethnic group or specific culture, and examines this in the light of a biblical view of Scripture. He also investigates the effects of *relevance theory* on contextualization. Back's critique can be compared with the criticism of Barth above, especially when attacking the view of theologians of missions, such as Nida, Kraft and others in stating that the Word of God is subservient to the worldview of each cultural and ethnic group into which the Scripture is incorporated. Back focuses on the interrelation between biblical authority, ethnotheology and relevance theory. On p.5 for example he describes the problem as follows:

"Where theology is written for a particular ethnic group the assumption inherent in ethnotheology is that validity is only established *in situ*, and in a *form* compatible to the persons for whom the message is intended. Therefore the usefulness of this theology is seen to be subservient to the limitations imposed by the ethnic group concerned. The **authority** of God who gave the Word is thereby weakened by the cultural presuppositions used to **validate** and **explain** the message." According to Tippet, cited by Back, incarnational theology is just "another name for ethnotheology" (p.8.)

⁷⁴ Back clarifies the dilemma in a similar way, though without naming and discerning explicitly and theologically between revelation and illumination, see p.13. What Kraft calls relevance and derives from relevance theory can be called illumination theologically: "Relevance *is* important, but in spiritual terms it is by the work of the Holy Spirit that Scripture is made relevant to the reader or listener. It is the receptor who comes **under** the authority of the Word of God and not Scripture which comes under the authority or control of a human recipient. The validity or power of Scripture is God given and not controlled or activated by men and women." (p.13.)

the “ought to be church,” then we arrive at a flaw of which these Transylvanian theologians were not aware. It cannot be believed that by the bare magic of critical distinction and by the theological prosecution of the objectification of the Word of God,⁷⁵ any real change in the practical life of the church can be achieved. Such a practice will prove self-deceiving in achieving any real reform of the church.

To accept Barth’s theory is to run the risk of not being able to justify a valid theological distinction between Scripture and theological formulations. In other words, it does not provide a clear distinction between text and commentary, since his doctrine inherently eliminates any distinction between revelation and illumination.⁷⁶ Church history gives evidence of the ongoing threat which comes from a formally insufficient interpretation of the materially sufficient Scripture. The protest of the Reformation was against this perpetual danger. The problem with an ecclesiology in which the definition of the church lacks a missional essence can be understood from the very self-deceptive theological formulations prompted by the value-appraisal of these Böhm-disciples. As Barth exercised the greatest influence on the Transylvanians we have to look now to the impact of Barth on missiology in order to evaluate to what extent he did or did not influence these leading theologians of the TRC in the interbellum period.

It is interesting how Kecskeméthy welcomed the “Barthian turnover” of these theologians who became committed to the theology of the Word. He could be both positive and grateful yet at the same time, still critical when commenting on this sudden change. One of his criticisms was that in their theology they had substituted the abstract Word for the Person of Jesus Christ. This was a concise

⁷⁵ The theological prosecution of the objectification of the Word of God in the Barthian, and successively in the Tavaszy-ian, sense is conceptualized in stating the ideal of the church out of generalizations about what the church should be ideally, according to the Bible, but not placing it under the special judgement of the revelation, subjectively adequate in illumination.

⁷⁶ As Back put it:

“This position would exclude the **Word of God** from being God’s word, *in and of itself*. In effect, the Word is said to depend on the **one** who embodies it in order for it to be translated into effective action. ‘Incarnational’ theology does attempt to place the divine Word into a human context. However, its limitation is that at the same time it *reduces* it to a place in which it is bereft of God’s authority unless empowered in some way by the humanity to which it is given.” (p.9-10.)

criticism, similar to that made by Kenessey two decades earlier when he said to the neo-Kantians, “not axiology, but more gospel is what the human souls need.”

To these comments, we now have to add another critique which explains many of Kecskeméthy’s philosophical and theological reservations, as we will see below.

Kecskeméthy’s Critique of Neo-Kantian Tendencies in Tavaszy’s Circle

The overwhelming importance of Kant both in philosophy and in theology cannot be disputed and that includes his influence on Protestant theology, even more specifically, on epistemology:

It is properly said, so far as the development of extra-biblical thought is concerned, that all roads lead to Kant. And so influential did Kant’s thought system become throughout the next two centuries, that he has been called the philosopher of Protestantism. (...) But to say that Kant was the philosopher of Protestantism is only to mark the decline of Protestantism itself. For above all else, Kantianism stands for the all-pervasive assumption of the autonomy of man.⁷⁷

Yet we have to be aware of Harold N. Lee’s summary in his study on Kant when he observed:

The development and subsequent wide acceptance in the first part of the 20th Century of the theory of relativity, the quantum theory and the theory of statistical mechanics make it impossible today to hold Kant’s first conviction, namely, that Newtonian physics expresses certain and unalterable knowledge of the physical universe.⁷⁸

It is remarkable that Kecskeméthy could grasp the influence of Einstein and the far reaching effects of his discoveries (and the discoveries of Einstein’s Hungarian predecessor in the proposed possibility of a non-Euclidean geometrical space,

⁷⁷ Douglas Vickers, *The Fracture of Faith, Recovering Belief of the Gospel in a Postmodern World*. Fearn Scotland, Great Britain: Mentor, Christian Focus Publishing,, 2000, p.158.

⁷⁸ Harold N. Lee, ‘The Rigidity of Kant’s Categories’ in *A Symposium on Kant*, Tulane Studies in Philosophy, vol. III. New Orleans: Tulane University, 1954, pp.114.

János Bolyai⁷⁹) on the Kantian premises, so early, and could express boldly some of his doubts regarding the still canonized neo-Kantian patterns of the thinkers of his times.

In contrast, Tavaszy in his diagnosis of the contemporary crisis listed three major movements as corrupting cultural life the more they dominated it: irrationalism, occultism and relativism. By the latter, he meant not a world-view or a sort of philosophical attitude, but Einstein's theory of relativity. As Márton Tonk, an able scholar on the philosophical views of Tavaszy rightly observed recently:

It is remarkable that the Philosopher of Kolozsvár [i.e., Tavaszy] understood by relativism, not a philosophical attitude but the theory of relativism. In Tavaszy's opinion, Einstein's theory forced natural sciences to a serious crisis. Due to its results the up till then infallible, accepted, basic laws were also touched by skepticism.⁸⁰

But we believe this was a natural reaction for a neo-Kantian, like Tavaszy. Kecskeméthy, however, had a totally different and very courageous opinion:

Einstein, who said the greatest word so far, whatever one can say based on the exact science of physics today, asserts that any meaning of space, time, and motion cannot be stated independently, (but only in relation with the material, the material, which even Einstein himself does not know what it is): that means, in the terminology of Kultsár, that space, time and motion are "nothing."⁸¹

We are aware of the tensions that this turning upside-down of the Newtonian world-view produced in the philosophical arena of the times. Kecskeméthy knew

⁷⁹ For more on Bolyai (and Lobachevsky) for the English reader as being a predecessor to Einstein, and on his non-Euclidean geometry see on the internet: <http://library.thinkquest.org/22584/temh3019.htm> and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Janos_Bolyai and <http://scienceworld.wolfram.com/biography/BolyaiJanos.html> and <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9080524> as found on the 29th of September, 2006.

⁸⁰ In Hungarian it reads:
 "Érdekes módon relativizmuson a kolozsvári gondolkodó nem egy filozófiai attitűdöt, hanem a relativitáselméletet érti. Tavaszy úgy véli, hogy Einstein elmélete súlyos válság elé állította a természettudományt, hiszen eredményeként az addig tévedhetetlennek hitt alaptörvényeket is elérte a szkepszis."
 Cf. Tonk, p.76.

⁸¹ István Kecskeméthy, 'A magyar metafizika' (Hungarian Metaphysics) in *Egyházi Figyelő* Vol 4, Nr. 5 (March 1, 1923): pp.1-2. For a comparison, see Diósadi András Kultsár, *Új gondolatok régi titkokról, Tentamen (New Thoughts on Old Mysteries, Tentamen)* Gherla-Szamosújvár: 1922.

of the mathematical and geometrical studies of Lobatchevsky, of Gauss, and especially of the Hungarian János Bolyai, and their theories of a non-Euclidean space, contrary to the Newtonian. “It has been suggested by historians that perhaps Gauss did not publish his insights toward a non-Euclidean geometry because he was such a thorough Kantian that he held them to be impossible and hence necessarily erroneous.”⁸² Perhaps another reason that Gauss did not publish his insights is that they may not have been his own originally.⁸³

We do not wonder that Kecskeméthy was despised by Tavaszy and Imre, for creating tension by introducing these ideas into the theological discourse as opposed to the neo-Kantian and Barthian theological framework of his colleagues. That can be seen from Imre's memoirs:

Our relationship with Kecskeméthy became especially full of tension when he started to make a defense for the confused philosophical system of a certain András Kulcsár and gave us a lecture on it in the main auditorium of the Theological Seminary. We issued a declaration that we would not identify ourselves with his position. For that reason, he became very upset with us.⁸⁴

⁸² Lee, p.116.

⁸³ The Hungarian János Bolyai was a young friend and contemporary of Gauss but Gauss considered him a rival as well. Some suspect that after reading Bolyai's thesis, Gauss tried to pass Bolyai's work off as his own. Lobatchevsky and Bolyai did not know that they had made similar discoveries in the field; later, historians named their theory the “Bolyai-Lobatchevsky theory,” which theory served as an inspiration to Einstein a century later. See the sources I indicated above among the vast literature on this particular topic.

⁸⁴ Imre, *Önéletírás (Autobiography)*, p.194. Cf. the full quotation in Hungarian: “Kecskeméthy szeretettel, de egy kis enyhe lekicsinyléssel fogadott – nemcsak engem, két másik társamat (valószínűleg Tavaszyról és Makkairól van szó, HL megjegyzése) is –, s úgy kezelt, mintha még most is a tanítványa lennék. Mint a fiatalok között felejtett öreg (mi 30–33 évesek voltunk 1921–ben, ő 57), mindig idegennek érezte s talán mutatta is magát közöttünk, és vádoló magam, hogy nem voltam hozzá elég gyöngéd és alázatos. Igaz, hogy már teológus koromban is idegenkedtem tőle. Láttam rajta a Bethlen Gábor kör munkája iránti bizalmatlanságot. Azt hiszem, soha nem volt megelégedve a hitemmel – egyikünkével sem. Elidegenítette tőlünk nagy sérelme, hogy Kenessey után nem ő lett az egyházkerületi főjegyző, majd püspök, továbbá a Szász Gerővel vívott régi harcok emléke, amelyről azt mondta, hogy akkor Kain–bélyeget sütöttek a homlokára, és még sok minden egyéb. Minket egyszerűen Nagy Károly teremtményeinek nézett. Bizalmatlanul figyelte azt az egyházépítő belmissziói munkát, amit később kezdtünk. Kétkedett abban, hogy az igazán hitből származik. A hitvallásos iskola kérdésében sokáig bizonytalan állásponton volt. Különösen feszültté vált a viszony, mikor egy bizonyos Kulcsár András zavaros filozófiai rendszerét pártolni kezdte s

I could not find any specific written records of this debate, the only exception being an article which appeared in *Egyházi Figyelő*, where Kecskeméthy commended Dr. Kultsár, as the founder of a genuine Hungarian (and new) metaphysics:

And so what about theology? She should not beg from the exact sciences, or even from philosophy, a little recognition or even permission to wear the title of "science" or, at least, a little tolerance; because behold, there is once more a Metaphysics. Hungarian Metaphysics. Just look at it.⁸⁵

But what was this teaching of Kultsár⁸⁶ which was so important and relevant, serving as an original critique to the theological reasoning of those years in the eyes of Kecskeméthy? In introducing the reader to his book (which resulted in his nomination for the Nobel prize), Kultsár modestly declared that his work was a *Prolegomena* to the one possible metaphysics, in contrast to Kant, who declared his as being the *Prolegomena* to every possible future metaphysics.⁸⁷ That is why Kecskeméthy stated that Kultsár must be right in declaring that modern philosophy was flawed by the fatal confusing of *reality* with *nothing*. It was an error to believe that something can originate from nothing and that something can diminish into nothing.⁸⁸ Then, as we can see in his introduction, Kultsár states that based on the principle of contradiction he could not find a more perfect contradiction, and in fact, there can exist no other but the Reality versus Nothing contradiction.⁸⁹ If contradiction in general is a precondition of knowledge, then such contradiction must be the condition of the most perfect knowledge.

Thus I have arrived to the thesis of *absolute contradiction*. I have realized that the notion of *nothing* is that from which every knowledge of the human mind on this earth *necessarily* proceeds, because to every reality and as such, even to the *thinking*

arról a teológia dísztermében előadást tartott. Mi nyilatkozatot adtunk ki, hogy nem azonosítjuk magunkat felfogásával, ezért nagyon megharagudott. Csak felesége halála, majd a saját betegsége alatt engedett közelebb magához, mikor megérezte szeretetünket. De akkor már sajnos nem tudott beszélni, s így a vele való kommunikáció szinte lehetetlenné vált. 1938-ban halt meg, s én most meghatottan s hálával emlékszem meg róla."

⁸⁵ See his article 'A magyar metafizika' ('Hungarian Metaphysics'), *op. cit.*, pp.1-2.

⁸⁶ Kultsár, *ibid*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* p. 5.

⁸⁸ Kecskeméthy, 'A magyar metafizika' ('Hungarian Metaphysics'), *op. cit.* p.1

⁸⁹ Kultsár, *ibid.* pp.15-16.

reality, i.e., man's, the most perfect contradiction to it, evidently, is - nothing. The thinking man cannot base his own knowledge on anything outside of himself because he doesn't know anything outside of himself, i.e., outside of *reality*. He knows nothing else other than *nothing*.⁹⁰

In fact, this serves as his starting point when criticizing the *cogito ergo sum* of Descartes:

Descartes was mistaken when he based human thinking on the "cogito ergo sum" as if he wanted to base it on *thinking* itself. Evidently, this is as if somebody wishes to build a house and so he would say that *in order for it to be stronger* he will lay down a foundation on the foundation itself, i.e., on *the new foundation* he would lay down his foundation. So on what does not exist, *but never can exist either*.⁹¹

Kultsár says the same as Cornelius Van Til regarding Descartes, that he made man instead of God a final reference point in his epistemological system. For Kultsár, Kant had considered the logical contradiction an empty contradiction; there is no real contradiction anywhere else but between Reality and Nothing.

Reality can be seen only in Nothing, but it is not encompassed in it. In the same way, life can only be seen in motion, but it is not included in it, either. (...) Reality is not Nothing, it only seems to be Nothing, because *nothing* is its reflection.⁹²

This is what Kultsár called an *absolute* contradiction; the picture or image of Reality is Nothing. As Kecskeméthy comments, the unique and quite revolutionary thesis of Kultsár was simply that 'nothing is the image of reality.'⁹³ He goes on to say that this apparently simple statement is not without a deep meaning; we realize that nothing is the image of reality *because* it is its absolute opposite or contradiction. Kecskeméthy gives an illustration to explain what he means: "I am only remarking in passing that if money did not exist at all, then I, when looking in my purse, could not say, what I am forced to say now, that nothing is [found]"

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 16.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* p.32.

⁹² *Ibid.* pp.108-109; in the original it reads:

"A valóság a semmiben csak látszik, de nincs benne, éppúgy, mint az élet is a mozgásban csak látszik, de szintén nincs benne." See also: "...a valóság nem semmi, csak látszik semminek, mert – semmi a képe."

⁹³ Kecskeméthy, 'A magyar metafizika' ('Hungarian Metaphysics'), *op. cit.* p.2.

in it.”⁹⁴ Kecskeméthy leaves the proofs to be checked by the reader; he simply points to the perspective opened by the book for ministers and theologians. That leads to his third comment on the book and we will quote it now at length:

If nothing is the image of reality, then reality by necessity is a cause and the image is necessarily an effect. With this the thesis of Hume, that the necessary relation of cause and effect in the pure reason *a priori* cannot be demonstrated, is overthrown. And with this, the ancient proof of the First Cause as an argument for God is put back on the scientific foundation which Kant refuted with such sagacity of mind. And all the rest of the arguments in opposition to the existence of God are collapsing again.

Einstein, who said the greatest word so far, whatever one can say based on the exact science of physics today, asserts that any meaning of space, time, and motion cannot be stated independently, (but only in relation with the material, the material, which even Einstein himself does not know what it is): that means, in the terminology of Kultsár, that space, time and motion are “nothing.” Yet what a rich nothing!⁹⁵

The way that Kultsár accuses philosophers throughout the centuries is quite interesting, if he proves to be right, because he speaks of a characteristic blindness in the history of philosophy:

Every philosopher, throughout world history, always confused the concepts of reality and nothing; always confused reality with nothing, and except for Christ, every founder of religions too. (...) Because the *one* God can be neither conjectured unconsciously; nor can He be (believed or) *known* consciously; unless we know Him as the absolute *antithesis* of nothing, in which case we can conjecture Him, moreover, know Him, as the *most perfect* Reality, and so the absolute Reality.⁹⁶

He then goes even further, stating that if he is proved right, then the suggestions of Hume, and in his footsteps Kant, that infinite worlds can be created by the autonomous mind out of nothing, fail also. After rejecting the antinomies of Kant, he would reduce them only to the antinomy of reality and of nothing. Then he asserts that in the light of the above, even Kant's definition of contradiction being the criteria of the pure mind, cannot be maintained: “Therefore, I repeat that the

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* p.2.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* p.2.

⁹⁶ Kultsár, *ibid.* pp.16, 18ff.

criteria of the pure mind is not that it contradicts itself, but that apart from reality and apart from nothing it does not know anything and does not want to know anything.”⁹⁷ Consequently, Kulcsár could give this definition of reality: “it is not the nothing”; and of nothing: “it is not the reality.” Any kind of nothing could never become reality and any kind of reality could never turn back into nothing.⁹⁸ Only then would he attack Hume’s apparently pious remarks, criticizing the old philosophies as having ungodly principles like: “*ex nihilo nihil fit*,” while in contrast, Hume would argue that not only can the will of the Highest Being create, but reasoning *a priori*, the will of any other rational being can create, as well.

Lo, if he thinks seriously about it, armies of creating gods emerged from Hume’s philosophy; so everybody could marvel, with reason, that he still did not regard his own philosophy as being ungodly, but instead, he accused the old philosophical school of being ungodly.⁹⁹

However, this is not the place to analyze Kulcsár’s whole system of philosophy; our task rather is to understand how Kecskeméthy could base his criticism on Kulcsár and to suggest what the outcome might have been if their thinking could have gained acceptance. We have to add that Kulcsár would not differentiate the world into noumenal and phenomenal, because in his thinking, God apparently seems to be nothing, and yet cannot be banished from the phenomenal world. Reality is the guarantee of his presence in both the noumena and phenomena, that is to say, he looks to be nothing in the phenomena and to be reality in the noumena. But of course, this makes meaningless the noumena-phenomena distinction in itself. So Kulcsár rightly had doubts about absolutizing the difference of the noumena and phenomena, (preferred by the neo-Kantian circle of theologians, in comparing the invisible and ideal world with the visible world of being). It is remarkable that those theologians who were disciples of Böhm ignored Böhm’s criticism of Kant in this matter.

Many years have passed since *the first time* I thought and since then *frequently* I meditate on the fact that God’s being or non-being is an eternal problem of the human mind because God, if He really exists, can be evidently the most perfect Reality

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 22.

⁹⁸ For a comparison see *ibid*, cf. pp.24. and 34, etc.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*. p.49.

of all. Then, *especially if He exists*, He *seems* rather much more (a) *nothing*, in comparison with any other reality before the human mind.¹⁰⁰

We could see the resulting confusion created by the Kantian presupposition in the Barthian Tavaszy when the ideal of the church is compared with the existing church in order to improve its condition. The circle of Kecskeméthy, instead of superficial and mere theoretical criticism, constantly compared the contemporary church with the judgment of God pronouncing nothingness on sinful human structures as expressed so radically in Scriptures. There the harsh words of the prophets in judging the *status quo* of the Old Testament institutional church and Temple resulted in the practical breaking down of any idolatry. Kecskeméthy in his comments on Kultsár goes on to ask:

What could be the eternal, endless life? Only the mind, the mind, the mind.¹⁰¹ And if this is not so, then who is going to tell me where consciousness comes from, this most clear, the only clear, and yet the most enigmatic thing on earth in front of contemporary man? And if it is, then who is going to tell me how one can imagine the world without God, and God without the world? Thought without mind and mind without thought? Yes, this endless and eternal world cannot be material, but the thought of God; so therefore indeed reality: that is the spoken, the verbalized thought of God. The only possible reality. The majestic Effect of the for-itself-enough-First-Cause, the not needing to rely on anything else, the not dependable One.¹⁰²

If Kultsár's conclusions against Hume and Kant are shown to be valid, that reality can be created by any autonomous human individual will *from nothing*; or against Buddha and Schopenhauer, that reality can be turned *into nothing*, then the theological question arises: how can we still justify the dogma of *creatio ex nihilo*? Especially, as Kultsár apparently rejects this historical teaching of Christianity.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p.77.

¹⁰¹ We can see the resemblances to the Augustinian concept here. We can also argue with this based on the philosophical rectifying of the matter and a correction of Augustine in the work of Ákos Pauler, the importance of which has been demonstrated above. But this topic needs a full study and is not the aim of this dissertation.

¹⁰² Kecskeméthy, 'A magyar metafizika' ('Hungarian Metaphysics'), *op. cit.* p. 2.

¹⁰³ Kultsár, *ibid.* p.103, for just one example, but there are many others throughout the book.

Ex nihilo nihil fit, that is true, but *ex nihilo nihil creatur*? The maxim *ex nihilo nihil fit* does not claim *ex nihilo nihil creatur*, i.e., that nothing is created out of nothing. According to reformed theology, no finite creature can create anything from nothing. Only God can give being to the finite order. He is the single exception because he is not finite and not a creature. Instead of *ex nihilo nihil fit*, better to say: *ex nihilo nihil generator*, i.e., that nothing is produced out of nothing. In this interpretation we might accept the intention of Kultsár, although not his words which, from a theological standpoint, could certainly have been formulated more cautiously.

To create a world from nothing; that was the philosophical orientation of Böhm and it is in line with the Enlightenment ideas as a mega-narrative. To create the transcendental world of values, apart from the transcendent Creator, as an autonomous human being; that is in keeping with Hume's and the Enlightenment's claims for the self-confident, proud human mind, but cannot be acceptable to any biblical theology which magnifies the one and only Creator rather than mankind.

There are several difficulties in our understanding of both the intellectual milieu of the times under discussion and the work of the value-oriented Neo-Kantian theologians' which this influenced. But one thing is clear to me: most of Böhm's disciples as theologians, with very few exceptions, did *not* change their views due to the sudden influence of "dialectical theology" in that period, as they themselves preferred to think; although they consciously strived to bring theology back to its rights and to keep philosophy just as a working method, in reality they were more influenced by neo-Kantian presuppositions and less by a Biblical theology. The very fact that they could not ground ecclesiology and missiology on a Biblical and theological grounding faithful to the reformational heritage proves this point.

In the case of ecclesiology especially, they assumed that they had changed their views completely, but maybe that was less true in the field of practical theology and ecclesiology, compared with other *loci* of dogmatics. The first intentional Practical Theology Handbook, after that of Ravasz's, appeared in 1938; authorized by Dezső László, it is a critical overview of Ravasz's work in the light of dialectical theology. The "missiology" written by Makkai in the same year is in fact, as Fekete rightly observed, an ecclesiology, and is partly still Neo-Kantian

and partly Barthian. The missiology which claimed to be *The Essence of Foreign Mission* was written two years earlier by Jenő Horváth and similarly to László, was written in the light of dialectical theology.

The problem with all these works was that in them the mission of the church is more of a function; the mission is not yet conceived as being the essence of the church. This ambiguous theological orientation will be researched in the next chapter when I will focus on their views of ecclesiology and missiology.

As we could see earlier in the mirror of Warfield's criticism of Kant, the gradual restriction of knowledge (or objectively adequate knowledge) to the phenomenal world was the outcome of the neo-Kantian progress. It was especially due to the fact that in the 19th century, positivism (as launched by the French philosopher Comte) developed to its full extent and was joined together with Böhm's philosophy. With this, the noumenal reality diminished or at least could not retain any scientific relevance as not being justified or reflected in the empiria. Kant, and the neo-Kantians in his footsteps, rejected the classical, or Anselmian "proofs" of the existence of God. For them, God degenerated into a postulate of practical reason at its best, and was left in the dull area of the unknowable. God was left in the sphere of subjectively adequate knowledge which in turn, as Warfield showed, cannot be consistently held to for long. For this reason they were completely prejudiced against Kecskeméthy's (and subsequently Kultsár's) challenge. But the upcoming postmodern changing of the tide toward the end of the 20th century seems to come very close to Kultsár's findings, which strange as it seems, has proved truer than was expected or ever imagined.

Barth and the Theology of Missions

In his book exploring Barth's theology of missions, Waldron Scott quotes the great Dutch missiologist Hendrik Kraemer, a contemporary of Barth:

There never was a full missions theology until Karl Barth wrote one, and no one should undertake to prepare a better one (or conceive that he might prepare a better one) until he has mastered Barth.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Waldron Scott, *Karl Barth's Theology of Mission*. Illinois, USA: InterVarsity Press and Exeter, England: The Paternoster Press, 1978, p.7.

This sets up the task for us. However critical one may be of Barth, his theology of mission cannot be avoided; it must be considered and scrutinized by means of thorough theological reflection. It has been on the theological agenda since it first took shape, primarily from a relatively brief section in his *Church Dogmatics*,¹⁰⁵ but also from critical remarks in his other writings.

Ray S. Anderson recently asserted,

(w)ith evangelization of the world and the intended conversion of every person to Jesus Christ as a fundamental imperative, evangelical theology has yet to articulate a theology of mission and evangelism which does not tend to be culturally and ethnically imperialistic.¹⁰⁶

We find this challenge was faced with honesty and wit throughout the theological opus of Barth, who was fully motivated by it from the very beginning of the century. He was also completely convinced that the demanding task of every theology, at least if it claims to be evangelical, has to be articulated in the faithful service of mission, and this particular task was undertaken and treated by him in a unique way. Barth, with his Christocentric emphasis, has undoubtedly given new incentives for missions, as Scott, among many others, has noticed. However, Barth himself admitted that his impact remained an indirect influence on the missionary enterprise. The Transylvanian Horváth also noted the indirectness of Barth's influence in his important book on theology of missions.¹⁰⁷ Demanding an "articulation" of a theology of mission and evangelism "which does not tend to be culturally and ethnically imperialistic," Barth not only made a specific contribution to the vast theological reflection in this area, but established a unique pattern of interpretation as well. In doing so, he fought against being what Anderson calls "culturally and ethnically imperialistic," as we shall see. Admittedly, in his many other theological assessments, Barth strove to impose his Christocentric principle as an ever-engaging particularism even in missions, along with almost every other

¹⁰⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, most notably in the volume IV, book 3, 2nd half, pp.873-879.

¹⁰⁶ See in: David F. Ford (ed.), *The Modern Theologians, An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, p. 495.

¹⁰⁷ See in Jenő Horváth, *A külmisszió lényege*, *op. cit.*; for example on p. 239, after he quotes Frick that missions is the real nature of the church, we read the observation that this view was deepened by the indirect influence of Barth, Brunner and Thurnaysen, and then, through the intermediation of Hartenstein, Barth's theology proved to be most helpful in missiology.

sphere of theology. So Anderson's claim, though still valid today, does not apply to the Barthian system (at least in its *ab ovo* intention), when he complains that

the "particularism" of Jesus Christ as the driving force for evangelical mission to the world has not yet dealt with the theological and religious pluralisms, which confront the contemporary mission task of the church. In the face of rising challenges to this christological particularism inherent in the theological paradigm of evangelicalism, theologians have yet to restate the case for conversion to Christ in compelling and convincing terms.¹⁰⁸

Of course, in the prevailing usage of the term today, Barth's system can no longer be regarded as an "evangelical theology." In his own understanding, however it certainly was evangelical in the "historical" sense¹⁰⁹ of that term, at least in intention, and we must accept this. In Barth's theology we still find the "particularism" of Jesus as "the driving force for evangelical mission to the world" put forth as an answer to the "theological and religious pluralisms" which are an even more serious challenge today, and which "confront the contemporary mission task of the church" even more strongly than in Barth's lifetime.

Missions in the Light of Barth's New Interpretation of Election

Barth would then confess with evangelical theologians today that the "Christological particularism" *is* indeed intrinsic to the theological paradigm of evangelicalism and must be kept as the "driving force" for the evangelization of the world. Nonetheless, the very core of this driving force, the gospel of the life, cross and resurrection of the historical Jesus, is deprived of its strength by Barth's understanding of election. Together with his critics, such as Berkouwer, Van Til and even Brunner, who himself is closely identified with Barth in the new "theology

¹⁰⁸ Ford, *ibid.* p.475.

¹⁰⁹ Barth often referred to his theology explicitly as evangelical theology (See for example the title of his book, *Evangelical Theology, An Introduction*. Edinburgh: T&T, 1963.) He enrolled himself among the Reformers who boldly called their theology evangelical; in return, they were called "evangelical theologians." Certainly the term has undergone a significant change since that time and no longer matches this "historical" connotation. Nowadays, most of the reformed evangelicals would claim to be orthodox rather than neo-orthodox in their main theological orientation.

of crises” or “dialectical theology” commonly referred to as neo-orthodoxy, we must address how Barth's doctrine of election cancels even the dynamic of evangelization inherent in the “Evangel” itself. Barth, in an attempt to correct the “rigid” *horribile decretum* of the *Deus absconditus* as understood by the Reformers and in an effort to avoid their symmetrical double predestinarian view, linked predestination with the God/manhood of Jesus Christ, proposing a Christological understanding of election as a better justification for the biblical data. He insisted that by dealing with the predestination of humans separately from the election of Christ as the Man elected, the Reformers were searching for the secret of election determined in an eternity before and apart from Jesus Christ, “in such an empty eternity, which in vain we can try to interpret as merciful and righteous.” He states clearly that this was the fault of Calvin's doctrine of predestination as well.¹¹⁰

In this case, the question must be asked, what justification remains for mission if all of the heathen, without exception, are elected in the election of Christ? Or is the only function left for mission not calling them to repentance, but only informing them¹¹¹ of their sure election,¹¹² knowing only that it is the secret of the

¹¹⁰ The only alternative was something similar to the late Lutheran quasi-Arminianism, which, in rejecting the unconditional decree of Calvin, found the secret of election in man's freedom in choosing faith. (This reasoning can be traced back to Melancthon.)

¹¹¹ Barth says this in many loci of his works and in many variations, but in immediate connection with missions we read:

“We must first maintain that even missions to the heathen, and they particularly, can be pursued meaningfully only on the presupposition of the clear promise and firm belief that everything which was needed for the salvation of all, and therefore of these men who have fallen victim to these false beliefs in false gods, has already taken place, that Jesus Christ died and rose again for these heathen too. Thus *the task of mission can consist only in announcing this to them*. It is on this basis that they are to be addressed from the very outset. [*Italics, LH*].” Cf. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/3/2, p.874.

¹¹² It is remarkable in this context how Brunner is critical of Barth's doctrine of election:

“Karl Barth has been charged with teaching Universalism. When he denies this, he is not actually wrong. He knows too much about the not especially illustrious theologians who have maintained this doctrine of *Apokatastasis* in Christian history to be prepared to have himself counted among their number... Rather, Barth goes much further. For none of them dared to maintain that through Jesus Christ, everyone - whether believer or non-believer - are saved from the wrath of God and share redemption through Jesus Christ. But this is precisely what Barth teaches... Hell has been blotted out, and condemnation and judgment eliminated. This is not a conclusion I have drawn from Barth's statements, but something he has stated himself. There is no doubt that many people today will be glad to hear such a doctrine, and will rejoice that a theologian has finally dared to consign the idea of a final divine judgment, or that

sovereign Spirit giving the fruit of the atonement in a sovereign way to those who are secretly elected? We can contrast this with the remarks of H. Lindsay:

(...) this advance [of missions in the 19th century] was predicated on a conservative theology which assumed the lostness of men without Christ, the eternity of hell for sinners, and the absolute necessity for the new birth through faith in Jesus Christ.¹¹³

It is well known that Barth's inconsistency devolves to a reluctant universalism. Theologians such as G. C. Berkouwer have long argued that Barth's doctrine of election implies the eventual salvation of all, and that he was therefore inconsistent despite his protests against theologians keen to defend the *apokatastasis ton panton*.¹¹⁴ Others will argue that that is not the case, and indeed it is strange for me that sometimes the argumentation of Barth goes in a different direction, as below:

Instead the negative picture of a shadowy existence of departed 'souls', we now have a picture of human existence in 'hell.' Hell means punishment of a very positive kind (...) The church of Jesus Christ [was] precluded from understanding man's existence in death merely as an existence in unwelcome but tolerable neutrality. On the contrary, they had to understand it positively as intolerable suffering.¹¹⁵

someone would finally be 'lost,' to the rubbish tip. But they cannot dispute one point: that Barth, in making this statement, is in total opposition to the Christian tradition, as well as - and this is of decisive importance - to the clear teaching of the New Testament.

Karl Barth, in his transference of the salvation offered to faith to unbelievers, departs from the ground of the biblical revelation, in order to draw a logical conclusion that he finds illuminating. But what is the result? First of all, the result is that the real decision takes place in the objective sphere alone, and not in the subjective sphere. The decision has thus been taken in Jesus Christ - for everyone. It does not matter whether they know it or not, or believe it or not. The main point is that they are saved. They resemble people who seem to be about to sink in a stormy sea. Yet in reality, they are not in a sea in which sinking is a possibility, but in shallow waters in which it is impossible to drown. Only they do not know this. Hence the transition from unbelief to faith is not a transition from 'being lost' to 'being saved.' This transition cannot happen, as it is no longer possible to be lost."

(See Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God: Dogmatics*. London: Lutterworth Press, 1949, vol. 1, pp.347-351.)

¹¹³ See in: Everett F. Harrison, *et al.*, (eds), *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1960, p.359.

¹¹⁴ Cf. G. C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*. London: T. E. by H. R. Boer, Paternoster Press, 1956.

¹¹⁵ Barth *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, E.T., pp.602-603.

It is eye-opening to quote here Henri Blocher as he deals with humankind in its final state and comments on Barth's view: "We could similarly compare Karl Barth's view on man in the final state: his emphasis is that man shall exist eschatologically *as past*, 'one day he will only have been.'"¹¹⁶ But this, in our proposal, would apply only to the lost.¹¹⁷

John Cowell in a recent study defends Barth from the charges of G. C. Berkouwer:

How can it be valid for Barth to appeal to the freedom of God as a means of evading universalism when he has previously limited this freedom of God by the *a posteori* necessity for him to be self-consistent? The point made by critics such as G. C. Berkouwer is not that Barth's God is bound by some external necessity to save all men and women but that he is bound by this internal necessity of his self-consistent grace. From Berkouwer's perspective it is Barth's definition of God's freedom as the positive freedom to elect as distinct from the freedom to elect or not to elect which orientates his doctrine of Election towards universalism.¹¹⁸

The argumentation of Colwell against Berkouwer reminds me of the debate carried out by John Owen against Samuel Rutherford¹¹⁹ as we find there the same issue of God's sovereignty and freedom exercised in the atonement.¹²⁰ But I do not

¹¹⁶ Blocher quoting Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2, on p. 632.

¹¹⁷ See the study of Henri Blocher, 'Everlasting Punishment and the Problem of Evil' in Nigel M. de S. Cameron (ed.), *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, Papers presented at the Fourth Edinburgh Conference on Christian Dogmatics. Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press and Grand Rapids, USA: Baker Book House, 1992, p.309.

¹¹⁸ See the study of John Colwell, 'The Contemporaneity of the Divine Decision: Reflections on Barth's Denial of "Universalism"', in: *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, *op. cit.*, p.143.

¹¹⁹ John Owen responds to Rutherford's views on the matter as presented in Dr. Samuel Rutherford's book on *Providence*, in chapter 22. The detailed counter arguments of Dr. Owen can be found in volume ten of John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, Goold, William H. (ed.), reprinted edition. London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967, (first published by Johnstone & Hunter, 1850-53), Volume Ten: 'A Display of Arminianism, The Death of Death in the Death of Christ, Of the Death of Christ, A Dissertation on Divine Justice', chapter XVII ('Rutherford Reviewed'), pp.607-618.

¹²⁰ The whole debate centers on whether the punitory justice of God exists in Him by necessity of nature or freely, as God is sovereign and absolutely free in His nature. The former position is held by Owen, who argues that atonement was an absolute necessity so that God might satisfy his punitory justice while He shows mercy to the sinner. Rutherford held the other position, stressing the absolute freedom and sovereignty of God in practicing mercy to the sinner. "But it is impossible that a free action can impose a natural or physical necessity of

have the space here to reflect more on the topic.¹²¹ What remains important now is to ask again in what does the driving force of missions consist, since Barth at least spoke clearly about the need for the emphasis to be shifted from the *mission of the church* to the *mission of God*, to the *missio Dei*?

What remains then of the “driving force for missions” in Barth’s understanding of the New Testament? One can answer: the Great Commission. But, although

doing any thing upon God. (p.610.)” – Owen quotes Rutherford, and responds (p.615.): “With respect to absolute necessity, which excludes all liberty, perhaps this is true; but with respect to that necessity which we maintain, which admits of a concomitant liberty in acting, it is altogether without foundation.” And again (pp.617-618.) Owen concludes his arguments: “We may say that God hath revealed to us that the punishment due to every sin, from his right and by the rule of his justice, is eternal; nor could the thing in itself be otherwise, for the punishment of the finite and sinful creature could not otherwise make any compensation for the guilt of its sin. But as it is certain that God, in the first threatening, and in the curse of the law, observed a strict impartiality, and appointed not any kind of punishment but what, according to the rule of his justice, sin deserved; and as the apostle testifies, that ‘the righteous judgment of God is, that they who commit sin are worthy of death;’ and we acknowledge that death to be eternal, and that an injury done to God, infinite in respect of the object, could not be punished, in a subject in every respect finite, otherwise than by a punishment infinite in respect of duration; - that the continuation or suspension of this punishment, which it is just should be inflicted, does not undermine the divine liberty, we are bold to affirm, for it is not free to God to act justly or not.” The whole problem of God’s freedom, and the necessity of atonement related to his free grace concerned Barth greatly, even when he tried to transcend the contradictions emerging from the debates of supra- and infralapsarian views and, similarly when he made an impressive though debatable theological effort to transcend the stumbling doctrine of double predestination maintained wrongly (according to Barth!) by the Reformers. His solution, which stressed God’s supreme free grace in practicing mercy, seems close to that of Rutherford. But this cannot be discussed within the limits of this paper; it remains a problem for further research.

¹²¹ Although it would have not been without interest to check the arguments of another opponent of Barth in this matter, such as Cornelius Van Til who used the views of the existentialist philosopher Karl Jaspers to contradict in a hypothetical way Barth’s views:

“But suppose now that Jaspers should choose to reply to Barth. What would he say? He would only need to indicate that if Barth’s argument for the need of the primacy of grace is sound, then grace is no more grace. Grace would be a universal necessity. And this necessity itself would be meaningless unless it were taken as the correlative of the idea of chance. Or, otherwise stated, Jaspers could tell Barth that, in insisting on his *universality* of grace, he has lost its *sovereign* character.” See in Cornelius Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1962, p.443.

he has a notable exegetical exposition of it,¹²² in Barth's view it does not serve directly as the driving force for mission. Instead, Barth emphasizes the major role played by the Christological concentration of the gospel event. I must rather concur with Scott¹²³ that reconciliation, not the *koinonia* of the Trinity, must be the major motivation for missions in Barth's interpretation:

According to Barth, missions cannot be derived directly from Trinitarian theology.... The church participates in the reconciliation event, not in the councils of the Trinity, and *therefore* moves out in mission.... The driving force of missions should be reconciliation, the cross/resurrection event, not the threatening end of history and the urgent need to inform others of this before it is too late.¹²⁴

Yet, many following Barth tried to avoid the charge of 'Christo-monism' which was sometimes brought against him. Missiologists like Newbigin¹²⁵ argued that the driving force for missions cannot be reduced to the Christological concentration affirmed by Barth,¹²⁶ but rather that mission has to be interpreted in its whole

¹²² See his detailed work on: 'An Exegetical Study of Matthew 28:16-20' in Gerald H. Anderson, (ed.), *The Theology of Christian Mission*, Thomas Wieser, (trans.). London, SCM Press, 1961, pp.55-71.

¹²³ Scott, p.11.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Newbigin (himself a disciple of Barth) declares: "The mission of the Church is to be understood, can only be rightly understood, in terms of the trinitarian model." See in Lesslie J. E Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. London: SPCK and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989, p.118.

¹²⁶ Like Bosch, who is fully aware of the tensions created by the two different ecclesiologies as a result of differing understandings of the *missio Dei*. As Goheen clarified: "The term *missio Dei* was initially intended to move beyond an ecclesiocentric basis for mission by placing the church's calling within the context of the mission of the Triune God. Originally the *missio Dei* was interpreted Christologically: the Father sends the Son who in turn sends the church in the power of the Spirit. The church participates in the mission of God by continuing the mission of Christ. However, after Willingen the *missio Dei* concept gradually underwent modification (quoting: Rosin, 1972; and Bosch, 1991). The *missio Dei* is God's work that embraces both the church and the world. The focus of the *missio Dei* moved from Christ to the Spirit: 'this wider understanding of mission is expounded *pneumatologically* rather than christologically' (quoting Bosch, 1991, on p.391.)" (See in Goheen, "As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You," cf. on pp.157.)

Goheen also presents and contrasts Newbigin's Trinitarian view with the Trinitarian view of his opponent, Raiser, see pp.157-164.

Trinitarian aspect.¹²⁷ I can agree, yet with a small corrective remark: even the emphasis on the Trinitarian dimension was not enough,¹²⁸ because the eschatological imperative cannot be ignored. One has to remember that the eschatological motive played a decisive, if not the most decisive role historically in the launching of an unparalleled world missionary enterprise in the 19th century. It remains a fact, that Barth's Christological concentration, although it motivated missions in other ways, ruled out the eschatological *imperativus* for the undertaking of the missionary task, even as understood in the conservative amillenialist view of Reformed orthodoxy.¹²⁹

The Theological Definition of Mission and Its Relation to the Church

There are many classical definitions of mission, all of which can be summarized in three decisive elements: 1) the proclamation of the gospel; 2) ministry, as the expression of that gospel in serving love; and 3) fellowship, as the practice of the sent community. Mission is not merely a specialized task or enterprise, as every member of Christ's Body must be a partaker of it. No one is exempt from the missionary call.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Goheen states of Newbigin: "Newbigin has maintained the Christocentricity of the classical paradigm, but has expanded and deepened it into a Trinitarian theology." See in Goheen, *ibid.* pp.160-161.

¹²⁸ Although not in the sense that Raiser would argue: "Formal acknowledgement of belief in the Trinity has, of course, never been a problem in the ecumenical movement, particularly since the basis was expanded at the New Delhi assembly to include the Trinity. But the Trinitarian doxology does not yet necessarily progress beyond an understanding of the Trinity as a formal principle of salvation history, which remains none the less unchanged in its Christocentric orientation." See Konrad Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition: A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement*. Geneva: WCC Publications, English Translation, 1991, p.91.

¹²⁹ For a further critique of Barth's doctrine of reconciliation, see the theological works listed below:

Fred H Klooster, *The Significance of Barth's Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1961, especially pp.92-97.

Donald G Bloesch, *The Evangelical Renaissance*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing House, 1973, especially pp.98-100. See also David L. Mueller, *Karl Barth* Waco: Word Books, 1972, on p.147.

¹³⁰ Goheen referencing H. Lindsay.

The major debates concern *how* this task should be carried out. On the one hand there is the church-oriented view, and on the other, a more flexible view that does not emphasize the centrality of the Church. Those who hold to this latter view usually like to define themselves as gospel-oriented, but in practice end up with an institutional framework that places a mission body as a paternal substitution for the church, rather than the gospel.

In an attempt to understand the tension at the root of this issue, I also have to bear in mind the warnings of missiologists like Harold Fuller, who identified the church-oriented view with the holistic view of missionary enterprise:

A church-centered view can be essentially a holistic view, which has its advantages and its disadvantages. If the church is God's central purpose, and if in order to fulfill God's purpose it should be organizationally one, then there is no need for separate mission organizations within or outside it. This can give rise to the concept that "all is mission" - with the danger that "nothing is mission" because it is no one's special concern. A holistic view would be in keeping with oriental thought patterns.¹³¹

Simply examining the advantages and disadvantages of a church-centered view can be of very practical use, but that still does not offer the systematic theologian biblical or theological justification in itself. Although the argument of Fuller can provide us with a starting point, as he goes on to say, "If 'all is mission' then there is no need for specific evangelism. 'Presence' replaces 'proclamation.'"¹³² When presence replaces proclamation, there is a sense in which the dynamics of mission is lost. This reminds us of Brunner's famous comparison, "the church lives by mission as fire lives by burning;" churches, in their inclination to protect the status quo, often consider themselves to be the ultimate end of mission. This was happening in the Hungarian Reformed Church in Transylvania between the two World Wars, as already was and will be demonstrated in the following chapters. Strikingly, even modern Roman Catholic theologians question this virtually "Catholic" concept of the church as the ultimate end of mission. As Adrian Hastings wrote:

¹³¹ Harold W. Fuller, *Mission-Church Dynamics: How to Change Bicultural Tensions into Dynamic Missionary Outreach*. Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 1980, p.76.

¹³² Ibid.

It is, therefore, somewhat misleading to say that the Church has a mission, as if the existence of the Church comes first. In truth it is because of the mission that there is a Church; the Church is the servant and expression of this mission. The mission consequently dictates the nature of the Church and in so far as the Church fails to live up to the demands of mission, it is effectively failing to be Church. In this perspective it is quite misleading to say that the purpose of the mission is the expansion of the Church; in the fullest sense of mission the Church cannot possibly be its end. Rather is the Church called into being by mission for the sake of salvation.¹³³

On the whole, Barth has a positive attitude toward parachurch societies and organizations (*"sodalities"*) and does not present any theological argument against their existence. In contrast to those who contend that the multiplicity of Christian organizations is schismatic in the body of Christ, Barth maintains that "multiplicity has nothing whatever to do with the sinful corruption of Christians."¹³⁴ As Scott observes, Barth

sees this plurality as proper and even indispensable to the Christian community's ministry. Therefore the community "can and should develop special working fellowships to which all Christians cannot and will not necessarily belong, but in which... a particular service is rendered."¹³⁵

In the case of these special working fellowships, Barth notes: a) that care must be taken to base their formation on divine gifts rather than self-will; b) that these groups should operate within the general framework of the community and not be disruptive; and c) that they be genuine working fellowships, not just organizations designed to gratify personal needs.¹³⁶ According to Barth, we may believe that sodalities with these particular characteristics, "do not arrive accidentally or capriciously, nor are they discovered and established by individuals for reasons of practical convenience. On the contrary, they are the works of God, of Jesus Christ, of the Holy Spirit."¹³⁷ What is relevant for us is that Barth leaves open the question of whether the cause of missions should continue to be executed by

¹³³ Adrian Hastings, 'Mission,' in Karl Rahner (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Theology*. Kent: Burns & Oates, 1975, p.968.

¹³⁴ See Barth, Karl *Church Dogmatics*, IV, book 3, 2nd half, Bromiley (trans.), p.855.

¹³⁵ Scott quoting Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/3, p.856.

¹³⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, p.857.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

sodalities, or whether the latter should be incorporated into the regular ministry of the organized churches; we are left with a situation where “good reasons have been advanced on both sides.”¹³⁸

In answer to Anderson's challenge to evangelical theology quoted above, we might now reply with Barth, as he insists that the daughter churches resulting from the missionary work might still be mature if

the goal of the missionary work of the community [is] to attest to the heathen the work and Word of God who, as He has created them by His call, wills to make them too His witnesses, and to equip them as such (...) The purpose of missions is to make themselves superfluous by the establishment of new missions carried on by the former heathen.¹³⁹

Does this mean that mission agencies according to Barth should become, instead of church-planting sodalities, sodality-planting sodalities? Or does this mean that sodalities should become church-planting sodalities, though they would retain their sodality character independent from modality? Or should they be sodalities working together with the modality as both church- and sodality-planting sodalities? These are questions which I will have to consider and deal with later.

In this chapter I first evaluated the influence exerted by Barth and neo-orthodoxy on the Transylvanians, then pointed to the resulting contradictions between their views on ecclesiology and on missiology in the setting of the neo-Kantian philosophical and Barthian theological background. I focused on the emerging ecclesiological and missiological dilemmas, both at home and abroad, in the light of the teaching of the respected mentor of the Transylvanians, Karl Barth. I posed the modality versus sodality dilemma in order to better understand the Transylvanians in their search for a more effective “driving force” for the missionary enterprise, before analyzing their theological motivations against the backdrop of Barth's teaching on the problem. Then I demonstrated that the Barthian theologians of Transylvania were not truly “Barthians” in many respects, especially in their missiology and ecclesiology.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.* p. 25.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* p. 876.

On a world wide level there were many examples offered to the Transylvanians. One can distinguish at least four options:¹⁴⁰ one, sodalities were working completely independently and separately from modality (i.e., from the denominations); two, or they were living apart together; three, or they were growing nearer; or four, they were evidently working together. As to which of the above models can be considered most justified theologically, representing the biblical paradigm, I will examine in the next chapter. I will also analyze how these models were regarded both by the official church leadership and by the leaders of the independent mission movement. Finally, I will discuss to what extent this Barthian theological framework could exercise any radical, lasting effect on the thinking of the Transylvanian theologians when they dealt with missiological and ecclesiological issues, while claiming to follow ‘dialectical theology,’ represented mostly for them by Barth.

¹⁴⁰ I am grateful to Rev. Dick Looijen, the director of home missions (IZB), Netherlands, who offered me this clear classification and challenged us with his insightful lecture with the title *The Relationship Between City Missions and Church*, delivered in London, at the conference of the European Association of Urban Missions, September 27-30, 2004.

Chapter Five

Modality versus Sodality

Theological perception of missions in the TRC

I now want to consider the theological perception of missions in the interbellum period of the Hungarian Reformed Church of Transylvania in the light of Peter Back's dictum that "missiology must essentially be robustly theological."¹ If missiology does not become "robustly theological" in the orientation of the TRC, then it cannot have any significant influence on the ecclesiology of the TRC either.² If theology of missions could not exercise a robust theological influence on the theology of the church, then the church could not become a missional church in practice. This is what actually happened in the TRC, which means that we might not be able strictly to speak of the existence of a real church at all or more biblically as developed by reformed theology. This challenges the TRC as a denomination, whether it could be considered part of the universal body of Christ or not, or at least to what extent it can be said that it could. As we move closer to our subject, we see that the theological milieu of the early 1920s was increasingly focused on the examination of missionary activity within the church. However, although the topic was debated regularly, there was still a lack of theological clarity arising from a failure to define adequately the terms used. The classical tripartite analysis of missions, such as the Dutch theologian Voethius' definition of the purpose of any mission as being the conversion of the heathen, the establishment of the church, and the glorification and manifestation of divine grace,³ was often

¹ Peter Back, *Principles of Reformed Mission Ministry: An Organizational and Exegetical Study*. UK: Tentmaker Publications, 1999, p.6.

² If the mission practice of the TRC could be shown to be not just one *function* but also the *nature* of the church in actuality, then one must concede that the theology of mission which they developed was "robust" indeed.

³ See William H. Crane in *International Review of Mission* Vol. LVIII, Nr. 30 (April 1969): pp.141-144.

forgotten. Nevertheless, theologians were still debating how the Church could be a real church⁴ and how the glory of God could be achieved through missions, as Voethius demanded. Their preoccupation was with the areas of both *ecclesiology* and *missiology*.

R. B. Kuiper⁵ follows the model of Voethius in trying to clarify the biblical approach to mission work, stressing that the aim is singular although understood in a three-fold way: the ultimate aim must be the glory of God to which the conversion of the heathen and the establishment of the Church contribute. According to R. Rodgers' recent study, "None of these elements may be divorced from the others without damage to the overall aim. There is a progression of thought though a practical division is impossible."⁶ Rodgers goes on to assert: "As the Evangelical sees it, the salvation of individual souls leads to the establishment of the Church and together these issue in the glory of God," quoting E. H. Palmer⁷ in support of this idea. We will consider whether this was an arbitrary or reductionist view in an examination of the crucial debate between Dr Sándor Makkai, a remarkable Transylvanian theologian, and Dr János Victor, a professor of systematic theology in Budapest. For these men, the question at stake was whether the salvation of individuals leads to the establishment of the church as Rodgers and others claim, or whether the process is significantly more complex. In order to carefully appraise the positions of Makkai and Victor, we must consider Karl Barth's theology of missions for this exercised considerable influence on their thinking, even though they were to some extent critical of his views. The emergence of the dynamic neo-orthodox theology promised much, and Makkai and Victor were unable to react to Barth in a sufficiently critical way. Transylvanian theologians like Sándor Tavaszy and Lajos Imre first hailed Barth; Makkai was

⁴ By 'real' church, I mean an evangelizing and missionary church, as I pointed to above. If the church's very nature is mission then the church is a real church and not just a mirage or utopia of an ecclesial idealism.

⁵ In., R. B. Kuiper, *God-Centred Evangelism, A Presentation of the Scriptural Theology of Evangelism*. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994, cf. chapter 9.

⁶ Robert Rodgers, 'Mission,' in: "Menjetek el szerte ez egész világba," *Tanulmányok Szabó Dániel DrH.c. tiszteletére*, 65. születésnapja alkalmából (Go into all the World." Essays in Honour of Dr Dániel Szabó H.C. on the occasion of his 65th birthday), Sárospatak: 1998, see his study on pp.74–99.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.74., Cf. *loc. cit.*, E.H. Palmer, *The Holy Spirit*, pp.78–86, 141–151.

more reserved.⁸ Yet, by the early 1940s, Barth's influence had also penetrated Hungary, thanks to the mediation and influence of the Transylvanians. His ideas were seen as a genuine revival of orthodox Calvinism, which promised fresh motivations that many hoped would lead to the renewal of the Church. János Victor, too, embraced many aspects of Barth's teaching.

The Makkai-Victor Debate

Makkai, like Imre, was influenced by Dr. László Ravasz, who left Transylvania in 1921 for Budapest, having been invited to become the bishop of the Danube Church District there. Ravasz's insights were very important to Makkai, as Ravasz was the first church leader who committed himself "to 'churchinize' the mission and 'missionize' the church." Makkai published his major work on mission and ecclesiology under the title, *The Mission Work of the Church* (*Az egyház missziói munkája*) in 1938.⁹ Three years later, Dr János Victor critiqued his ideas in an article entitled, 'What is "Mission Work"?' (*Mi a "missziói munka?"*) in the journal *Református Világ szemle*. Makkai replied and Victor responded, defending his position. So began one of the most famous debates that would help to clarify the theological definition of mission in the church.

Victor's article is a careful attempt to give an adequate interpretation of the word "mission," first in a broad, then in a specific, biblical sense: "If we apply the term [of mission], going beyond the immanent circle of human life, the notion of 'mission' becomes characteristically a Christian notion."¹⁰ Victor, like Makkai, was also influenced by the Ravasz program of "churchinizing" mission and "missionizing" the church. The Transylvanian-born Ravasz was still influential in

⁸ Makkai was less liberal at the beginning than Tavaszy and Imre, so at first he took a more Calvinist-traditionalist, although not altogether orthodox, line. He tried to criticize Tavaszy's and Imre's enthusiasm for Barth, emphasizing that in fact what Barth stood for is the same as what historical Calvinism already confessed. Thus, there was no need to look for a more fashionable, modern theologian to maintain the reformed doctrines. It was only later that some of these theologians realized that Barth at many points qualified the teaching of the reformers and could not be considered strictly orthodox.

⁹ Sándor Makkai, *Az egyház missziói munkája* (*The Mission Work of the Church*. Budapest: 1938.

¹⁰ János Victor, 'Mi a "missziói munka?"' ('What is "Mission Work"?') *Református Világ szemle* Vol. 10, Nr.1 (January 1, 1941): p.14.

Transylvania, even after his departure to Budapest in the early twenties. Dr A.M. Kool is right, when she asserts: “It is no coincidence that especially in Transylvania, where the Hungarian Reformed Church lived in a minority position, the reflection on the mission task of the Church had been the most significant.”¹¹

It is no wonder that the effect of the Treaty of Trianon and the severing of the Reformed Church from the mother church of Hungary led indirectly to a misinterpretation of the church’s mission. Many church leaders in the TRC would consider the inherent or apparent, real or assumed mandate(s) of the church, whether spiritual or not, i.e. even if cultural, political or social, as *the* real mission of the church, rather than the evidently biblical mission demand set for the Church toward the evangelization of the world. It remains for us to evaluate carefully whether Kool’s remarks on the situation in Hungary after World War I can also fit the Transylvanian situation:

Influenced by...Trianon, the [Hungarian] context became a dominant factor not only in church life as such, but also in the concept of mission. In the search for a Reformed concept of mission, which would fit the Hungarian situation, the Hungarian situation became dominant, over the dogmatic and biblical contents.¹²

We need to investigate whether Kool is correct to speak critically of the “special’ Hungarian” concept of mission (see on p.345), as she concludes:

...This might explain for the relatively great influence of Transylvanian Reformed theology (Dezső László, Sándor Tavaszy, Lajos Imre, Jenő Horváth) in Hungarian missiology – which was still in its infancy anyway. [...] Thus, no international correction and reinforcement of the biblical contents could take place, which left the Hungarian concept “isolated,” with weak contents and a lack of dynamism.¹³

The “relatively great influence of Transylvanian Reformed Theology” refers, *par excellence* to the self-defensive nature of the Hungarian church in the minority context. Unfortunately the mission concept shaped under the constraints of a survival instinct to preserve Hungarian religious tradition and culture had an effect influencing the “specific Hungarian concept of mission” far beyond Transylvania. Even in the mother country, where the Hungarian reformed churches did

¹¹ Kool, see chapter 6.1.3., esp. pp. 328-340.

¹² *Ibid.* p.346.

¹³ *Ibid.*

not wrestle with being a minority, they shared in the post-Trianon trauma because of their Hungarian identity.

The refusal of any “alien” or “not specifically Hungarian” concept of mission had a natural and yet tragic effect: it did not allow room for checking the concept against the theological thinking of the world wide reformed community. Any differing concept from their own was considered suspicious¹⁴ *ab ovo*, although it might be derived from the Scriptures and despite the fact that the Hungarian reformed churches still claimed formally that the Scriptures are absolutely authoritative in the dogmatic orientation of the church’s teaching. This is what Kool has called the process of “over-contextualization” of missions, when speaking of “the Hungarian context becoming a dominant factor not only in church life as such, but also in the concept of mission.”¹⁵ To this confused situation Victor reacted critically; he refused a broadening of the mission concept which would produce a very vague understanding of it, in line with missiologists like Stephen Neill: “if everything is mission, nothing is mission.”¹⁶ At this point Victor would agree with Neill, yet the dilemma remains: if mission is not everything, if it is not the overarching call of the Church, moreover if it is not the *very essence* of the Church,

¹⁴ “As we search for the reasons this phenomenon of the all-compassing unique Hungarian concept of mission to develop we observe that non-Hungarian concepts, either Anglo-Saxon, German or Dutch, were rejected for weak theological arguments. In general this ‘special’ Hungarian concept was considered to be a real indigenous contextualized mission concept, closely linked to the Hungarian situation, whereas those based on the English or German concepts were felt to be alien. This attitude brought both Hungary and Transylvania in an isolated situation. By ‘giving’ the Hungarian context such an important position, the discussions taking place abroad were considered of little relevance to the Hungarian situation and therefore often rejected.” (See in Kool, *ibid.* p.345.) Kool even brings up the example of Dr. Sebestyén, the Hungarian follower of Abraham Kuyper, who tried to narrow down the ever broadening concept of mission to the narrower biblical sense. Although he wanted to involve the church in mission work rather than the societies, he was not listened to simply because he referred to the Dutch theological orientation in many of his arguments.

¹⁵ In this regard see the description: “In the search for a Reformed concept of mission, which would fit the Hungarian situation, the Hungarian situation became dominant, over the dogmatic and biblical contents.” (See in Kool, *ibid.* p.346.)

¹⁶ Quoted in Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 511.

“One of the negative results has been the tendency to define mission too broadly – which prompted Neill to formulate his famous adage, ‘If everything is mission, nothing is mission,’ and Freytag to refer to ‘the specter of panmissionism’.”

then the Church ceases to remain the Church.¹⁷ Paradoxically speaking, *esse ecclesiae est missio*, the church's very essence or being *is* mission. In other words, mission does not exist *for the church*; rather the church exists *in order and for the sake of mission*.¹⁸ Bosch tried to both state, and possibly to solve, the dilemma of the sodality versus modality problem by throwing the blame on the persisting phenomenon of the emerging *ecclesiola* within the *ecclesia*, a centuries old 'malfunction' of the church:

Often one distinguished between the 'true church' – the *ecclesiola* or little church – within the *ecclesia*, the large and nominal church; this *ecclesiola*, not the official church, tended to be viewed as the true bearer of mission. Here there was even less appreciation for the idea of the church as the bearer of mission. The 'voluntary principle' was widely followed. Groups of individuals – sometimes members of one denomination, sometimes devout believers from a variety of denominations – banded together in missionary societies which they regarded as the bearers of mission.¹⁹

I question how a nominal majority ("the large and nominal church") in the church can be expected to be the true bearer of mission, when this majority must itself first be brought by evangelism and mission from nominalism to confessional commitment. Only then can it commit itself for mission *per se*. This was the big dilemma in the case of the TRC. There the *ecclesiola*-type of CE movement tried to awaken the nominal majority to its missionary calling, but for decades they encountered strong opposition from the larger majority of nominal members and church leadership. And yet I still agree with Bosch that the demand for a

¹⁷ Victor could agree with Makkai that mission must be the mission of the church, but without Makkai's broadened view: not *everything* the church does is and should be called mission.

¹⁸ This means that mission is and must be for the sake of the *missio Dei* and not for the sake of any mission of any church or denomination, i.e. not for the sake of the *missio ecclesiae*. This raised the question of who is the *subject* and who is the *object* of biblical mission. Is God, the Church, or the individual the subject of mission? Similarly, are those inside the Church or outside the object of mission? And when speaking of those inside and outside the Church, how do we define the Church, i.e. where is the boundary that distinguishes the covenant people of God? Does the emanation of the Christian witness cross the boundary of the Church, of the Kingdom of God, or of a certain and so-called "Christian nation?" Is there still a point in speaking of a *corpus Christianorum*? These questions were raised in Victor's debate with Makkai. In this regard at least, the Transylvanian theologians of the 1940s all shared the view of Barth who pointed to God by insisting that mission is and must be the *missio Dei*.

¹⁹ See in: Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p.369.

missionary church must be emphasized, and with the idea that the church as a whole must be the bearer of mission. Nevertheless, I do not see a realistic description of the state of a particular church as reflecting “less appreciation for the idea of the church as the bearer of mission.” It is theological confusion when one swaps the missionary *dimension* of the church with its missionary *intention*, and it is a neo-Kantian failure to confuse the “ought to be” state of the church with the biblical realism of describing what the church actually is. Makkai understood to some degree that mission, as stated above, does not exist for the church but rather the church exists in order and for the sake of mission. I think Victor came closer to grasping it by introducing a dogmatic concept in his attempt to define mission. He makes a distinction between mission in the broader and limited senses, based on distinctive Calvinistic teaching about *gratia universalis* and *gratia specialis*, but fails to complete the whole picture with a systematic doctrine concerning the reality of the Church-world relationship. In fairness to Victor, we note that his attempt was good enough *to initiate a systematic and theological approach* in trying to define the concept of mission. Even Makkai acknowledged this effort despite his conclusion that Victor in the end fails to give a proper theological perspective in his attempt to reach a clear definition of mission. Makkai insisted that the theological and biblical definition was still missing in their debate, and that it had to be the demanding theological priority of any further discussion in the future.²⁰

What merit was there in Victor’s attempt - although with mixed results²¹ - to ground the concept of mission on a theological basis formulated on the doctrine

²⁰ Makkai, ‘Mi a “missziói munka?”’ (What Is “Mission Work?”), *op. cit.*, see pp.31 and especially p.34:

“In an ultimate analysis, the problem is there, that János Victor examined mission not on a theological ground, but first of all from a practical view and so he did not give a theological interpretation of it.” We dare to say in return that Makkai failed to do the same. His approach also proved to be only a practical one; his concept was determined by the practical interests of the visible church structure, rather than becoming, as he would have wished, a theological (and systematic) clarification.

²¹ Victor in his answer: ‘A “missziói munka” teológiájához’ (To the Theology of “Mission Work”) *Theologiai Szemle* Nr.2 (1941): 84-99, appreciates Makkai’s attempt to set as his goal the theological clarification of the mission concept. But he also declares that: “...we would not find Sándor Makkai’s doctrine of ‘missions’ a valid one, because he himself could not keep strictly to the rightly set theological goal. The attempt to found his thesis on

of common and particular grace? First of all, he tried to limit mission from other general “missions” (in reality, mandates) of the church and specify its scope in keeping with the distinction between the *gratia specialis* and *universalis*. He clearly speaks of the Christian character of a divine mission in contrast with any “human mission:”

...the unbeliever can speak of “mission” only if this means the affairs of humans in and amongst themselves. But beyond this, there is only the believer, i.e. the person who falls under the dominion of the Word, who can speak of “mission.” If we apply the term [of mission], going beyond the immanent circle of human life, the notion of ‘mission’ becomes characteristically a Christian notion.”²²

But this distinction remains problematic and too general, given the fact that, as Victor rightly observed, in the light of the Word everything becomes “mission” for the believer. As he has to render his every activity under the will of God, so everything will be commissioned by God in the Christian's life. There is a mandate for all of life and action commissioned to us by God's will; this is the classical definition of the divine calling of a Christian in every sphere of this earthly life. Victor's understanding of *gratia universalis* clearly falls in line with these “callings.” The problem is that even Victor had to admit that “the line of distinction in reality cannot be drawn boldly, as the activities of *gratia universalis* and of *gratia specialis* are mutually interwoven with each other.”²³ Thus Victor is constrained to conclude that “...in relative terms the individual Christian believer's mission first of all is taking place in the sphere of *gratia universalis*, but the Church's in the sphere of *gratia specialis*.”²⁴

But is the theoretical distinction between the individual Christian and the Church as a whole in this context valid or is it only “theoretical?” In a practical

the Word succeeded only in appearance: the foundation cannot hold the building on which it was built.” (see p.86.)

²² In Hungarian this reads:

“Úgy áll tehát a dolog, hogy ‘misszióról’ a hitetlen ember voltaképpen csak akkor beszélhet, ha embereknek egymásközötti ügyéről van szó. Ezen túlmenően pedig csak a hívő, vagyis az Ige uralma alatt álló ember beszélhet ‘misszióról’. Az emberi élet immanens körén túl vitt vonatkozásban a ‘misszió’ fogalma jellegzetesen keresztyén fogalom.”

In Victor, ‘Mi a “missziói munka?”’ (What Is “Mission Work?”), *op. cit.*, p.14.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.15.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

sense there is no such entity as the church as a whole, except in strict ecclesiological terms, and no such entity as an individual Christian, except in strict soteriological terms. Moreover, the interwoven nature of the practical realities denoted by these terms makes the application even more difficult in the sociological terms of the respective responsibilities of the Christian individual and the Christian community. This difference from the sociological perspective concerns how the individual Christian can represent the whole church; from the theological perspective, it concerns how the same individual Christian can be regarded as a member of the Body of Christ, of the Invisible Church. The theological *empiria* differs from that of the sociological or cultural in setting the agenda of its human realm. This always carries the risk of over-contextualizing (see Kool's interpretation above where politics and national identity issues are said to over-ride the dogmatic orientation and self-interpretation of the church) the mission field *empiria* at the expense of remembering its biblical foundation. Kool observes:

The confusion in the discussion on the mission concept in the early 1940s focused on two issues. The main question seems to be what the nature of mission work is, but closely linked to this issue was a probably more fundamental issue, that of the nature of the church. Is there any element in the church which is not in need of mission work?²⁵

For the above reasons, I agree with Dr. Károly Fekete, jr. who in his comments on Makkai's 1938 *The Mission Work of the Church*, (which was criticized by Victor) describes it as being more an ecclesiological rather than a missiological study:

Concerning the genre of the book, *The Mission Work of the Church* is an ecclesiology (...) At the presentation of Makkai's work it is important to make clear that it's genre *is not missiological*. This is the reason why it does not start either with the exploration of the biblical-theological roots of mission or with the etymological examination of the word (mission) in itself, but being an ecclesiology, in the introduction it presents the historical view of the church starting from the religious historical archetype about her, through the view of the church found in the Scriptures, then continuing through the ages of church history up to the age of his time.²⁶

²⁵ Kool, p.347.

²⁶ Károly Fekete, jr., Makkai Sándor gyakorlati teológiai munkássága (The Work of Sándor Makkai in Practical Theology). Debrecen: 1997, (Dissertationes Theologicae Nr. 3.), pp.90-92.

If Fekete is correct in his defense of Makkai, I suggest that Makkai himself is wrong when he defends his work as missiology rather than ecclesiology in his response to Victor. Although Fekete argued that Makkai was not writing a missiology, he cannot avoid the fact that Makkai intended to write his book as missiology rather than as an ecclesiology. This intention is worded not just in the title of his book but in the content too and is as explicit as it was in the case of the other Transylvanian theologian, Jenő Horváth, who composed his own missiology with the title: *The Essence of Foreign Mission*, just two years earlier in 1936. On the other hand, if we compare Fekete's views with those of Dezső László's,²⁷ we realize that in László's opinion even the etymological analysis would not guarantee a correct understanding of the mission concept. This is evident when László, criticizing Horváth's work, states:

In the Bible, neither the word mission or the word home mission can be found. (...) First of all, let us pin down that in the Greek Bible two words, the Greek verbs *apostelo* and *pempo* are serving as the root of the Hungarian verb "I send." When the Bible uses these two verbs, it applies them equally to express the sending of Jesus, of the Holy Spirit, the angels, the apostles, and generally to express the sending of [ordinary] people and worldly officers as well. This kind of sending in Latin is *missio*, so it doesn't simply fit either the apostles or their descendents today, the so called missionaries; nor does it refer exclusively to their mission type of work, but to all of their activity.²⁸

Fekete would have agreed with Kool that the one-sided emphasis of the "congregational mission" (the special term of Makkai) within the church itself can be done only at the expense of ignoring the immediate commandment given in the Great Commission to the church to exercise foreign mission ("go into all the world..."), and thus the congregation itself becomes the object of mission. In this way the perspective of "all nations:" disappears. Yet Fekete sees the root of the tension in something else, thus differing from Kool's interpretation:

In our opinion the real tension was not between the "congregational mission" set against foreign mission, but rather between the champions of home mission and

²⁷ Dezső László was an important Transylvanian missiologist who became the leader of the Office of Missions of the Transylvanian Church District from January 1950.

²⁸ László, 'A belmisszió alapkérdései,' (The Basic Questions of Home Missions), *op.cit.*, pp.462-463.

the official church becoming aware of her mission duty. The strategic missionary goals of Makkai offered an easy opportunity for abuse, so that the church led mission could become an organ of control for the political goals of the [Communist] state. This could literally happen with the introduction of the Mission Statute Orders of 1951 [*in Hungary*].²⁹

In a way, the same sad events happened in Transylvania after its 1947 re-annexation to Romania and the coming to power of the Communists.³⁰ The very danger that both Imre and Makkai wanted to avoid from the beginning occurred. Ironically and tragically, the attempt to *integrate* mission and make it possible for mission to be *orchestrated and supervised* by the official leadership of the Reformed Church ended in *centralization*. This, in turn, made possible the easy suppression and, finally, the *total abolition* of any mission work under Communist rule. To this, the official leadership of the church surrendered themselves in a compromising collaboration.

Two Opposite Missiological Models

I rely partly here on Harvie M. Conn's summary of the question in his unpublished notes³¹ when trying to encounter the dilemma that we face here, because I have found his insights most helpful for analyzing the sodality versus modality dilemma as it appears in the case of the TRC. The question arises as to what are the

²⁹ Fekete, jr, p.102.

³⁰ This re-annexation was "necessary" because in 1940 the German and Italian powers had decreed that a portion of Transylvania be given back to Hungary. (Out of 103,093 sq km annexed by the Treaty of Trianon, 43,104 sq km was given back. 1.34 million Hungarian were living in that re-annexed portion.) In fact, the Romanian army re-occupied the area as early as September 12, 1944 with the approval of Stalin. It wasn't until February 10, 1947 that the boundaries of the 1920 Treaty of Trianon were re-established.

³¹ I am grateful to the Canadian missiologist, Dr. Michael Goheen, who introduced me to the thoughts of his professor, Dr. Harvie M. Conn. I am also grateful to Dr. Conn who allowed me to quote from his class notes. However, I am using his material only in an indirect way, or as a basic guidance, trying to fit the general assumptions he makes to the Transylvanian reality. The original idea in Conn's notes was a comparison of the Faith Missions and Home (sending) Churches. I am following his example but set in the Transylvanian context with its special particularities. See the unpublished study: *How We Got Where We Are: The History of the World Mission of the Church*, summarized by Harvie M. Conn, PT 343 Church Mission and Ministry, Westminster Theological Seminary, February, 1983, pp. 14-16.

relative merits and demerits of the Protestant para-church independent mission movements, represented primarily by the revivalist Evangelical Union (EU), or Christian Endeavour Bethany Union (CE), and the Covenant of Evangelical Workers of Transylvania (CEWT), in contrast with church missions, that is, the home mission movement of the official church? I want now to quote the table below from Conn's own notes and will then comment on his points section by section:

A. Arguments in favor of denominational/modality missions (by its advocates):

1. The church is the only institution on earth, which is of divine origin. Societies by contrast are the work of man. Missions, biblically speaking, is clearly the work of the church.
2. The societies draw attention away from the church. They are a menace to the unique function of the church, financially and biblically.
3. The society does not wish to be a church. Yet it plants a church. What they bypass on the home front they plant on the mission field.
4. The idea of many para-ecclesiastical boards, that of founding an "*ecclesia in ecclesia*," the true church inside the church, is not theologically stable. The tension between what a church is and what it ought to be cannot be resolved by a society that bypasses reality and divine intention.
5. To remove the missionary task from the church often removes also the missionary dimension of that church. The church then slips into a ghetto mentality.
6. Ralph Winter has popularized the argument that the missionary task is not completed when a young church has come into being. For the sake of effective proclamation of the gospel, a missionary society ought also to come into being among members of the so-called younger church.
7. There was a time when para-ecclesiastical societies had a right to exist. But this is not true today, at least in terms of new societies. The establishing of such societies was an emergency solution because the churches were mission-less and introverted. We should not make a virtue or biblical necessity out of historical exigency.

B. Arguments in favor of faith missions/sodalities (by its advocates):

1. History justifies for [sic] the “faith mission” approach. These societies arose because of the lukewarm-ness and indifference of the churches [to mission]. They reached into areas where the established church did not go, and often did not care to go.
2. In practice the church rarely undertakes missionary work. The older and more established a denomination becomes the more likely it will concentrate on self-growth and internal development.
3. Where they do indeed proceed to missions, bureaucracy and officialdom rule. Ralph Winter compares the problem to the difference between prophets and politicians. The prophet launches out and his voluntary followers constitute potentially a sodality. Politicians, on the other hand, must watch the people who constitute the fixed modality. The politician can only suggest what he hopes the majority will approve.
4. The younger churches, which are planted in this way, are forced into the same corset as the “mother.” The same cumbersome machinery, which operates on the home-front is exported to the mission field - from the style of church buildings to the formulation of the creeds. Often in the mission society the missionary becomes Chinese for the Chinese. In the many ecclesiastical missions the Chinese must rather on conversion become American before they can be Chinese Christians.
5. The mission societies are more adaptable and imaginative. Further, the missionaries can identify themselves more easily with a small organization than with a massive, formless church.
6. The faith mission exists as a testimony to the catholicity of the Bible. Denominations are no more church in this sense than the faith mission. Given the existence of one church, the faith mission would then be a church mission. Denominationalism is no more biblical than para-ecclesiastical agencies.

Now I want to evaluate critically the above presented arguments in order to place the TRC's dilemmas in this wider picture. First, I will explore the arguments in favor of the modality mission concept and will show how it was interpreted and reflected in the case of the TRC. Second, I will explore the arguments in favor of

missions carried out by sodalities and compare that with the particular Transylvanian situation.

A. Arguments in favor of denominational/modality missions (by its advocates)

1. *The church is the only institution on earth, which is of divine origin. Societies by contrast are the work of man. Missions, biblically speaking, is clearly the work of the church.*

Can we draw such a sharp contrast between the church and societies and declare the church as being divine? Even if we accept that it is, can we conclude that the church's institution is divine? I have five counter arguments to add to the questions posed above:

- 1) Can the supposed divine origin of the church in itself justify everything that we see in the church? Can any supposed divine origin guarantee that the church will remain divine and stay unspoilt by "the work of man?" Moreover, can it avoid being influenced by human sins? The reformed creeds warn that there is no divine work which cannot be polluted by the sin of man and by the sinful work of humankind.³² Makkai, for example, referred to the Heidelberg Catechism when he criticized the church view which regarded its institutional or denominational forms as altogether divine or free from "the work of man," i.e. the sinfulness of man.³³

³² Conn obviously is quoting here a theological theorem and thus the meaning of the notion "the work of man" refers to the very opposite of an uncompromising statement often underlining the theology of God's sheer grace and the divine sovereignty of that grace; as a contrast it would point to the willing and accomplishing sovereign humanity as is in view here and as such it cannot accompany God's sheer grace. It is decisive for those in line with reformed theology to avoid any kind of *synergism*, i.e., humans working together by their own effort with God and with his grace. Hence the theological usage of the Greek word: *synergism*, or working together, co-working.

³³ "The church is not an institution or simply a denomination. These are just its temporal modes of existence. The church itself is not a closed, static, institution-like reality, but the ever dynamic army of Christ's witnesses expanding to the utmost ends of the earth. That is how the Heidelberg Catechism presents it also: as *ecclesia militans...*," etc.
See in Sándor Makkai, *Szolgálatom, Teológiai önéletrajz, 1944* (*My Ministry, A Theological Autobiography - 1944*). Budapest: A Református Egyház Zsinati Irodája Sajtóosztályának kiadványa, 1990, p.118. Yet it was only at the end of Makkai's ministry as Bishop that he boldly insisted, "out of an official, institutional character the church must turn toward a spiritual,

- 2) By contrast, can we declare that the societies are, or can be regarded as being, unmixed and clearly just the work of men? Can this be credibly sustained? Can nothing divine be found in their origins? This leads me to the next problem:
- 3) Can we exclude the possibility of any divine initiation in the emergence of the sodalities? I might disagree with Dr. Walls, yet admit that in connection with this first point of Conn's there is some truth in his caricature when he states:

There never was a *theology* of the voluntary society. The voluntary society is one of God's theological jokes, whereby he makes tender mockery of his people when they take themselves too seriously. The men of high theological and ecclesiastical principle were often the enemies of the missionary movement. (*italics by the author*)³⁴

Although there never was, is it true that there never can be a theology of the voluntary society? I have no intention here of adding more to the Establishment versus Voluntary Principle debate, yet I have to disagree with Walls that there was and is not any attempt to create a theology of voluntary principle. Although this leads beyond the limits of my thesis, I observe here that since the early 17th century Presbyterian versus Independent Congregational theological debates which resulted in many interpretations all of which would prove that every kind of church government structure, no matter what its theological approach, is vulnerable to varying kinds of ecclesiastical abuse. This kind of abuse still happens in the name of the accepted and traditionally maintained church structures, against the cause of missions. However, to conclude that the institutionalized structures of church government in themselves are a hindrance to missions would be

missional character." See in his last speech before the General Assembly, quoted also in Sándor Makkai, 'Makkai Sándor püspök búcsúszószata egyházához,' in *Nem lehet. A kisebbségi sors vitája (It is Impossible, The Debate On the Fate of Minority)*, Péter Válogatta Cseke és Gusztáv Molnár (eds.), Budapest: Héttorony Könyvkiadó, Limes könyvek, 1989. In Hungarian the whole argument reads:

"Az egyház nem intézmény és nem felekezet, ezek csak idői létmódjai, ő maga nem lezárt, álló, intézményszerű valóság, hanem Krisztus tanúinak a föld végső határáig terjeszkedő, örökké mozgó serege. Ilyennek mutatja a Heidelbergi Káté is: ecclesia militansnak, mely természetesen és életszerűen öntudatos, szervezett, fegyelmezett, munkálkodó, szolgáló közössége az igazi hitben megegyező lelkeknek."

³⁴ Walls, 'Missionary Societies and the Fortunate Subversion of the Church,' *op. cit.*, p.234.

simplistic and short sighted theologically. For this reason I cannot agree completely with Walls, despite my sympathy with his powerful argument:

If the voluntary society was one of the Lord's theological jokes, the stately structures of church government, hallowed by centuries of doctrinal exposition and smothered in polemical divinity, had by the end of the 19th century become the scene of a hilarious comedy.³⁵

- 4) With regard to the last statement in favor of a modality mission model proposed by its defenders, that missions, biblically speaking, is clearly the work of the church, I do not question the statement. Imre's circle declared the same and emphasized this thesis against the circle of Kecskeméthy. I admit that this view was both biblical and in accordance with the reformed creeds. And yet this argumentation proves too much and misses the point. One agrees with it without giving up the arguments in favor of the sodality model, as follows. If missions is solely the work of the church, and if a given sodality is not conceived as a local entity, i.e., as the local church or congregation, but rather as a para-regional church agency, than *q.e.d.*, the church, and only the church, is doing missions!

In summarizing my arguments presented above, I make one further important point. The Church, or the TRC in particular, is often confused with the Kingdom of God³⁶ but this is a mistake according to reformed standards.³⁷ Because of this apparent confusion, the TRC's vocal majority subscribing to the modality model was exclusivist in its approach and could not regard sodalities as part of the same church. If the Transylvanians had been more aware of this theological error, this unnecessary contradiction could have been avoided. The Kingdom of God of divine origins can take the shape of the divinely instituted church and/or can also appear as the divinely instituted "theological joke" of God, such as the societies. And both the church and the societies also present the human, the temporal and

³⁵ *Ibid.* p.236.

³⁶ This was Augustine's view, when he regarded the Kingdom of God as a present reality and identified it with the Church.

³⁷ As Louis Berkhof stated:

"The Roman Catholics Church frankly identified the Kingdom of God with their hierarchical institution, but the Reformers returned to the view that it is in this dispensation identical with the invisible Church." See Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*. Edinburgh, Carlisle, and Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1988, p.569.

the fallible side as well; they demonstrate the sinful nature of the human beings who constitute them.

- 5) The logic of this first statement is wrong when it suggests some kind of argument from time, that is to say, that the older something is then the better or the more reliable, or more divine it is. Just because societies are not as old as the church, it does not follow that they are not acceptable and on an equal level. The suggestion springs typically from illogical reasoning, going back to the time of Augustine. According to Dr. Ákos Pauler, Augustine did not distinguish between validity and being.³⁸ In other words, from the bare fact that something is right, true or valid, it does not follow that that thing necessarily exists. For example, Pauler asserts that Augustine's argument in favor of the immortality of the soul was based on this same false assumption.³⁹ Similarly, I argue that if the church is the only institution on earth which can be regarded as being divine and not the work of man, then logically it could follow from this that the church is eternal and the societies are temporal entities.

2. *The societies draw attention away from the church. They are a menace to the unique function of the church, financially and biblically.*

My counterarguments to this statement flow from the above-mentioned conclusion:

- 1) If the sodality is by definition one way in which the church appears, though not in a local form, then the societies draw attention not away from, but rather toward the church.
- 2) That they are or could be a menace to the function of the church financially, can be measured only if we interpret the notion of "church" here either in a denominational sense or in the sense of the local congregation. In both cases, and only in those cases, the societies do run the risk of becoming a menace

³⁸ See the evaluation in chapter three, where I analyzed the neo-Kantian school of Károly Böhm.

³⁹ Pauler, p.93. Pauler says if Augustine is right that the knowing Subject is able to come to know something immortal against the temporal, then this knowing Subject has to be, by necessity, immortal. But, Pauler argues that this deduction is mistaken by proving too much. It would follow from it that the soul is not just immortal but also eternal, just as the such known truth is eternal. Indeed, this is true as much as its opposite is true: from the fact that mortals can come to know something mortal or temporal, it would not necessarily follow or prove that they are mortals or temporal beings.

to the church financially and biblically. Likewise, in the case of the TRC, the sodality could be a menace, locally or denominationally, such as when the insistence on donations for the foreign missions cause might have burdened the financial budget of some local congregations. If we take the word “church” to mean the one universal body of Christ, of which duty is doing mission first of all in this world, then the sodalities are challenging any church in the sense of both denomination and local congregation whether they are a real part of the one church. If the local church's budget is prioritized for missions, then the same local church would never consider the sodality a menace, neither financially nor biblically to their own church. In this way the sodality worked as a reminder and drew the attention of a church to the church. Unfortunately, CE was viewed with suspicion when they wanted to focus the church's attention on foreign missions. Instead they were labeled by the officialdom as promoting the folly of some unhealthy ‘pietists.’ This stereotyping reaction intensified the uncommitted indifference to mission endeavors in the reformed church as a whole. The attempts of CE to draw the church's attention to mission had instead resulted in the opposite. Paradoxically, they drew the church's attention from the Church and from its missional essence because of the prejudice with which they were viewed. This became obvious in the case of Sándor (Alexander) Babos, the TRC's missionary to China in the 1930s, half of whose salary was paid by the Scottish United Presbyterian Church. The poverty of Transylvania in the interbellum period understandably intensified this dependency on Scottish aid, a circumstance which unfortunately hindered the TRC as a whole from a serious commitment to fundraising and in promoting the cause of foreign missions. In other words, it did not help in developing the voluntary principle. Interest and involvement in missions were not encouraged. It was regarded as the strange, spectacular “hobby-horse” of a few extravagantly pious and dubious people who simply wanted something different than what the tradition and good customs of the church dictated. The third argument in favor of the modality mission model leads us to the core of the problem which appeared in the life of the TRC in the first half of the 20th century:

3. *The society does not wish to be a church. Yet it plants a church. What they bypass on the home front they plant on the mission field.*

I have three remarks to make here:

- 1) The logic of this argument presupposes that the sodalities in bypassing the church on the home front are demonstrating that they, intentionally or not, are ignoring the church. And that when a society willingly ignores the church (as can be a real possibility), then that society in fact wishes to be a church! Wherever it plants, it always plants itself as a church, otherwise there could be no self-identity posed for that group. This is a sociological fact. But we are not talking about societies turning into new denominations. We are talking about those societies, such as the CE Union who never wished to be a church.
- 2) But why cannot a society which cannot and does not want to define itself as a church, plant a church? Why cannot the sodality aid a particular church or denomination in planting a church on the mission field? Why would such an effort not be regarded as a help by the church at home, and a proof that the sodality genuinely wants to act as an arm of the home church? If a sodality sees its own task as assisting the church/denomination in its effort to plant churches and if the sodality considers itself an outstretched arm of that church empowered by God for that particular work with appropriate charisma for that task, then I do not see why it cannot be a necessary and fruitful tool for the church in long term.
- 3) My third remark is that the dilemma presented above simply could not apply much to the Transylvanian situation. In reality CE supported via the TRC the work of Babos in China and also the mission of Mária Molnár sent from Hungary to the Admiral Isles of Papua New Guinea. Similarly, the Külmisszió Barátai (Friends of Foreign Missions), initiated by the "Group of Seven," never became a society. Even if it had become a mission society, as happened in Hungary, it definitely would not have played the role of a church. Yet later in Hungary a strange thing happened. When the Hungarian Mission Society was divided into Lutheran and Reformed, then they were able to place a bigger emphasis on the denominational aspect of the mission work and so, indirectly, they could enforce the modality better. So instead of diminishing the role of the denomination, they in fact served the denominational character of the mission work and as such they contributed to the strengthening

of the modality. My conclusion is, if the sodalities plant a church on the mission field, they are not bypassing the church at home. Instead, they edify it and strengthen it.

4. *The idea of many para-ecclesiastical boards, that of founding an “ecclesiola in ecclesia,” the true church inside the church, is not theologically stable. The tension between what a church is and what it ought to be cannot be resolved by a society that bypasses reality and divine intention.*

I will make a few comments on this issue of the “ecclesiola in ecclesia” and then on the neo-Kantian posing of the question in the argument presented by Conn.

Concerning the possible founding of an “ecclesiola in ecclesia” as a solution to the problems of the organized church and the argument that this is not theologically tenable, I must raise several questions:

- 1) Does the sodality really claim to be the “true church inside the church” or does it claim to merely offer a practical solution to rendering the right people in the right place, a pragmatic view in doing missions, in accord with the biblical demand of serving the Church/Body of Christ with the appropriate charismas in the appropriate places?⁴⁰
- 2) If the sodality is not based on a model of what the church ought to be, who will remind the church of her calling and divine intention? If the sodality is not assuming the role of reminder, does there not also result a “bypassing of reality and divine intentions?”
- 3) Regarding the phrase, *“The tension between what a church is and what it ought to be cannot be resolved by a society that bypasses reality and divine intention,”* I must comment that this is a characteristically neo-Kantian dilemma, the posing of the tension between what the church *is* and what it *ought to be*. The question is rather not what the church ought to be but what it is in God’s intention. The Kingdom of God is God’s intention which in itself, in accord with reformed creeds, *is* the Church, the invisible Body of Christ. There is no ideal church which stands against the existing one; the whole thinking is

⁴⁰ This is quite theologically tenable given the biblical concept of the church, cf. 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. In other words, it is right that the “eyes” serve only as “eyes” of the “body” and not as “hands,” which means, not taking over the job of the “hands” which would be inappropriate.

rather neo-Kantian, than biblical. To clarify this, I receive support from notable reformed scholars such as Louis Berkhof who noticed:

Under the influence of Kant and especially of Ritschl it [the Kingdom of God] was robbed of its religious character and came to be regarded as an ethical kingdom of ends. It is often defined at present as a new principle introduced into society and destined to transform it in all its relations, or as the moral organization of mankind through action from the motive of love, the final end of creation.⁴¹

One can observe the tremendous influence this neo-Kantian philosophical trend exercised on the church's life when, succumbing to modernist rationality, the Church's theology gradually sacrificed the eschatological perspective of the Kingdom of God.⁴² In this way the Church hoped to gain over modernity to the gospel, but at what price?⁴³ It is revealing to re-consider the value-centered arguments of the neo-Kantians in this respect, as Berkhof shows. The tendency to confuse the Kingdom of God with "an ethical kingdom" over-shadowed the fact that trying to reform the Church as the Reformers intended does not rest on the fact that it was once an ideal Church, the ought to be Church, and that the being one, the existing Church has to be changed to conform to the pattern of the former. The Reformation of the Church was about something else; the work of the Reformers cannot be read back into history from a Kantian starting point. The "new

⁴¹ Berkhof, p.569.

⁴² In this way one can understand that Kant could see only the will as being timeless in history. Searching for the timeless in the time-bound history brought up the idea of a moral world order which 'lies in us and is given with the moral will,' according to Kant. Later Albert Schweitzer, the German neo-Kantian theologian (who wrote his doctorate on Kant) emphasized this idea, he himself admittedly being influenced greatly by Kant when working out his ethical mysticism on the mystery of life. There is ample evidence that Schweitzer exercised a great influence on the Transylvanian neo-Kantian theologizing of the period. See his theological work on this idea in Schweitzer, Albert *Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus* Tübingen, 1930; in English translation: *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* London, 1931, Montgomery, W. (trans.). One might also ask, is there not an apparently direct line from Kant and his ethical kingdom leading to the great protagonists of the ethic of the will such as Schopenhauer, Wagner and Nietzsche?

⁴³ It might be appropriate here to quote Professor J. C. O'Neill's skeptical statement on this attempt when he contrasted the effort of Eichorn to try to make the Church the instrument of ever increasing enlightenment. Despite this noble effort it seems that "Kant was content to leave the church in Stygian darkness while he made arbitrary allegorical use of scripture to support his own independently-won positions." Cf. J.C. O'Neill, *The Bible's Authority, A Portrait Gallery of Thinkers from Lessing to Bultmann*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991, p.93. ff.

principle introduced into society” of an “ethical kingdom,” as Berkhof observed, “destined to transform it [society] in all its relations, or as the moral organization of mankind” can be very attractive as a pragmatic solution. It is more attractive, perhaps, than maintaining “the scandal of the gospel” in the midst of a secularized and ethical kingdom of a Christianized but not Christian society (see Kierkegaard’s famous critique in this regard!). I have to state that the invisible Church’s ideal cannot be deduced from the Church as the ought to be ideal; it can only be seen as it is presented in the Scriptures. Thus the neo-Kantian position helped and enforced the refusal of the “ecclesiola in ecclesia” phenomena, as something which could be easily labeled theologically unjustifiable or at least not tenable from a standpoint of Kantian moralism, as it appeared in ecclesiastical legalism. Even Barth would protest against any identification of the institutional Church with the Kingdom of God, openly stating that this was a characteristic only of the Roman Catholic Church.⁴⁴ Yet, he was unaware of the opposite temptation of making the Kantian ethical interpretation of the kingdom of God into a philosophical principle ruling over the theological. Hence even Barth’s interpretation of eschatology became more identical with a modernist philosophical trend rather with the biblical-theological one, as Hoeksema noted.⁴⁵ All I can conclude

⁴⁴ “...their [i.e., the Roman Catholic’s] rigid identification of the Church and the Kingdom of God, and their optimistic assurance as for the undeniable correlation of nature and grace, of the old man and aeon and the new,” etc. See in Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/3/1, p.23.

⁴⁵ Cf. Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1966. See his chapter on Eschatology, especially pp.730-738. Hoeksema launched his critique on Barth’s perception: “Barth, however, presents an entirely new eschatology, that has nothing to do with the faith of the church or the teaching of Holy Writ.” (p.731.) Then, again on p.735, he wrote: “The end of things, according to him [to Barth], has nothing to do with time in its chronological succession. It is always near because eternity always marks time.” After quoting Barth at length on the issue on p.737, Hoeksema continues and concludes his critical remarks: “If all this means anything at all, it means that in the end in the Barthian sense of the word, we will be no more temporal but eternal. Time will be swallowed up in eternity. And this is certainly not the teaching of the Holy Writ (...) ...even in the future age we shall still be creatures, and therefore temporal. God alone is eternal, and we shall never become like Him.” I could argue with parts of this, but right now, the important fact for my study, is the following observation of Hoeksema: the fundamentally philosophical (and let me add to this, neo-Kantian) discourse instead of a theological one proves the point that the Barthian school regarded the kingdom of God as an ethical kingdom which is determined by the ongoing nearness of eternity which always marks human time. To Hoeksema’s credit I might add that he turns the Kierkegaardian-inspired slogan and leitmotiv

here is that the neo-Kantian way of arguing presented above by Conn, does not justify the caveat against the concerns in regard of the “ecclesiola in ecclesia,” as being theologically unstable or untenable paradigms. On the contrary, raising the question in this Kantian pattern is also theologically unstable and untenable.

The next argument in favor of the advocates of the exclusively modality paradigm is even stronger than all the others raised heretofore:

5. *To remove the missionary task from the church often removes also the missionary dimension of that church. The church then slips into a ghetto mentality.*

The possible removal of the mission task from a church means in fact the removal of the mission dimension of that particular church which necessarily leads to a ghetto mentality, but more than that, it causes the Church to cease to be a Church any more. I have four counter arguments to offer:

- 1) If a sodality works as a living conscience for the whole church, or a reminder of the missional nature of that church, then the church's missionary task is not removed; rather, the church is prompted to take responsibility toward its own mission task and to do everything in its ability to undertake the mission task, even using the support and tools offered by the sodality in fulfilling missions.
- 2) If the church is not ready for this collaboration and refuses the initiative and prompting of the sodality, even if ill feeling arises, this unfortunate situation

of the qualitative distinction between eternity and time of the Barthian school against their own reasoning when he states, on p.731: “Again and again in the works of dialectic theologians this distinction is emphasized. What do they mean by this distinction? Do they merely mean that eternity is not time, that only God is eternal, and the creature is necessarily temporal; in other words, that eternity is not time indefinitely prolonged? If this were the meaning, there would be no dispute. But this is not the case. They mean something entirely different. In dialectic theology eternity is related to time as yes and no. Eternity is everything; time is nothing. (...) According to Gogarten, eternity is in principle a dissolution of time. Everything in the sphere of earthly existence and life, all history, and man, measured by eternity are nought. *Offenbarung und Zeit*. Eternity is the wholly other, and between eternity and time is the death-line. Eternity marks or limits time on every side. And the ‘end’ is not an end of time in the chronological sense of the word, but it is rather the moment, the *Augenblick*, in which eternity breaks into time, now, in the moment of revelation, and at the moment of death forever. This, according to Barth, is true eschatology. This is the parousia of Christ, this is the *Auferstehung der Toten*.”

can serve to move the church to fulfill its missional task in jealous competition with the sodality; or

- 3) If the fortunate situation occurs that a church or denomination is flexible enough and ready to collaborate with the sodality, then not only does the modality fulfill its task but it escapes the danger of becoming isolated in a perverted conservatism. Sodality thus can be an outstretched arm of modality toward the world and neighboring society, and by this means the church is kept open to avoid a ghetto mentality.
- 4) There is one possibility for which I have no counter argument. This possibility, to which I frankly do not see any solution, happens when the church chooses to ignore her mission task, alienates herself from her calling, and throws an anathema on the sodality. In such a case, there is also a risk that the church may even declare something else as her mission. I am afraid, there were times when the TRC chose this option. The next argument relies on Ralph Winter's reasoning and Conn builds on Winter's thoughts as follows:

6. *Ralph Winter has popularized the argument that the missionary task is not completed when a young church has come into being. For the sake of effective proclamation of the gospel, a missionary society ought also to come into being among members of the so-called younger church.*

In the context of the TRC it is not possible to gain a good overview given that Rev. Babos has no successor in mission to Manchuria and the events of WWII and the takeover of China by the Communists meant that Manchuria as a mission field was cut off. Thus, we are not in a position to analyze the effects of his work either on the mission field itself or on the sending (home) church, which itself came under Communist rule. Babos, as noted previously, worked together with the Scottish Church on the mission field as they had an official partnership with the TRC. The young church in Manchuria was already in existence when both the Scottish and the Transylvanians were invited to work in a kind of partnership with the Manchurians. In fact this situation supports the argument of Winter. The missionary task was not completed when the young church had come into being. And the fact that Babos asked the churches in Transylvania to support the needs of a young native evangelist and the Bible-school set up for training the people there, and of any future local ministers, is a proof that at least a kind of an informal

missionary band (though not yet a formal missionary society) also came into being “among the members of the so-called younger church.” But of course, there was no strategy for establishing a missionary society among the members of the local “younger church.” One can only speculate what could have happened if the TRC had a mission station of its own there. What would have happened if the TRC had been a sending or mother church from a colonizing nation and had sufficient financial resources? In that case, I am afraid that we might not have escaped the temptation to reproduce the same church institutions and the same obstacles against the organizing of any sodality among the natives. The importing of the same ecclesiastical structures could have been a reality also.

In answering the arguments of this section, I do so again in the form of questions addressed to the arguments developed above:

- 1) Can a sodality not have a double task, both establishing a modality (a new church on the mission field), as well as reproducing the sodality itself?
- 2) If only a church/modality is planting newer/young(er) churches, is there not a danger that she will simply reproduce her own image and produce a non-missionary minded young church? The danger exists of importing not just the blessings but also the shortcomings and sins of the sending/mother church at home. Sadly, the history of missions gives ample demonstrations of this point. We cannot anticipate what would have happened if the TRC would have had its own mission station in China, whether they or their missionaries would have reproduced the home structures and problems. Babos and his wife were allowed to stay in Manchuria, unlike the Scottish, as they had no formal links with an establishment which proved to be on the enemy side during WWII. But Babos being alone, relatively independent of the home church, and cut off from the home church, was not in a position to replicate the mother church in any way. Rather, being somewhat independent of any establishment, he was able to enjoy the benefits of neutrality as a missionary from a country which was not at war with the Manchuria of those times. About the TRC mission in Manchuria, we can agree with Winter that the mission task was not completed because after the younger church came into being, it was not followed by an indigenous missionary society also

coming into being.⁴⁶ Moreover, even if outside circumstances had not hindered this, the pattern at home leads us to suspect that if a mission faithful to the TRC model would have reproduced the same ecclesial structures, any sodalities that came into being would have been sanctioned.

The next argument raises again the temporal justification for or against the existence of sodalities contrasted with the Church, which cannot disappear as it is initiated divinely:

7. *There was a time when para-ecclesiastical societies had a right to exist. But this is not true today, at least in terms of new societies. The establishing of such societies was an emergency solution because the churches were mission-less and introverted. We should not make a virtue or biblical necessity out of historical exigency.*

This argument reminds me of a somewhat similar argument of Barth who also speaks of the process of making a virtue out of historical exigency. Barth begins with an assertion that although the Roman Catholic Church was left behind in terms of purity of biblical doctrine and although its hierarchical structure was rightly repudiated by the Reformers as being unbiblical, nonetheless the Roman Catholic Church over the centuries became more missional than the Protestant Churches:

But more relevant is the fact that in the modern period, however well or badly, the Roman Catholic Church has also and primarily been a missionary Church, and this far more radically even to-day than the Protestant Churches. (...) The tardiness of the Reformation Churches in this sphere has often been asserted and deplored.⁴⁷

Barth then goes on to criticise the Word-centered Protestantism for being unexpectedly careless in mission, at least in the first two centuries of their history. Barth contrasts this with the surprising fact that though the Protestant Churches

⁴⁶ Rather the opposite happened, as indicated before. Babos expected that a young Manchurian would be trained as an evangelist with financial support from Transylvania, rather than from any local, Manchurian missions society. The famous mission model of John Nevius (see below), originating in China, which argued that indigenous churches be self-supporting, was not heeded in the work in Manchuria.

⁴⁷ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/3/1, p.23.

did not identify the Kingdom of God with the Church, they still proved less dynamic and gospel-centered than the Catholics:

Most surprisingly, these Churches of the Word did not at first, or for a long time afterwards, perceive the opportunity of mission offered by the new discoveries and conquests. (...) It may also be argued that the Reformation Churches were so preoccupied with the new and original content of the Word of God and the renewal of the Western Christianity ostensibly before them that in the first instance they had necessarily to stay behind as the Romans confidently launched out across the seas with their Paternoster and Ave Maria, their rigid identification of the Church and the Kingdom of God, and their optimistic assurance as for the undeniable correlation of nature and grace, of the old man and aeon and the new.⁴⁸

It is clear from Barth's presentation of the issue that although there might be historical and political arguments in defense of the "tardiness of the Reformation Churches," these arguments are weak and cannot excuse the failure to develop a missional church vision within the ranks of the reformed constituency. Barth's basic accusation consists in the charge, similar to that of Conn's against the sodality (except that he places it on the other side against the modality), that a virtue was made out of necessity to justify the non-missional tardiness of the Protestant churches:

The only trouble is that, even if the time for missionary activity had not yet come for these similar reasons, there was not even the realization of the duty of mission. A virtue was made out of necessity, and it was explained that the missionary command was given only to the apostles, and had long since been fulfilled by them. Thus the heathenism of the heathen was an unalterable judgment of God suspended over them on account of their obstinate rejection of the Gospel as previously offered to them. [Italics, LH]⁴⁹

I ask now a few questions when arguing against the position in favor of the modality, presented above by Conn. I have five points to present against this argument:

- 1) Although the Church may have already undergone a radical Reformation of its rigid structures, as one can see from the above argument of Barth, might

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* pp.23-24.

it still not slip back to a stage where “emergency solutions” (i.e., of “establishing societies”) are justified?

- 2) Following from the above, is there any guarantee that such an emergency situation will not occur again and again in the life of the church? Rather, we are duty bound to expect and fear that such a situation will arise repeatedly if not guarded against.
- 3) It is true and I can agree that we should not turn a historical exigency into a virtue or a biblical necessity. But the question is, does the New Testament not provide examples when historical exigency was made in reality a Biblical necessity? For example, the New Testament Church in her early, Jewish form was itself founded on a historical necessity turned into a biblical necessity after it excluded the Gentile-Christians from among its ranks. A para-church council proposed solution appears to happen in the first Jerusalem Council, as we can see in Acts 15. Without the convocation of that Council the unity of the church would have been endangered! So “para-ecclesial societies” seem to have had the right to exist even in biblical times.
- 4) If even at the time of the church's birth and for a while after the existence of the para-ecclesiastical “society,” the Jerusalem synod, was justified, at what point can we declare that it no longer had a right to exist?
- 5) Is it not a fact that even the early church itself was, to some extent, missionless and inward-focused? If this was not the case, why was a whole Council called to convince the missionless and the inward-looking Mosaic Jewish Christians of the need for missions among the Gentiles?

Having tried to argue with the arguments listed in favor of a modality paradigm, I now evaluate critically the arguments presented by Conn in favor of sodalities:

B. Arguments in favor of faith missions/sodalities (by its advocates)

Critical evaluation of arguments in favor of sodalities

1. *History justifies [for](sic!) the “faith mission” approach. These societies arose because of the lukewarm-ness and indifference of the churches. They reached into areas where the established church did not go, and often did not care to go.*

- 1) I want to evaluate the above first argument in five ways: History can suggest and even justify a functional and pragmatic solution to a certain need, but it does not follow that such a solution is a biblical or wise one.
- 2) If the sodality is not considered to be the church regional, but a para-church, or a church substitute, then it is wrong to suggest that it has gone where the church could not or did not even care to go. Such a proposal would result in a schizophrenic self-identity for those society members who would not consider themselves also members of the church. The minute we accept the sodality's existence for itself, apart from the church, then the sodality becomes the "true" church, a self-delusion over against the actual church. In this regard I agree with Barth who, in my opinion, weighed up both the modality and sodality paradigms in a balanced way:

Nor can we do more than lightly touch on the question whether the missionary cause should continue to be prosecuted by freely constituted societies and associations with the churches or whether it should be incorporated into the regular ministry of the organized Churches as their own affair (as, for example, in Scotland). Good reasons have been advanced on both sides, but can this still be done in the future or will a decision have to be reached?⁵⁰

It is interesting that Barth raises the example of the Church in Scotland and how they tried to exercise missions through the Church for, importantly, Imre studied in Scotland. On more than one occasion he referred to the Scottish example, such as when he first brought up his case for introducing home missions into the practice of the official church at the General Assembly, as I quoted and commented on in chapter two. The Barth-disciple Imre opted for "the incorporation of missions in the regular ministry of the organized Church as their own affair." But Imre never admitted as Barth did that "good reasons have been advanced on both sides;" moreover none of those from his circle, even the most eminent disciple and friend of Barth, Tavaszy, ever did so. Their position was rigid and, I suggest, was not in keeping with the Scottish solution, despite appearances. The Scottish Church never questioned the role and use or benefits of the societies; it was able to work together with the sodalities, without questioning their existence although certainly this kind of collaboration was not free from tensions. I accept even the

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* p.25.

argument above which states “these societies arose because of the lukewarm-ness and indifference of the churches.” I do not deny that even the Church of Scotland, for example, became lukewarm and indifferent at times. I will later quote and comment on the 1795 negative decision with regard to missions of their General Assembly. Yet an indifferent church can be awakened to its duty to missions and so the lukewarmness of a church, by itself, cannot justify the existence of the sodalities. What I am unhappy with is the case of the TRC, when from the argument that a church can be awakened to its duty in missions, Imre’s circle deduced that there is therefore no need at all for the existence of the controversial CE or any other dubious sodality. Earlier I quoted Kecskeméthy who justified the need for the existence of CE with a similar argument as that presented above by Conn. The sodalities are, and were, reaching “into areas where the established church did not go, and often did not care to go.” Barth in the continuance of his argument has a different handling about the timing and justifying of the sodalities’ existence. He would argue that the “good old days” of conservative Protestantism are over, and urges, based on this fact, for a revision of opinions on the modality versus sodality dilemma. I disagree from this, as I cannot see this being enough to justify taking sides with either mission paradigm. Here is Barth’s reasoning about the challenge of the future in this regard:

What we wished to emphasize at the moment is simply that it was not in the “good old days” of classical Protestantism, but in the time of its regrettable, or not so regrettable, dissolution, i.e., in the 19th century, which was also the time when modern secularism reached its supreme and most conscious maturity, that Evangelical Christianity of all streams could not and would not stop at the position of the Reformers, but saw and accepted with remarkable unanimity its task as a Church of the living and even geographically outreaching Word, awakening and bestirring itself, even if only in the words and actions and prayers of free associations of innumerable individual Christians, to the serious realization and fulfillment of its mission to the heathen.⁵¹

Was this change due merely to the fact that “Evangelical Christianity of all streams could not and would not stop at the position of the Reformers?” When Barth highlights the remarkable stand of the Reformers taken for the living Word

⁵¹ *Ibid.* pp.25-26.

in calling back the Church as a whole to the Canon of this living Word in faith and practice, and which then served as a catalyst after two centuries to launch the greatest missionary enterprise in history, does not Barth himself offer unconsciously a different reason, admitting that the tide against the Reformers was inspired by the Reformers themselves? This question lies outside the scope of this paper so I leave this question for others to pursue. Barth still is right in his critique, although reality might prove to be more complex than his one-sided analyses. Barth himself admits that this Word-centeredness of the historical Reformation is “awakening and bestirring” the church. But he also admits, in contrast with the Transylvanian official line, that the societies are an organic part of the same church as well when he states it happened: “only in the words and actions and prayers of free associations of innumerable individual Christians,” yet this was still *the* Church who “saw and accepted with remarkable unanimity its task as a Church.”⁵²

I now turn back to the argument in favor of sodalities presented by Conn and I am adding some more points to my three previous ones contradicting this argument:

- 3) The bare acceptance of the terminology, “church versus societies” intensifies the schizophrenic identity and the confusion in understanding what the church and what sodality is. Individual members and leaders of different societies are also members of the Church and separating or excluding them from the Body of Christ would be considered by some a Roman Catholic view. Yet, I add immediately, to the credit of the Roman Church, they would accept and incorporate the different monasteries, orders and societies (their sodalities!) as integral parts of their own Church.
- 4) Just like the modality, the sodality can also become lukewarm and indifferent. There is no guarantee against this; it is also true that there might be cases when the organized church is better at a task.
- 5) I can summarize the above in this way: what I am contesting continuously are the terms used and how they are used. There is a lot of ambiguity in the arguments because on both sides there is no consistent, agreed meaning of

⁵² The sodality being inseparable from the Church in Barth's understanding.

terms such as the church or the sodality, etc. There is a confusion of theological terminology here.

2. *In practice the church rarely undertakes missionary work. The older and more established a denomination becomes the more likely it will concentrate on self-growth and internal development.*

I can accept this argument as valid with regard to the world wide community of the reformed churches, and also as valid particularly with regard to the TRC. But I cannot exclude the possibility that the situation described may be changed, as has happened many times in church history. Thus I still have some reservations about this argument, as follows:

- 1) If the situation described is true, then the TRC must have been most missions minded in its early days. Likewise, the whole reformed world must have been most missions minded in the first two centuries of its history, when it was younger and when it had not yet become so rigid in its institutional forms and was not yet burdened with the presence of so many nominals among its ranks. But this was not the case.
- 2) Going further, if the above statement is correct then awakenings and revivals⁵³ have little chance of revitalizing older churches. But church history

⁵³ According to the *EDWM* the definition of revivals is: "to wake up and live. The basic idea of revival is the returning of something to its true nature and purpose. It is a special movement of the Spirit of God in which he renews the hearts of believers. Earle Cairns defines revival as 'the work of the Holy Spirit in restoring the people of God to a more vital spiritual life, witness, and work by prayer and the Word after repentance in crisis for their spiritual decline.'" The same article on this entry written by Timothy K. Beougher deals with distinguishing between revival and revivalism, and states: "Revival, seen as a synonym for spiritual awakening, should be distinguished from revivalism, which is generally identified with prominent evangelists and mass evangelistic crusades focused on reaching the lost with the gospel. Despite a close relationship between revival and outreach, revival should not be seen as the same thing as Evangelism or revivalism. (...) Yet even though revival and evangelism are different in nature (as revival primarily deals with God's people whereas evangelism focuses on unbelievers), they both flow from the same source – the Holy Spirit. (...) An awakened church is an evangelistic church. An awakened believer is an evangelistic believer. When revival truly comes, evangelism will follow." (See in the *EDWM*, p.831.) In chapter one, when discussing the relevance of the immediate link that we can observe between missions and revival spirituality, I tried to give a more comprehensive definition of 'revival' and 'awakening,' based on the research done by the Oxford Association for Research in Revival or Evangelical Awakening. I use the term 'revival' as it was adopted for individual Christians, and 'awakening' more to refer

proves the opposite. The argument carries an aspect of unbelief and tends to limit the role and ability of the Holy Spirit in reviving any “dead” or “fossilized church,” which is also a theologically incorrect assumption. It is unbiblical, too, because the prophet Ezekiel⁵⁴ was called to revive through his prophecy even the dead bones and corpses of Israel, which represented the Church of the Old Dispensation according to most of the reformed hermeneutics of the Reformers and their descendants.

3. *Where they do indeed proceed to missions, bureaucracy and officialdom rule. Ralph Winter compares the problem to the difference between prophets and politicians. The prophet launches out and his voluntary followers constitute potentially a sodality. Politicians, on the other hand, must watch the people who constitute the fixed modality. The politician can only suggest what he hopes the majority will approve.*

I admit this was also true of the TRC. And yet, I have still a few counter arguments here:

- 1) First, this characteristic situation proves the point that the universal church of Christ which appears even in an old and bureaucratic denomination needs the inter- or denominational sodality forms that keep it challenged with the biblical call for missions. If the majority which is decisive in constituting a fixed modality is approving a non-biblical view of the church’s task in missions and the leaders are “politicians” rather than “prophets” who can only suggest what they hope the majority will approve, then the “prophets” who preach the biblical task of mission prescribed for the church as a whole can still remind and challenge the modality even when officialdom rules. They can give an opportunity for re-formation from inside to the established church, and refuse the option of separating from it, which would leave the church subject to its own closed-up rigidity and lukewarm-ness. The resolved

to the community. I also pointed to the acceptance of the term ‘revival’ as suggesting a renewal of life among *those already possessing* it, and the term ‘awakening’ suggesting an attraction of *the whole community* to spirituality, even *outside* the church walls.

For further clarification of these terms and on the distinction between ‘revival’ ‘revivalism,’ and ‘awakening’ from a Calvinist theological standpoint see also the church historian’s comprehensive study, Murray, *Revival & Revivalism, op. cit.*.

⁵⁴ See in Ezekiel: 37.

step to stay can hinder mission work in the beginning, but by separating and walking away from the modality the sodality itself removes the constant challenge of undertaking the missionary task and the constant biblical demand for the natural duty of the church. Yet, reminding the church of her own missional nature and task cannot be the sole theological justification of being for a sodality. In stating that, to continue in line with reformed hermeneutics on comparing the role of the Church in the old dispensation in shaping and instructing the Church of the New Testament, the “prophetic voice”⁵⁵ cannot be silenced when the prophet suffers together with his own people under the same judgment of God that he himself proclaimed. The Transylvanians would do well to remember both the theology and the example of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in this regard, who called for a certain solidarity and yet subversive fulfillment⁵⁶ in obeying the status quo. None of the Old Testament

⁵⁵ I admit I am debatably embarking to some extent here on a somewhat curious hermeneutical suggestion in the course of an academic discussion. But I have to note here in my defense that I am trying partly to illustrate the ‘prophetic element’ and criticism, and even the way of speaking/ theologizing in a post-Barthian environment, which was so characteristic of the period in Transylvania. Thus I quote in support of my argument O’Neill’s remarks in this context as he would characterize the Barthian scholars of the age as follows: “This was a generation that saw through every pretension yet believed that by relentless and unremitting cynicism they could discover the secret of the whole universe that would bring utopia. (...) Their characteristic mode of discourse was not argument but prophesy; ‘the cry drowned the word’ [cf. Ludwig Marcuse, but there is a parallel drawn here even with the Marxist utopist of the ‘Hope principle,’ Ernst Bloch, remarks mine, LH]. They thought that they were on the edge of a new understanding, a break-through of the eternal.” For my analysis of the Kantian roots of the Barthian, and *mutatis mutandis* the Transylvanian thinking, it is of much significance that even O’Neill would argue that all this happened because of the Kantian influence exercised on them: “The philosophy behind was a flourishing idealism (...) The dominant interpretation of Kant was that he preached we must believe *as if* God existed, *as if* the natural laws held, *as if* we have freedom, and *as if* we were eternal beings.” Cf. O’Neill, *The Bible’s Authority, A Portrait Gallery of Thinkers from Lessing to Bultmann*, op. cit.

⁵⁶ This is the way that the missiologist Lesslie Newbigin, for example, sets the mission task of any established church. See my comments later on his Kuyperian ideas, where I quote his “subversive fulfillment” idea, borrowed in essence from the theology of Abraham Kuyper. For the moment it is enough to state here that subversive fulfillment means to fulfill obedience to the powers and rulers of this present aeon (above which powers Christ is still omnipotent Lord), in a subversive way, i.e., in a “prophetic way” with gospel criticism; yet with obedience accepting and embracing sufferings due to the possible resulting persecution, fulfilling the truth that Christ is the Lord of both the world and of his own Church, no matter in what “worldly state” this Church might be found.

prophets would join the neighboring nations to make their voice heard in Israel. To the contrary, they stayed within the circle of the covenanted people and suffered the persecution from their fellowmen from whom they would not go out.

- 2) This view is a success-oriented view but a mission effort cannot be judged based on its apparent success. The Lord of all Christian ministries will judge the success of any mission activity and it would be dangerous to guess the level of success based simply on how it appears to us. I cannot say, for example, that the fact that the Hungarian reformed churches only sent out a few missionaries over the centuries means that they were less successful compared with the Western churches. A mission should not be carried out only when it has the approval of the majority, of the whole denomination, because *vox populi* cannot be considered as *vox Dei*, as Calvin and many others warned the churches. The next argument is the hardest for me to refute:

4. *The younger churches, which are planted in this way, are forced into the same corset as the "mother." The same cumbersome machinery, which operates on the home-front, is exported to the mission field - from the style of church buildings to the formulation of the creeds. Often in the mission society the missionary becomes Chinese for the Chinese. In the many ecclesiastical missions the Chinese must rather on conversion become American before they can be Chinese Christians.*

It is hard to engage with this argument in the Transylvanian context, for at least two reasons. First, such a situation never occurred in the mission field of the TRC, because the mission work carried out by Rev. Sándor and Mária Babos, as I stated above, had not the chance to be placed in a wider perspective. This mission did not take place in the well-known context of a colonialist setting for the TRC, neither did the TRC have the financial power to carry out a mission on its own. So we are left with mere speculation as to what could have happened and such speculation cannot have a place in an academic evaluation. Second, even if I was in a position to argue from the perspective and practice of the TRC, I cannot refute this argument. It is quite convincing and I am afraid that the TRC's "cumbersome machinery, which operated on the home-front" (and which I am constantly criticizing in this paper as a major hindrance to the TRC's becoming a real missional

church), would surely have been “exported to the mission field.” Yet, while the critical argument above can be true, it should not be assumed to be automatically true in every case. On the contrary, the more questionable the institutional burden is in the mother church, the more aware and cautious they may be in what they pass down to the younger church in the mission field. The younger church herself may be wary in that regard as well. The worse the structure is, the easier it is to see and critique it.

I need to add another critical point here. It is mistaken to assume that simply because this kind of export is possible, it will definitely happen. In return, it is also an illusion that not exporting such “cumbersome machinery” will guarantee that such dead bureaucracy will never happen. It can happen later, as part of the institutionalization process, as we could see from the analyses of this process previously. A young church may be very antagonistic to any institutionalization and yet ending up gradually and slowly in creating its own. However, the overwhelming role played by the CE movement in preparing and supporting the mission of Babos and any new missionaries coming after him⁵⁷ could have been a guarantee against this kind of “export,” given that, as a lay movement, they were the most acerbic opponents of the church’s hierarchical clericalism and “cumbersome machinery.”

The fifth argument in favor of sodalities appeals to the creativity of the societies and to the sociological fact that a smaller organization can develop a better group-cohesion and psycho-socially works for better group dynamics:

5. *The mission societies are more adaptable and imaginative. Further, the missionaries can identify themselves more easily with a small organization than with a massive, formless church.*

⁵⁷ Again, can we say that the mission carried out by the Transylvanians was not successful mission just because the Communists stopped the continuation of the missionary effort of the TRC? We know that Rev. Ödön Dávid, a minister serving in Ploiești, in the former Romania, as a missionary to the Hungarian reformed diaspora there, was prepared to go to Manchuria and join Babos. Cf. Kool, p.404. where we read:

“Ödön Dávid, from Transylvania was prepared to join Sándor Babos as the second Transylvanian missionary in China.” Kool mentioned Sándor Bíró also, but I personally know of many other possible candidates from that time as well, from conversations with Jenő Horváth.

I have no objection to this psycho-sociological presentation of the advantages of a sodality, but there can also be advantages on the modality side for the same reasons of creativity and group dynamics. I will argue the point in three ways here:

- 1) The resistance of the majority in an established church can also make the societies working with them more imaginative, although they are not adaptable to the church's structures. The missionaries coming from a sodality which is committed to a denomination or modality, are not less imaginative than those committed to more independent sodalities. Any resistance can press them to be even more imaginative and creative in finding ways to present the gospel in a different or resisting environment, rather than in ordinary circumstances. There are many examples from mission history, such as the imaginative and creative revolution in missiology which came surprisingly, not from an independent society missionary, but from the famous Nevius-plan initiator in missiology, John Nevius,⁵⁸ and the propagator and developer of that plan, the Episcopalian Roland Allen.⁵⁹ The more they had

⁵⁸ John Livingstone Nevius, (1829-1893) was an American missionary who studied at Princeton Theological Seminary and spent his life as a Presbyterian missionary to China, dying there after forty years. He was invited to Korea in June 1890 to lecture to Presbyterian missionaries there, and this was the event for which he became famous as a missiologist. He invented and developed to a certain level the Three-Self theory (self-support, self-propagation, self-government), what is called now "the Nevius plan" in mission circles. The good reception of the 'Nevius plan' or of the 'Nevius method' by the Presbyterians in Korea prompted the native church there to formally adopt it as their mission policy, cf. the article on Nevius written by Jim Reapsome in the *EDWM*, pp.676-677. Reapsome states: "His plan is credited with the subsequent church growth in Korea after World War II and the Korean War. It shaped the mission strategies of countless evangelical agencies after World War II. Similar theories were developed by Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson, and later by Roland Allen. His plan also included requiring thorough Bible teaching of all converts and wide itineration by missionaries accompanied by national helpers. This was the reversal of the usual mission approach of paying national evangelists to do the preaching." His most important book in the matter was *The Planting and Developing of Missionary Churches*. Strangely enough his method was better received in Korea than in China, although Nevius spent only two weeks in Korea lecturing on this topic.

⁵⁹ Roland Allen, (1868-1947), was an English clergyman who studied at Oxford University and was ordained in the Anglican Church in 1892. He is considered a significant missionary to China and Africa, and also an important mission theorist. He became famous as an international missions consultant and worked toward the revival of missionary vision in the Church. Roland Allen's most significant contribution to missiology remains his proposed further developed so-called Three-Self theory. This theory consists in the well assumed

to challenge and resist opposing factors, the more aware they became of the dangers and the more creative in opposing them effectively.

- 2) It is a fact that “missionaries can identify themselves more easily with a small organization rather than with a massive, formless church.” But is this a hindrance to mission, especially in a foreign land? Is the missionary's work not dependent exclusively on God? Can this be relativized by the activity of the sending church boards? And if it is *home mission* work, can this be stopped or can God's work be made to cease by the sanctioning of an insensitive officialdom?
- 3) The question can also be put as to whether a balancing power against the sanctioning of any officialdom back home can be made by those on the field through entering into a sisterhood with other similar denominations on the mission field?⁶⁰ Can a challenge be made against the given resistance of officialdom by finding solidarity with the world wide church, not just on the mission field but even beyond? If resistance of the officialdom of “a massive, formless church” can actually be ridiculed in this way, i.e., by getting into a more cohesive fellowship with an even more massive, world wide community, then will that resistance still work as a real hindrance on the mission field or anywhere? Even if “missionaries can identify themselves more easily with a small organization,” do they still not need to rely on the bigger and wider “massive and formless” community of the universal Church of Christ in order to resist their own “massive and formless church” which tends to isolate itself from the same world wide body of Christ and runs the risk of

responsibility of the “home/mother church” on the mission field, that she should be duty-bound to work toward three goals, namely that the younger/indigenous churches started by the sending mother churches should become in every possible way self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating as soon as possible. Jim Reapsome (see in the *EDWM*, p.54.) states that “Allen's somewhat iconoclastic approach to missions attracted wide interest among evangelical mission agencies.” His most important and most influential writings in the matter are *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (written in 1912) and *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church and the Causes Which Hinder It* (written in 1927). Allen embarked basically on the teachings of Rufus Anderson and Henry Venn, the two famous protagonists of foreign missions at the beginning of the 19th century.

⁶⁰ As in the case of the above mentioned John Nevius who encouraged missionaries to work together with missionaries from different denominations and mission agencies in the second half of the 19th century.

becoming a closed up national or ethnic or culturally uniform grouping of people with a ghetto mentality? I have data to show that this happened in the case of the TRC. Even Imre to some extent made good use of the opportunity to rely on respected international Christian leaders in order to convince his own church of the rightness of home mission, even though the domestic church had previously labeled it as sectarian, as can be seen in my evaluation throughout this research. This can be illustrated by the visit of Mott described earlier. The positive way in which Mott was received and heard became a weapon in Imre's hands towards achieving the long expected breakthrough concerning home missions, altering the church's interpretation and attitude. He could appeal to the world wide community of the Protestant churches and to their practices in how the home mission ministry among the youth should be carried out. As a contrast to this, I also have evidence in the autobiographical notes of missiologist J. Horváth⁶¹ that his highly respected mentor and professor once resisted Horváth's efforts at the Seminary to organize an evangelization week. Imre most probably felt that

⁶¹ See his unpublished *Autobiographical notes* in the family Archives, Nr. 3/a. (1944-1953): "It is a painful truth: Imre does not want to work together with me. I raised the idea again of organizing evangelization in the Theological Seminary [building]. They have refused the idea in the Executive Committee of the 'Good Shepherd' [Mission] with the argument that it is not commissioned to them – rather it is [commissioned] to the congregations of Kolozsvár and to the [official] leadership. I talked there [in the leadership, i.e., the Bishop's office] with the most appropriate person, Dezső László. His answer was, they will not take responsibility for it [for such action] because there is no need here in the downtown for it. There is the church and the bible-study group there. (...) I made the point that it would be most appropriate if the Central Mission Office [of the Bishopric] would organize it. [This was led by Imre, the Commissioner of the Church in Missions]. When Imre objected that he has no time for this, I replied, if the Central Mission Office just organizes it officially, I [offer myself that I] will do all the [administration and organizing] work." (An entry written on the 14th of March, 1946.)

In Hungarian it reads:

"Fájdalmas igazság: Imre nem akar velem együttműködni. Felvettem a Teológián ismét megtartandó evangélizáció gondolatát. A 'Jó Pásztor' Végrehajtó Bizottságában azzal utasították vissza, hogy nincs a 'Jó Pásztor' Misszióra bízva – a k(olozs)vári (sic!) egyházközségekre, vezetőségre. Beszéltem ott a legilletékesebbel, László Dezsővel. Az volt a válasza: nem vállalják, mert itt a belvárosban nincs rá szükség; van templom és bibliaóra. (...) Szóvá tettem legtermészetesebb lenne, hogy a Központi Missziói Iroda rendezze [amit Imre vezetett, mint missziói előadás, megjegyzés LH]. Mikor Imre azt vetette ellen, hogy nincs ideje, azt mondtam: csak rendezze meg a Központi Misszió, én eljárom a járnivalókat." (1946 márc. 14.-i bejegyzés.)

church policy would not favor such an event, or that it could not be balanced by a reference to the wider publicity of the world wide community of the churches.

I have used the method of *usus elencticus*, the elenctic or elenctical usage of arguments, or using an argument by refutation most of the time when commenting on the arguments presented by Conn for both the modality and the sodality paradigm defenders. I arrive now to the last point left to be examined. Here I have to work with both the *usus polemicus*, the polemic usage, polemic which indicates simple attack, and also the *usus elencticus*, the elenctic which implies refutation toward positive statement. That is how I can summarize then the whole controversial topic for the sake of any productive moving forward theologically in this matter.

6. *The faith mission exists as a testimony to the catholicity of the Bible. Denominations are no more church in this sense than the faith mission. Given the existence of one church, the faith mission would then be a church mission. Denominationalism is no more biblical than para-ecclesiastical agencies.*

I have found this argument helpful in my evaluation of the Transylvanian situation and I will use it later when I critically evaluate the opposing views of two distinctive scholars on the subject, Ralph Winter and Bruce Camp. At the same time, I must say that this same argument may cause great confusion in the matter presented above. This leads me to my first critical remark:

- 1) At last, it is recognized here, although indirectly, that the usage of words and phrases like 'church,' 'one, universal church,' 'sodality,' 'mission agencies,' 'denominationalism in respect to the given existence of one church,' were never carefully defined and explained in these modality versus sodality debates. This proves my point, as I previously demonstrated, that terms are often used inconsistently or used with their general meaning, with no clarification. This happened repeatedly among the Transylvanians. I think the wrong usage of words arises not merely from terminological confusion, but that beneath the terminological or etymological confusion, there is often a philosophical precondition which makes the confusion more complex. For the Transylvanians, their neo-Kantian philosophical preconceptions were especially invasive, as I point to frequently in this paper.

- 2) One can not disagree with the statement that “denominationalism is no more biblical than para-ecclesiastical agencies.” But para-ecclesiastical agencies can be regarded as a token of the church universal in para-regional appearance, as I will elaborate later when discussing Camp versus Winter on the issue. The only problem is that the para-church society might be irrelevant in terms of a synodical model, cf. the Jerusalem Council. By “synodical model”, I mean the reformed and Presbyterian interpretation of both the synodical model and of the Jerusalem Council recorded in the New Testament, as this was more appropriate to the Transylvanian understanding of the church. In their interpretation it was obvious that para-agencies or agencies “above” (i.e., cross-denominational or non-denominational) the church type of agencies are not needed. Instead they called for inter-church agencies, (although the official line would reject inter-church agencies when that meant inter-denominational agencies) as forums for inter-church dialogues in a given region. They limited this dialogue within the boundaries of their denomination, a dialogue carried out between parishes constituting a whole area of “egyház megye” or Presbytery, and between the different Presbyteries constituting a whole ‘District’ or ‘Bishopric.’
- 3) In my opinion Paul did not have a ‘the messengers and ambassadors of different local congregations to maintain a flow missionary band,’⁶² as Winter assumes, but rather he had an inter-church agency, formed by of information, to comfort one another, and to allow for the flow of support and donations. As a conclusion, if the nature and very essence of the church is mission, can we not state that sometimes she can function best as a missional church with the aid of the sodality?

Yet the question still persists: when the church is slow to respond to the apparent needs of world-evangelization, does this justify theologically the being and functioning of the sodalities? Is this not simply another “theological short-cut” solution, created by a pragmatic interest for carrying out missions? Is this not a *petitio principii* way of argument seeking a theological legitimacy for sodalities? I think, rather, that it is an *a posteori* argument rather than a *petitio principii*, but although it is valid as an *a posteori* argument, it is still not enough to prove the case.

⁶² As Winter assumes, see below.

First of all because it can make a virtue out of necessity, as we saw in Barth's argument, cited above. Making a virtue out of necessity is a post-fact argument, so in that sense it can be an a posteori argument. Secondly, when the validity and truthfulness is not enough to prove the case, I mean in a Pauler-ian, neo-Kantian way, that validity does not prove the existence of the same (valid) thing. But instead of arguing the justification of the existence of sodalities in a philosophical sense, we need to have biblical justification to provide an adequate theologizing in the matter. We need to find a more explicit biblical argument in order to support the a posteori argument in favor of what we are stating.

Then, we still have to ask, given that the TRC claimed to be based on the principles of the Reformation, what were the theological views upheld and accepted according to her standards concerning the definition of the church?

One also has to keep in mind when trying to analyze the Transylvanian definition of the term 'church' in a strictly theological way, that within the notion *ecclesia militans*, a clear distinction has to be made between the *ecclesia synthetica* or "*ecclesia collectiva*," and the *ecclesia repraesentativa*, the representative church. The former term in reformed theology identifies the whole body of believers, while the latter identifies the *ministerium ecclesiasticum*, the ministers of the church whose responsibility it is to preach the Word and teach the sacred doctrine.

Having clarified in what consists my grill of investigation in the ecclesiological thinking of the TRC, I will turn back again to the two contradictory paradigms of modality and sodality described above which I have already critically evaluated.

Attempts to Solve the Modality versus Sodality Dilemma

Harvie Conn, after posing and comparing the two sides of the arguments, presented in the table above, proposes a compromise between the two models. It is important to see his arguments before we go to the critical evaluation of Camp on the ideas popularized by Ralph Winter in this important dilemma. Conn writes:

My own position is a compromise. The faith missions continue to perform *functions* not fulfilled by the denominational ones. They are quicker to respond to apparent

needs (e.g., Tentmaking Project, Samuel Zwemer Institute). Because of their scope, they are also able to draw on more gifted people in areas to supervise their work (*italics, LH*).⁶³

Does the primary mandate and very essence of the church, the task of missions, become the function of the sodality to be performed in cases when the church itself forgets? In other words, as implied above, does the church's *slowness* or even tardiness in responding to the apparent needs of world evangelization justify the existence and functioning of the sodalities? Does this quick and efficient response on the part of the independent societies constitute a theologically valid and well-justified *raison de l'être* for the sodalities? Conn goes on to present his criticisms both of the modality and the sodality in order to search for possible cooperation between the two in a pragmatic way. He is aware of the need for a closer reflection on the biblical perspective on missions, an emphasis especially characteristic in Reformed circles. Yet the weakness of his arguments in favor of a compromise, a model in between the modality and sodality, consists in their *lack* of a biblical foundation:

Further, sticking only to a denominational board may deter you from using your gifts in a geographical area where your gifts are uniquely suited [underline by the author]. The board may simply not have work in that area. On the other hand, church boards do seek to reflect a more biblical perspective on missions as the work of the church. This however *can get overemphasized in Reformed circles*. For both church boards and para-church boards end up planting churches and working with churches on the field [*Italics, LH*].⁶⁴

These arguments were strengthened by Bruce K. Camp⁶⁵ when a decade later, in the 1990s, he tried to challenge the views of Winter,⁶⁶ basically stated in favor of the co-existence of the sodalities with the modality, or rather in favor of the bare existence and theological justification of the mission/voluntary societies.

⁶³ Conn, p.16.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ See the article of Bruce K. Camp, 'A Theological Examination of the Two-Structure Theory' in *Missiology: An International Review*, vol. XXIII. No.2. (April, 1995): pp.197-209.

⁶⁶ See Ralph D. Winter's article 'The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission' in Ralph Winter, et al. (eds), *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement, A Reader*. Third edition, William Carey Library and Paternoster Press, 1981, 1992, 1999, pp.220-230. The article was written in 1974.

Although Camp considered sodalities theologically and biblically unjustifiable, he realized their pragmatic usefulness and, like Conn, suggested a compromise for how the church could work together with them.

In introducing Camp's article, the editor commented on the controversial nature of the issue under debate. "What began as a historical observation [in Winter's article], primarily, has developed into a theological doctrine which advocates theological legitimacy for mission agencies."⁶⁷ Thus Camp seeks to reject "the accepted doctrine of sodalities as being another expression of the universal church." However, he still admits that sodalities should be accepted and utilized on a pragmatic basis by congregations.⁶⁸ Enlisting first the views of some missiologists⁶⁹ who maintain that sodalities are not biblically justified bodies for carrying out the mission task, Camp turned to quote those⁷⁰ who *are* in favor of it and attempted to prove that they can be biblically supported. Then he summarizes the discussion in two theological questions:

Is the mission agency structure separate from, but equal to the congregational structure insofar as both structures are expressions of the universal church?

If the mission agency structure is separate from, but equal to the congregational structure, then is it correct to differentiate between the ministries of the two structures?⁷¹

The stated dilemma and the contrasting perspectives are enormously important, as having many significant similarities in Transylvania in the time period that we are focusing on in this thesis. But let us first evaluate the arguments of Camp against the proposed model of Winter.

Camp asks if there are any visible expressions of the universal church other than the local church. Winter's answer was that Paul's "missionary band," a "traveling church" was just such a visible expression. Quoting Paul Pierson that both modalities and sodalities are each "normative expressions of the church" and Charles Mellis that "the two structures together constitutes the Church," Winter

⁶⁷ Camp, p.197.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Like Rolland Allen, Harry Boer, and George Peters.

⁷⁰ Like Howard Snyder, C. Peter Wagner, Jerry White, Bruce Bauer, Charles Mellis, Samuel Metcalf and J. Raymond Tallman.

⁷¹ Camp, pp.197-209.

concludes that there exists both the local church and the missionary band with the two together constituting the universal church of Christ.⁷² But a closer look at the New Testament immediately calls into question not just the conclusion of Winter but also that of Camp. For example, the first Jerusalem Synod (cfr Acts 15 and Galatians 2) was also a visible expression of the Universal church (and more “universal” than any local congregation!) to which Paul’s “missionary band/team” had to report,⁷³ in addition to reporting to the Antioch congregation which had basically authorized them and sent them out to the mission field. I cannot see that this authoritative body of believers from Jerusalem had less authority over Paul and his companions than did the local Antioch church. The Christians from Jerusalem questioned them and they had to argue their case in front of them. This they did, respecting that visible “organ” of the church universal with great seriousness. Finally, Paul and company were sent back as their ambassadors with a letter on the Synod’s behalf, so why should this non-local body of Christians meeting in Jerusalem not be considered a visible expression of the church?⁷⁴

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ I am aware of the fact that it appears here that I am arguing more in line with the Presbyterian and/or Anglican view and my point can be questioned from the angle of a more Independent or Congregationalist approach. Otherwise a theologian committed to independency would express this above sentence differently, such as “...the Jerusalem Council ... to which Paul’s ‘missionary band/ team’ chose to report (instead of *had to*)...,” and also perhaps he would continue: “in addition to reporting to the Antioch congregation to which they had basically chosen to report as that was their sending local church who authorized them and sent them out to the mission field.” But despite appearances I am not debating here which view, whether the Presbyterian or Independent, the Methodist or Congregationalist, Episcopalian or any other Connectionalists, is theologically correct. To make the very subtle difference clear, I am not asking at this point who is *authorized* to be reported back to by Paul and his companions, and in what quality or position or with what kind of commissioned authority these bodies are authorized and allowed to do so, but the only thing I have in mind is that we can approach the issue from a *corporate* angle, claiming a more *organic* perspective of the *body* of Christ, if we focus on the willingness of Paul to test with ‘the communion of the saints’ the work of him and his colleagues.’ I will come back later to this problem when discussing the TRC’s specific situation and compare that with the recent discussion on the topic, where Dr. Eryl Davies defended Independency and Dr. Harry Uprichard the Presbyterian view. See in Alan F. Gibson (ed.), *The Church and Its Unity, When Christians Disagree*. Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992.

⁷⁴ Similarly, we can ask, besides the “synod,” as a non-local and visible expression of the Church Universal, cannot we also enlist the group of “their ambassadors,” “Paul and his company” as a third entity which constitutes “a non-local and visible expression of the Church Universal?”

After quoting the missiologists who have elaborated on Winter's ideas, Camp specifically presents Bauer and his comparison of Congregational Structures (11 characteristics) with Mission Structures (7 characteristics)⁷⁵ and repeats his question: "Is there a biblical justification for believing that both of these structures together constitute the universal church?"⁷⁶ In the light of our criticism above we ask, is there biblical justification for believing that all three structures, church non-local, church local, and missionary band together constitute the universal church? Or at least two? Or is only one necessary?

Then, he goes on to ask: "is it theologically accurate to maintain that congregational structures should be nurture-oriented, and mission structures cross-culturally-oriented?"⁷⁷ I see no justification for the distinction being made here. If a structure is nurture-oriented, why can it not be at the same time cross-culturally-oriented as well, if it is nurtured in a "sound and biblical way," that is to say, toward a mission mindedness such as occurs in the Bible as being of the essence of the church? We agree with Metcalf when Camp quotes him suggesting that the usage of the term "the church in local form" equals the local congregation and "the church in mobile or mission form" equals para church. But how can we define the church in a synodical form or the church in a 'para-region'-al form? Camp says that Winter termed both denominations and local churches as modalities, and missionary bands as sodalities. But in my opinion even a denomination is not limited to a local area; it works more like the Jerusalem Council or synod. There is no point in interpreting the term to mean a local appearance of the church. Rather, it can function as "a church in mobile or mission form" which Metcalfe contrasted with "the church in local form." The weakness in the arguments of both Winter and Camp is that they fail to recognize the *corporate* aspect of doing mission in the New Testament. To acknowledge the corporate aspect⁷⁸ serves as a

In this way we have not one or two, but even three and clearly very specifically differentiated entities/structures all together, and thus not just the local congregations representing the visible expressions of the same universal church.

⁷⁵ Camp, pp.197-209.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ For example even in the New Testament we see that Paul does not send his letters as simply being from himself, but he names his co-workers as co-authors of the letters and of the theological reasoning found in them.

correction to the Western individualism read back so often into the New Testament and its theology.⁷⁹

If we take Winter's definition of a modality and a sodality we can immediately identify this failure, as can be seen below:

Elsewhere I have developed these terms in detail, but briefly, a modality is a structured fellowship in which there is no distinction of sex or age, while a sodality is a structured fellowship in which membership involves an adult second decision beyond modality membership, and is limited by either age or sex or marital status. In this use of these terms, both the *denomination* and the *local congregation* are modalities, while a mission agency or a local men's club are sodalities.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ This is a question of submitting myself to (indeed of *choosing*) the relative authority of a freely accepted fellowship of the brethren. One willingly submits to such a *community-cohesion* because of the desire for accountability and constructive criticism. According to the New Testament community-cohesion is considered stronger than *individualism* in fulfilling the mission task. The biblical mission paradigm is definitely non-individualistic, so it is a mission which is not commissioned solely by God, but is commissioned both by the sending God, in an *absolute* sense; and by the sending church (in whatever sense understood: solely local or also regional), in a *relative* sense. One can see this clearly in the case of Paul, who although he received his mission call directly from his Lord in an exceptional revelation, and who confessed that he "immediately conferred not with flesh and blood," Gal 1:16; yet he was able to wait until the Holy Spirit made it clear for the Antioch community that he was set apart with Barnabas to be sent out by the church for the same mission, see in Acts 13. I do not deny that I have a certain conviction in the form of church government. But I contest the repeated amnesia, or the presence of a persistent blind spot in the matter whereby this *corporate dimension* and the *fellowship cohesion* in the Body of Christ usually is forgotten. Perhaps this happens because of the impregnated individualism on the Western or European mind, when this issue is debated. I can fully agree here with Dr. Eryl Davies, when he asserts in a similar context: "There are encouraging signs that some organizations recognize *their subordination* to the local church [emphasis, LH]," demanding also that "Christians themselves need to honor this God-given unit." Dr. Davies explicitly supports my point with regard to the importance of *corporate*-ness being stressed against the dominance of *individualism* in an indirect way, when he cites individualism as one of the reasons for there being no adequate teaching on ecclesiology: "In addition, many churches have neglected to teach ecclesiology partly due to an excessive emphasis on individualism, pietism and low estimate of the church." Eryl Davies, 'Independency' in Alan F. Gibson (ed.), *The Church and Its Unity, When Christians Disagree*. Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992, p.82.

⁸⁰ See also his elaboration on this in Ralph D. Winter, 'The Warp and the Woof of the Christian Movement,' in his and R. Pierce Beaver's, *The Warp and Woof: Organizing for Christian Mission*. South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1970, pp.52-62.

I suggest that even this attractive comparison of Winter appears culture-bound (“a local men’s club”, etc.). When I argue for the failure of both Winter and Camp to recognize the *corporate aspect* of carrying out missions as was done in the New Testament, against the individual aspect, I am also arguing in favor of my debatable point of whether the Jerusalem Council can be regarded as an embodiment or visible expression of the church universal, in contrast to the church local.⁸¹

But instead of going further in my argument, I am happy to place the Transylvanian situation in this wider context of the debate. In doing so, it becomes clear that the Episcopalian church government ‘remnants’ and ‘leftovers’ which are found in the supposedly and avowed Presbyterian church government of the TRC, resulted in a chaotic inconsistency which is still present today. This hindered not just mission and evangelization work, but a church with such an ecclesiology was self-handicapped in becoming a missional church. Moreover, as a reaction to this inconsistency, the CE movement was forced to become a resistant and partisan movement, an internal opposition which thus shaped and pushed the movement into a more Congregationalist mould. See on the one hand, Kecskeméthy’s proposal for establishing a ‘spiritual eldership’ alongside the ‘institutional and formal’ one cited above, as an example of how desperately CE tried to solve and bridge over the tense situation, which emerged due to inconsistent church government. On the other hand, the official church held CE guilty of being sectarian and moving toward independence. For example, in 1928 Dr. Géza Nagy accused the CE Union of entertaining and promoting congregationalist views⁸² as evidence of their sectist position and as something unacceptable to the TRC, at a conference held at the Seminary; see my observations regarding the conference later in chapter six. CE, in fact, tried to defend *connectionalism* also but more in a spiritual and fraternal sense rather than in the sense of an ecclesiastical order (although they would not necessarily refuse that either). I agree with Eryl Davies

⁸¹ One has to be aware of the fact that many theologians committed to independency would argue for a different interpretation of the Jerusalem Council. For example, Dr. Davies is very convincing especially in refuting John Murray’s arguments on the debated issue, see in: Davies, ‘Independency,’ *op. cit.*, pp.70-74, and also pp.82-87.

⁸² It is true that the founder of Christian Endeavour, the American Stephen Clark, was a Congregationalist minister. Yet, to regard the Congregationalist churches as a sect when they professedly were also Calvinists, was unfair on the part of the official TRC.

in this context, that in the same way even Congregationalism supports connectionalism when he states that

there is an important sense in which independency supports and practices connectionalism. Are you surprised? Well, remember that independent churches where the Bible is preached are connected dynamically by virtue of their union with the exalted Christ, their submission to Christ as the church's head, and their obedience to the word of God. The connection between them, therefore, is spiritual and is expressed in mutual, spontaneous fellowship with, and concern for, other local churches. While there is spiritual connection between Christians and churches, independency insists that each local church is self-governing.⁸³

I could argue that the TRC 'solved' the two different opposing church government models by tolerating the presence of any freely organized "spiritual connectionalism" and "spiritual eldership" in and above some of the congregations, alongside "institutional and formal" organizations in the church and thus maintained the unity of the denomination. But that would be an exaggeration. The real issue revolved around the problem of how the modality on one hand, and CE on the other hand interpreted the distinction between the *visible* and the *invisible* church. As again Eryl Davies observes:

The principle of the gathered church of believers challenges the traditional distinction between the 'invisible' and 'visible' church. This distinction was used by the Reformers and remains popular with some connectionalists today. As mixed, denominational churches often include significant and even large numbers of unregenerate, the distinction can be useful to connectionalists. For example, the mixed membership is sometimes referred to as the 'visible' church whereas the term 'invisible' church is used to refer only to true Christians who are difficult to distinguish in many denominational churches.⁸⁴

I think the same can be said of the TRC, that this distinction "remains popular with some connectionalists today." This is how the above 'practical' solution to the dilemma was able to work without resulting in a split between the church and

⁸³ Davies, 'Independency,' p. 70.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p.76.

the mission movement, a movement which otherwise perhaps would have become a new denomination.⁸⁵

The Ambiguous Relationship Between Sodality and Modality in the TRC

During the formational years of the mission movement in Transylvania, Kecskeméthy in his articles, most of which were published in his *Kis Tükör* magazine, wrote frequently about how the movement should relate to the larger ecclesial context within which it had begun, namely the TRC. But this was only his secondary concern. His first concern revolved again and again around differences in perspective on the scope and purpose of the movement. He was also engaged in the clarification of the related theological and ecclesiological, even organizational, concerns. According to Kecskeméthy, the role of CE was that of a missionary force with the task of proclaiming the gospel in the immediate context of what was perceived to be a spiritually lax and institutionalized church. Kecskeméthy defined CE as a revival movement. However, the nature and characteristics of the Transylvanian CE movement reflected the definition of a well contoured religious movement. Stark and Bainbridge would regard it as a religious movement which is: “(a) social movement that causes or prevents change in a system of beliefs, values, symbols, and practices concerned with supernaturally-based general compensators.”⁸⁶

⁸⁵ There is no room here for engaging deeper with this debate, yet I have to note that although I have found Dr. Davies' arguments more convincing than those of the pro-Presbyterian Dr. Uprichard's, I cannot agree with his refusal of the authority of decision making elders coming together in Presbyteries or Assemblies. I disagree based on the following: if these elders have no authority to make decisions binding the local congregations, how can one sustain the univocal argument of the Reformers for the careful distinction which has to be made between the *ecclesia representativa* and the *ecclesia collectiva* or *synthetica*? Otherwise the significance of corporate-ness in the missions task is undermined. I am not suggesting that the sometimes un-spiritual way in which the officialdom ruled could justify the regional importance of those assemblies, but merely ask where can this representative aspect come to the surface if not in the corporate form of a church Council or of a sodality or 'missionary band'?

⁸⁶ Stark Rodney and William Sims Bainbridge, 'Of churches, sects and cults: Preliminary concepts for a theory of religious movements' *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 18 (2), (1979): pp.117-133. (Referred to also by Keppeler; see his paper, cited below.)

The importance of the laity's role in evangelization, preaching the gospel and missionary activity was strongly emphasized in the writings of the leaders of the CE movement. Such activities were not considered to be solely the prerogatives of the church clergy but rather the duty of every Christian for otherwise, we might run the risk of dividing the church into active and passive parts. Interestingly, Iosif Trifa, the leader of a lay revivalist movement (the so called "Oastea Domnului" or "Lord's Army" movement which began in 1923) within the Romanian Orthodox Church, wrote in a similar way, when protesting against the division of the church into active and non-active parts by maintaining the gap between clergy and laity: "(S)uch a thing does not correspond with the true essence of Christianity; and we need to oppose this, *together with the Protestants, with the idea of the universal priesthood and holiness of the people of God* (italics, LH)"⁸⁷ In this regard, Thomas Keppeler noticed:

The heavy emphasis Trifa placed on the role of the laity can be seen in his criticism of one cleric who proposed that the statutes of Oastea Domnului require the leader of a given local Oastea Domnului assembly to be a priest. Trifa responded by emphasizing that Oastea Domnului is a group of lay volunteers and that *to restrain Oastea Domnului adherents in an official structure would mean killing the movement* (italics, LH).⁸⁸

Keppeler goes on to describe another important feature of the movement which corresponds with what CE believed, namely the emphasis on the new birth:

(that) Trifa's concern was to safeguard the freedom of the movement from the institutionalized control of the Orthodox Church, and this concern is evident in Trifa's seeing Christ as the invisible leader of the movement. Furthermore, *the visible leader can only be a person who has experienced the new birth* (italics, LH).⁸⁹

Trifa's position can be compared with the stand of CE as represented and discussed in detail by Kecskeméthy in an issue of *Kis Tükör* in 1928. At first, he

⁸⁷ Iosif Trifa, *Ce este Oastea Domnului? (What is the Lord's Army?)*. Sibiu: Editura și tiparul Tipografiei Oastea Domnului,, 1934, p.136, quotes Keppeler, see below.

⁸⁸ Thomas Keppeler, *Beliefs and Assumptions About the Nature of the Church and Its Leadership: A Romanian Case Study* Unpublished Doctor of Education dissertation, submitted at Trinity International University, Deerfield, Illinois, 1996, used by the permission of the author, p. 35. Quoting also Trifa, p.202.

⁸⁹ Keppeler, p.35.

suggested alternatives to the solution of the general crisis of church life on a congregational level. He was fully aware that many who thought responsibly about the church were in favor of a renewal. But, Kecskeméthy argued, all ideas proceeding from such a concern are and cannot be good; a biblical way which is in agreement with the Creeds of the church also has to be found, otherwise, without genuine conversion of each single member, the Christianity of the congregation is fake:

It is absolutely certain that a congregation in which all members become truly converted to Christ will defeat the world. But how many of the congregations actually believe that they are truly and in practice on the right way to this state? Let us suppose that our church would take this problem very seriously and at its next synod it will include this goal into its program. In this case the question arises: by what means does the church want to reach this aim? The means it has so far are not good enough. The leaders of the church have sensed this and they tried to amend the problem by supporting the congregational unions so that those members of the church who feel the need of more intimate, more warm, more confidential religious communion should be able to fulfill this need without being compelled to leave the church. These unions are the oasis of the congregations, which prevent the flowing streams of the water of life to silt up in the sand. Rather they gather the brooks so that they can bring fruits and flowers. This is how the relationship of the church to the union and vice versa is defined.⁹⁰

It is interesting to see here how the “relationship of the church to the union and vice versa” is conceived; it is an alternative solution-proposal to the modality-sodality tension. Eryl Davies summarized this problem in a helpful way; his statement describes the dilemma of the Transylvanian situation:

There is a challenge concerning the legitimacy of para-church organizations. The word *para* means that these organizations should, ideally, stand alongside the local church as ‘helpers’ or agencies providing specialist knowledge or gifts enabling the

⁹⁰ István Kecskeméthy, ‘A “viszonyok” általános tisztázása’ (‘The General Clarification of the “Relationships” /between the church and the CE movement/’), in *Kis Tükör* Vol. 18, Nr. 37 (September 15, 1928): pp.145-146. Also republished in István Kecskeméthy, *Beszélgünk nyíltan, Válogatott Írások* (‘Let’s Talk Plainly’, *Selected Writings*). Kolozsvár: Koinónia Publishing, 2003, pp.147-150. A subtitle reads, *Hogyan szolgálják a CE-szövetségek az egyházat* (How the CE-Unions Are Serving the Church).

church to fulfill its God-given responsibilities. Only within this framework can local churches recognize the legitimacy and usefulness of para-church organizations.⁹¹

Kecskeméthy is keen, like Trifa above, to emphasize the need for personal spiritual regeneration, before we can focus on the renewal of the whole congregation as an aim:

However, the unions that are content with reaching the aim of intimate and warm communion – no matter how beautiful and honorable this aim is – will never be able to help the church reach its true goal. The way to the defeat of the world leads from being born again. That means that we need societies in the church that can be soft, warm and nice nests for rebirth. In this regard, experience has already proved that the CE Unions first can here be of account.⁹²

We can see that a sodality, in Kecskeméthy's thinking here, serves as a spiritual oasis in the local congregation, or as a nest, a "warm communion." But Kecskeméthy also saw the problem realistically and tried to search for solutions for the ongoing problems. He gave at least two reasons for these difficulties. Both issues concern a serious devotedness to the Creeds and Confessions of the reformed churches. The "ecclesiastical common sense" is different to what the church has vowed to believe and to which it has subscribed:

Unfortunately it is their [CE's] relationship to the church and to its pastors that is considered suspect by the majority of the church members. There are two reasons for this. One of the reasons is that these unions have a more serious concept about the doctrine of rebirth than that held by the ecclesiastical common sense in general. And - odd though it may seem - this in particular is the reason for their falling under the suspicion of being sectists. It is for this reason that the pastors relate so uncomfortably to these people, especially those who academically consider rebirth to be only a human decision, a constant endeavor to do good. But let us consider the fact that the unions preserve the most crucial part of our confession of faith and pastors can find great resources in these unions even if they disagree with them. They [the pastors] do not need to pretend to be born again. On the contrary, that would be truly harmful. All that is necessary is an honest understanding. They should always remember that they are pastors of the entire congregation, so they are not allowed

⁹¹ Davies, p. 82.

⁹² Kecskeméthy, *ibid.* p.148.

to exclude anybody from their love. In return, the members of the union shall also love and honor their pastor without asking for his guidance or for ways of ministry with which he cannot agree. This is the only fair relationship between pastors and members of the unions. Inconsideration of this truth has already created many problems; mutual understanding of it promises much good.⁹³

Two observations are pertinent here. First, according to Kecskeméthy, the need for rebirth is not altogether excluded from “the ecclesiastical common sense of the church.” This would be too great a denial of what the Heidelberg Catechism and the Second Helvetic Confession, the official Standards of the TRC, (especially highly regarded by Imre and his circle and by the “official leadership” of the TRC at that time), teach. If the clergy could not ignore these standards, as they could thirty years before when theological liberalism was dominant, similarly they could not ignore and reject as not being reformed either the name or the activity denoted under the concept of “mission” and “home mission.” Now they were constrained to pay attention to the teaching about regeneration, but they still altered its meaning. That alteration, typically, consisted in the denial of the main teaching of the Reformation concerning justification by faith. Thus Kecskeméthy criticized these representatives of the clergy, “who academically consider rebirth to be only a human decision, a constant endeavor to do good.” So justification by faith alone, the *sola fide* teaching of the reformers was reduced to a “constant endeavor to do good;” instead of emphasizing God’s grace, at the end it became a mere “human decision.” The theological liberalism dominant in the TRC resulted in an emphasis on moral endeavor, ignoring supernatural grace. This was at the very least a synergist view, as we can read in the detailed critique of a non-CE adherent, Makkai, in his famous book, *Öntudatos kálvinizmus* (*Self-conscious Calvinism*).⁹⁴

The problem with the lack of consistent Confessional teaching on the important topic of regeneration led to the practice of a merely formal profession of faith in the ceremony of Confirmation. The official theological orientation did not require a genuine faith in Jesus Christ for salvation.⁹⁵ No evangelization was

⁹³ *Ibid.* pp.148-149.

⁹⁴ , Sándor Makkai , *Öntudatos kálvinizmus* ('Self-conscious Calvinism') Budapest, 1925.

⁹⁵ Yet, the simple formal requirement of a “profession” of faith is not the same thing as having a personal saving faith in Christ, as is clearly taught in the Creeds and Standards of the reformed

needed once a person was baptized and professed faith at Confirmation; it was assumed they were all now Christians and thus regenerated. CE did not automatically challenge this assumption; they accepted that regeneration could have happened by the time an individual reached Confirmation age or even during the actual ceremony of Confirmation, as a result of the secret work of the Holy Spirit in the human heart. Yet they felt compelled to challenge and question in their preaching if this had really happened in the lives of those to whom they preached.⁹⁶ What CE argued with was the prohibition against any challenge being made to such an audience in preaching. An overview of *Kis Tükör* articles during this period shows convincingly how this problem characterized the TRC's life at this time.

Confessional Commitment and Ecumenical Openness

According to Imre, Kecskeméthy hesitated for a long time before pushing for the reintroduction of the Reformation Confessions as the official Church Standards during the 1920s. "Regarding the Confessional school he did not take sides for a long time..."⁹⁷ But then in other places Imre openly contradicts himself and speaks about Kecskeméthy as being orthodox: "He was orthodox in faith and radically thinking in science, he had a great knowledge, he was a good preacher, but he

Church. Both the Heidelberg Catechism and Second Helvetic Confession teach that saving faith is different from a nominal faith, and also that a bare professing of faith does not necessarily imply genuine faith. Such a profession might just be a "temporal" faith and self-deceptive. For this reason, the biblical teaching expressed in Calvin's *Institutes* and in the Reformed Standards speaks about the church as consisting of both genuine Christians and unbelievers, with only God knowing the identity of the elect. Both the official church and CE agreed on this point but tension between the two sides arose. The church accused CE, because of its emphasis on evangelization and need for rebirth, of playing God and, according to critics, tacitly claiming to know who were genuine believers and who were not. CE, in turn, accused the official church of ignoring what they claimed to attest, that a significant number of church members were either hypocrites or simply did not have saving faith, and thus need to be challenged to repentance and regeneration. The difficulty was that no difference was permitted to be made by the official church even in its preaching because it regarded all of its people as Christians.

⁹⁶ They called for a personal search of the heart in order to avoid any self-deception in believing and with regard to repentance.

⁹⁷ Imre, *Önéletírása*, (Autobiography), p. 194.

could get the attention of only a small circle.”⁹⁸ In fact, Kecskeméthy challenged the church for not following the Standards long before Imre and his companions (and long before anyone in the TRC opted for the reintroduction of the Standards), motivated by the Barthian and partly Dutch influences, turned from liberal theology to the more orthodox confessional position. The extract below indicates Kecskeméthy’s high regard for the Second Helvetic Confession, the official Standard of the Hungarian Reformed Churches in a period when theological Liberalism in the church marginalized it:

We do believe and confess and try to assert with all our ability the doctrines of the Reformed Church. But among those who try to save the church from us there are many who do not believe in our official doctrines, do not regard the teaching of the Bible and the [Second] Helvetic Confession as compelling for themselves, but rather they attempt by their words and their way of life to undermine the authority of these teachings. The state of affairs being such, I would be so bold as to raise the question: who are the true defenders of the church? Can the true defenders be those who undermine the foundation of the church? And who constitutes a real danger for the church? Can it be those who attempt to live according to the true doctrines of the church? Some people from Debrecen and their fellows think so, but no one with common sense could believe this.⁹⁹

This clear evidence of his demand for orthodoxy was highlighted by the fact that he publicly confessed his commitment for the Creeds in an early period in his ministry, but for that same commitment he faced the possibility at that time of being thrown out of the church (in the late 1890s):

I believe they should not forget that as long as the official standard of faith and action of this church is the Bible and the official confession is the Helvetic Confession of Faith, we are at home in the Reformed church both according to the eternal divine truth and human law. We cannot be invited to leave and we cannot be driven out. And we can ask at least that much consideration in our own home that we

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* pp.70–71.

⁹⁹ See Kecskeméthy’s clear stand from as early as 1897 expressed in his article, ‘Néhány megjegyzés’ (A Few Remarks), in: *Protestáns Egyházi és Iskolai Lap*, Vol. 40, Nr. 12, (1897), pp.184–186. Parts of this article were republished recently with the added subtitle “*Ki van otthon a református egyházban*” (*Who Is at Home in the Reformed Church*), in István Kecskeméthy, *Beszéljünk nyíltan, Válogatott írások* (‘Let’s Talk Plainly,’ ‘Selected Writings’), *op. cit.*, pp.128–131.

would not be called rebels and traitors by those who are just apparently living in the house and meanwhile constantly undermine its foundations. We would give up these rights only if our church would accept as their standard of faith and action, instead of the present one, the Protestant journals of Debrecen and as their confession of faith, the previous issues of the *Ébresztő* (*Wake Up Call*). Which I do not think will be the case, at least not in this century.¹⁰⁰

By contrast, Imre never admitted that he first was a liberal and never confessed publicly that he slowly changed his theological views from that of a liberal toward a more confessional position of Dialectical theology. Since the mid 1920s he blamed, as did Tavaszy, liberal theology but he did not view himself as being a Liberal up until that time. It is even stranger that he blamed Kecskeméthy for being hesitant in pushing for the Church's return to the Confessions since Kecskeméthy was in favor of the Reformation Confessions from the beginning of his professorship. That Imre was first a Liberal, then later gradually became a strict Confessional, though he accused Kecskeméthy's circle of not being reformed and orthodox enough and not holding to the Standards, is even more contradictory in the light of his own words toward the end of his life. Then, in his autobiography, he admits being antagonistic to what Kecskeméthy followed because of the "yeast of Liberalism" in his thinking. We quote a few sentences below but it is also clear from several other places of Imre's *Autobiography*:

I think I was already friends with Imre Révész, when we debated with János Victor through half the night about the pre-existence of Christ. As far as I am concerned, I must admit to my regret that the intellectual points-of-view that we were arguing for, were wrong. Still I confess that those times and occasions were tools by which God helped me to come to a more thorough understanding of these questions and thus grow spiritually and develop my theological knowledge. Of course my liberal-intellectual view and attitude remained a great hindrance.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ See his *Önéletírása*, (*Autobiography*), pp.76-77. We can find more evidence of the same on pp.77-78:

"As far as our theological views are concerned I can tell that we still had plenty of the liberal yeast within us and only later followed the debates with János Victor and his group and with Imre Révész about the foundations of the Christian faith and the right path of the Christian life."

Moreover, Imre blamed himself even for his previous theological attitude to missions and admits that because of his Liberal theological thinking he was dismissing foreign missions entirely as belonging to the despised Pietism:

Because of my liberal theologian attitude, as a theology student I also regarded it as a Pietistic thing. Though in Aberdeen I witnessed how great the interest of the church in mission is, I thought it to be no more than a means for the expansion of the British Empire.¹⁰²

In contrast to his early views Imre, the later missiologist, admits and affirms that Kecskeméthy was the first proponent of missions in the church:

Kecskeméthy's Christian Union was the first one in Transylvania to propagate the idea of the church's responsibility to do foreign mission. [...] The idea of foreign mission started expanding to the Sunday schools through both the Christian Union and of the Christian Youth Association (*started also by Kecskeméthy, LH*).¹⁰³

Given the above, it is confusing as to why Imre once insisted that Kecskeméthy was not orthodox, then at another time admitted that because of his orthodoxy, Kecskeméthy propagated missions. Again, it is strange that Imre blamed himself for his "liberal" thinking and yet still concluded that missiologically he was bound to distance himself from Kecskeméthy's circle. The same Imre admitted that he himself never had time to develop a theology of missions:

In fact we never defined mission and home mission scientifically or theologically. We were more concerned with the practical aspects of this work *distancing ourselves from views that were inconsistent with the Reformed confession of faith and with the Bible, first of all from the Pietistic trend represented by the Christian Union [CE] and the Transylvanian Association of the Evangelistic Workers* (Evangéliumi Munkások Erdélyi Szövetsége). We emphasized and practiced the view that this work belongs to the church." (bold, LH)¹⁰⁴

So how could Imre and the official line justifiably distance themselves from the trend of CE before even defining what mission is theologically and determining if CE was faithful theologically to the Standards of the Church? There seems to be

¹⁰² *Ibid*, p.277.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*. p.290.

no answer to our questions, except that of mere prejudice. In my opinion Kecskeméthy did not agree with the official acceptance of the home mission movement, which deliberately ignored what CE had done already in the home mission arena, because he could not accept any renewal or mission movement which remained “liberal” to some extent and not consistent with the Standards of the Church. This seems to be confirmed by the quotation below:

An interesting fact is that Kecskeméthy who might have been justly thought to be sympathetic to and supportive of the newly started “awakening,” kept entirely away from us. It is true, we never shared our questions with him either. But it is also true that he did not consider us converted and **he was right in this judgement, because we still had the liberal yeast within ourselves.** We regarded him as a Pietist and we were right in our judgement, too, because his exclusivist and reticent attitude was the result of a false pietistic sense of superiority. (bold, *LH*).¹⁰⁵

Victor also remembers this period in the 1920s as being a time of struggling to reinforce the Confessional Stand of the Church, which had been lost or neglected since the Enlightenment.

Under the influences of the Enlightenment - from the end of the XVII-th century onwards - these standards fell into oblivion in large parts of the church. The Law books of the church preceding the above mentioned one in the XIX-th century contain no reference to them. Their authority began to rise however again since the beginning of the present century and is generally recognized today.¹⁰⁶

Referring again to Kecskeméthy's quotation above, the second observation to make is that the tension between modality and sodality is not avoided or ignored by Kecskeméthy; in fact, the proposed solution is not an easy one, though an irenic spirit and effort can be seen clearly in his words. Kecskeméthy is not a prisoner of the figure of speech of the neo-Kantians; he does not talk constantly about how the church “ought to be” and does not even expect an ideal church can be achieved: for example, that all the ministers should be regenerate. Instead, he appeals realistically to the pastoral responsibility of the ministers and pleads with them: “They should always remember that they are pastors of the entire

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* pp.76–77.

¹⁰⁶ Victor, Answers to the Questionnaire concerning “The Nature of the Church,” p.1.

congregation, so they are not allowed to exclude anybody from their love.” Similarly, he urges CE members to love their pastors even if they disagree with them.

Kecskeméthy then turns to the second reason for the tensions observed in the modality-sodality relationship and his analysis is even more significant here, as he is approaching the problem from the angle of the universal Church:

The other reason why the relationship of the CE unions towards the church is considered suspicious is that members of the union take the part of the Apostle’s Creed that refers to the communion of the saints very seriously and they also make it real. And thus they fall under the suspicion of not behaving worthy of the church. But if they are regarded without prejudices, this suspicion does not stand. The members of the unions are truly the most active and most faithful members of the church. But the question should not be considered from this point-of-view, but from the point-of-view of the universal Church. The denomination that does not feel that it exists for the sake of the universal Church, will gradually become empty, lifeless and secularized. The greater the consciousness of being part of a denomination, the sooner this will turn into lack of consciousness and into meaningless boasting, if its roots are not in the consciousness of the universal church.¹⁰⁷

One notices the emphasis Kecskeméthy places on the cultivation of Christian fellowship with the wider universal Church. The denominational commitment, according to him, should not conflict with the serious practice of brotherly love and fellowship with the wider Christian church of the One Shepherd.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, some of Kecskeméthy’s statements here are questionable and I disagree with him on some points. For example, when he states that “The denomination that does not feel that it exists for the sake of the universal Church, will gradually become empty, lifeless and secularized.” There is not enough evidence in support of this. Church history indicates that even those denominations which felt that they exist for the sake of the universal Church, could, and have, become “gradually empty and lifeless.” Similarly, is it necessarily true that the eventual growth of a feeling of denominational identity would automatically result in “meaningless

¹⁰⁷ Kecskeméthy, ‘Néhány megjegyzés’ (A Few Remarks), *op. cit.*, p.149-150.

¹⁰⁸ Kecskeméthy observes that the suspicion and prejudice experienced by those who practice this unity and fellowship with the larger body of Christ is, in itself, a test of real commitment to their own church. Thus he notices that the faithfulness to the larger community of the saints in the spirit of the Apostle’s Creed does not separate, but rather enforces, their commitment to their local church and denomination.

boasting?" I cannot agree with these assumptions, especially when Kecskeméthy adds that such a church will "soon be secularized." Yet I acknowledge the importance of pointing to the universal fellowship of different denominations as being part of the same Body of Christ. Kecskeméthy was right in keeping the balance between a commitment to the Standards of faith of his own church while meanwhile demanding, with equal vehemence, that we should not forget we are all part of the same Church of Christ. He was aware of the fact that constantly emphasizing this delicate issue in the TRC would provoke tensions and misunderstanding, and would cause CE to be viewed in an even more problematic and prejudiced light as it tried to play a role in the church as a movement for renewal and mission. Yet he would not withdraw or pretend for the sake of a superficial peace with the "official church," not even at the expense of perhaps taming the prejudices of the ecclesiastical common sense in order to make it more by appearance confessional. That is why he concludes by touching on this sensitive issue again:

Even in this really delicate question one can easily ascertain what the correct relationship between CE and the [other] denominations should be. CE does precious service to the denominations in this case as well. So there is no need for securing its faithfulness by chains of administrative paragraphs. CE should remain the free arm of the denominations, which can be stretched out toward each other in order to embrace each other into one body, the body of Christ.¹⁰⁹

It is interesting to observe here that the mission of the sodality in the understanding of Kecskeméthy is not just to serve as an out-stretched arm toward the world, or toward those who live beyond the church walls; rather, the mission of the sodality could serve as an out-stretched arm to Christians from other denominations also. This is a more complex view of the sodality as being "both arms" of the church, one which expresses the intensive character, the other which expresses the extensive character of the same modality in the world. This double function of the sodality, as a voluntary power and missionary driving force in, and beyond, the church's limited sphere, is confirmed in the analysis of Andrew Walls and can

¹⁰⁹ This closing section is missing from the republished *Selected Writings* of Kecskeméthy, op. cit. But it can be found in the original *Kis Tükör* article on p.146.

be seen as an important contribution which CE brought to the life of the TRC. As Dr. Walls has emphasized:

From age to age it becomes necessary to use new means for the proclamation of the gospel beyond the structures which unduly localize it. Some have taken the word 'sodality' beyond its special usage in Catholic practice to stand for all such "use of means" by which groups voluntarily constituted labor together for specific gospel purposes. The voluntary societies have been as revolutionary in their effect as ever the monasteries were in their sphere. The sodalities we now need may prove equally disturbing.¹¹⁰

Kis Tükör's Critique of "the Transylvanian Reading" of Dialectical Theology

In an editorial article, Kecskeméthy gave his theological evaluation of the theology of Barth and Brunner, a theology which the Transylvanians like others called dialectical theology. Even a quick survey of the published materials proves a reluctant acceptance of the selective "Transylvanian reading" of dialectical theology, and of the particular Transylvanian embodiment of "Barthianism." I agree with Zoltán Szász's statement that, "Nowadays the common view is that István Kecskeméthy, and the CE camp marching behind him, received with some reservations the popularity of dialectic theology in Transylvania."¹¹¹ According to Szász there was no official position formulated either by Kecskeméthy or by the CE Union but he observed that articles in *Kis Tükör* frequently reflected the theological view of the revivalist movement represented in CE.

Kecskeméthy began his article by praising this new theological trend, contrasting it with the previous liberal and rationalistic theological trend which had prevailed in 19th century Transylvanian reformed churches with terrible effects on the TRC believing community. He introduced his theme by recalling a student

¹¹⁰ Walls, 'Missionary Societies and the Fortunate Subversion of the Church,' p.239.

¹¹¹ See his unpublished paper: Zoltán Szász, *Az erdélyi CE Szövetség története a két világháború között* (The History of the Transylvanian CE Union Between the Two World Wars), Szakdolgozat egyháztörténetből, Protestáns Theológiai Intézet, Református-Evangélikus Kar, Kolozsvár, 2003, especially pp.61-63. Szász also read part of this paper in a lecture given at the Centenary of the CE Movement in Budapest, in 2003, cited here and below by the kind permission of the author.

from Kolozsvár Seminary who had complained to him in tears that he had lost his faith:

“(D)ue to the rationalistic religious philosophy of Károly Nagy, the theological professor,¹¹² to such an extent that he felt like a fish thrown on the ground and now, even if he would like to do so, he could not believe the Bible anymore.”¹¹³

Is Kecskeméthy exaggerating the situation because of his evangelical enthusiasm and alleged impatience? If we compare this account with how Lajos Imre and Sándor Makkai, (the Transylvanian bishop in those years and famous professor), who both recalled the identical situation, the evidence is that they were in agreement with Kecskeméthy. Imre remembered similar events, where because of Nagy and even Ravasz, the following type of situation occurred:

The delegates of the Students' Union and of the Christian Youth Union [the YMCA from Hungary] had no easy task [in those first two decades of the century, remarks, LH]. They were not enough well prepared for the fine dialectics of Károly Nagy and László Ravasz who participated and commented on the presentations. Most of the delegates had absolutely no philosophical knowledge. And the theology students especially enjoyed the arguments at which their teachers proved to be so brilliant. It seemed the professors wanted to protect from the pietistic peril not only us, the theology students, but all the pastors of the church district. On one occasion, poor Gábor Kónya, the delegate for the Christian Youth Union, after such an unsuccessful presentation was nearly crying on the way to the railway station where I accompanied him, about how cruelly he had been silenced. In my opinion neither of the parties was right.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Imre, *Önéletírása*, (Autobiography), on pp.76-77.

Cf. in the article of Sándor Makkai, 'Ravasz László igehirdetői útja' (The Preaching Career of László Ravasz), in *És lőn világosság*, (1941): pp.10-14.

Nevertheless, we should add that even Makkai praised Nagy for his academic contribution in building up this bridge and called his work "precise, scientific and correct." See Makkai, *Az erdélyi református egyházi irodalom 1850-től napjainkig*, (*The Transylvanian Reformed Church's Literature from 1850 to the Present*), p.36.

¹¹³ István Kecskeméthy, 'Az isteni tudomány' (The Science of God), in *Kis Tükör* Vol. 21, Nr. 34, (August 22, 1931): p.133. (Signed with the pseudonym, "Aleph.") In fact, the Hungarian word 'tudomány,' can be translated both as 'doctrine' and 'science.' For the purposes of this section of the paper, where two *Kis Tükör* article with similar titles, 'Az isteni tudomány' and 'A Jezusi tudomány,' are cited, we will translate the word to mean, 'science.'

¹¹⁴ Imre, *Önéletírása*, (Autobiography), pp.76-77.

The same happened in the case of the CE movement, as Imre continues:

Besides public debates, personal debates regarding this matter also took place. On one occasion the *Bethánia Union (CE)* (*Bethánia Szövetség*) was holding a meeting and Kecskeméthy was presiding. At that meeting they argued fiercely with Viktor Benkő. (...) As far as I am concerned, I must admit to my regret that the intellectual points-of-view that we were arguing for, were wrong. Still, I confess that those times and occasions were tools by which God helped me to come to a more thorough understanding of these questions and thus grow in faith and develop my theological knowledge. Of course my liberal-intellectual view and attitude remained a great hindrance in this, my development.¹¹⁵

In comparison, we quote now another source. Makkai's description of the situation has, of course, a slightly different emphasis, but the same picture, more or less, emerges from his account:

While the Theological Institute of Enyed had in liberalism a predominant, unified, all-defining ideological basis as its world-view (*this Institute was closed down and the Kolozsvár Theological Seminary was opened instead in 1895, so Transylvania always had only one Seminary at any time, explanatory remarks, LH*), the theological trend of Kolozsvár was characterized at the beginning by contradictory trends and ideas confronting each other.¹¹⁶

These contradicting trends were in fact only two, the liberal and the 'Pietist-Calvinist,' or 'revivalist-Puritan' trend. The first was represented by professors Kenessey and Kecskeméthy, the latter by professors Nagy and Molnár. The fifth professor, Dr. József Pokoly, sympathized with Kecskeméthy when he was attacked. What is not clear from Makkai's report is that this trend was debated much more outside, rather than inside the Seminary. Even Bishop Szász sided up with Kecskeméthy against the deputy-bishop, according to my sources.¹¹⁷ The trend

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Makkai, Sándor 'Ravasz László igehirdetői útja' (The Preaching Career of László Ravasz), *op.cit.*, pp.10-14.

¹¹⁷ For a deeper understanding and a better overview of the subject, see the related documents translated into English and placed in the Appendices of this paper. There is also evidence of Dr. Pokoly's defending Kecskeméthy and his mission movement against the attacks of the deputy-bishop.

represented by Nagy and Molár is clearly a continuation of the liberal trend ruling previously in the Enyed Seminary¹¹⁸

It is somewhat strange that Makkai called the revivalist and 'living Calvinist' trend an alien trend, and the liberal trend an inherited traditionalist trend of the Transylvanian reality:

It is in these circles that a trend alien to the Transylvanian tradition appeared, an alien and condemned spirituality, the spirituality of the "Pietistic," "living Christian" movement. The leader of this movement was Béla Kenessey. Next to him, István Kecskeméthy worked the most in order that this new form of imported piety should be accepted in Transylvania. In spite of the efforts of these two outstanding men, the trend spread only temporarily in a Transylvanian church life which was rooted in tradition, and only under their personal influence. Theology and religious life remained and developed on the same old basis. Another new trend grew from the inherited traditional spirit of theological liberalism. This trend at first utterly fought against the newly imported trend, but at the same time it was also unnoticeably inspired by it and it became suitable as a bridge for healthy development. The main representative of this [old] trend was Károly Nagy.¹¹⁹

It is significant to note that Makkai presents the missional trend as something which remained isolated and alien to the Transylvanian spirit and traditions. He also states that both theology and church life "remained and developed on the same old basis," meaning on the liberal foundation. Similarly, it is of importance that Makkai praises the "two outstanding men" and their "personal influence," praises the fact that the liberal trend was "unnoticeably inspired" by the "alien trend," and would be quite pleased with the "healthy development" of bridging the two trends. This is curious as the same Makkai considered himself to be a traditional Calvinist. In my opinion this confusion originated in the neo-Kantian thinking of Makkai. Convinced that bridging over between the liberal and orthodox positions when both are opting for the revitalization of the church in their own way was appropriate, he believed that this revitalization could happen 'in the spirit of the Reformation.' Nevertheless, to highlight the contradictory character of his description, I add that Makkai also praised Nagy for his academic

¹¹⁸ Nagy himself was the greatest disciple of the rationalist-liberal leader of that Seminary, the late professor Dr. Ödön Kovács.

¹¹⁹ Makkai, *ibid.*

contribution in building up this bridge and called his work “precise, scientific and correct.”¹²⁰ Meanwhile Kecskeméthy concluded in his retrospective analysis that as a result of many prayers, though he had to admit he did not really believe they would be listened to, the liberal theological ebb was changing for the better in the reformed church, beginning in the 1930s. A more Biblical and confessional theological trend was emerging. Kecskeméthy appreciated this relative change, although he was aware from the beginning that it developed basically into a neo-orthodox trend rather than an orthodox one (as we will see it later):

At last the secret of why this spiritual renewal emerged has become clear. A new science, a new theology, which nevertheless is as old as the Bible, became fashionable. Its name sounds a bit strange and, as a serious science deserves, is dull enough: *dialectical theology* (emphasis by the author).¹²¹

I suspect there is a gentle irony behind Kecskeméthy's words, yet this is an accurate description of the emerging theological trend. We also must remember that the article was not written primarily for academics but for a family magazine promoting missions. Nevertheless the simplicity of the statement does not mean it lacked theological depth in defining the essence of the new trend for the wider public:

What is its essence? The previous rational religious sciences would interpret religion as a demonstration of the spirit of human life in which the human soul is formed, developed and *became purified* (?), (emphasis and question mark by the author) over thousands of years, up to the most ideal Christianity. This new theology, in contrast, throws sharply in people's faces that religion is always only an answer, a reaction of the human soul to the preliminary revelation of God. Until this revelation happens, there is no religion. If God does not reveal Himself to human beings at a time appointed by Him, human souls in vain stir themselves up or look deep into themselves, yet they cannot produce a [proper] religion.¹²²

There are four key points here. First, Kecskeméthy points to the rationalist neo-Kantian interpretation of religion which assumed a development in the thousand

¹²⁰ Makkai, *Az erdélyi református egyházi irodalom 1850-től napjainkig*, (The Transylvanian Reformed Church's Literature from 1850 to the Present), p. 36.

¹²¹ István Kecskeméthy, 'Az isteni tudomány' (The Science of God), *op. cit.*, p.133.

¹²² *Ibid.* (Signed with the pseudonym: "Aleph")

years purification towards “the ideal Christianity.” This is the typical position taken by the so-called “school of religious philosophy,” a school of which the most exponent adherents were both Ravasz and later, his disciple, Makkai. Secondly, I suspect that the long purification process is mentioned ironically, as the question mark in Kecskeméthy’s text suggests. Obviously he would reject the idea that faith consists in the gradual “demonstration of the spirit of human life in which the human soul is formed” and doubted that this process could ever reach its own supposed ethical climax: “up to the most ideal Christianity.” Thirdly, the text suggests that the new dialectical theology questions the place of religion as an ethical value-centered orientation of the human soul and defines it as just a human answer and reaction to the previously heard divine Revelation which addresses humankind. It is even stated that “until this revelation happens, there is no religion” at all. Fourthly, it is made evident that it is impossible for humans to produce a proper religion if they merely “look deep into themselves.” This last statement also applies as a criticism to the searching for value in ourselves by comparing the ought to be ideal with the reality as it is, according to the Böhman school.

Kecskeméthy uses the contrasting description of theological liberalism to give a context for throwing more light on the new trend whilst also locating it historically. But he is also aware of the importance and necessity of pointing to the main features of this new trend:

Thus religion becomes a reality – forgive me for the trivial comparison – like a confession before the inquiring judge. The judge states, inquires, and the delinquent answers, or *confesses*.¹²³ The *eternal Judge* speaks to human beings in spirit, and as these humans answer, *whatever* they *confess*, that is their religion (“confession”). Because religion is such a spiritual dialog, it becomes a reality by the given Revelation and by the answer given to it. That is the reason why this new theology calls itself a *dialectic* theology. And because this science places not the human but the divine in the first place, I dared to call it in the title of this article, The Science of God. As for us, we anachronistic and left behind CE members, we can rejoice with great joy that our prayers were answered and the Lord who used to reveal Himself [usually] to the ignorant and to the little children, at last and at once as in an

¹²³ The Hungarian word for *religion* is *confession*!

exception, has revealed Himself to the scientists of theology too, in and by dialectical theology.¹²⁴

Kecskeméthy is explicitly grateful in these last few sentences for neo-Orthodoxy in theology which was serving to revive the confessional commitment of the TRC. He regarded this theological renewal as an answer to the prayers of those who had tried to revitalize the church from its liberal paralysis through the mission movement which had been introduced three decades earlier and which was still being persecuted. Nevertheless, this does not prevent him later from criticizing this same trend of failures which he himself perceived from the beginning with theological clarity. There were many things which he held against this neo-orthodox theological orientation; for example, the danger of putting the abstract Word in place of the Person and salvific work of Christ on the cross, reducing Him to the level of the ideal, similar to the neo-Kantian axiology.

This can be seen also in another article in which he protested against his own appraisal of Barthian theology. Using a pseudonym he wrote an “answer” to the above quoted editorial in the *Kis Tükör* of September 6th 1931. The title, *A jézusi tudomány* (“*The Science of Jesus*”), is significant, for it is in opposition to the editorial’s title. The identity of the author behind the pseudonym has been debated; the article was signed, and perhaps written, by Kecskeméthy’s foster daughter, Erzsébet Kecskeméthy-Máthé, but it is clearly in the style of the professor. But even if this article was written by his foster daughter, it is clear he fully agreed with her, as some scholars argue. For example, Zoltán Szász, who also holds the view that the two articles, which debate with one another, (the first signed with the pseudonym “Aleph,” and the second by “Erzsébet Kecskeméthy-Máthé, a lady-teacher,”) are both penned by Kecskeméthy:

The article with the title: *Az isteni tudomány/ The Science of God* states that there is no denying it, the CE people were in war with the science of theology. This is stated by the author of the article, including himself among them, who is none other than Kecskeméthy himself. Without any blessing from liberal theology, the poor and despised CE members, whatever else they might have done, prayed without ceasing

¹²⁴ Kecskeméthy, *ibid.*

that the Holy Spirit of God might penetrate and sanctify theology, both as a science and as an education for ministers.¹²⁵

Szász assumes, perhaps too easily, that the responding article was also written by Kecskeméthy:

Two issues further on Kecskeméthy returns to the topic and with the title *A jézusi tudomány/The Science of Jesus* develops the following thoughts: first of all, he asks for forgiveness that in his previous writing he declared that God revealed Himself in dialectical theology, although according to the conviction of the CE Union members, God can be known and found in Jesus alone. As a result, the only theology of CE can be the science of Jesus...¹²⁶

The fact that in that period the editing of the magazine for a month was handed over to Dr. Arthur K. Tompa, the general secretary of the Transylvanian CE, casts some doubt on this opinion.¹²⁷ The article on dialectical theology appeared six (!) weeks later, in the issue dated August 22nd but the following week, in the August 29th issue, we read his new apology that his holiday lasted longer than planned, but now he is back and can pick up the editorial work again. Then, the next week, in the September 6th issue he published “the answer” to the (or his?) appraisal of dialectic theology.¹²⁸ This certainly makes the case mysterious and leaves us with some uncertainty.

The reason for this pseudonym, in my view, was that he did not want to disappoint his colleagues, namely, the new generation of theological professors.¹²⁹ On the other hand, he felt it his duty not to keep silent about what he believed to be a justifiable critique:

¹²⁵ See in Zoltán Szász, *ibid.*, under the subtitle Dialectical Theology and CE, p.61.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 62.

In Hungarian it reads: “Két lapszámmal később visszatér Kecskeméthy a témára és Jézusi tudomány címen a következő gondolatokat fejtegeti: Bocsnátot kér azért amiért előbbi írásában azt állította, hogy Isten a dialektika teológiában jelentette ki magát, holott a CE-sek meggyőződése szerint, Istent egyedül csak Jézusban lehet megtalálni és megismerni, tehát a CE teológiája csak jézusi tudomány lehet.”

¹²⁷ See the of Kecskeméthy's apologies for departing for a four week holiday in *Kis Tükör* Vol. 21, Nr. 28 (July 11, 1931): p.109.

¹²⁸ The Nagyenyed debate, where “the Barthian breakthrough” could take place, happened the previous year.

¹²⁹ Almost all of these were his former students and they had almost unanimously embraced this new trend of neo-orthodoxy with enthusiasm.

that God would have revealed Himself in dialectical theology (...) can give me no rest (...) In contrast, we the CE people have it as our unalterable conviction that God can be found alone and can be known only in Jesus. So our theology can be the science of Jesus only. (...) Thus the theology of CE, boldly put, the doctrine of *Kis Tükör*, at least if we speak of a theological doctrine, differs rightly in this regard as presented above, both from the passed away rational theology and from the newly coming on stage, dialectical theology. Because not even rational theology would forget and deny God, only it searched Him by reason everywhere and tried to understand Him in everything.¹³⁰

This is a plain reference to Christian Wolff (1679-1754) who introduced the keyword of rationalism and the Enlightenment as it became common in most European languages, the notion of the *raisonnable*, *reasonable*, or *vernünftig*. He also introduced the concept of a *religion of reason*, and declared for the first time ever that the life worth living for any human being is a reasonable life. This can be put in parallel with his predecessors, René Descartes (1596-1650) and Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), the creators of the “age of reason.” The latter, for example, insisted that “*toute notre dignité consiste donc en la pensée. C’est de là qu’il faut nous relever et non de l’espace et de la durée, que nous ne saurions remplir.*”¹³¹ And yet, the same Pascal, in contrast with Descartes and other rationalists, insisted that God cannot be found by reason, because “*Le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît pas.*”¹³² For these reasons, although he was among the founders of rationalism, he also transcended it, and became a predecessor of Existentialist philosophy too. He criticized Descartes for altering true philosophy toward mere Deism. It is relevant for our investigation that in Kecskeméthy’s article fair credit is given even to rational theology in its honest seeking after God, although only by or through reason; and yet a critique of the same, as appears only in the remarkable and unique thinking of Pascal, too Kecskeméthy then turns to describe dialectical theology:

¹³⁰ Kecskeméthy-Máthé, Erzsébet, ‘A jézusi tudomány’ (‘The Science of Jesus’) *Kis Tükör* Vol. 21, Nr. 36, (September 6, 1931): pp.141-142.

¹³¹ “All our dignity, then, consists in thought. It is upon this that we must depend, not on space and time, which we would not in any case be able to fill.” *Pensées*, Chapter XXIII. Grandeur de l’Homme.

¹³² “The heart has its own reasons which the reason cannot know.” See *Pensées*, the famous fragment Nr. 277., in the Brunschvicg edition.

The dialectical theology does not deny Jesus, but because it does not search God in His person, but rather in the *abstract Word*, to some extent it rejects Him, and though it respects the (His) doctrines yet will not follow Himself. (...) If it would follow [Him], it would know by whom and in what God has revealed Himself. And, if it would truly follow Jesus, it would know absolutely – because it has to know – that [strictly speaking] only one theological science exists: the doctrine of Jesus, the holder of love. Without this [science], there are only rational and dialectical sciences.¹³³

Was Kecskeméthy fair and accurate in declaring the above? How adequate was his description? Did not a concise presentation, such as the limits of which an article would force upon him, lead him to be unfair? We can easily criticise what has been quoted here. Brunner, if not Barth, contradicts Kecskeméthy in many of his writings. As is commonly held, Brunner often insisted that the person of Jesus cannot be substituted for his teaching or for an abstract theological principle or for the abstracted word of God, or for any theological doctrine, however biblical and sound it might be. Barth, for his part, insisted that theology is not “a science” in the common understanding of the sciences. It cannot flatter itself with such vanity; on the contrary, it has to be a science based on the “scandal of the cross.” Kecskeméthy’s charges appear to be superficial, if not totally unfair; his remarks seem to be prejudiced. Besides, how could an academic like Kecskeméthy write or agree with such an account without running the risk of seeming a charlatan in theological matters? Many similar questions can be posed here, all of which have the right to be presented at the crossroads of such important theological orientations for the Transylvanian reformed churches. Before we proceed to answer these questions there is one more important aspect of the article which sets the scene historically for the debate. We need to quote at length before we draw any conclusions:

Rational theology in principle and in appearance stood far away from CE. It did not even want to and could not understand it, but was satisfied simply with mocking it. Yet, in its more noble moments, it admitted that whatever CE does, it [rational theology] cannot do and achieve: thus deep inside, it owed a certain respect toward it [CE] always. In contrast, let us look now to the time of science, of dialectical

¹³³ Kecskeméthy-Máthé, *ibid.*

theology. Apparently, it is closer in its outward slogans, but in reality, inwardly, it is even further removed [from CE], because since its ascendance, the mockery of CE has grown to a kind of persecution or boycotting.¹³⁴

Now this makes Kecskeméthy more defenceless. One cannot escape the suspicion that it is the mockery and persecution that motivates him to make judgements like those above which can hardly be called objective. Besides, he confuses or identifies too closely a doctrine with the advocates who might use such doctrine as a banner in their cause. To blame a doctrine because of the actions of those who embrace it is somewhat subjective and unfair, for such actions should not invalidate the doctrine as such but only its advocates. What has this to do with an academic polemic, *sine ira et studio*? Nevertheless, the next phrase which follows reduces our suspicion if we listen *sine ira et studio*, and give him credit once he expresses it, that this is his motivation for writing such things.¹³⁵ Whatever our suspicions, we must accept *this* motivation as objective investigators without prejudice:

The only cause and reason for this [persecution and boycotting] is that CE would never put any science or theology in the place of the living Jesus' person, nor acknowledge any. Thus, until science would revolve around Jesus or avoid Jesus, whether rationalistically or dialectically; it would never understand the theology of CE which rests on the science of theology of Jesus and on the love revealed by God alone.¹³⁶

But this is not an adequate answer to the questions posed. Was there merit in Kecskeméthy's objections to dialectical theology as it was emerging in the 1930s in Transylvania? Especially when posing the question in reference to dialectics

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ There is one more point we need to consider before we rush to judge this approach theologically. The apparently unfair criticism of Kecskeméthy can be accepted on an objective and fair ground if he speaks about the scandal of the cross in the way that, since Luther, we understand the *theologia crucis*, i.e. as "a theologian of the cross" rather and not as "a theologian of glory." As quoted above, Gerhard O. Forde, in his important book dealing not just with the theology but also with the theologizing of Luther, could convincingly argue for the uniqueness of this same approach, cf. in Gerhard O. Forde *On Being a Theologian of the Cross. Reflection on Luther's Heidelberg Disputation*, 1518. Grand Rapids, Michigan, Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997.

¹³⁶ Kecskeméthy-Máthé, *ibid.*

(to “avoid Jesus, whether rationalistically or dialectically”) is in itself a demonstration of the same dialectical thinking. Did supporters of dialectical theology really think of it as being essentially scientific when consistent with its own confessional foundation? Was Kecskeméthy right to question whether the rise of dialectical theology actually marked a return to the Biblical foundations as congruent with the teachings of the Reformers? Was it true, as he asserted, that this new trend replaced the person of Jesus and the essentialness of his centrality to historic faith, replacing his person with his teaching? As we argued in chapter four,¹³⁷ dialectical theology tended to separate the abstract Word of God from the person of Jesus in order to use that abstraction as a theological principle which in turn makes the Bible sufficient. We concluded that in this way the doctrine held by the Reformers and expressed in the Confessions collapses, as the use or necessity of this principle robs the Bible of its *self-sufficiency*. If our earlier arguments are valid, then Kecskeméthy’s critique here was insightful and important

Kenessey's Advocacy of the Centrality of ‘theologia crucis’ in the TRC

The other professor who came with Kecskeméthy to the newly established Theological Faculty of Kolozsvár, Dr. Béla Kenessey, made a similar emphasis many years before dialectic theology appeared, although this was still the heyday of full glory for liberal-rational theology: “(t)he essence of Christianity is not just *the teaching* of Jesus, but He *Himself*, because He stands behind all of his words.”¹³⁸

¹³⁷ See the evaluation on the ‘illumination’ and ‘self-sufficiency’ of the Scriptures.

¹³⁸ Béla Kenessey, *A keresztyénség lényege* (*The Essence of Christianity*), (Különnyomat hat előadásról), Kolozsvár: 1901, p.5.

This same material was published previously in several issues of different church periodicals, including the *Erdélyi Protestáns Lap* and the *Értesítő* and collected afterwards in a book. Their material constitutes the written form of six evangelization lectures held by Dr. Kenessey as part of the Faculty’s home mission events, started by the CE movement. They called these events *Protestáns vagy felolvasó estélyek* (Protestant evenings, or Reading Evenings) and the series tried to give the mostly lay audience the basics of faith in a simple, yet deep and colorful presentation. The titles of his lectures also are suggesting this evangelistic structure: 1. The Essence of Christianity (*Erdélyi Protestáns Lap*, 1901, pp.397-400); 2. Sin and Grace (in: *Értesítő, Az Erdélyi ev. Ref. Egyházkerület Theológiai Fakultásának Értesítője az 1901-1902 évről*); 3. The Person of Christ (*Erdélyi Protestáns Lap*, 1901, pp.409-412); 4. The Atoning Work of Christ

Kenessey warned that Jesus was not just *a historical person*, as many would regard Him. Similarly, it has to be emphasized that *true religion* is not the *dialectics* of notions, but *life*.¹³⁹ Kenessey's caveat about the dialectics of notions as contrasted with the personal dialogue of the believer with his personal Lord and Saviour, is a preliminary critique of the risks that dialectical theology can run. One might ask if both Kecskeméthy and Kenessey were not standing on the old neo-Kantian liberal ground on which Harnack had opposed his disciple Barth? This objection might be valid if I consider that Harnack characterized dogma as an imposition of "the Greek spirit on the soil of the Gospel."¹⁴⁰ He saw this alien "Greek spirit" as being in contrast with the spirit of Jesus of Nazareth who emphasized the love of God and of neighbour. He also wanted to search for the real Christ; the difference between him and his Transylvanian colleagues lies in the fact that Harnack proposed that this can only happen "through the critical historical study" to discover the real person of Christ; this latter method was considered academic and scientific by scholars of the day. Harnack attacked those who showed themselves "contemptuous of scientific theology" (*wissenschaftliche theologie*), but Barth in a Kierkegaard-ian way¹⁴¹ and in his footsteps criticized this Harnack-ian approach as being a means by which to avoid 'the scandal of the cross' while maintaining the apparently scientific character of theology.¹⁴² Although Kecskeméthy himself often opted for "critical historical study," especially in his Biblical theology, yet he was bold on the need for a personal relationship in faith with the person and atoning work of Christ. In his view there was no other way to have a personal relationship with Christ except through the atonement of the Saviour. This often entails a total refusal of a relationship with Christ based on ethics, which emphasis characterises the neo-Kantian approach. In this he kept firmly to the strictly biblical

(*Erdélyi Protestáns Lap*, 1901, pp. 422-425); 5. Justification by Faith (*Erdélyi Protestáns Lap*, 1901, pp. 426-439); 6. Christian Ministry (*Erdélyi Protestáns Lap*, 1901, pp.444-448). See also the book's critical appraisal by Szóts Farkas in *Protestáns Szemle*, 1902, pp.125-128.

¹³⁹ Kenessey, p. 10.

¹⁴⁰ Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*. New York: Dover Publications, 1961, vol. 1, p.17.

¹⁴¹ Kierkegaard accused in a famous statement the Theological Seminaries in Denmark of his time of having many 'professors' but few 'confessors.'

¹⁴² Adolf von Harnack, 'Fifteen Questions to Those among the Theologians Who Are Contemptuous of the Scientific Theology,' cited in James M. Robinson,(ed.), *The Beginnings of Dialectical Theology*. Richmond: John Knox Press, 1968, pp.165-166.

teaching on regeneration which attests to the centrality of the person of Jesus Christ in the life of the individual believer.¹⁴³

Kenessey also emphasized as early as 1891, before his arrival in Transylvania, that “in Christian religion everything proceeds from Christ and everything returns back to Him, the eternal centre of everything.”¹⁴⁴

If we remember that Kenessey was writing in this way already in 1891 and 1901 and, further, that Kecskeméthy never changed or retracted his position on this basic issue, the often alleged charges against both him and Kenessey about their unfaithfulness to orthodoxy and even to the Confessions, collapse. It is remarkable in this context to quote Kecskeméthy again:

¹⁴³ I am indebted to Paul Avis, who brilliantly analyzed this problem, cf. in Paul Avis, *The Methods of Modern Theology, The Dream of Reason*. UK: Marshall Pickering, 1986. See especially p.142ff, where he states: “As Lonergan puts it in *Philosophy of God*: ‘Objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity’ (p.13). It is in keeping with this approach that Lonergan gives religious experience considerable attention (*Method*, pp.104-111, 115-118) regarding it not as discontinuous with revelation (as Barth would) but as a tacit, inchoate, unarticulated knowledge of God and love of God: ‘As the question of God implicit in all our questioning, so being in love with God is the basic fulfillment of our conscious intentionality’ (p.105). Effective theology too is grounded in a ‘transformation’ of the theologian through intellectual, moral and religious conversion - ‘a fundamental and momentous change in the human reality that a theologian is’ (pp.130, 270). “Conversion, as lived, affects all of a man’s conscious and intellectual operations. It directs his gaze, pervades his imagination, releases the symbols that penetrate to the depth of his psyche. It enriches his understanding, guides his judgement, reinforces his decisions (p.131).” Conversion is successively intellectual, moral and religious: “Intellectual conversion is to truth attained by cognitional self-transcendence. Moral conversion is to values apprehended, affirmed and realized by a real self-transcendence. Religious conversion is a total being-in-love as the efficacious ground of all self-transcendence, whether in pursuit of truth, or in the realization of human values, or in the orientation man adopts to the universe, its ground and its goal (ib., pp.240f).” Religious conversion is the inescapable precondition of fruitful and effective theological work and of a genuine theological vision, for through it we receive an intimation of what we are seeking, a tacit knowledge [as Michael Polányi would say, LH] that guides our enquiry. In this sense it is true to say that love precedes knowledge. The fruits of this triple conversion are incorporated into the method in the *functional specialty of foundations*. But to become capable of this, conversion has to transcend the individual and become communal and historical, in other words a corporate enterprise, ‘a movement with its own cultural, institutional and doctrinal dimensions.’ In this form, conversion ‘calls forth a reflection that makes the movement thematic, that explicitly explores its origins, developments, purposes, achievements and failures’ (ib., p.131; cf. 2 *Coll.*, pp.66f).

¹⁴⁴ Béla Kenessey, *Keresztyén tanítások* (Christian Teachings). Budapest: 1891, p.9.

In my youth, I was an “infamous orthodox theologian (for this reason, when I came to Transylvania, the people were alarmed). Then I became a “Pietist.” Now I am considered the most dangerous “modern” (my old friends from Hungary “buried me” long ago); and who knows what else I yet will be. I suspect that soon I will be again an over-enthusiastic orthodox (i.e. it is not needful that my theology should change; it is enough if the theology of another is changing, because he would then consider mine different). In my student years I was immediately stigmatized as an orthodox [believer]. Only a few of us would admit that we were; nevertheless, a few would admit also that they were not. Because church members did not like if they were urged to believe; nevertheless, they did not like it either if their ministers were unbelievers.¹⁴⁵

Like Kecskeméthy and for the same reasons, Kenessey was attacked and had to defend himself against the charges of not being sufficiently orthodox in theology, that is, not reformed or confessional or scientific enough, of being a “Pietist.”¹⁴⁶ This is what Dr. Zsolt Kozma wrote recently about him:

During his professorship there were enemies of his, especially those who accused him of pietism, but these all died or yielded before his authority. Although the statement of Imre Révész, that Kenessey did not bolster up the truth by his personal authority but by the Word [of God] is completely true.¹⁴⁷

The “piety” and the so called “pietism” of both Kecskeméthy and Kenessey suffered from time to time from prejudice on the part of the neo-Kantian theologians. It is curious how this kind of labelling was sometimes changed to real Calvinist piety in due course. It is significant as Kozma concludes in his characterization of Kenessey:

¹⁴⁵ István Kecskeméthy, ‘A theologia tudománya’ (The Science of Theology) *Kis Tükör* Vol. 20, Nr. 21 (May 24, 1930), p.81.

¹⁴⁶ For further research on this see Kenessey’s self-defending articles, such as: ‘Felelet Anonymus vádjaira’ (Answer to the Accusations of Anonymous) in: *Protestáns Egyházi és Iskolai Lap* (1888): p.993; and ‘Nyílt levél’ (felelet a pietizmus vádjára) (Open Letter’ – an answer to the accusation of “pietism”), in: *Erdélyi Protestáns Lap* (1898), pp. 34-37. For example on p.36 we read: “faith itself is not to withdraw from real life and take refuge in someone’s piety, but quite the opposite, impacting every relation of that [real life].”

¹⁴⁷ See Zsolt Kozma, ‘Kenessey Béla; 1858-1918’ in Zsolt Kozma, ed., *Akik jó bizonyyságot nyertek...* (Those Who Have Obtained a Good Testimony...), pp.29-53, especially p.33.

Some declarations of Kenessey – usually they are not immediately linked to the [contemporary] debates – seem to be answers to those accusations with which the workers of [home] missions have been attacked and to those with which they are attacked even today. We have to note that it is not about the accusations against pietism, which also can be valid, but against biblical piety and against the [home] missionary spirit.¹⁴⁸

Strangely, Sándor Tavaszy, who also attacked pietism and the works of the sodalities carried on by these “pietists,” characterized the evangelical “apostle of Transylvania,” Kenessey, six years after his death with the same eulogizing words:

He came [to Transylvania] like a quiet voiced witnessing missionary and he left as a grim prophet torn down by a storm.¹⁴⁹ He came in our midst as an evangelist, but we provoked out of him the prophet.¹⁵⁰

In him the consciousness of prophetic distantness was united with the immediacy of an evangelist.¹⁵¹

The first role as evangelist demonstrated by the life example of Kenessey, according to Tavaszy, means that we have to be more courageous in our fight for God's glory, and in our self-rebuke;¹⁵² the second prophetic role means that we have to be more meek, having a perspective of hope.

Returning to our analysis of Kecskeméthy's theological evaluation of dialectical theology and of theology as “science” in general, we must ask: whether any of these reflections have relevance for the concept of mission and the interpretation of the relationship between church and mission? Have they any bearing on what we have called *the modality versus sodality dichotomy*, created specifically

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p.45. to his full characterization Kozma also adds: “[Kenessey] was a foreigner here [in Transylvania] (...) because he brought an epoch-making thought, the idea of missions.” (p.46.)

¹⁴⁹ Sándor Tavaszy, ‘Kenessey Béla püspök az Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület történetében’(Bishop Béla Kenessey in the History of the District of the Transylvanian Reformed Church) *Református Szemle*, (1924): p.34.

¹⁵⁰ , *Ibid.* p.35.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.* p.34.

¹⁵² We will return to this observation of Tavaszy later on in the paper, bearing in mind how he characterized this as a **particular and “prophetic” stand**, which in our opinion was a significant and almost unique aspect of the spirituality of the whole Transylvanian mission movement. One can see this embodied elsewhere also, for example, in Kecskeméthy's *Kis Tükör*.

and characteristically in Transylvania, i.e., the influential and authoritative group of the Böhms-followers?

We can now observe how Kecskeméthy develops his argument and his conclusion:

While the science of rational theology wanted to climb up to God in the heaven of heavens without Jesus and with the greatness of reason; the science of dialectical theology gave to God such an aristocratic authority there in heaven, similarly without Jesus and with reason, although in a different projection (e.g., taking the prophetic Word too much in an Old Testament understanding); so that anybody who would dare to approach Him in thought, prior to speaking to Him and being addressed by Him,¹⁵³ would drop dead.¹⁵⁴

There is a subtle objection here against a philosophical type of discourse, or conversation with God, against an abstraction of the living dialogue of two different persons in a very personal manner; an objection against a possible monologue of the philosophically educated mind being assumed as a dialogue when in fact, it might just be a conversation of someone with himself, and not really with God, a conversation with the idea of God rather than a real and living relationship. If this is what Kecskeméthy meant, then we can answer the questions posed above with one basic argument, in line with the *I and Thou* relational approach proposed by Martin Buber and other philosophers of personalism. The relationship of humans with God can be held within the boundaries of an *I and Thou* personal relationship only if God is not reduced to an *I and It* relationship in the dialogue. Once an abstracted notion of God and a notion of dialectical dialogue take His place and the place of encountering a living God, the relationship immediately is reduced and sinks to an *I and It* relationship, where theology itself serves as a substitute

¹⁵³ The reference is made to the dialectic relationship taking place in an abstract *dialogue* between God and human beings, as reflected and emphasized in this new theological trend, and as explained in the previous article of Kecskeméthy (*The Science of God*, quoted above), like “religion is always only an answer, a reaction of the human soul to the preliminary revelation of God” and also: “Because religion is such a spiritual dialog; it becomes a reality by the given Revelation and by an answer given to it, that is the reason why this new theology called itself a *dialectic* theology,” etc. (See as above in: Kecskeméthy, István, ‘Az isteni tudomány,’ *op. cit.*, p.133.)

¹⁵⁴ Kecskeméthy-Máthé, p.141.

for Jesus, making a mental object out of His Person, out of his Being as a Subject. Thus the argument closes:

And thus we can see it clearly now – unless we want to close our eyes intentionally - that in both [theological trends] God is found and, in fact, Jesus is missing; because the first one demonstrates God in and through the great world of nature without Jesus; the second one shows God in the Word of the Old Testament as an impossible-to-approach and utmost holy Judge, again without Jesus. The first one in the wonderful and worldly dress of nature, the second in the temptingly blinding bright dressing of holiness. In neither way can you arrive to the living God. But when in the revealed love of God, in Jesus Himself, reason melts by Jesus and for the sake of Jesus, and when the power of aristocratic feeling is broken; then, in that very moment, the soul becomes God's. But not before that, because it cannot happen unless this happens! Then He (...) can become our Father, and at last we can call Him our beloved Father and it happens that we can go to Him in bold confidence.¹⁵⁵

In my view, Kecskeméthy is not criticizing Barth or Brunner directly, or any other contemporary representatives of this theological trend abroad; what he is doing is reacting particularly to the representatives of this trend at home in Transylvania. He knew them as his students and they were for a long time liberal theologians and antagonistic towards mission and revival, that is, pietistic movements. Then they started to change their views without personal and public retraction of what they had been teaching previously. While embracing a more evangelical and confessional stance, they still kept their distance from Kecskeméthy who had consistently stood for the same theological position for decades. It would have been difficult for them to admit their error and humble themselves and join those whom they had mocked for many years. For this reason a theological pretext was sought for not doing so. Yet Kecskeméthy never made a personal issue out of it, never named them, except when praising their work. He kept his criticisms general and sought instead to merely challenge the other side.

Tavaszy, Imre and Makkai felt especially challenged by him in those early years of the 1930s, yet Kecskeméthy used their names only in positive contexts.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Examples are when Makkai was elected the Bishop of Transylvania in 1926 or when Kecskeméthy commenting on Lajos Imre and his outstanding efforts in home mission work, as we read in the *Kis Tükör* of September 20th, 1930: "The lecturer was the theological professor,

In contrast, Imre had a disparaging opinion of both Kecskeméthy and CE members; he held most of these people in varying degrees of contempt:

Kecskeméthy received me with love, but also with a little contempt – the same with two of my colleagues [*the continuation of the text strongly suggests that the two are probably Tavaszy and Makkai, note by Levente Horváth*] and he treated me as if I were still his student. As an old man he always felt a stranger among us young people (we were 30-33 in 1921, he was 57) and maybe he even let that show. I often reproach myself for not behaving gently and humbly enough with him. I admit I did not like him from the time I was a theology student. I could see how much he distrusted the work done by the Bethlen Gábor Club. I think he was never satisfied with my faith, with the faith of any of us.¹⁵⁷

Imre's attitude may also be understood by van der Ende's reference to Imre's rejection of CE, of what he regarded as merely an Anglo-Saxon Pietism, despite the fact that he himself was a postgraduate student in Scotland:

Besides his [Imre's] character that never allowed him to fit in easily when there were new circumstances, his reserve was due to the same disapproval of the Scottish-English Pietistic movements that he expressed while at home in Kolozsvár.¹⁵⁸

Three years after Kecskeméthy launched his critique in *The Science of Theology* as quoted above, both Tavaszy and Imre felt bound to answer this challenge. In a *Memorial* book on the anniversary of the seventieth birthday and the fortieth year of Kecskeméthy's professorship, they each wrote an article as a direct response. Imre wrote about the justification of a mission model of modality, reduced

Dr. Lajos Imre, who is an old, enthusiastic and persuaded activist of home mission. He knows [what is] home mission not just from books, but he also puts it into practice. He worked in it in practice as a practicing minister, and he works in it now too as a professor. And confidence in the power of home mission lives in him with an inexterminable strength. The same cannot be said about everyone. This confidence, of course is not based on the outward accomplishment of home mission works, but on the imbibing of that spirit from which these works spring and flow. We do not find it in vain to make this observation for those who think that merely starting a particular home mission work, like a Sunday School, a Women's Association, etc is enough for the cessation of problems. Because home mission truly is profitable only to the extent of how much living gospel [it can] mediate." István Kecskeméthy, 'A református nagyhét' (The Reformed High Week) *Kis Tükör*, Vol. 20, Nr. 38 (September, 20, 1930): p.149.

¹⁵⁷ Imre, *Önéletírása*, (Autobiography), p.194.

¹⁵⁸ Ende, p.38.

exclusively to the work of the official church alone and excluding the independent sodalities as sectarian and non-reformed.¹⁵⁹ Tavaszgy¹⁶⁰ also attacked some statements of Kecskeméthy's old article, especially those which argued that God revealed His love in the Son which is why we can approach Him in bold trust. Tavaszgy argued for dialectic theology as having at its centre the person of Jesus. Quotations from his work support this as, for example:

Let us conclude from the above listed premises that final conclusion that outside Christ any search for God is uncertain and wavering, so there is no clear-cut and full answer outside Christ to this question: Who is God? The only principle and way to know God is Christ. What is known outside Christ is a god of the desert, either an imaginary or a mere thought reality. The God known in Christ is a Self-revealing God, who is a living God and a reality, owning a personal will and nature.¹⁶¹

It is remarkable that Tavaszgy elaborates his views on the topic further by using the 10th and 11th Questions and Answers of the Heidelberg Catechism.¹⁶² In the footsteps of this Standard, he tries to harmonize the Righteous God with the Merciful God, in a direct attempt to answer the common accusation that the God of dialectic theology is an aristocratic and remote, Old Testament-type of holy and righteous God, not a loving Father as well. In response to Kecskeméthy's critique

¹⁵⁹ Imre, 'A predestináció tana a missziói munkában' (The Doctrine of Predestination in Mission Work), in: *Kecskeméthy Emlékkönyv, op. cit.*, pp.135-141.

¹⁶⁰ Sándor Tavaszgy, 'Az igazságos Isten könyörülő Isten' (The Righteous God is the Merciful God'), in: *Kecskeméthy Emlékkönyv, op. cit.*, pp.79-85.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.* p.80.

¹⁶² It was Tavaszgy who translated the Heidelberg Catechism (written by Zacharias Ursinus and Gasparus Olevianus in 1563 and accepted by the Hungarian Reformed Church as her Standard at the 1567 Debrecen Synod) and it was revised and published in the 1930s by the Transylvanian District as the re-established official Standard of Faith of the TRC.

Question and Answer Nr. 10 reads:

Q. 10: Will God suffer such disobedience and rebellion to go unpunished?

A. 10: By no means; but is terribly displeased with our original as well as actual sins; and will punish them in His just judgement temporally and eternally, as He had declared, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things, which are written in the book of the law, to do them."

Question and Answer Nr. 11 reads:

Q. 11: Is not God then also merciful?

A. 11: God is indeed merciful, but also just; therefore His justice requires that sin which is committed against the most high majesty of God be also punished with extreme, that is, with everlasting punishment of body and soul.

that theology can apparently be scientific and proudly claim a place among other sciences, but cannot be *the* science of theology as such if it is not Christo-centric, Tavaszy answered by declaring that the Righteous God judges even science just as He judges religion, culture, arts and civilization: “Sciences as well are standing under God’s judgement. It developed enormously in the last one hundred years and yet could not bring us closer to the truth, but just gave into the hand of man lots of tools for mass destruction.”¹⁶³ But the most important feature of his article is a more explicit attack on “pious” believers, where he answers the charge against the new theology as not proclaiming a gospel of a loving Father:

Many, if not most, believers regard God as a kind, a countenancing every fault, a forgiving everything type of loving Father. As such, Someone with whom you can [compromise and] negotiate, whom again and again can be appeased, who would immediately accept any kind of excuse, moreover, who does not even desire any excuse. Pious Christians cannot abuse anything else more than the teachings on God’s love. God is not angry! – many of the pious will profess, He only loves. God is not judging! – they say, only forgives. God is not punishing! – but always exempts. With our concept of “a loving God” we have almost arrived to the point where we take seriously neither what He says in His Word, nor what we say or promise in our prayers because the “loving God” will again and again forgive anyway and bypass everything! Against this careless, flimsy, frivolous and lewd behavior, our reformed and Christian faith confesses and teaches that God is angry with sin and as such He is terribly angry with every sin.¹⁶⁴

His critique is justified but the only problem with this kind of argument is that this is not the point that Kecskeméthy is making. Kecskeméthy speaks about *justification by faith*, the position of the believer in and through Christ, when as a sinner she or he receives grace. That is the main teaching on adoption in the theology of the Reformers. Kecskeméthy, when speaking about the condition of the same believers, would use even harsher language than Tavaszy to criticize their Pharisaic self-contempt and false confidence. Both truths are valid and are valid for every single Christian. There is no exception whether a CE or not a CE member; that point is clear if we overview all of Kecskeméthy’s writings. Tavaszy’s answer seems to be prompted by self-defense. To which Kecskeméthy could reply

¹⁶³ Tavaszy, *ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p.82.

by pointing to the problem of substituting the person of Christ for an abstraction of the Word of God. Even in this article, Tavaszy speaks about the Christ event as God's great deed and about Jesus Christ being the Logos that God is telling us. In other words, according to Kecskeméthy, the neo-Orthodox theology of Tavaszy and Imre seems to think that the Word become flesh in order to read about himself in the new Transylvanian theology.

And yet, it is peculiar that the same Tavaszy in the same essay would grab the core of the gospel as a "missionary act" of a merciful God:

God became man in Jesus Christ and with this [act] He Himself crossed the boundary which separated God from man so that He should meet personally with man. Jesus Christ Himself is that exterritoriality [*Tavaszy is using a Hungarianized Latin word here: exterritorialitas, note, LH*] where God and man are meeting [each other].¹⁶⁵

So Tavaszy was defining the *missio Dei* (or better to say the *missio Filii*), the mission of Jesus as going into the world, as crossing boundaries and as meeting man "outside of His own territory." That ex-territoriality is embodied literally in Jesus; His becoming the meeting point of God with man, on man's own field, is the essence of mission. The church's call is to participate in that *missio Dei*. If we transfer this view, as a consistent and logical outcome of Tavaszy's thought, to the church and her task,¹⁶⁶ then it is clear that the mission of the church is found in this very going out from her own territory to meet the outsiders on their own territory. That is the essence of the *missio ecclesiae* flowing from the *missio Dei*.

Why then did Tavaszy argue against this concept of *missio ecclesiae* so vehemently? Why did he emphasize the inward calling of the church's mission to the church itself? Why did he reduce the concept of mission to the home mission idea? Why, instead of participating in the ex-territorial overflowing of the gospel from the church to the world, did he choose to argue in favor of an in-terior and in-territorial mission? One can notice the absurdity of this imbalanced emphasis of home missions to the detriment of foreign missions, despite the promising age of dialectical theology dawning in the church. Although Tavaszy and other

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.* pp.79-85.

¹⁶⁶ This is vital and unavoidable if one wants consistently to establish and build a genuinely reformed theology of the church, an ecclesiology and missiology based on *theologia crucis* principles.

leading theologians in the church were no longer antagonistic in theory to either home or foreign missions as they had been thirty years before, home mission was conceived as the normal self-edifying activity of the church.

Is it valid to conclude that this theological renewal because of embracing this new trend of the “theology of the Word” (as Dezső László, and many others of that generation of theologians preferred to call it), could not produce the expected renewal of the church as a whole, neither in home missions nor in her call to “go into all the world,” except for sporadic signs and initiatives? Can we say that both the modality and the sodality mission models failed to work effectively because of the lack of a breakthrough in missiology on the part of contemporary church theologians, their failure to grasp the concept of mission as being a foundational factor in construing a biblical ecclesiology, and their unrecognition of mission as expressing the essence and basic calling above any other calling of the church?

Before answering, a few important points should be stressed again. First note the emphasis that Kenessey, Kecskeméthy, Tompa, and others in their circle laid on the primacy of the person and atoning work of Jesus as being *the* gospel, or even *the* science of theology per se, rather than his teachings for example, or any abstraction of his Word, to a bare concept or explanatory principal, or to a theological principle. They stridently opposed any notion, such as that which we examined earlier in our analysis of the Barthian view, of a need for a driving principle to make the Bible sufficient to *become* the Word of God, as this denied the reformed Creeds which clearly maintain the self-sufficiency of the Bible.

We have seen secondly, that Tavaszy, although he came very close to an understanding of mission as being the essence of both the church and theology, remained inconsistent when approaching ecclesiology. The same is true of all those around him. Thirdly, we have seen Tavaszy’s realization that *missio Dei* can be accomplished in an ex-territoriality, as we see in Jesus’ Person and Atoning Work. Yet, he never drew the radical conclusion of what this might mean for the task of the church in its participation in God’s mission. Instead, we saw that both he and Imre and their circle continued to enforce the in-territoriality of the church’s mission. Fourthly, we have seen how Kecskeméthy fought back against the hubris of both theology and the church hierarchy, refusing to concede anything or to compromise the freedom and independence of the sodalities in their partnership scheme with the modality.

With this as background, we now examine the doctrine of the centrality of the person of Christ as the head of the church, as it was officially subscribed to by the confessions of the TRC, and let us compare this with how it was actually understood and expressed in the teaching and actions of the TRC in the period under discussion. How did they interpret the headship of Christ over against the institutional leadership of the church? Were they consistent with their own critical remarks and insights which called for a renewal of the church? There is no doubt that they unanimously wanted such a reformation and renewal of the church. They frequently criticized the state of the church and wanted a change for the better. Why, then, did their efforts fail?

The Church “Transcending” Both the Person and Mission of Jesus

My thesis is thus: the efforts of the TRC failed because of the separation of the church from the person of Jesus. The suggested and inherent argument is this: if the separation of the person of Jesus and the Word of God could take place in a Kantian separation of the abstracted Word from the person of Christ, then the separation of the church from the person of Jesus becomes a possibility also. In other words, the Transylvanian theologians of the new trend *nolens volens* emphasized the primacy of the church at the expense of Jesus. The visible church as represented in a particular denomination, particularly in the TRC, was portrayed as *the Church*.¹⁶⁷ And as such, was seen as the body of Christ, to such an extent that it was, in fact, regarded as identical with his person. The authority of the official church was assumed to be almost the authority of Christ. Of course, these ideas were never explicitly stated, but rather the contrary was always

¹⁶⁷ See for example the thoughts expressed in theory in the studies of Tavaszy on the Church in his *Reformed Christian Dogmatics* and particularly in a preliminary exposition of it in: ‘Az egyház református dogmatikai felfogása’ in: Sándor Tavaszy, *A Kijelentés feltétele alatt, Theológiai értekezések (Under the Condition of Revelation, Theological Studies)*, *op.cit.*, pp.76-88. But in practice, although this study is an excellent and faithful rewording of all that the Reformed Confessions teach, yet we cannot understand his apparently opposite views with regard to practical theology and particularly regarding the method of home mission. See also his article in *Az Út* Vol. 6, Nr.11 (1924):pp.12-17, where he renders any and all mission activity explicitly under the control of the church, thus running the risk of describing the reformed church in the same way that he critically described the Roman Catholic church concept.

emphasized; they would never have been openly expressed. But reading over the vast literature of the times, in my opinion, they created a mirage of an abstracted church concept which replaced the real church. For example, Tavaszy strongly argued in favor of the identification of the visible church with the invisible, protesting against a rigid separation. However, he runs the risk of the other extremity, of in this manner identifying the person of Jesus with the church, which is of course conceived as being the TRC first and foremost.¹⁶⁸ As we will see later, this identification, paradoxically, can lead in fact to the separation of the church from the person of Christ. And at anytime and in any church on whatever part of the globe, if this takes place, then the church, humanly speaking, transcends the person of Christ. In stating that this happened in spite of the fact that the dialectic theologians never argued theologically in favor of such a process, I am *not* suggesting that they can be blamed for lack of clarity in their seemingly pure doctrine, as it was verbalized. What I am suggesting here is that in spite of the verbalized theological reasoning for the opposite expressed in their writings from the period, the church *was in practicality* transcending the person of Christ.

Can the thesis that the church was in practice transcending the person of Christ be justified? This statement can be defended when we look at it in the context of evangelization and mission, particularly. Let me enroll here a few historical comparisons, together with the inherent arguments drawn from the facts of the Transylvanian church history of those times; and finally, by quoting the opinions of theologians of the period.

First of all, it is revealing to compare the Transylvanian ecclesiastical position concerning both Foreign and Home missions with that of other reformed churches in Western Europe to display the striking similarities with, for example, the Scottish Church (although this similar process took place there *a hundred years earlier*):

When the general Assembly of 1796 declined to take action to promote the aggressive evangelization of the world, one of the arguments put forward to justify such a policy of inaction was that there was quite enough for the Church to do about its

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

own doors. It was indeed quite true that there was already a problem of Home Hea-thenism. The lapsing of the masses had begun.¹⁶⁹

(...) To meet the needs of this situation the Church was remiss in making adequate provision.¹⁷⁰

For a comparison, we have to focus on the early years of the ministry of Kenessey and Kecskeméthy after they became professors at the Kolozsvár Seminary. Bishop Szász had to intervene to save them from “excommunication” in their first years of professorship (1895!) in Transylvania because of their efforts to introduce foreign and home missions in the ministry of the church:¹⁷¹ “If the Bishop had not taken a stand defending Kenessey, a church-discipline procedure against him and against Kecskeméthy would have been started.”¹⁷² Yet, due to a somewhat strange irony of history, on the 18th of February, 1908, Kenessey himself was elected and on the 8th of April, he was inducted as bishop of Transylvania! But even then, as Ravasz remembers, the now *Bishop* Kenessey could not succeed in leading the General Assembly to take action promoting Foreign Mission:

About 25 years ago, during a Church Assembly, Bishop Béla Kenessey promoted foreign missions in a speech, and stated that the Hungarian Reformed Church needs foreign missions. An upright, old professor from Debrecen stood up and said: “It is a nice thing to give a black child a starched shirt and teach him to sing Halleluiah, but let us wait with it, because here at home there are so many in need of clothing and there are so many who can't sing.” Thus it was decided at the meeting that there

¹⁶⁹ John Macleod, *Scottish Theology in Relation to Church History Since the Reformation*. Edinburgh: The Knox Press, 1995, p.222.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

¹⁷¹ Between the years 1895-1899, see some of the translated documents of their case in the Appendix at the end of this dissertation.

¹⁷² Zsolt Kozma, ‘Kenessey Béla; 1858-1918’ in Zsolt Kozma, ed., *Akik jó bizonyágot nyertek...* (Those Who Have Obtained a Good Testimony...), p. 44.

is no need for foreign missions,¹⁷³ because home missions need to be established first.¹⁷⁴

Then, secondly, the experience of the Evangelical wing of the Reformed Church in Transylvania (embodied in the home mission movement and expressed mostly in CE), against the Liberals and the official leadership, can be put in parallel with the picture of the Scottish reformed churches from a hundred years earlier, where the former can be paralleled to the Scottish Evangelical Party and the latter to the Moderate Party:

In Scotland it was when Moderatism was at about the lowest ebb of unbelief that the Moderate Party became the greatest sticklers for Church authority, which, indeed, meant their own autocracy. History has a way of repeating itself.¹⁷⁵

History repeated itself exactly a hundred years later in the life of the Hungarian Reformed Church of Transylvania. The “lowest ebb of unbelief” had existed since the second half of the 19th century among the neo-Kantian rationalist theologians¹⁷⁶ and it is no wonder that their energy was largely compensated in a pursuit for power and authority. Even when, due to the influence of dialectical theology, they started to speak of the need for a “theocracy” to be enforced in the Church, for a long time what they really meant was “their own autocracy.” This distorted concept of the church dominated by a bona fide “autocracy” pretending to be a

¹⁷³ See also József Farkas’ remarks in his study when he speaks about the overwhelming “camp of liberals and rationals,” who were still in the majority in the Hungarian reformed churches at the turn of the century, refusing vehemently both the holding of prayer weeks and the practice of foreign missions:

“In 1906, when the World Alliance of Presbyters/Elders requested the Synod to propose that the congregations hold a prayer week for foreign missions, the Synod unanimously decided that keeping prayer weeks, was ‘something totally alien aspect from the character of the church,’ and they would ignore it.”

(See József Farkas, ‘Evangélizáló szolgálatunk az elmúlt két évtized alatt’ *Theológiai Szemle* Vol. 1 (1958): p.8.)

¹⁷⁴ László Ravasz, ‘Külmisszió vagy belmisszió?’ (Foreign Missions or Home Missions?), in: *Mi a külmisszió? (What is Foreign Missions?)*, Külmissziói Füzetek, Nr. 13, Kiadja a Magyar Református Külmissziói Szövetség. Budapest: Hungarian Reformed Foreign Missions Association, 1933.

¹⁷⁵ Macleod, pp.280-281.

¹⁷⁶ The most influential theologian of Transylvania in the second half of the 19th century was the Dean of the Nagyenyed Theological Seminary, Dr. Ödön Kovács (the mentor of Károly Nagy), who did not believe in some of the basic teachings even of the Apostle’s Creed.

“theocratic” arrangement in the institutionalized church, calls to mind Goheen’s analysis of Lesslie Newbigin’s comments on this missiological issue:

Newbigin leans on the Dutch tradition of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd to argue that the problem with Christendom is not that Christians exercised power but that the institutionalized church exercised power. Over against this ecclesiastical totalitarianism Newbigin advocates the neo-Calvinist notion of sphere sovereignty, the doctrine that God has given in the creation order a measure of autonomy to each of the various areas of human life such as art, science, politics, and economics. The institutionalized church does not have direct authority over these spheres; rather each sphere is shaped by God’s word discerned and implemented by those within that sphere. This avoids both the post-Enlightenment idea of total autonomy of these spheres and the medieval understanding that each of these spheres is under the rule of the church. So while the church as an organized body has no right to authority in these spheres, Christians with insight to these areas may exercise power.¹⁷⁷

The stand-point of Victor¹⁷⁸ seems very close to Newbigin, whereas Makkai seems to defend the medieval Christendom concept of the church exercising direct authority over every sphere. Let us now quote Victor at length, first defining his concept of missions and his views on the related spheres in connection with the idea of missions; and then his critique of Makkai’s approach. First, his definition:

If we apply the term [of mission], going beyond the immanent circle of human life, the notion of ‘mission’ becomes characteristically a Christian notion. It is the gift of the Word [of God] for us. Because God reveals Himself in His Word and in His will, we all have a “mandate” for our whole life and for all its related work. On the one hand, there is no “mission” [as such] outside the lit up circle of the Word, merely a “mandate” in the everyday meaning of the word, as the business of humans among each other. On the other hand, in the light of the Word, everything turns into “mission,” because humans have to render all of their activity under the will of God. Yet we are not interested here in this over-embracing meaning of the term [of mission], but in a more restricted sense within this wider one. The limitation is given in the

¹⁷⁷ Goheen, *“As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You,”* p.402. See also in this regard p.390. I will follow many of his insights and will refer to Newbigin also in my analysis, using his critical remarks as a comparison to evaluate the Transylvanian situation in the following pages.

¹⁷⁸ See the debate of Professor János Victor with the former Transylvanian bishop Sándor Makkai at the beginning of this chapter.

distinction that reformed thinking usually makes between the *gratia universalis* and the *gratia specialis*[sic]¹⁷⁹

Having attempted to define the concept of mission, narrowing it down from a general and not necessarily theological meaning of the term, Victor arrives at the reformed dogmatic concept of distinguishing between general and special grace, as we have seen above. The reformed criticism of the medieval and quasi-Roman Catholic handling of the power issue was made in full by the neo-Calvinistic Dutch school of Kuyper, as Newbigin observed. But Victor seems to go almost as far as his Dutch reformed counterpart as he develops his ideas in the matter. Although he concedes, “the line of distinction, in reality, cannot be drawn boldly, as the activities of *gratia universalis* and of *gratia specialis* are mutually interwoven with each other,”

Yet we can state the following. Believers in their own community, in the life of their church, can succeed in being lifted above their worldly life more so than they would be able to do in the places where they are scattered [in this world]. Yet the church is involved in the world’s web of lives, not as a church first of all, but by and through the individual life of its members individually. As a consequence, in a relative meaning, the “mission” of the individual Christian believer is carried out primarily on the field of *gratia universalis*, whereas that of the [“mission” of the] church is on the field of *gratia specialis*.¹⁸⁰

Victor makes his point very vividly by using illustrations. This concreteness makes clear for us the distinction between what we would regard as an ideal and generalized neo-Kantian concept of the church, and that of a concrete church built up of individual believers. This distinction is important when we criticize the neo-Kantian framework in which Makkai operated when constructing his own ecclesiology over against Kecskeméthy and his circle. Victor pictured the Kuyperian-type spheres of autonomy in this way:

Although the shoemaker as a believer in God’s will has to strive to lead, under the rule of Christ, as many people as he can by his witnessing, nevertheless his first “mission” in this world is to make good shoes to the joy of his customers and so to the glory of God. Contrary to this, the church, although God might want to use her also

¹⁷⁹ Victor, ‘Mi a “missziói munka?”’ (What Is “Mission Work?”), *op. cit.*, p.14.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.* p.15.

so that her members through her ministry might be lifted up in their culture, welfare and in other worldly regards too (and it would be a sin for her to forget about this!), yet her primary and her special mission still is to build the eternal Kingdom of Christ in their hearts and to glorify God's name through this in the world. In the case of the individual, every endeavor for the sake of serving the *gratia specialis* will turn to a false "mission" if that individual's endeavor falls short in the accomplishment of his duties in the area of *gratia universalis*. (...) Similarly, the church fatally falls into self-deception if she engages herself in all sorts of activities, however historically important and ethnically defensive, or undertakes many cultural, or social, etc. ministries, and yet in the meantime, the person of Christ is fading away and His royal rule ceases in the life of its members.

It is not our task to follow Victor's next step toward a further narrowing down of the church's activity in the field of special grace to an even more limited, specifically missionary activity. We will be satisfied with these highlighted thoughts which are so similar to the Kuyperian interpretation of the church's authority in the world. Victor has many good insights, including the insight that any mandate of the church becomes "mission." It is not just or not necessarily determined "by the place where it is carried out, but is qualified as mission by the goal set before it."¹⁸¹ For us, it is important to see that when the church identifies her authority with the authority of her Head in the world, and then steps illegitimately into the field of the *gratia universalis*, she is crossing a God-given boundary by trying to dominate a sphere which is a sovereign sphere. This can be done only to the detriment of her good witness in the world, her mission, and to the detriment of her own power balance. Her leadership becomes an autocracy, and theocracy remains a theological pretext to justify both power games within the church and the thirst for institutionalization; which in turn might serve the thirst for power of the official leadership. This medieval Christendom pattern was challenged by the Reformation and continues to be challenged by the missionary movement which justly feels threatened by the power games in the practical life of the everyday church.

Again, resulting from the above analysis, we can see that, strangely, this way of identifying the Church with Christ (or the leadership authority with His authority), actually separates Christ from the church and lessens his person as a real

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.* p.19.

authority above his own church. That is what happened in the Transylvanian context; the sodalities were, and could enter, many times in the way of this (power-preserving) structure. They, as independent and, thus, hard to control, entities were labeled as sectarian, in order to remove them out of the way of the claimed power structures. The ideal of the church, against the real church, was assumed philosophically, but not biblically. The neo-Platonic view of assuming that in the TRC we can see the ideal church, led not just to the identification of this church in her ideal state with the person of Christ, but caused the transcendence of it above the person of Christ. When identification is not assumed, even in the ideal church, then the starting point in loyalty to the church is no longer humanistic. It is not down-upwards, but theo-centric: from up-downwards in accepting the judging care of God for His church.

The church's mission cannot be an educational or cultural or any other kind of bare ideological rallying cry. Otherwise, the activity of the church becomes an ideology which is then assumed to be the gospel. Then inviting the church members to put trust in it, as an overall salvific action, is nothing else than to betray them by giving them false expectations. The question I ask in regard to the TRC is: was the Transylvanian reality similar to the Western accommodation of the gospel? Goheen says:

The problem that confronts the church in the West is that the Bible has been part of the culture for so long that it has accommodated itself to the fundamental assumptions of the culture and appears unable to challenge them.¹⁸²

I have presented adequate historical data already above to demonstrate how much more this was true in the case of the TRC in Eastern Europe. Again Goheen states:

If 'Bible bits' are absorbed into the reigning cultural story, then there is no challenge. The church finds a place within the culture. It is only as the story as a whole in its comprehensive claim is maintained and embodied that the church will offer a contrasting way of life to its contemporaries.¹⁸³

¹⁸² Goheen, "As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You," p.390.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.* p.392.

There is another reason why this prophetic challenge could not take place in the cultural setting of the TRC, partly because of the hermeneutical orientation: "The message of the text is silenced and the reader is not challenged; he or she examines the text but in turn is not examined by it."¹⁸⁴ The other extreme is also a danger, when the church is assumed to be concerned only with the salvation of the people but does not care about the socio-politico-cultural mandate, the prophetic one. That danger was certainly present in the more legalistic wings of CE. Some actually left the TRC and joined other denominations, criticizing the TRC because of her heavy involvement in Hungarian cultural life at the educational, social, and political levels. So both ways proved to be wrong: proclaiming Jesus without the church or the church without Jesus.

To summarize my observations: the church is not called to embody an ideal of itself but to embody the purpose of God in creation and redemption and is to testify to that purpose and make it known to the world. Not only was this not realized, but furthermore, the leadership of the TRC actually nursed her theological blind spots. This, together with a refusal of the prophetic dynamism preserved in the CE tradition, made her especially vulnerable to future events.

In this chapter I have carried on with the contrasting of the mission models of Imre's circle and of Kecskeméthy's circle described in the second chapter; this was done by pointing to the modality versus sodality dilemma and I have evaluated the possible solutions of the dilemma offered by the Transylvanians in the wider international context, before considering the general Hungarian context and, finally, the local Transylvanian context. I focused then on the period of the Barthian breakthrough and evaluated the results of the domestication of the home mission program as accepted by the officialdom and criticized by Kecskeméthy's circle, before pointing to the danger which arose from the mistaken ecclesiology of the church transcending the person and mission of Jesus. Considerable attention was given to the ecclesiological versus missiological convictions prevailing in the Transylvanian context and to the resulting missionary acts of the TRC. I argued also that at the background of the distorted missionary acts of the church, which sprang from a flawed ecclesiology, were the philosophical beliefs of Ravasz, whose ideas were perpetuated by Makkai, Imre and Tavaszy, all of

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p.395.

whom were first neo-Kantians, then “theologians of the Word.” Their thinking reached its extreme peak with Dezső László, as we will see in the next chapter. In what proved to be a disastrous survival strategy for the Church, with tragic results at the time of the Communist takeover and during the forty years of dictatorship which followed, the TRC under his leadership moved into a *theologically* justified compromise with the State. That process will be analyzed in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter Six

Attempts to Re-Define Missions and the Communist Takeover

In this chapter I explore four main issues. First, I summarize and compare briefly the theological positions of the different leading Transylvanian theologians with regard to missiology, paying special attention to their ecclesiology, and I examine what proved to be a significant breakthrough in the concept of Foreign Mission in the church. Secondly, I consider the sending out of the first foreign missionary from Transylvania, along with an analysis of his missiological views; thirdly, I explore and evaluate Dezső László's critique of Jenő Horváth's concept of mission at the beginning of the Communist assumption of power. Finally, I will examine why the TRC's official theology of mission failed. This failure was sadly evidenced by the official church leadership's ambiguous collaboration with the Communist authorities after 1948 which resulted in a servile concession to an atheist ideology and the self-abortion of the missionary and evangelization duty of the church.

The enigma of less involvement in missions by the TRC

At the outset of my research, I was faced with the vast study and challenge of A. M. Kool, who echoes Kenneth Scott Latourette's statement¹ that the contribution of Hungarian Protestantism to the foreign mission movement has been limited, numerically speaking, if compared with equally strong Western churches. Motivated by Kecskeméthy, Imre, and more than any other Transylvanian theologian, by TRC missionary, Babos, I sought to contribute to a better understanding of the theological reasons for this fact, at least in the case of the TRC in Romania. Kool has already explored the case of the HRC in Hungary. My findings underline what Imre says in this regard that only now in 1926 "our church started to realize the

¹ Kool, p.1, quoting from Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity. The Nineteenth Century in Europe*. Vol. II. New York: 1955, p.205.

real importance of the idea of foreign missions.”² His primary interest was in how to “educate our people that they might see this question in its whole size and significance.” He gave a profound and precise diagnosis of the situation:

It is evident that in a situation when a church is not dealing with the question of foreign missions and is not interested in it, that this is always a sign of decay and backsliding in that church. It means that a church is so busy with herself and with her problems that she has not the space and time to care about others. Just as how in the individual's life, a lack of care about others is a sign of an egoist and a selfishly guided life and will also result later in a selfish concern for one's own salvation only; a similar thing is true in the life of a church community. In the same way that no one lives and dies for himself, so neither can a church live and die for herself, nor does she exist for herself. The life of a church closed up and living only for herself will become narrowed and weakened. The automatic result of this is that a lack of mission will demonstrate and disclose the lack of faith in that individual or (and parallel to that) of that church. [*Italics, LH.*]³

Imre was sharp in his criticism of his contemporary church where he saw a lack of sacrificial spirit in the life of the church as being symptomatic of weakness in faith and spirit:

This living for herself and lack of care for others (symptom) of our church, on the one hand, was a sign of the church's weakness in faith and spirit; on the other hand, it slowly became also a cause of it('s weakness). Also it contributed to such phenomena that not only did we not think of bringing the gospel to others, but we fell short of defending the cause of mission before the world and ourselves. Even here and inside our ranks we should have been edifying ourselves and, if we were ashamed of being interested in the Hottentots, at least we could have been interested in the cause of our members and congregations.⁴

Contrary to this description of Imre's, some church historians argue that the Hungarian Reformed Church (especially in Transylvania, which has often been occupied or influenced politically by Turks) was very mission-minded even from the time of the Reformation. There is historical evidence that a spontaneous mission

² Lajos Imre, 'A külmisszió kérdése a munkában,' (The Question of Foreign Mission in the Ministry) *Az Út* Nr. 9. (1926) p.240.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

work emerged in the sharing of the gospel with the Muslims at the time of Reformation. However, this became very soon an unheard of thing in the successive centuries in the history of the TRC. In view of this background of such zeal for the ever-demanding task of mission at the dawn of the history of the TRC, I first examined in this thesis the peculiar historical process that led to a deterioration in the theological understanding of the essence of missions in the Hungarian Reformed Church which, ever since the Reformation, had been a vigorously mission-minded church. Both the geographical position and the historical situation provided a unique opportunity for mission outreach in Transylvania after the time of Reformation, as Murdock observed: "The Hungarian Reformed church not only bordered the Orthodox world but was also forced to adapt and survive under and near areas of Muslim control."⁵

Throughout the thesis I focused on why the missiology of the church became inward focused, losing the outward focused perspective it had possessed for a short period at the beginning of the 20th century. I tried to unfold why and how missiology came to be not based on a clear theological foundation; and concluded that due to the immediate historical situation and needs of the church, understanding of missions in the TRC became grossly distorted. Like Bosch, I concluded that the HRC at the time of the Reformation was still a movement and thus easily able to cross boundaries towards the Turks, Saxons and Romanians, spontaneous in their zealous mission-mindedness.

The early church ceased to be a movement and turned into an institution. There are essential differences between an institution and a movement, says H. R. Niebuhr (following Bergson) the one is conservative, the other progressive; the one is more or less passive, yielding to influences from outside, the other is active, influencing rather than being influenced; the one looks to the past, the other to the future (Niebuhr 1959:11f). In addition, we might add, the one is anxious, the other is prepared to take risks; the one guards boundaries, the other crosses them.⁶

Therefore Bosch's view describes best the TRC situation, where the rigidity of the gradually institutionalized and hierarchized forms of the church became a fatal hindrance against her own well intended struggles to promote missions. Based

⁵ Murdock, p.140.

⁶ Bosch, *Transforming Missions.*, p.54.

on my research, I can state that the reformed church soon after the Reformation ceased to be progressive, very soon becoming “passive, yielding to influences from outside” and toward the end of the 19th century becoming “the one (who) looks to the past.” As a contrast, only the emerging mission movement of the C.E., growing out of the church’s fossilized body was able to become a progressive, active movement, critical of the preservation of the *status quo*, “influencing rather than being influenced”, and “prepared to take risks” even in crossing the boundaries which the traditional church preferred to guard.⁷

The official home mission movement, like CE previously, tried in turn to introduce and stir up a greater awareness toward foreign missions in the church, and toward the importance of doing missions in general. The first meeting of the Group of Seven took place in 1926 when they decided to create a Friends of Foreign Missions group⁸ to promote the idea of starting foreign missions and later on maybe organizing financial support for it. Especially in this regard I have pointed to the difference between the situation of the HRC in Hungary and in Romania and, successively the difference between the emerging mission models in these two countries.

I have also observed that the theological thinking on missions was molded in the framework of three decisive factors which influenced the TRC in the researched period: the influence of the neo-Kantian school, the influence of Barthian dialectical theology, and the influence of the revivalist mission movement on reaching Transylvania.⁹

⁷ The challenge created by the occurring *sodality* embodied in CE produced significant tensions in the *modality* represented by the TRC, resulting in its total official refusal of both evangelization and foreign missions on its part for about three decades at the beginning of the twentieth century (from 1895 until the 1920s). However, this mission movement embarking on an evangelical awakening, for the first time ever in the history of Transylvania, despite vast opposition, became so provocative to the official church that indirectly it produced a churchinized mirror image version, the ‘church’s home mission.’ This was promoted and led by Professor Lajos Imre. This change in the official line of the TRC began in 1922, when Imre proposed that home mission, instead of being labeled as something bad and sectist, could and should be incorporated into the church and should be led by the official leadership of the TRC.

⁸ This never became a sodality. See chapter one for an explanation of why they decided not to organize an official missions society.

⁹ As we saw in the previous chapters, this basically started with the arrival of Dr. Béla Kenessey and Dr. István Kecskeméthy to Kolozsvár in 1895, when they commenced their teaching careers at the Theological Seminary, as newly appointed professors.

First, my thesis is that neo-Kantianism prevailed to such an extent that Barthian dialectical theology could not bring a real change or paradigm shift in the theological orientation despite the belief of the Transylvanian theologians that it had done so.

Second, I am stating that Barth's influence did not strengthen the confessional stand of the church as again, they tended to believe; instead, the TRC's unselective and somewhat arbitrary embracing of the neo-Orthodox theology, at least in the field of the theology of the church (whether ecclesiology or Transylvanian 'ecclesiastica') failed to produce any *paradigm shift* in their missional thinking, or at best, left the neo-Kantian thinking unaltered. But to declare that, despite what the Transylvanian theologians believed, no paradigm shift in fact took place in either ecclesiological or missiological orientation, does not mean that there was no change at all. Many encouraging steps were taken, many changes took place, and certainly it was a remarkable period in the life of the TRC.

Three, I have to notice also that the mission movement channeled by CE was co-opted by the church leadership in an ambiguous and somewhat contradictory way, giving an incentive also in an indirect way to the life of the church.

After stating all these, I now summarize why I have found problematic the evidenced influence of the Hungarian neo-Kantianism and Kantianism in general on the official theological orientation of the TRC.

Beginning with the writings on Practical Theology of Ravasz, and followed by the theological works of the disciples of Böhm, Transylvanian ecclesiological thinking clearly dovetailed with the value-appraisal world view of the neo-Kantians, climaxing in Pauler. Böhm's *Axiology* and Pauler's correctives to Böhm, on the one hand; and Kant's influence channeled through Western theologians such as Schleiermacher, Ritschl and more on the other, prepared the soil for the specific all-encompassing and authoritative view of 'pan-missionism' which emerged in the church. The illusionary views fuelled by defining ethnic identity as a Kantian category also demanded a totalitarian vision of values as championing the moral imperatives of the homeland, and the mission duty bounding to that homeland.

To prove my point, I now will summarize and compare briefly the theological positions of the different leading Transylvanian theologians with regard to ecclesiology and missiology.

Comparative Summing Up of the TRC's Theologians' Ecclesiology and Mission Concept

When summarizing Imre's work, Ende first emphasized his home mission work and created mission model, his greatest contribution to the life of the TRC.¹⁰ In my view, and I am not alone in this,¹¹ Imre was first a theologian of catechism and religious education and then, only secondary to this, a missiologist. Writing on Lajos Imre's early years, when Imre was still a neo-Kantian liberal theologian, yet already fascinated with education matters, the church historian Dr. Bucsay made an interesting statement:

In his study published in 1912 he still viewed it as necessary to emphasize that in religious education we do not need even the Apostle's Creed, not to speak of the later Confessions.¹² (...) In the mass multitude of dogmas there is but one base on which we can build: our own self-consciousness.¹³

This liberal and humanist idea of the individual's own self-consciousness is a clear neo-Kantian stressing of the Self-awareness-centered world-view of the Böhm-disciples. In a 1914 article he expresses a similar idea prioritizing the humanistic approach: "People must be taught first to be human and then to be Christian."¹⁴ And then again: "Formation of religious characters must be preceded by intense formation of ethical characters."¹⁵

In 1920 Imre still thought in liberal patterns. For example, in counseling the youth, he suggested a very humanistic pattern with an emphasis on the free and

¹⁰ Ende, p.122. "During the two decades of his home mission work he co-operated with great workers of the Transylvanian Reformed home mission work such as Bishops Sándor Makkai and János Vásárhelyi; Professors Mária Pilder, Lajos Gönczy, Albert Juhász, Dezső Lázsló, Jenő Horváth, Dániel Borbáth and András Mózes and with many pastors and leaders of the church. Those who commemorate him consider his home mission work to be his most important achievement "

¹¹ See among others Dr. Zoltán Adorjáni's 'Introduction' to Imre's *Autobiography*. Ende's book also confirms this observation, despite the statement: "Those who commemorate him consider his home mission work to be his most important achievement."

¹² Mihály Bucsay, *Tanulmányok a Magyarországi Református Egyház történetéből 1867-1978* STUDIA ET ACTA ECCLESIASTICA V. kötet, főszerk. Dr. Tibor Bartha és Dr. László Makkai. Budapest: Magyarországi Református Egyház Zsinati Irodájának Sajtóosztálya, 1983, p.218.

¹³ *Ibid.* p.218.

¹⁴ Lajos Imre, 'A falu kultúrája' (The Culture of the Village) *Református Szemle* (1914): pp. 45, 60.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

autonomous reason of the individual in his ability to produce changes in his own life:

We should not be afraid to point to the individual mistakes of a person in an open and serious way. (...) We can conclude (the discussion) with the confidence that we are certain that his strength of will and character will be able to reset this failure.¹⁶

But by 1930 he had refuted the same ideas, as we read in his bold criticism of the failure of liberal thinking:

When [the Liberals] encouraged the child that out of his own strength, by way of self-education and self-control, he could reach the goal of education; then in fact, they misled him, because they did not consider the clear and experiential fact of the reality of sin, but instead they minimized and flattened it.¹⁷

Again in his 1942 Catechism, Imre asserts his new position, when criticizing the standpoint of the Liberals: "They regarded the Confessions as nothing else than the condensing of religious experiences, a kind of system of theses of which acceptance or refusal depends only on the individual, in this case on the child."¹⁸ This was his changed view, due to the Barthian influence over theology in early 1930s Transylvania. Then he retracted what he believed about the usage of the Confessions in religious education. We can trace his changed views in the 1942 edition of his basic work: "(f)rom the material of religious education and teaching, the Confessions and the (Heidelberg) Catechism cannot be omitted."¹⁹ It is my thesis after a close survey and evaluation of his work in this paper, that there are clear evidences that Imre considered home mission as *an immediate extension of the educational work of the church*.

Seeing this very close link between the two, I realized why throughout his whole career, he insisted upon the somewhat *paternalistic* control of the official church leadership over the practice of mission work. In chapter two, where I

¹⁶ Lajos Imre, *Vezérfonal – az ifjúság gondozására (A Guideline for Caring for the Youth)*. A Magyar Pedagógiai Társaság Könyvtára 3. kötete. Budapest: Franklin-Társulat kiadása, 1920, p.86.

¹⁷ Lajos Imre, *Az ifjúság válsága (The Crisis of the Youth)*. Nagybánya (Baia-Mare): Az "Ifjú Erdély" kiadása, 1930, p.70

¹⁸ . Lajos Imre, *Katechetika – A református keresztyén vallásos nevelés rendszere (Catechism - the System of Reformed Christian Religious Education)* Református Egyházi Könyvtár XXII. Kötete. Budapest: 1942, p.205.

¹⁹ Ibid.

evaluated Imre's mission model, I noted that in his Proposal to the Assembly he gave as a reason for the failure of Kecskeméthy's mission model, "that these ministries were not initiated from or by the local congregations," and that even when the official church took some of these initiations into its hand, "they were ordered from above, from the church leaders and officials of the District."²⁰ But Imre was not critical of this "ordered from above" model on the same grounds as Kecskeméthy, who fought for independent leadership for societies alongside a strong partnership with the church, refusing the "ordered from above" type of mission work. In contrast, Imre argued that this paternalism of the officials of the District would not be a tragedy if the Transylvanian Reformed Church were still under the Hungarian government! What explains this somewhat ambiguous and conditional approval of paternalistic control?

In my view, the explanation lies in the primarily educational interest of Imre and in his taking responsibility for *Hungarian* education. That is why immediately after Trianon he thought that the time had come for the official church to take over the planning of the home mission movement. In this way, the church could better develop a complete strategy for all ministries toward the aim of the Christian and Hungarian education of church members, both children and adults. This ethnic emphasis could not be left to be carried out merely *at a grassroots level*, as any mission work would demand. "It is time now that we take in our hands the task of the education of our people²¹ at every level, said Imre."²² With this he showed that when educational and missional interests collided, he chose to decide in favor of the former. Ende also confirmed the close link between education and mission in the thinking of Imre, which initially puzzled her in her endeavor to understand Imre's mission work and his theory of home mission in particular: "It is especially problematic to place his writings about home mission in his oeuvre."²³ This piece of work is a direct proof of that problem. Ende, however, goes on and remarks, in line with my findings:

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ See in Imre's Proposal to the General Assembly, quoted in length and analyzed in chapter two.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ende, p.122.

Still I think that this great amount of work was no more than the completion and extension of his catechetical work. His biography and those studies of pedagogy I mentioned earlier prove this.

*Lajos Imre regarded home mission, just like schools, as an occasion, a form for religious education; however what was important was not the form, but the ministry done through it. This explains why, among many branches of the Transylvanian Reformed home mission, he paid real attention only to those which were related to religious education. For this reason I deal with his home mission work within his catechetical work. (Italics, LH)*²⁴

Therefore, similar to Fekete's observation concerning Makkai that his book *The Missionary Work of the Church* was not about missiology but rather ecclesiology, I consider that Imre was a systematic thinker and devoted worker of Christian education rather than of missions. In the strict sense of the word he was not a missiologist, but rather a gifted catechist of the TRC. The same applies more or less to his whole circle, and also to his successor and disciple, the leader of the Mission Department of the Church, Dezső László.

²⁴ *Ibid.* Later on p. 124, Ende observed the close link of missionary education with confirmation, as well:

"Lajos Imre attempted to link the aims of home mission and the work of the home mission workers to the religious education of the church, which has confirmation as its focus. Confirmation is the "fireplace" of the home mission work. According to his view this meant that there is no second central event after confirmation, but the forces defining confirmation overflow into the lives of the children, of the young people and into the lives of the leaders of home mission attending them. These forces are personalized by the freedom and activity manifested in the work of these youth."

Prior to this on p.66, we read how the Sunday School movement attracted Imre's attention. He considered it as an important social renewal tool available to the church and so home mission was conceived in a paternal sense as a means of social mobilization through education:

"He realized that the Sunday School and all the other church events happen within the church and through them the communion of the pastor and the congregation is carried out. He called the renewal of the church "social" renewal in this respect. His opinion was that earlier the church educated through discipline, now it educates through the social mobilization of the members of the congregation. He had the same aims with the Transylvanian home mission. He loved and supported those associations of the Transylvanian home mission which had education among their aims. The Sunday Schools always came first with him and later he gladly joined the work of the World Union/Federation of Sunday Schools."

Comparing him with Kecskeméthy, it is possible to see some striking similarities between Imre's views and those of his mentor and colleague; the influence of Kecskeméthy is apparent:

They refuse to admit that just because someone is a pastor or a teacher, that does not mean he has a God-granted right to monopolize the mission work and that there are many pastors and teachers, maybe even they themselves are like that, who preach the word of God but have no spiritual connection with it.²⁵

The strange thing is that despite this sharp criticism against neglect of the spiritual criteria, when it came to choosing able workers for home mission, Imre trusted the official church uncritically and put in the hand of this leadership the cause of education through home mission:

First, the disposition of the individual needs to be examined. A person who does not yet consciously live a Christian life, who does not have a connection with his God yet, who has not given him his entire life, is not fit for evangelistic work²⁶

And this happens in spite of the crisis of the church of which Imre was fully aware and which he exposed so clearly:

It is obvious that spiritual work in our church has reached a crisis. We will shortly see what will become of this mission, will it turn out to be an unsuccessful attempt ..., or will it become a renewal in the church as we believe God wants it to be. This crisis is not only the crisis of home mission, but *the crisis of the entire church* and the key issue here is whether the church seriously intends to serve God and depend entirely on Him or still rely on its own strength, *its own institutions* and the like. [Italics, LH.]²⁷

All these (home mission work and its special branches) are needed, according to Imre. Since home mission work is less rigid than the traditional ceremonies and practices of the church, it is more adaptable to concrete, contemporary tasks. Yet, although he admitted this, Imre declared this kind of mission has and can be done

²⁵ Lajos Imre, 'Lelki munkánk válsága', (The Crisis of Our Spiritual Work) *Az Út* (1925): pp.209-211.

²⁶ Lajos Imre, 'A belmissziói munkások kérdésének rendszeréről' (The Systematizing of the Issue of Home Mission Workers) *Az Út* (1923): pp.40-42.

²⁷ Imre, 'Lelki munkánk válsága', (The Crisis of Our Spiritual Work), *op. cit.*, pp.209-211.

without establishing institutions (sodalities).²⁸ This reminds us of what Walls asserts about the role of sodalities, for example, in education: “(t)he societies, as we have seen, developed other roles, as educators of church and public, as a conscience for peoples and governments.”²⁹ In Transylvania, due to the work of Imre and his circle, the opposite happened: the church, not the sodalities, became the educator of the public and even of society, to some extent. For this reason, no revolutionary tremors shook the church, no de-clericalization occurred (whatever was wished by some), and in contrast to the Western Church, the TRC took a different historical route. Walls says that the sodalities

continued the revolutionary effect of the voluntary society on the church, assisting its de-clericalization (...) adding an international dimension which hardly any of the churches, growing as they did within a national framework, had any means of expressing. After the age of the voluntary society, the Western Church could never been the same again.³⁰

By contrast, the Eastern Church, or at least the TRC remained without a challenge to its status quo and without significant de-clericalization. The later insular state of the TRC can be partially explained by instinctive refusal to add “*an international dimension*.” The ensuing consequences of this insularity are nowhere sadder than in the case of the youth. In general, Imre recognized, youth work did not have the same rhythm as other branches of home mission work. It did not progress as well as the Sunday schools. In his opinion the reasons for this were the following: organization of this work (by the official church and by clerics locally, “orchestrated from above”) was bad for the spirit of the work, and groups that have not adopted the genuine personal principle of ‘young people ministering to young people’ have joined the Youth Christian Association (the IKE). First I will look at Imre’s analysis of the crisis of the youth:

The other thing that we have to see is that the crisis of the youth is a *central* and an *existentialistic* crisis. (...) the crisis of the youth is bound to, and related inseparably to the whole crisis of our present day world. (...) We cannot stand up before the

²⁸ Cf. Lajos Imre, ‘Egyházi öntudatra való nevelés’ (Educating Towards Churchinized Self-consciousness) *Az Út* (1931): pp.

²⁹ See Walls work, quoted above.

³⁰ Walls, p.238.

youth with a lofty and confident gesture, saying: you are in trouble, you are ill, so here I come, the healthy and the perfect to heal you, only listen to me. Such an attitude is entirely vain, false, evil and hypocritical. And the only people who are different are those who first pass sentences on themselves and see themselves to be just as ill and miserable as the youth whom they seek to remedy.³¹

If the church proves too rigid and fossilized in its over-institutionalized state, then it will lose the younger generation; this was the great insight developed by Imre in the same book and it is worth quoting at length. He is very aware of the disadvantages of a clerical and over-institutionalized church structure:

The church as a social community, as an organized life structure, cannot captivate [the youth], as we already could see, because they search for an ultimate essence [of life], the only unquestionable reality; and they can be led from this *individualism* to the real understanding of the church and to a real sight of its faith, only if there this unquestionable reality (or foundation of life) is demonstrated to them. This stands above and beyond the bare human communities and beyond the very human aspects of the same communities. This is why the *prophetic* and *missionary* character of Christianity is so attractive to the youth, mostly because, besides the unceasing search, ever present in them, they also can see in these two aspects the *possessing* of something which stands above the merely human; and they can see the *activity* which they long for due to their age and character, and this can be seen as above the church's traditional and organizational character. (...) [If this cannot happen then] the church will stay alien to them forever, and (the young people) will act in the narrowed down circle of their individual enjoyment of salvation reduced to the activities limited in conventicularies.³²

In other words, if the church remains rigid and in lack of "the prophetic and missionary character of Christianity," then the youth will be forced either into the sodalities ('conventicularies'), or to leave the church where "this unquestionable reality (or foundation of life)" is not demonstrated to them. This calls to mind how Kecskeméthy argued for the need of the sodalities as the stretched out arms of the modality in the world beyond the church walls. Kecskeméthy is proved correct, that the church needs societies to help in preventing the loss of the youth and to serve it as an outstretched arm to them and to all those outside of the

³¹ Imre, Lajos *Az ifjúság válsága* (The Crisis of the Youth), p.66.

³² *Ibid.* p.14.

church. As early as in 1896, he used a real life example where political government complements, but cannot substitute for, social co-operation or civil associations (non-governmental organizations) and their manifold specialized activities:

Look at politics. Is there any politician who would say that we do not need societal life besides even a flourishing political life; that we do not need social co-operation, social union as well as government? Is there any legislation or government in the world that *can exhaust and control and fulfill all aspects of life to such an extent that there is no need for social activity?* This has been imputed only to the legislation and government of the Hungarian Reformed Church. But who believes it?" [Italics, LH]

33

After summing up Imre's missiological stance and comparing it with that of Kecskeméthy, I now have to continue my brief survey by summarizing the views of other contemporary theologians concerning the interpretation of the mission concept. I begin with Imre's most influential mentor, Tavaszy, the systematic theology professor.

Systematic Theologian Tavaszy and His Failure to Systematize Ecclesiology

As we saw in previous chapters, Sándor Tavaszy, like Karl Barth, preferred to influence the home mission movement only in an indirect way.³⁴ So Tavaszy could have avoided the subject completely, yet instead he says: "because neither the space, nor the time is suitable here for giving a critical evaluation, I will simply indicate what I mean by home mission."³⁵ In this unfortunate way he still tried to make a direct contribution to the *practice* of missions, home mission particularly, without doing the job of a systematic theologian in the matter. I wonder why he

³³ Kecskeméthy, *Beszéljünk nyíltan, Válogatott Írások* ('Let's Talk Plainly, Selected Writings'),

³⁴ According to Scott, "Barth sees missionary endeavor and theology as two independent acts of the church, each with its own validity. Theology must not attempt to force missionary activity into some ideal mold. Neither must missions look to theology for justification of past and current practices. (...) theology best serves missions *indirectly* as it pursues its own object, which is God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, the event of reconciliation." Cf.: Scott, *Karl Barth's Theology of Mission*, p.10.

³⁵ Tavaszy, 'A belmisszió egyéni és intézményes módszere' (The Individual and Institutional Method of Home Mission), *op. cit.*, p.12.

did not attempt to define it or make more effort to clarify its meaning theologically; instead he stated simply:

I want to define the concept of *home mission* like this: *the church's home mission*. Another form of home mission is also possible, but with regard to Hungarian Protestantism only the *church's* home mission can possess a real life power; [italics of the author] *and any other forms of home mission are illusory* in regard to it. [Italics, LH] ³⁶

But such a blunt statement without any sustaining argument is flawed; especially when he himself admitted in the same article:

The concept of *home mission* not just in our Hungarian Protestant theological thinking and common sense, but generally in the whole world of Protestantism is a very undefined concept and is a concept with a very elastic concept. (italics by the author).³⁷

In his introductory sentences he says that although he himself does not work in the field of Practical Theology but is committed to Dogmatics, he still felt responsible to say something on the subject.³⁸ It is surprising how quickly he excludes the possibility of any other form of home mission for the *modus vivendi* of the TRC, based on the assumption that it would be “illusory.” But I think this is not logically consistent; it is unfair to label as illusory something that is also declared as a possibility and even as being justified in any other geographical places. If he rejects it, he should make it clear why he does so; how and why it has proven illusory, first theologically, and then, in the practice and the everyday life of the church. Instead, he turns to home mission's field of action, its workers, its goals, its specific character and finally, its motivation.

The *sphere of action* of the *church's home mission* is *the church*; the *workers* of it are the elders of the church (like her pastors, masters, and doctors) and the members of the church; the *goal* of home mission is the evangelical Christianity specifically lived out by the *church* and an enhancement of it to the point of becoming a vivid

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ I find this very characteristic of him and yet somehow peculiar, given that the whole generation of theologians in the footsteps of Ravasz would separate Ecclesiology from Dogmatics and would give it over to Practical Theology, as I observed earlier in my paper.

lifepower. The specific *character* (of the church's home mission): that it is an out-stretched arm of the *church* reaching out beyond the church building and the school (building), and a possible multiplication of its activities. And at last, the *motivation* of home mission: the eternal dissatisfaction of the *church* with herself and with her results. (*Italics, LH*)³⁹

Although Tavaszy paraphrased Kecskeméthy's idea of mission as being "the out-stretched arms of the church beyond the church walls," yet the limitations of this concept are clear immediately: it is a contradiction in itself to assert that *home mission's sphere of action is the church!*⁴⁰ Either the concept of mission is twisted, or the linking of it with the notion of "home" must be wrong, or the very meaning of the church is not adequate in this sentence. It is difficult not to regard it as a rush to render home mission under the control of the church, as even in its unpredictable effect and unlimited sphere of action in the world. Last, but not least, the notion of the world is not clarified here. Apparently the world is regarded as almost equivalent to the church (the Christendom idea), or completely separated from it, which would not be compatible at all with Tavaszy's ideas and which view would exclude any mission activity outside the church (non-Calvinist view). This also seems to be in total contradiction of what he says afterwards about the specific character of home mission, when he calls it "a stretched out arm of the church beyond the church buildings."

I have problems also with what Tavaszy above called the *motivation* of home mission, even though what he focused on can be rightly considered *one* among many of mission's motivation. But biblically and theologically, any mission activity has as its final motivation the proclamation of the Gospel, as Kecskeméthy worded it in a brilliant study (see, for example, in his article: 'Mission,' and in

³⁹ Tavaszy, *ibid.* p.13.

⁴⁰ One notices that he adds the school as well within the realm of the church: "reaching out beyond the church building and the school (building)....," that is a reference to the closer link of education with the mission of the TRC, as interpreted by the theologians around him. It refers to the organic link of church and school united for defending and maintaining a specifically Hungarian education under the Romanian government. However strongly that was justified in order that the Hungarian and Protestant minority culture might survive, it is still questionable, strictly theologically speaking, when they formulated ecclesiology from it.

many other articles).⁴¹ Again, instead of clarifying what exactly home mission is biblically and theologically, Tavaszy points to it as the ever present activity of the church throughout the centuries, as if it were a natural activity of the church. In such a view the church would demand that the status quo go unchallenged. Yet then, to his credit, he denies that mission activity automatically happened and takes place and insists that “only by the souls missionized by Jesus Christ” can mission be carried out:

So home mission in its constituting concept is not something totally new and is not a kind of magic powder. You cannot just take a pinch from it and inject it in the body of the congregations so that they should go renewed from one day to another. Because “*home mission*” cannot be effective automatically; but rather only by the souls missionized by Jesus Christ, who live perpetually in renewal and in ardent faith and creative love they are persistently active, so it is by these people’s activity [*home mission* be carried out].⁴²

So then, what is new in this movement and in the concept of mission, if it was there throughout the centuries and practiced by the church? According to Tavaszy,

(t)he novum, the new in the concept of home mission is that according to a differentiated social life, through a more differentiated activity and work you ought to conquer *the church members* who became alienated, indifferent, cold, and sleepy. It also serves perpetually for deepening and warming up the spiritual life of the faithful church members.⁴³

There is no room in Tavaszy’s concept of the church for people who, although part of the covenant, still might be unbelievers who have not heard the Gospel, or who simply never became church-goers and as such cannot be alienated but are alien *ab ovo*, thus remaining in complete need of evangelization.

⁴¹ See his thoughts in this regard in Kecskeméthy, ‘Misszió’ (Mission) *op. cit.*, for example: “...This is *the* mission and this is *the* salvation, which is worthy of being shared with everyone who is still lacking it,” etc. So both the compelling force, inherent in the Gospel, and the Great Commission, as an urging command of Jesus to his disciples, together serve as the greatest motivation for someone in doing missions.

⁴² Tavaszy, ‘A belmisszió egyéni és intézményes módszere’ (The Individual and Institutional Method of Home Mission), *op. cit.*, p.13.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Why was there not much awareness of Barth's position in this matter at those times in the TRC, even for such a committed Barthian theologian, as Tavaszy? I will try to summarize the reasons for it below.

There were also traditional Calvinists, like Makkai,⁴⁴ who argued at first but then conceded to Barth as represented by Tavaszy, in the belief that Barth could really fit in with the orthodox line of the Reformers.⁴⁵ Thus Makkai accepted neo-orthodoxy after opposing it briefly at the Nagyenyed debate of 1930. The same conviction was held by many others,⁴⁶ given the fact that they believed there were good reasons to turn back to the Reformed heritage following Barth. But Barth himself would certainly have protested, in several respects, against this choice of interpretation of Calvin made by the neo-Orthodox school in Transylvania, especially when they lifted up his name and his authority as their banner campaigning against the Reformed Orthodoxy represented previously in Kenessey, then in Kecskeméthy, Tompa, and against CE. This is clear from the latest research of Professor Dr. Bruce McCormack who found Niesel influential in the spreading of this misreading of Calvin and so identifying and justifying the totally Barthian position with the great Reformer:

Niesel's work (...) turned out to be the more influential (...) by (his) more comprehensive goal of identifying the 'essence' of Calvin's theology as well as by the notoriety achieved through defending Karl Barth's appeal to Calvin in support of his rejection of natural theology.(...) It can hardly escape the notice of today's reader that Niesel's Calvin bears a remarkable likeness to Karl Barth; that the 'Christo-centric' reading of Calvin has brought him into line, so to speak, with theological concerns

⁴⁴ He wrote a few articles and books on the need for a church renewal in line with the Reformation standards, such as *Öntudatos kálvinizmus (Self-Conscious Calvinism)*, *op. cit.*

⁴⁵ Wilhelm Niesel played a key role in this process. Due to his influence, his interpretation that there is no incompatibility between the theology of Barth and that of the Reformers was widely believed throughout Transylvania. Ottó M. Nagy translated his epoch-making book: *Calvin's Theology (Kálvin Theológiája)*, which convinced the ministers and theologians and even the public of the church that there was no major difference in the theology of Barth compared with that of the Reformers, simply changes of emphasis.

⁴⁶ Another key figure in this trend was Ottó M. Nagy, who was concerned with educating the new generation in a confessional way.

which owe their origin to the stimulus provided by Barth. To his credit, Barth had serious reservations about this re-reading of Calvin.⁴⁷

Then, as a conclusion to the above, McCormack raises a serious issue, questioning the haste of scholars in taking for granted every hypothesis without cautious inquiry and honest investigation in any theological matter:

How was it possible for Calvin scholarship to achieve consensus with respect to the claim that Westminster⁴⁸ constitutes a 'falling away' from Calvin - in spite of the fact that close examination of the content of their respective treatments of predestination seems to suggest a quite different relation? The answer, I would like to suggest, has everything to do with the Barthianizing, if I may put it that way, of Calvin.⁴⁹

On the other hand, as he noticed, even those who differ significantly both from Calvin and from Barth, would try to justify their alleged loyalty to the Reformed tradition, using this proposed "christocentric" type of reading:

Many there are who, while disdaining Barth's theology, have found in the 'christocentric' reading a way of remaining faithful to Calvin in spite of their personal discomfort with his doctrine of predestination. Still, the origins of the 'christocentric' reading are to be found to attempt to Barthianize Calvin.⁵⁰

This was exactly what was taking place in the development of Transylvanian Reformed theology. Most of the ministers and theologians who embraced Barth's view of a Christo-centric reading and of his doctrine of election, were convinced that they could still remain loyal to Calvin, while they rejected the Dordrecht heritage with the teaching of limited atonement. They tended to think they were still orthodox Calvinists, although in a "progressive way," as McCormack would say.

⁴⁷ Bruce McCormack, *Christ and the Decree: An Unsettled Question for the Reformed Churches Today*. Paper read at the Seventh Edinburgh Conference in Christian Dogmatics, 1997. Unpublished manuscript, pp.3–6.

⁴⁸ He means obviously the Assembly of 1643–47 which produced the Westminster Confession of Faith and other standards, as an expression of the 17th century Puritan Reformation. Similarly in Transylvania some theologians started to think that there was a considerable gap between the Reformation and the later orthodoxy of the "epigones" in the century following which orthodoxy would, in fact, be a return to the scholasticism of the pre-Reformation theology. They championed their view by referring back to Barth, unaware of the neo-Kantian qualifications and alterations of their own theology.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

The traditional Calvinist, István Kecskeméthy,⁵¹ although influenced in his Biblical Theology by the German Bible–criticism of his times, took a critical position to the “theology of the Word,” represented by the Transylvanian Barthian school. As I have demonstrated already, he held to the views of Calvin in the interpretation of the epistemological method in theology, as did his contemporary, Warfield; also in regarding the sufficiency of the Scriptures and protesting against “the abstracted Word-theology” replacing the person of Jesus in any believer’s “living faith.” He remained unshakable, holding to his previous views, even after the Nagyenyed debate. He, and his circle, kept not just “a christo-centric reading” (and certainly not because that could be “a way of remaining faithful to Calvin in spite of their personal discomfort with his doctrine of predestination”), but also a Trinitarian and *theologia crucis*-focused reading and interpretation⁵² of what is the church and of what is mission, in its biblical sense. There was no realization of the absolute need for evangelization and mission-mindedness in the ‘Barthian’ theological orientation of the TRC, despite Tavaszy’s efforts and despite what Barth himself stated: “Certainly a Church which is not as such an evangelizing Church is either not yet or no longer the Church, or only a dead Church, itself standing in supreme need of renewal by evangelization.”⁵³ And just as the church ceases to be church if it is not missionary, theology ceases to be theology if it loses its missionary character,⁵⁴ despite the quoted dictum (in chapter three) of Tavaszy himself, when he explicitly demanded the same missionary character for Calvinist theology⁵⁵.

⁵¹ Kecskeméthy did not have a systematic criticism of the neo-Orthodox views, and yet his critical approach was theologically relevant as I have shown above, based on his many articles.

⁵² Compare this with my argumentation in the previous chapter based on Newbigin with regard to the Trinitarian, and on Forde with regard to the Luther-inspired “theologian of the cross” aspect of the matter.

⁵³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV/3/2, p 874.

⁵⁴ Wilhelm Andersen, *Towards a Theology of Mission: A Study of the Encounter Between the Missionary Enterprise and the Church and Its Theology*. London: SCM Press, 1955, p.60.

⁵⁵ I think that the somewhat weak and ambiguous demand for any evangelization and freely carried out mission work in the life of the church, and the intention of the leadership to consolidate the metaphysical will of power in this reconsolidation process of the church’s centralization in any institutionalized mission work, could not be kept successfully together. It resulted in creating devastating tensions, which in the end led to tragic outcomes for any dynamic mission involvement.

Thus Tavaszy failed to work out a consistent foundation for missiology, not even in keeping with the Kantian intention. He was unsuccessful when he tried to clarify conceptually the *a priori* principles of missiology that in fact the moral judgement of a moral agent being previously and continuously presupposed; and thus being an evidence in itself, needs not be proved or justified.

Lajos Gönczy and the Eschatological Dimension

In my view Professor Lajos Gönczy had a more careful approach than Tavaszy when dealing with home mission and trying to bring it closer to the biblical foundations in defining it. Although his Neo-Kantian thinking is also evident, and he basically followed Tavaszy in his re-orientation towards the Theology of Crisis, Dr. Gönczy seems to have handled the problem of missions in a more complex and nuanced way. He also tried to give a proper definition and to describe more specifically what home mission is or should be in relation to *other church activities*.

Now, when we have to point in general to the relation which stands between home mission and other activities of the church; there is a need to draw a border line between these two kind of activities, so that it might stand clear for all that home mission is not just a method (by the use of which method all the activity of the church can turn into home mission); but under this collective concept, *home mission* (italics LH), [only] activities which cannot be substituted with other activities [of the church] can be included and enrolled.⁵⁶

In this regard he radically differs not only from Tavaszy but even from the view of his colleague, Professor and Bishop Makkai, who rendered every activity of the church as mission activities (panmissionism). As we saw with Tavaszy, that home mission consists only in newer methods of the activities that the church always has done, Gönczy also is aware of the fact that it “cannot be substituted with other activities of the church.” But he goes further than Tavaszy. He is not content with turning mission into a new method toward achieving a better and more

⁵⁶ Lajos Gönczy, ‘A belmisszió tartalmának összefoglalása;’ ‘A belmisszió viszonya a többi tevékenységi ágakhoz’ (The Summing up of the Subject-matter of Home Mission; The Relation of Home Mission to the Other Church Activity Branches) *Az Út* Vol. 6, Nr. 1 (1924): p.10.

successful survival of the church, nor would he enroll mission among the other activities of the church. Rather, he would realize (and recognize!) some kind of specific aspect of mission when compared with the “normal activities” of the church for its own self-edification. Yet, his definition still bears some lingering resemblance to Ravasz’s theological standpoint, based on the philosophy of Böhm:

The church taken in her *ideal* meaning is the fellowship of the saints who own salvation. In this state, there is no home mission because it is not needed. Home mission at this stage can be only foreign mission, i.e. activity focusing on the further on expansion to the periphery of her community of salvation. (Italics, LH)⁵⁷

It is important to notice that like Tavaszy, he would not accept the emphasis of Kecskeméthy and his circle that there must be evangelization toward the members of the covenant, toward the baptized and yet unbelieving members of the church, who not being church-goers practically live outside the church. Such people may never have heard the Gospel or been encouraged to put their trust in Jesus, which is a “saving faith” according to the reformed teaching and to the Creeds of the TRC explicitly expressed, for example, in the Heidelberg Catechism. He states: “at this (ideal) stage can be only foreign mission.” As already observed in this thesis, very few theologians, perhaps only Victor, saw clearly that home mission cannot (in the static sense of the word) be called mission, but theologically speaking, only foreign mission can be regarded as mission in the strict sense of this word. Although both Kecskeméthy and Victor considered the usage of the adverbs “foreign” and “home” an unfortunate and misleading distinction in regard to mission, it was only Victor who regarded mission first of all as a dynamic distance-conquering activity and not merely a teaching (catechism), discipling (religious education) or baptizing activity. This was faithfully biblical and the integrity of such a concept as being theologically more Calvinistic is beyond doubt. The distance-conquering aspect was seen by Victor in the command “go and make disciples” of the Great Commission and he added, as we saw in his debate with Makkai, that this has to happen not only geographically but also cross-culturally. Thus he avoided a self-focused mission which emphasized the self-defensive and insular nature of every church work as justifiable, interpreting this as real mission.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

In contrast to this, Gönczy would allow the distance overcoming dynamic for mission only in the ideal state of the church, and in an absolute sense of the concept. Thus the trap Gönczy entered was the assumed self-edifying priority of the church for her own being, for her *esse* (addressed by home mission), and so making foreign mission secondary compared to it, as something which belongs only to the *bene esse* of the church.

All the activities of the church are aiming and endeavoring toward her inward being; aiming toward the sustenance of this existing ideal state, aiming toward the unending sustenance of her existing ideal state. Those activities what we call administration, preaching, pastoral care and catechism are serving for the carrying into effect of this endeavor. Administration ensures the uninterrupted operation of the organization; preaching controls the unity of the *existing* (“*való*”) and the *ideal* (“*kellő*,” italics LH) state. Pastoral care is for those in need of it as the members of the community; catechism is “the education into the community” of a new generation born into the church.⁵⁸

It is strange that right after realizing that mission activity cannot be substituted with the characteristic and natural activity of the church’s everyday life and self-edifying ministry, he still would not distinguish mission from administration, preaching, pastoral care and catechism. Regarding catechism, as we saw earlier, even Ravasz made a distinction that “catechism is an extension of the church in time as mission is the extension of the church in space.” Or, put another way, catechism provides for the survival of the church beyond the present time and the actual living generation, whereas mission provides for the survival of the church beyond the existing and actual boundaries of the believing community.

The need for home mission becomes apparent to the extent that the existing state [of the church] is distanced from the ideal one, “the ought to be” [= “*kellő*”] and this distancing, as an ill condition, expects healing and so (in the life of the church) becomes a conscious awareness. This process of distancing from the ideal is unconscious, is not intentional, otherwise it would lead to splits or separation. Thus it is a slow process, and goes unnoticed a little while and is demonstrated in the fact that the spirit which once created the community is fading away from the members

⁵⁸ Ibid.

constituting the community and the spiritual community becomes an organized community. (...) ⁵⁹

Gönczy also is aware to some extent of the tension between the present, supposed well-being of the church and the possible decay of it in the future and of how the awareness of this distancing from an ideal state of the church may serve as a driving force for missions. In his opinion, this historical perspective can serve as a potential drive for missions: “(t)he more irreproachable the administration, the preaching etc., that were carried out, the later these outside signs will occur.” ⁶⁰ In the concept of Gönczy the historical perspective acquires a meaning from the theologically conscious emphasis put on eschatology. He demanded this emphasis on eschatology be present in preaching not as a frequently repeated topic, but as the ever present perspective of proclaiming the gospel: “It is not that we should preach only on eschatology. What we demand is that preaching should regard every issue in the light of eschatology.” ⁶¹ This theological emphasis was inspired by Tavasz, whom he quoted: “Predestination, the decree (of God), calling, the justification, the glorification are eschatological because everything looks to that future which is hidden with Christ in God.” ⁶²

If everything is eschatological, as “everything looks to that future which is hidden with Christ in God” then one would conclude that certainly mission, both home and foreign mission, must be regarded in eschatological perspective. Strangely enough, there is not a word about mission in Gönczy’s vast study, either in relation to eschatology or to the *proclamation* of the Kingdom of God, which has to be heralded in its joyful arrival. Although Gönczy stated: “(the eschatological end) will not bring deliverance from the world, but deliverance (together) with the world,” ⁶³ there is no explicit reference to *missio Dei*, to world mission through which God will bring deliverance. Although Gönczy would continuously

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.11.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ See Lajos Gönczy, ‘Eschatology and Preaching’ in: *Theologiai Tanulmányok, Emlékkönyv Dr. Kecskeméthy István, theologiai professzor életének 70.-ik* (Theological Studies, Kecskeméthy Memorial Book). Theologiai tanári szolgálatának 40.-ik évfordulójára. Kolozsvár: Az Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület theologiai fakultásának tanári kara, 1934, p.132.

⁶² Tavasz, Református keresztyén Dogmatika (Reformed Christian Dogmatics), p.270, cited by Gönczy, *ibid.* p.133.

⁶³ Gönczy, *ibid.* p.130.

stress the theological demand of the eschatological reference, there could arise a strange confusion concerning the historical horizons related to proclamation, in spite of the clear teaching of the Reformed Standards on eschatology. I mean omitting the perspective of world mission from the historical horizons:

Eschatology teaches that in the last days what is now super- or above the earth, will become earthly, so simply transferring the last things to a transcendent world makes eschatology completely unreasonable and in vain both in its details as well as in the whole.⁶⁴

At this point of our criticism on Gönczy's views it might be of importance to compare his studies on eschatology and home mission quoted above with the findings of Bishop Newbigin: "the implication of a true eschatological perspective will be missionary obedience, and the eschatology that does not issue in such obedience is a *false eschatology*."⁶⁵ But could Gönczy arrive logically to different consequences from his previously presented premises? His starting point theologically was correct in putting proclamation in its proper eschatological perspective, yet in aborting the horizon of the proclamation of the arrival of the Kingdom of God and its perspective of world-wide missions, he was mistaken. Furthermore, the substitution of the Kingdom-guided mission with the visible church's guidance and control resulted in what Gönczy himself was so keen to avoid: in this way he himself "transferred the last things into a transcendent world" and achieved a view of an "ideal church" which "makes eschatology completely unreasonable and in vain", if not in its details, at least "as in a whole." (See the quotation above). We see confirmed the logical outcome of an un-intentional transcending of the church above the person of Jesus by excluding the sodalities and by rendering missions under a centralized and totalitarian official church leadership:

As the disciple of the Albert Molnár-inspired Ravasz, Gönczy took a stand against the sodality-type of Christianity and wanted to make the church an able guide and leader for home mission and for every edification.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p.129.

⁶⁵ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church*. London: SCM, 1953. Kerr Lectures given at Trinity College, Glasgow, pp.153-154.

⁶⁶ Nagy, A Kolozsvári Református Teológiai Fakultás története (The History of the Kolozsvár Reformed Theological Faculty/Seminary), p. 162. In Hungarian it reads:

But to his credit, although Gönczy in many regards was following the path of Tavaszy, he was more realistic and more aware of the effect of sin in his ecclesiological views and could see clearly that an organic link observed between the doctrine of sin and the doctrine of the church better explains the alienation of some people from both God and the church. To some extent he was able to see how this tragic state of alienation and distancing prompted some who had no genuine calling to heal the situation and could not be satisfied with this. Tavaszy, however, like Imre,⁶⁷ thought that merely urging for a more faithful and lively preaching, pastoral care, catechism, etc, was sufficient, due to the recognition that those who live outside the church and never attend these events do not profit from activities within the walls of the church.

In order that this home mission work might start as the self-sustaining factor of the church; it is necessary that all should become conscious and the church should realize that with all those activities with which she sustained herself she cannot reach those who distance themselves from her, and the farther they go, the less she can reach them. What profit is preaching, pastoral care, catechism, and administration to those who do not go to church, of whom we do not know anything anymore?⁶⁸

Gönczy still does not think in terms of the kind of radical evangelization needed for unbelievers; he still gives much credit to the baptism of the nominal members and would not go so far as Barth, who speaks of “Christo-pagans” living within the boundaries of the covenant. And he does not go as far as Makkai went, although

“Mint a Molnár Alberttől ihletett Ravasz tanítványa, állást foglal az egyesületi keresztyénség ellen, s az egyházat szeretné a belmisszió és minden építés alkalmas vezetőjévé, irányítójává tenni.”

⁶⁷ See for example Imre’s study on the role of preaching in regard to missions:

“(T)he church became aware of her own task and is returning back to the Word of God in the work of preaching, education, pastoral care and mission. More and more the Christian Church sees that the command of mission is not just a universally demanding duty which cannot be avoided anymore, but also that this duty consists of preaching the Word which ought not to be replaced and identified by anything else, with either human thoughts, or tasks or even with organizations. This idea means in essence that mission from being the task of the state, the task of the society, or the task of associations turned to become the *task of the church*.” (See in: Imre, ‘A predestináció tana a missziói munkában’ (The Doctrine of Predestination in Mission Work), in: *Kecskeméthy Emlékkönyv*, *op. cit.*, pp. 135-141.)

⁶⁸ Gönczy, ‘A belmisszió tartalmának összefoglalása,’ ‘A belmisszió viszonya a többi tevékenységi ágakhoz’ (The Summing up of the Subject-matter of Home Mission; The Relation of Home Mission to the Other Church Activity Branches), *op. cit.*, p.11.

I have to admit Makkai changed his views in this regard in the 1940s after his departure to Hungary, under the influence of the revival there. This shift is evident in a book of Makkai's from 1948 where he spoke of the need for evangelization. He argued then that this need also exists among church-goers, because people were born spiritually dead. That they have been baptized, and as such, carry the sign of the covenant to which they belong by the promise of God, is the ground on which they can be addressed with the Gospel, as yet in need of being resurrected spiritually:

Evangelization is the means of regeneration in the hand of the Holy Spirit. Now we have to ask: who can be born again? Our answer cannot be other: only those who have died. Every human born from the flesh, we have to consider dead, since Adam. (...) Every mother gives birth to a dead person... however you educate him, he cannot become a believing Christian, because he is a corpse, no life will ever come out of it. (...) Every flesh, even the congregation as a body, is dead. (...) The first word of evangelization is this: you are dead. Dead because of sin. Your great problem is that you considered yourself alive.⁶⁹

What a change from the Makkai of just a decade before who would have demanded that anyone sitting in the church be regarded as a Christian since their baptism and would have rejected describing them as spiritually dead and in need of regeneration. As a contrast, Gönczy approached this same need for the revitalization of the church and outreach for the lost or nominal church-goers, from a neo-Kantian point of view. He still thought between the parameters of the Böhm-school, as the ought to be versus the being, the deontological state of the church ideal versus the ontological empiria:

We need to look for methods, ways and opportunities with which the church can reach these souls in order to wake up in them this awareness of distancing from the ideal, to wake up in them the longing for this ideal, and to make it available for them to reach that ideal. With such resources home mission is started, i.e. so many the

⁶⁹ Sándor Makkai, *Élő gyülekezet; Tanulmányok, előadások a gyülekezeti misszió közösségi szolgálatának köréből* (The Living Congregation; Studies and Lectures On the Communal Ministry of the Congregational Mission). Budapest: Református Egyetemes Konvent Sajtóosztálya, 1948, pp.80-81.

branches of its work, so many are the causes of that distancing. Those causes produced diseases and (home mission) can heal and relieve those diseases. (...) ⁷⁹

I reflected already in chapters two and five on Dezső László's critique of this Ravasz-inspired ecclesiological concept that home mission is supposed to heal the diseases caused by the distancing of the people from the church ideal.

Sándor Makkai and the Integration of Missions

I turn now to Sándor Makkai's contribution in formulating the mission concept. As stated above, he came to a more theological and strict understanding of the evangelization concept in the 1940s. But like Imre, he also underwent a theological development, although he was coming not so much from the theological Liberalism, preferring historical Calvinism to some extent. Géza Nagy and László Ravasz suggested that Makkai be called to the professorship at Kolozsvár Seminary, describing him as a disciple who furthers the school of Böhm, "when he uses the subjective epistemological standing-point, not just as the principle of explanation, but also using it apologetically as the *witness of reality*." Against rationalism and intellectualism, he emphasized the practical character of the church, morality and religion. In the early 1920s he still regarded Christ as being *the most noble ideal* of life, the dynamic and life-shaping power, the warranty of our life of faith and justification of belief. It is rather interesting how Makkai toward the end of his life slightly changed his ecclesiology or rather his 'Ecclesiastica.' This was partly, but not wholly, due to a kind of missiological clarification in his thinking, as one would expect. When speaking on the marks of the Church he points to the fact that Calvin and the reformers were right when they listed pure preaching of the Word, the right way of living with the sacraments and the proper practice of church discipline as among the most important marks of a true church. But according to Makkai, in the Heidelberg Catechism (Cf. Question and Answer Nr. 50.) the "host (of the faithful)" as a mark of the Church is also expressed; which he referred to earlier in his debate with Victor and elsewhere when discussing the role of predestination in calling the church as the host of believers throughout space and time. This view of Makkai constitutes also a warranty for world-wide

⁷⁹ Gönczy, *Ibid.*, p. 0.

missions.⁷¹ Then Makkai adds another *novum* to his (and others') definitions of what the Church is:

According to our opinion this concept of the reformers and the creeds despite however true it is in itself cannot be exhaustive. It grasps essential and important marks without which there is no Church, but its only eclipse is that this approach is not *organic* (...) The main characteristics of an *organism* are self-activity and specific aim-oriented articulation. [Italics, LH.] ⁷²

So, instead of having just fixed marks, presenting the church in a *static* stage, we can see the church in its *organic* life, being *dynamic* or, active in her mission, as Makkai describes. Here he refers to the biblical picture of the church as it is described before us in the New Testament. The church as a Mother, is like a living Personality who carries out a specific self-maintaining and aim-oriented conscious life in her self-activity, harmonizing all in an organic way. In its outside self-maintenance the Church can realize her own essence rooted in the invisible, i.e., her calling and her ministry. These inner, essential life-activities of the Church, according to Makkai, are worship, education and mission. He looked to the liturgy as the perpetual form of worship and to proclamation as to something which is ever changing, yet essentially having always the same content. The ministry of education has its formal aspect in church discipline and its essential aspect consists in religious pedagogy and cultural work.

Then, in regard to the third essential life-activity of the church, i. e., mission, in my opinion, in Makkai's late work on 'ecclesiastica,' he reformulated his own views in a slightly different way. There is certainly a shift from the time of his debate in the early 1940s with Victor on what mission is and should be, and this change is probably had its origins in that discussion. The positive aspect is that he tended now to regard mission as among the *essential* life-activities of the church, as a living *organism*. But unfortunately the negative aspect of this reformulation is that at the same time he seems to be even more rigid in rendering mission among the *inner* life-activities of the church, weakening significantly the

⁷¹ Sándor Makkai, *Ekkleziaszttika*, Kézirat gyanánt (Manuscript). Debrecen,: Debreceni Theologus gyülekezet kiadása, 1950, p.45. Used by permission. A Sárospataki Református Kollégium Levéltára (The Archives of the Sárospatak Reformed College), Kt. 4860.

⁷² *Ibid.* p. 48.

essence of mission⁷³ which in fact theologically is rather outside-bound, both a “self-maintaining” and extensive life-activity.⁷⁴

As a conclusion, Makkai stated that the scientific research and evaluation of such an organic life and wholeness of the Church was the task of the discipline called Practical Theology. A fundamental part of this discipline is ‘ecclesiastica,’ or the doctrine of the church which as its task deals with the life and activities of the church in principles, trying to give a general teaching on what the Church’s life should be. From this fundamental core will emerge in different branches the disciplines⁷⁵ focused on the individual activates of the church:⁷⁶

It would be interesting to compare this last version of his system from 1950 (he died in 1951) with the one which Dr. Károly Fekete, jr. presented in his book on Makkai,⁷⁷ but that is beyond the bounds of my research. The only remark we have to make relevant to our thesis is that in earlier versions diaconal work, or ministries of mercy, were not rendered under the doctrines of congregational mission, while in this last version it was put beside ‘koinonica.’ So by still stressing the ambiguous notion of “congregational mission” (criticized by Victor in their debate), Makkai would add diaconia, or ministries of mercy, too, as a special

⁷³ See the well gathered material and detailed analysis of Kool, on Makkai’s views towards the end of his life in Kool, pp.786-795.

⁷⁴ He had a threefold categorization of mission work: 1) the individual form of mission is pastoral counseling, 2) the communal form of it is the congregational mission and 3) the self-reproducing mission of the church is foreign mission. Even after Victor challenged it in 1941, he reiterated this categorization with little reformulation in 1948, although, in my view, he dropped the emphasis on the ministers contribution in favor of bolstering the laity’s participation).

⁷⁵ Makkai laid out the following ecclecclesiological system in his *Ekkléziasztika*, *op.cit.*: theories of outside and self-maintaining activities of the church:

- doctrine of church law
- doctrine of church politics
- theories of inner activities:
 - liturgy
 - ‘homiletica’ (theory of preaching)
 - pedagogy of religion (‘catechetica’)
 - ‘poimenica’ (theory of pastoral counseling)
 - doctrines of congregational mission (‘koinonica’ and ‘agapetica’)
 - the doctrine of foreign mission (‘halieutica’)

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p.49.

⁷⁷ Fekete, Makkai Sándor gyakorlati teológiai munkássága (The Works of Sándor Makkai in Practical Theology), p.86.

mission work. Just a year earlier, in 1949, Borbáth still praised the fact that Horváth in his *The Essence of Home Missions* did not consider diaconia as mission:

Against the interpretation of Wichern regarding the essence of home missions (which was still represented in our theological literature by Dr. Sándor Makkai), he follows the orientation of Dr. Lajos Imre, Dezső László and János Victor and declares that ‘home missions could include neither diaconia, nor spiritual counseling, nor any cultural-social work of the church.’⁷⁸

Borbáth, a member of the Group of Seven, being involved in ministry to the orphans and running the Training Institute for Deaconesses, was very aware theologically in his own study on the matter, where ministries of mercy should be enrolled; although at this time, every church edifying activity, in the footsteps of Makkai (the “Transylvanian bishop of home missions”) was called mission by most ministers.

We also notice in Makkai’s system the fact that even foreign mission is enrolled under the heading of “theories of inner activities” of the church (the same is true in the description of Fekete, /under ‘oikodometica’/), thus suggesting an inward looking attitude, instead of the “go to the nations” type of cross-cultural demand of the Great Commission. Yet Makkai in his last years came closer to the biblical essence of the church recognizing its organic life as the “living Body of Christ,” above the institutional organizational and hierarchical machinery in which assumes an earthly shape.

The Lack of a Significant Challenge to Ravasz’s Original Foundation of Ecclesiology

Finally, I now compare this systematizing with the most influential and foundational work of the Transylvanians written by László Ravasz in 1907.⁷⁹ Ravasz’ ecclesiology built on the same two-fold division; he simply gave them different names.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ See on p. 22 in Dániel Borbáth, ‘A belmisszió lényege,’ (The Essence of Home Missions) *Református Szemle* (January 15, 1949): pp.21-24.

⁷⁹ Ravasz, *Bevezetés a gyakorlati teológiába* (Introduction to Practical Theology), p.90.

⁸⁰ His classification of the ecclesiological system was as follows:

It is immediately clear that basically there is no difference between the systems of Makkai and Ravasz; there was no challenge and no change to the ideas of Ravasz. Despite the Barthian turnover of the TRC, the pattern stood unaltered and still determined by the neo-Kantian and Böhm inspired vision of Ravasz, from 1907 up to the 1950s. Essentially there was no move from this stand throughout half a century. That is true more or less in the ecclesiology and practical theology developed by Lajos Imre, Jenő Horváth and Dezső László. More or less, I emphasize, because there were small differences of emphasis, but these were not radical paradigm shifts, in spite of the fact that virtually all these theologians became Barthians and explicitly rejected the old path climbed by Ravasz. This happened, although for example Lajos Imre, surprisingly, in his *Ekkleziasztika* of 1941, came closer to the view of the essentiality of mission in the conceptualization of what the church is. Above all, he stressed that the very root and foundation of mission work is rather in the local congregation (that means on a grassroots level) and cannot be forced by the whole church, i.e. the official church, as from 'above,' although it still has a universal significance for the whole church's life and its territory should be the whole church.⁸¹

The two divisions he distinguished were called the general and the specific in his *Practical Theology*:

General part or 'ecclesiastica': on the essence, on the offices and on the organization of the church.

Specific part: which is a prescription of the several functions of the church, like:

'Oikodometica': or the doctrine of the self-building/ self-edification of the church:

liturgy (constant formal)

homiletics (changing content)

'Agapetica': or the doctrine of the church's ministry of charity:

poimenica (personal /pastoral/ care or counseling)

koinonica (institutional care)

Paedeutica: or the doctrine of the reproduction of the church in time and space as:

catechetica (religious education)

halieutica ("proselytization" or in other words: mission itself)

⁸¹ Lajos Imre, *Ekkleziasztika, Az egyház élete és szolgálata (Ecclesiastica, The Life and Ministry of the Church)*. A Coetus Theologorum Református Theologusok Munkaközösségének Kiadványsorozata, 2. Budapest: Bethlen Gábor Irodalmi és Nyomdai Részvénytársaság, 1941, p.54.

From Foreign Missions to the “Death of Mission” On the Home Field

In my view, the new generation of Neo-Kantian theologians, like Tavaszy, Imre, Makkai and László, were prompted to embrace dialectical theology due to the influence of Existentialist philosophy. Tavaszy, the leading figure of this clear shift in thinking, first wrote a book on the philosophy of the Existentialism of Kierkegaard and later, as a consequence, he embraced the teachings of Barth.⁸² Yet, I submit that they were all moving back to a Hegelian dialectic, the kind that was embraced by their theological predecessors, such as Frank, Biedermann and Rothe, the German mentors of Ravasz and his Hungarian circle of disciples. This process of theological development first served to aid the cause of missions and its acceptance by the church; later, however, the process undermined the mission concept, both foreign and home mission. Their ecclesiology represented an effort to transcend the anti-thesis of “the real” and of “the ought to be” configurations of the church on a purely theoretical level. Instead of being blurred by a kind of concept-mythology and correct ideas rather than the practices of the church, they could have received their theological correction directly from the Reformers. The latter did not develop a genuine missiology, yet by taking the absoluteness and authority of the Revelation which is present in Scripture they prepared the way to understand the nature and being of the church missiologically, as I discussed in the previous chapter. Of course, this theological process was not the only hindrance in the mature understanding of the concept of foreign missions as being *the* mission of the church per se, first above all. Specifically in Transylvania, there was another major obstacle generated by the ethno-political situation. Horváth in one of his early articles on mission asked his readers:

The reformed churches alone have 29,188 missionaries [worldwide] (cf. The Christian, 1925.); and how many have there been throughout four centuries! Yet none of them was Hungarian! Is this because God never sent any? Or the ones that He sent, did they not go? *And if He sent them, why did not the church send them?* [italics, LH.]⁸³

⁸² This is the common view of secular philosophers too; see, for example, Tonk.

⁸³ Jenő Horváth, ‘Miért nincs magyar hittérítő odakinn?’ (Why Is There No Hungarian Missionary Out There?) *Az Út* (1930): pp.13.

Does Horváth mean that the ecclesiology of the church is deficient if this could happen? If Horváth's statistics for 1925 are correct, and there are no grounds for questioning our sources, then he has highlighted a significant detail. When he suggests that over four centuries, none of the Reformed missionaries were Hungarian, he is obviously speculating and exaggerating.⁸⁴ However, Horváth is correct in assuming that the statistic does reflect on the Reformed church itself in Hungary in that it had not encouraged mission or had re-interpreted mission radically. He suggested that perhaps God *had* sent Hungarian missionaries, but he had no evidence for the suggestion. Horváth admitted that this poor showing of Hungarians on the mission field could not be simply ascribed to the church's inability to live up to her divine mandate or a failure in her duty. There had to be other reasons, like a lack of interest in, and a lack of encouragement for mission work; but most of all, there were misconceptions of mission which sprang from a gradual and unfortunate re-interpretation of the church's mission calling by the Transylvanians. Therefore, I have to explore reasons for the mistaken understanding of the nature of the church.⁸⁵ Horváth goes on to reject the general, common excuses against missionary enterprise which he found in the church.⁸⁶ These were basically the customary excuses brought up at that time anywhere in Reformed Churches worldwide.⁸⁷ But among those, Horváth turns to a very sensitive issue, which was certainly a particular one, mainly for the Hungarian milieu:

⁸⁴ One can compare this exaggeration with the mission history of the Hungarian Reformed Church presented, for example, in the work of A.M. Kool, cf. *op. cit.* above; according to which this certainly cannot be true, at least for the last two centuries (between 1750-1952) that Kool described.

⁸⁵ John Murray is blunt in calling the lack of missionary zeal of a church a commentary on the coldness and the well deserved judgement of the same given church: "The paucity of consecrated and endowed missionaries of the evangel is a commentary on the lethargy, coldness, indifference, lack of zeal on the part of the church. Mission is the vocation of the church and if men are not forthcoming for the special office, judgement must begin at the house of God, and judgement, let us remember, to a large extent upon our prayerlessness. 'When Zion travailed she brought forth children' (Isaiah 66:8)". Quoted from his study on 'The Church and Mission' in Iain Murray (ed.), *Collected Writings of John Murray* vol. one. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976, p.250-251.

⁸⁶ "There is so much to do at home, there is no time for far away countries, we need to serve our own nation and home country first," etc.

⁸⁷ Murray considers this to be a problem especially in main line churches: "It is true that the organized church has oftentimes been apathetic and failed to carry out the demands of commission." Murray, p.250.

The millennial nationalistic efforts of Hungarians could also serve for some time and for some measure as an excuse. But it becomes an accusation immediately as our religion (*i.e., Calvinism*), due to this situation, becomes a nation-saving “Hungarian” religion in which the Hungarian is important and not the religion. Posting the national flag on a church building should never have been allowed. The importance of the national being [of the Hungarians] forced everything else to be secondary, even faith as well. That explains why our history knows no spiritual awakenings, only national ones. But nothing can be more important compared to the Kingdom of God: it comes before every earthly kingdom.⁸⁸

The “millennial nationalistic efforts of Hungarians” refers to the celebrated *millennium* at the dawn of the 20th century, the one thousand year presence of the Hungarians since they entered the Carpathian basin in Central and Eastern Europe and since the setting up of the Hungarian Kingdom by King Szent István (St. Stephen), following the turning to Christianity of the originally Asian migrate Hungarian tribes. This millennium jubilee served as a symbol of the national efforts for survival of the Magyars/Hungarians in Europe.⁸⁹ Horváth observed critically: Calvinism “due to this situation, becomes a nation-saving ‘Hungarian’ religion in which the Hungarian is important and not the religion.” The 1930s takeover by Hitler’s Nazi party in Germany, Hungary’s closest ally at that time, accentuated the focus on the nationalist emphasis in Hungary too. Horváth also pointed to another reason why the church could forget its mission duty when he asserted that “our history knows no spiritual awakenings, only national ones.” This can be contrasted with the Western reformed world, where successive

⁸⁸ Horváth, Jenő, *ibid.* pp.13-14.

⁸⁹ The fact that the Hungarian language is so different from other European languages and the permanent threat from either Turkish or Austrian domination throughout the centuries, all contributed to the enforcement of this kind of Hungarian nationalist identity feeling. The constant struggle for political freedom diverted the church’s attention from the missionary task, rendering its self-defending strategy as the first priority and then interpreted even as *the* mission of the church. This helps to explain why to be a Calvinist became an identity badge for being a genuine Hungarian, when resisting Austrian rule. This fight was also identified with the rejection of the forced Counter-Reformation efforts of the Habsburgs to change the once-majority-Protestant status of Hungary. In this way, religious rights for the Protestants corresponded with the political rights to be achieved on every front. That explains why Horváth referred to Calvinism as a nation-saving “Hungarian religion,” but obviously this does not excuse the emphasis on Hungarian-ness over the religious aspect.

religious revivals contributed to a focus on missions, and thus Horváth's statement is not an exaggeration when he spoke of the lack of Hungarians on the mission field throughout the four centuries.

Dr. Vilmos Szász in his 1933 article 'Foreign Missions Conference in Halle,' deals with the same problem but indirectly. His starting point is an analysis of the German perspective since Hitler's takeover when foreign missions came to be viewed as 'almost a betrayal of race and of homeland.' Used as a comparison, this provides important insights as Szász describes the impact of German nationalism on the cause of mission:

In these circumstances foreign missions is considered almost a betrayal of race and of homeland. But the confessing church does not concede to this totalitarian demand and is fighting for the independence of the church and for her right to fulfill her duty not only within the borders of the homeland but also to every nation, according to the command of the Lord.⁹⁰

The German situation and reasoning described here by Szász was intentional. He was aware of the similar attitude at home as some argued that thinking of missions betrayed the Hungarian cause. The "confessing church" which Szász pointed to played a decisive role in Germany. Through its emphasized commitment to the confessions, it was able to maintain a critical distance from the nominal *Volkskirche*, still enforced and embodied in the German Christian pro-Nazi movement, (*'Deutsche Christen'*) where the nationalist aspect was not submitted to a Biblical view. The Hungarian church situation was also similar to the German one in how the church was divided into a "confessional" over the "national/nominal" or "Volkskirche" church. However, against the *Deutsche Christen* of Hitler the German churches in resistance organized the "German Confessing Church," a movement which united the Reformed and Lutherans against the Nazi-influenced and nationalist wing of these churches.

It is significant how Szász uses quotes from the famous missiologist, Dr. Hartenstein⁹¹ from the Basel Mission Institute, to establish his point that when

⁹⁰ Vilmos Szász, 'Külmissziói konferencia Halleban' (Foreign Missions Conference in Halle) *Az Út* (1933): pp.142.

⁹¹ Hartenstein was quite familiar to the Transylvanians, for his studies of Barth's writings in which he focused on their inherent missiological teaching. Tavaszy also quoted him in his book on the world-mission of Calvinism, see above.

the church succumbs to nationalist feelings and a closed-up mentality, it runs the risk of losing its missionary vision. He takes up the often repeated argument against foreign missions that is still prevalent in the church, including the TRC, that “there is so much to do at home, there is no time for far away countries, we need to serve our own nation and home country,”⁹² and he quotes Hartenstein in refuting this:

(I)n isolation it is impossible to build (...) our own church. The early Christians, similarly to the church nowadays, were surrounded by pagans and could build only if they stepped out on the mission field. As a matter of fact, mission belongs to the confession [of the church]; it is nothing else than its functionality, it is the confessing activity of the church. A living church can never be anything other than a church doing missions, because by this she builds the church of the future generation. (...) a church can deny itself as a church if it is not interested in missions. Because mission is the same in space as is preaching in time; that cannot cease before this one ceases.⁹³

Notice in passing that Dezső László in his important study, *Az Anyaszentegyház élete és szolgálata* (*The Life and Work of the Holy Mother Church*) meant to clarify the relationship of practical theology with ecclesiology and also with missiology, dedicating an entire chapter to missions and missionary preaching. There he referred explicitly to both Hartenstein and Imre, alleging that he used them both as a source and guide for his own thoughts on the topic. I suggest that his reliance on Hartenstein is rather uneven; for he quotes him only when Hartenstein agrees with his own convictions. He calls mission work a preaching which will lead to a church community among those who are not yet signed with the outward sign of election, i.e., with baptism.⁹⁴ He also asserts that “*We reject the distinction between home and foreign mission work.*” In saying this he apparently came closer to the concept of both Kecskeméthy and Victor, especially to the latter in his debate with Makkai, as we have seen above. But László’s rejection of the distinction comes from a totally opposite position. He would not call for an evangelization of

⁹² See footnote above in reference to Horváth’s analysis.

⁹³ Vilmos Szász, p.143. The last sentence could also be rendered, “Because mission is the same in space as is preaching in time; one cannot cease without the cessation of the other.”

⁹⁴ See László, *Az Anyaszentegyház élete és szolgálata* (*The Life and Work of the Holy Mother Church*), Cluj: 1938, p.101, under the heading: ‘Missionary Preaching (Foreign Missions)’.

those who are baptized and outwardly are church-goers; he would not regard them as people in need of regeneration and repentance like the “pagans” who are outside the boundaries of the Christian church.⁹⁵ I am uneasy with this kind of selective interpretation. Hartenstein, for example, stresses the need for aiming to lead the converted into a church community and sealing them with baptism, but he acknowledges that such an emphasis can result only in a nominal rather than a dynamic membership. For this reason, he also declared that “a church can deny itself as a church if it is not interested in missions.” On the other hand, Dr. Szász accepts that “mission has to adapt itself to the national character.” But he stresses that “this can [only] happen if missions are bringing the gospel and not Christianity to the nations.”⁹⁶ Here he refers to the gospel itself but without the cultural and contextual aspects linked with the national character of a sending church. This is clearer if we replace Christianity with Christendom, when realizing Szász’s intention in saying this. Szász then quotes from another lecture given by an individual whose initials only are given as D. K.:

Whether the preaching of the gospel creates a new social order or not, that is not the business of missions. The gospel will change the relationship of the pagan nations with God. Any other mission which wants something else or works towards something else counterfeits the gospel.⁹⁷

The concern of Dr. Szász was in fact that the gospel in itself could have worked toward a specific realization of the desired new social order which would have been comfortable for the Hungarian minority in Romania. He firmly believed that a Christendom pattern which in itself can be a blessing socially and politically too cannot survive in the long term unless Christ is kept in the centre of that Christendom.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ See in this regard my analysis of László’s ideas in the last section of this chapter.

⁹⁶ Vilmos Szász., p.144.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ What Szász had in mind was that the covenant blessings can work for the benefit of society but can also reduce the core of the gospel, turning it into a mere social gospel. This is why he warned: “any other mission which wants something else or works toward something else” but the gospel “counterfeits the gospel.” In other words, neither Christianity/Christendom, nor even the Church itself can be the *agent* of mission, but at best can serve as only the *locus*, i.e., *the place* of it.

In the previous chapter, it was noted that Victor described only a few ministries and mandates of the church as being missionary activities; such activities are defined as mission not merely on the basis of the *place* where they are carried out, but also depending on the precise *aims* of those activities.⁹⁹ In line with this, Szász's observation that "any other mission which wants something else or works towards something else counterfeits the gospel" is extremely important. The question of whether the gospel was counterfeited in the Transylvania of the period might be very uncomfortable, if proven true, for Transylvanian theologians still holding to such a church concept.¹⁰⁰ For this reason I have to turn to another important theologian who could not avoid the trap of a theological orientation which qualified the gospel as a result of nationalist overtones.

His name is Dr. Géza Nagy, who also embraced, at least until the 1930s, neo-Kantian thought. His contemporary essay on the idea of nationalism and internationalism in the ministry of pastors is shockingly in accord with the national-socialist ideas of the times in which it was composed. It was written after Hitler came to power and Nagy is to some degree influenced by this, but without realizing the trap. We need to familiarize ourselves first with his thoughts on this issue:

The eternal [values of] truth, goodness and beauty can only be attractive and can only have a fertilizing effect if they are not just cold stars on the canopy of heaven, but when they are also incarnate. This will pull out a remarkable individual color of ideas and ideals. Moreover, we can go further in our assertion. Certain kinds of historical, racial and national developments necessarily will prepare the ground on which the idea can incarnate. (...) Without the appearance of the Aryan race, H. Chamberlain already stated thirty seven years ago [in 1898], we cannot understand Western European culture *and the Reformation*. It is not accidental - and we have to acknowledge the truth of this both with him and with Hitler - that from this both physically and spiritually exceeding, and world dominating race [i.e., the Aryan!],

⁹⁹ Victor, "Mi a "missziói munka?" (What Is "Mission Work"?), *op. cit.*, p.19.

¹⁰⁰ Nonetheless, we need to explore critically the situation of the TRC, regardless of whether our findings will prove to be painful even today. We must be objective despite our respect for the great theologians of that generation.

the greatest spirits, scientists, poets, politicians of humanity are emerging. (italics added, LH)¹⁰¹

What is striking here is that Nagy shares the belief that not just Western culture, but even the Reformation, cannot be properly understood without the appearance of the world dominating Aryan race. Nagy is clearly neo-Kantian when he speaks of the expected ‘incarnation’ of the Platonic tripartite value-idea: the eternal idea of truth, goodness and beauty. Then he speaks about the racial-politico-historical conditions necessary to “prepare the ground on which the idea can incarnate.” There is certainly a lingering evolutionist optimism behind this assumed process of development. But opposing this, if we accept that the (geographical) *place*, the *spititus loci*, cannot be the only criteria for automatically asserting that an activity of the church is mission, not even in the case of foreign missions (‘far away’ places) then we have to state that similarly, even the ethnic *homeland* and the affection felt for it cannot be an ethically binding criteria (as a *categoricus imperativus*), for claiming first priority among the mission fields (as a “projection of the race”), nor can a place taken in its solely geographical sense be the exclusive place for missionaries to carry out mission. Yet Nagy still continues his argument unbiased in the same direction when he declares:

On the other hand at every historical approach and social attitude we have to emphasize the importance of the place where the nation, as the projection of the race, will come to fruition. The noblest, highest task of the national state (völkischer Staat) according to Hitler is the preservation and lifting up of the race. Even if we do not accept his state theory and the excesses of it (we are devotees of the *legal state!*), we still have to give him credit that a powerful, self-conscious national life is an unavoidable precondition of the materialization of the values commissioned to the race and to its individuals.¹⁰²

Nagy clearly sets “the materialization of the values” which he believes are “values commissioned to the race” as “an unavoidable precondition” for a powerful and self-conscious national life. These supposed race-bound values are commissioned: this is language which if transplanted to a theological context suggests

¹⁰¹ Géza Nagy, ‘A keresztyén nacionalizmus és internacionalizmus a lelkipásztori szolgálatban’ (Christian Nationalism and Internationalism in the Pastoral Service) *Az Út*, (1935): pp.14-20; and pp.33-39; Cf. p.16.

¹⁰² Ibid.

immediately that this is the real mission of any denomination linked to an ethnic community, as in the case of the TRC. The “materialization of the values” is translated back into a theological language to mean ‘the incarnation of the Word’ in a curiously unashamed neo-Kantian way of speaking. As such, it becomes a strong invitation and justification to misinterpret the “incarnational missiological model” so that it is the church’s primary duty to serve the homeland on the home mission field. Serving the homeland would not be bad in itself, one might argue, if the church is careful not to disregard the main mission of the church as set before it in the Scripture. But that is precisely what happened, and I believe it was due to a self-imposed ideological necessity which resulted in a historical necessity. This misinterpretation came dangerously close to Nazi ideology, although Nagy tried to remain critical of Hitler to some degree: “even if we do not accept his state theory and the excesses of it (we are devotees of the *legal state!*).” To be fair, Dr. Nagy later retracted these ideas, as he did his criticism of CE which he had expressed at a famous theological conference in 1928,¹⁰³ and there are clear signs of him becoming more sympathetic and even expressing open solidarity with the movement in the darkest period of its persecution. In 1993, a formerly imprisoned CE member who was also a church minister, recalled how professor Nagy had respected CE.¹⁰⁴ Rev. Ferenc Visky (sentenced for 22 years imprisonment in 1958) also mentions Professor Nagy as being in solidarity with the movement along with Professor Jenő Horváth.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ See some of the material from this conference published in *Református Szemle* Vol. 18, Nr. 44 (1928), under the title, ‘A liberális gondolkozással és a CE szövetség munkájával szemben való állásfoglalás’ (Statement of Position Against Liberal Thinking and Against the Work of the CE Union); and also some remarks in *Kis Tükör* Vol. 18, Nr. 10, with the title ‘Képzelet és Valóság’ and in Vol. 18, Nr. 26, 27, 28, ‘A Keresztyén Szövetség szolgálata az egyházban,’ both written by Rev. Dr. Mihály Mezey. See also what CE proposed with regard to Foreign Missions and compare this with our analyses on the matter later in this chapter.

¹⁰⁴ Interview of the author with Rev. László Szőke at Les, Romania on July 12th, 1994, when he spoke about his dear professor, Dr. Géza Nagy:

“When I was released from prison and visited him, he suddenly knelt down before me, asking me to forgive him for not defending the CE movement and said he had a huge respect for them as they suffered under Communism for the sake of Christ and for the reformed church, as genuine martyrs and confessors of the Calvinist faith.”

¹⁰⁵ András Visky (ed.), in *Bilincseket és börtönt is* (*Also Chains and Imprisonment*). Arad-Kolozsvár: Koinónia Publishing, 1996, p.214.

More disturbing is the case of Dezső László when entertaining the same approach. Although already fully aware of what Hitler was doing, in 1942 he wrote about *The New Vernacular Ethnicity in the Light of Reformed Theology*. The essay had previously been presented as a lecture to the students of the Kolozsvár Theological Seminary at a conference in February 1942. László declared in his introduction that he was not concerned so much with the concept of vernacular ethnicity, but more with its historical appearance. The avowed aim of his lecture was to give a theological critique of these ideas, and yet he is uncritical and only positive in his text:

Today we witness a new flourishing of vernacular ethnic thought throughout all Europe. No doubt, *Adolf Hitler* is the one who could express it with the greatest effect and also who could turn it into a movement. As in his opus *Mein Kampf*, he would expound in detail his peculiar conceptualization of vernacular ethnicity and of the national state built on national or ethnic thought. Although *Hitler* is the greatest servant of this thought, we have to realize clearly that this thought is older and greater than he is (...) Yet we cannot deny his (i.e., Hitler's) enormous importance in the conceptualization of the idea of vernacular ethnicity as much as his unmistakable portrayal of the consequent requirements which are following from it. In Hitler's thinking, vernacular ethnicity, or, in other words, the race idea – with him these are two sides of the same reality – means a determined attitude of mind of the German nation against the *Jews* and against the *bolshevism*.¹⁰⁶

It is important to recognize that László follows the same line of thought which appears in Hitler's *Mein Kampf* without giving any theological criticism of vernacular ethnicity, although his essay was intended as an evaluation of this idea in the light of reformed theology.¹⁰⁷ Continuing the quotation, we see his threefold

¹⁰⁶ Dezső László, 'Az új népiség a református theologia megvilágításában' (The New Vernacular Ethnicity in the Light of Reformed Theology) in *Nép, nemzet, lelkipásztor, Két előadás* (Ethnicity, Nation and Pastor; Two Lectures). Az igazság és élet füzetek 28. Debrecen: Városi nyomda, 1942, p.3.

¹⁰⁷ I wish to comment respectfully on Ferenc László's article written in defense of his late father. I cannot believe he ignored the existence of the above quoted lecture; it seems more plausible to me that the existence of the lecture was not known by the author. I have a great respect for Dezső László and I believe that he certainly regretted later some of the assertions he made in this infamous lecture. See the article of Ferenc László, 'A "harmdik út" áldozata. László Dezső állambiztonsági ügyirata (1948-1955)' (The Victim of the "Third Way." The State Security

approach concerning the pureness of race, the strengthening of the individual, and through both, the empowerment of the state:

The vernacular ethnic thought with regard to race is a protest against any corrupting influence of the Jews on the German nation which would harm it; the racial thought with regard to the vernacular is concerned with the strengthening of every individual who makes up the German nation; and also with bringing the nation's best individuals to the surface and training them to become leaders against the bolshevik mob type of thinking. According to the Hitlerian vernacular ethnic thought, every state has to guarantee the empowerment of the state-forming nation on every level. It is also necessary to preserve its development, its attaining of power; and in such a strengthened nation the fulfillment of the individual's life style has to be protected as much as the leading role of the best individuals. So with *Hitler* the vernacular ethnic thought means on the one hand the pureness of the race, and on the other hand the strengthening of the individuals of that race; then through both the realization of the empowerment of the state can be achieved.¹⁰⁸

In his footnotes he cites *Mein Kampf*. Now, László, in his above quoted book on ecclesiology and missions *Az Anyaszentegyház élete és szolgálata (The Life and Work of the Holy Mother Church)* has a whole chapter under the heading '**Prophetic-Critical Preaching (A próféta, kritikai igehirdetés)**'.¹⁰⁹ There he argues powerfully that there should be room in the church for critical reflection on the moral and practical life of the church and nation. He also calls for a prophetic message of perpetual self-examination on the part of the church and its theology, which should be practiced in the church and society by preaching. He even declares that "this kind of prophetic, critical preaching is the closest to the *missionary kind* of preaching (italics, LH.)"¹¹⁰ The only difference consists in the fact "that in it not the calling, but the judgement, not the good news, but the gospel, as Life-Law will be emphasized."¹¹¹ If we compare this with his above quoted convictions where he fails to filter critically the Hitlerian ideology through biblical and

Police Files of Dezső László) in: *László Dezső emlékezete (In Memory of Dezső László)* Péter Cseke, (ed.). Kolozsvár: Polis Könyvkiadó, 2004, pp.147-177.

¹⁰⁸ László, *ibid.* pp.3-4.

¹⁰⁹ László, *Az Anyaszentegyház élete és szolgálata (The Life and Work of the Holy Mother Church)* pp.101-102.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* p.101.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* p.102.

confessional standards, it is even stranger that the same László would here go so far as to demand a prophetic guard, namely, self-examination, regarding the ethnic aspects where the church is bound territorially, as he declared:

God committed to the church the prophetic office of watching over the whole world. The church, as a guardian commissioned with this office, can bring the whole community of a nation amidst whom she serves, under the judgement of God, and can point to God's Law in the decisive turnovers of life. It is the church's duty to declare the command of the hour to the national community in the time of decisive turning points in its life [and history] [*Italics, LH.*]¹¹²

It is paradoxical that a theologian, who could so accurately and precisely define the prophetical-critical role¹¹³ of preaching against the presumably false expectations and subjective desires of a given nation, could not give a theological critique of the ideas of the vernacular ethnicity, even when this was his self-proclaimed intention as noted above. As a comparison and contrast, we now examine what Kecskeméthy said as early as 1933, almost a decade before, in an editorial article called *Hitler-religion*:

Germany (and just to mention in passing, the Saxons of Transylvania also) is conquered by the Austrian-originating Hitler, on behalf of the so-called National-Socialism. (...) The Lutheran church which Hitler now has put in his rucksack is acknowledged as a national church. (...) Those who want to make it more nationalistic would only add water to the sea. But every sign points to the fact that it is not just about making the church more national, but it is more than that, it is about putting the church in the service of politics; and that is already a great danger. And it is a universal danger. As much as the Lutheran church is a precious treasure for humanity, so much is the "hitlerchurch" [or Hitler's religion] like bad yeast among the denominations.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Similar to John Murray, who even states: "... this is not the only aspect of the church's mission. The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers received appropriate recognition in the churches of the Reformation. But I fear that, in our reformed churches, the implications have been conspicuous by their neglect in the practical sphere. If there is the universal priesthood, there is also the *universal prophethood*. And therein lies the mission of the church." [Emphasis, LH] Murray, p. 251.

¹¹⁴ István Kecskeméthy, 'Hitlervallás' ('Hitlerchurch' or 'Hitler-religion.' As stated previously, the Hungarian word here, 'vallás' also means 'confession,' so the title can be translated 'Hitler-

These critical remarks of Kecskeméthy proved to be prophetic indeed, although he did not live to see it for he died five years later in 1938. He had other important insights, criticizing the quick and uncritical undertaking of other mandates by a church which ignored its God-given and only mandate, that is, missions:

Let us guard ourselves [against], that kind of dangerous principle is included here that religion has any other supposed task apart, besides, or even above fellowship with God and with our neighbors and the edifying-nursing of these; other tasks like protection of the race, denominational goals and interests, etc. This is a great danger because that kind of Hitlerian thought is incubated and lurks in every denomination; moreover, it is not just “lurking” in some. Where it comes into force, there the denomination will reject the very essence of real religion. There the salt becomes tasteless, becomes good for nothing, not even for garbage.¹¹⁵

What he is referring to is the radical view of the nature of the church, whether a Lutheran, Reformed or any other Protestant denomination. But Kecskeméthy refers to his own church first, realizing the danger which openly “lurks” within the TRC. He concludes by urging a self-reflective and repentant attitude on the part of his whole church:

Hitler and his companions are showing us a mirror today, in which we can see clearly that not only the denial of the thought of universalism, but even the irresponsible neglect of it (which all denominations have as a tendency!) can make any denomination so distorted. Let us look into this mirror and try to learn from it.¹¹⁶

This is certainly different from the concept of László, who nowadays can be enrolled easily among the adherents of a peculiar “school of missiology,” called *ethnotheology* which sets as its task the adaptation of Christian belief to a particular culture or people group.¹¹⁷ At the roots of the ‘prophetic perspective’ of Kecskeméthy’s view lies also a particular Calvinistic conviction resisting the kind of

confession’ as well) *Kis Tükör* Vol 23, Nr. 6 (July 22, 1933): pp.21-22. Re-edited in Kecskeméthy: *Beszélgünk nyíltan, Válogatott írások* (*Let’s Talk Plainly, Selected Writings*), pp.51-52.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* p.53.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ See a thorough critique of this school of missiology by Peter Back above. In my opinion Back is right in his criticism of an ethnotheology which, with good intentions to make the gospel acceptable to a certain ethnic group, forces its limits, even at the expense of distorting that same gospel. See Back’s well-balanced recent study on this issue.

‘German philosophical pantheism,’ which influenced both Nagy’s and László’s thinking, especially in defining and enrolling ethnic identity into the terms of the Kantian *category*. Present day Transylvanian philosophers, such as Károly Veress,¹¹⁸ argue that Makkai, for example,¹¹⁹ definitely can be seen as the representative of that school in his thinking about the fate and role of Hungarian ethnicity when found in a minority situation in Romania. This German philosophical pantheism emerging from a Hegelian mysticism advocated a state-sovereignty, an illusion very attractive to the Transylvanian elite in the 1940s when most of Transylvania was rejoined to Hungary, as an ally of Hitler’s Germany. There was no significant Calvinistic-inspired ‘prophetic-critical’ opposition to it by the supposedly Calvinist theologians marshalling as the representatives of the official church, as could happen in other Calvinistic environments, such as the Netherlands. The voice of theologians such as Kecskeméthy, who were marginalized because of their opposition and their involvement in the revivalist movement, were not heard. We see a different picture elsewhere. The influential ‘spheres of sovereignty’ doctrine created by the famous Dutch theologian, Abraham Kuyper, and developed further by the outstanding Calvinist philosopher of the Netherlands, Herman Dooyeweerd, played an important role in the recent development of misology, especially in the way that Newbigin applied to it. At the opening of the Free University of Amsterdam in 1880, Kuyper gave a lecture entitled ‘Sovereignty in the Distinctive Spheres of Human Life’ and he developed the idea of the autonomy of the different and various social spheres. The principle of ‘spheres of sovereignities’ meant to guard the freedom and rights of the various social spheres,

¹¹⁸ Cf. for example Veress who would definitely use the concept of “ethnic identity” in this sense; there is even a chapter in his book entitled ‘A kissebségi kategóriától a nemzeti kategóriáig’ (‘From the Category of Minority-ness to the Category of National-ness’). See in Veress, *op.cit.*, pp. 201-204.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* especially pp.171-200. Although Veress states, that “Makkai’s faith-concept is the key to the interpretation of the *nem lehet-probléma*, to the ‘not possible’-problem” (just for a reminder here: the not possible-problem refers to Makkai’s infamous article when he left Romania for Hungary in 1936, concluding that the situation of the minority is an ‘sub-human’ and an impossible way of life due to the humiliation which the Hungarians had to suffer under Romanian rule), and it is not just the problem itself which is opened up by this key [of his faith-concept], but light is also shed on “the philosophical paths and concepts which are leading to it as well.” Veress continues that “(t)his is equally valid to both philosophical attitudes of the times, to the neo-Kantian value-philosophy and to the Heideggerian existential-philosophy too.” (p.149.)

and Dooyeweerd applied it to all reality, not just to the relationships between church, state, home and school. But Rodgers warns that “(i)t is not to be confused, however, with the idea of ‘popular sovereignty’ associated with the French Revolution nor should it be seen in concert with the idea of Rousseau...”¹²⁰ Therefore, says Kuyper,

in opposition both to the atheistic popular-sovereignty of the Encyclopaedians and the pantheistic state-sovereignty of German philosophers, the Calvinist maintains the sovereignty of God as the source of all authority among men.¹²¹

Kecskeméthy as a genuinely Calvinist thinker, critical of the Modernism of his age which mostly sprang from the neo-Kantian mindset, could discern the ideological perils in the vernacular ethnicity developed by Nagy and László and was the ablest to critique and reject these ideas from the very beginning.

There was an explicit Neo-Kantian-Böhmian attempt to define mission in the 1930s which I have discovered in my research. The author, György Szentes, was a reformed minister serving in Paris, mainly among the Hungarian Diaspora. Even the title of his article, published in *Az Út*, is significant: *Mission in the perspective of “the being” and of “the ought to be.”*¹²² There is a well worked response to Szentes published in the same issue of *Az Út* by Alexander (Sándor) Babos, who became the first foreign missionary of the Transylvanian church to China¹²³ under the title, *A külmisszió és a regáti misszió (Foreign Missions and the Mission to the Regat)*.¹²⁴ I will now outline and discuss the content both of Szentes' articles and Babos' response.

¹²⁰ R. E. L. Rodgers, *The Incarnation of the Antithesis, An Introduction to the Educational Thought and Practice of Abraham Kuyper*. Edinburgh, Cambridge, Durham: The Pentland Press Ltd, 1992, p.41.

¹²¹ Cited by R. E. L. Rodgers from Abraham Kuyper, *Calvinism*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1943, pp.88, and 90.

¹²² György Szentes, ‘A misszió a “kell” és a “van” perspektívájában’ (Mission in the perspective of “the being” and of “the ought to be”) *Az Út* (1930): pp.225-230.

¹²³ Or within what is present day China, but what was, at that time, the independent state of Manchuria, also ruled for a period by Japan.

¹²⁴ The Regat was the name for the Old Regions of former Romania, excluding Transylvania. It encompassed Moldavia, Walachia and Oltenia.

Breakthrough in Thinking About Foreign Missions and an Analysis of Its Practical Hindrances

In the beginning of Szentes' essay he provides a definition of the term mission:

Mission, on the one hand, is rooted in the essence of Christianity and as such is a **power** flowing out of it and is a power which strives to realize itself under the law of spontaneity; on the other hand, regarding Christianity, it is an eternally present **command, commission** and **program**, conditioned by its compulsory nature. (emphasis by the author)¹²⁵

He also says that today's missions give the impression of being the means of pursuing church politics, so it becomes a tool of cunning diplomacy. Such mission is not a conquering and prevailing mission for the cause of Christianity,¹²⁶ by which he meant here the mission activity of other churches abroad or in Hungary, as Babos would be sent out by the TRC only on August 24th, 1936, six years later. Szentes is keen to challenge the hypocrisy of European Christianity and to raise moral questions and objections regarding the right of the Christian Church to undertake any mission work: "(U)ntil Christianity honestly and seriously faces itself, with heroic resolution it should not missionize."¹²⁷ Szentes goes on in his criticism stating that mission, "(L)ooking at it from the outside, *in longitudinal section, is just a pre-combat activity; looking at it from the inside and from a cross-sectional view, it is the narcoticum against the accusation of Christianity's conscience.*"¹²⁸ This view is reminiscent of the epoch making controversial book of the same period, *Re-thinking Mission* published in 1932,¹²⁹ which was reviewed by Jenő Horváth as early as 1936 in his missiological *opus*.¹³⁰ For example, the optimistic advice of

¹²⁵ Szentes, p.225.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* p.226.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.* p.227.

¹²⁹ William Ernest Hocking (ed.), *Re-thinking Mission, A Laymen's Inquiry After One Hundred Years*. The Commission of Appraisal, Chairman William Ernest Hocking. New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1932.

¹³⁰ Horváth, Jenő *A külmiszió lényege, op. cit.* See especially on this topic his comments on pp.236-237. The book's observations are similar in tone to those of Szentes'.

I have to note in passing that recently theologians such as the Gambian-born Lamin Sanneh and many others, including famous missiologists, have tackled and commented on the issues raised in Hocking's book, re-evaluating his findings in the contemporary context. See for

Szentes is in line with Hocking, when he asserts: we have to wait patiently till “the supreme religion, Christianity, conquers everybody slowly.”¹³¹ Since then the critique given in *Re-Thinking Missions* deconstructing mission has become “fashionable” among many modern and some post-modern missiologists, especially among practitioners of Mission History. The new “modernist” slogan: ‘*Missions had many problems, but a paradigm shift took place in the 20th century: since then, missions itself has become a problem,*’ was indeed sparked by books such as *Re-Thinking Missions*. As Bosch remarks, “The remedy, so W. E. Hocking and others believed, did not, however, lie in disavowing the ethos that had given rise to secularism, but in redefining mission as ‘preparation for world unity in civilization.’”¹³² But Szentes suggests that until the reformed church examines itself and is changed, there should not be any foreign missions. The only approvable mission is home mission: “So what is there to do till then...?! She [the church] should do the serious, diligent and responsible home missionary work.”¹³³

At the end of his article, realizing the criticism which might be directed toward him, he wrote: “I am conscious of the fact that I can be accused of the tendency of particularism and of having a narrow-minded nationalism (of the Jonah-type); my intention was only that we should think through these issues...”¹³⁴ Remarkably, Szentes makes no reference to the title of his article, (*‘Mission in the perspective of “the being” and of “the ought to be”’*) in the article itself, and yet for me it is clear that there is a direct link between this characteristic title and the way Szentes interprets mission throughout the article in the context of these neo-

example the very inspiring evaluation in the chapter entitled ‘Theology of Missions’ by Lamin Sanneh, in David F Ford (ed.), *The Modern Theologians, An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997, pp.555-574. On Hocking see especially pp.563-567. Sanneh writes: “His [Hocking’s] dilemma is the postmodern dilemma: how to justify social change and moral reform without drawing on the reserves of religious doctrine and ideals are already deemed at fault for impeding change and reform.” Then, at the end of his evaluation Sanneh concludes: “Hocking was the gadfly that perturbed the conscience of his generation. He commenced a wide-ranging debate in church and missionary circles about how Christians should henceforth understand their responsibility for faith and witness. Many felt he had cut the ground from under the feet of missions. (...) It would be fair to say that with him Protestant liberalism wrote its verdict on missions.” (p.567.)

¹³¹ Szentes, p.237.

¹³² Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p.326.

¹³³ Szentes, p.228.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.230.

Kantian terms. Philosophical idealism has a clear demand for changing the “how it is” to the “how it ought to be,” by unfolding the “how it ought to be” from the “how it is,” as I demonstrated with the arguments of Pauler earlier. It is optimistically believed that the self-criticism and self-examination of the church as a reality, the “how it is” church, can bring us to the “how it ought to be.” So mission is falling under these premises as well! Similar objections can be found in two other articles by Pál Bitai¹³⁵ and Zoltán Nagy,¹³⁶ but those were answered by the Lutheran theologian, CE protagonist, and later martyred, Andor Járósi.¹³⁷ Rev. Sándor Babos, himself an adherent of the CE movement too, according to Kool¹³⁸ responds to all three in an ample and very systematic theological article.¹³⁹ Babos started his article by stating that only three years earlier people were talking in the church about the need for foreign missions. This is a clear reference to the conference of theologians at the Kolozsvár Seminary in 1928, where Kecskeméthy gave a lecture on the importance of Foreign Missions for the health of the church. At the same conference he presented a resolution-proposal which was rejected.¹⁴⁰ Already, this emerging situation had provoked some articles which, by attacking foreign missions, attempted to focus on and transfer any missionary energy and activity to the Hungarian communities settled in the old Romanian regions, the *regat*, where the Hungarian Diaspora was in constant danger of being *assimilated* by the Romanian population. Babos thought that such an incident justified the thesis that

¹³⁵ It appeared with the title ‘Először a mieinket!’ (Our Own [Nation] First!), in *Egyházi Újság* Vol. 2, Nr. 11. It is significant that it was published in the *Regat*, in a periodical published by the Hungarian Diaspora living in the Romanian capital [Bucharest] of the country. But it is also significant that Babos at that time was serving in a diaspora church, in Lupény (Lupeni).

¹³⁶ With a title similar to Bitai's in the *Református Lelkészek Lapja*.

¹³⁷ In the *Kálvinista Világ*. Járósi was an outstanding missionary to the Jews and saved the lives of many Jews during the war. He was taken to the Soviet Union after the war and died, or was perhaps killed, although the circumstances are unclear.

¹³⁸ For more about Rev. Sándor (Alexander) Babos (1903-1996) in English, his ideas and activity as the first Transylvanian missionary, see Kool, pp.450-452-461; 543-545 and 764-766, etc. Although Kool's work focuses on Hungary, there is an exception made here with the Transylvanian Babos, justified by Kool on p.452, fn. 788. Given that we are not doing historical research into mission in Transylvania either, we have to limit our paper to analyzing just the mission concept that Babos represented.

¹³⁹ See Sándor Babos, ‘A külmiszió és a regáti miszió’ (Foreign Missions and the Mission to the Regat) *Az Út*, (1930): pp.231-239.

¹⁴⁰ See the comments related to this Proposed Resolution later in this chapter.

simply raising the question of foreign missions will draw attention to the home mission tasks! At the same time, Babos admits that the antithesis thus created to pit foreign missions against home missions *is a problem which is not easy to solve*. This is the only critical and misleading point to which foreign missions should be sensitive, as the argument has an apparent validity. It might be one of the greatest counter arguments against foreign missions that first it is necessary to complete home mission duties; consequently when the population at home is 100% Christian, only then, if we still have money and time left, should foreign missions be considered. But, according to Babos, there are many other counter arguments on which he honestly reflects. I list all the arguments and objections below in nine groupings paraphrasing Babos' wording, with occasional comments:

1. Home missions must come first; only when this is completed should foreign missions be engaged in.
2. Do we have the right to speak of foreign missions when the church at home is undergoing a severe trial? When, for example, Hungarian reformed organizations and institutes (such as the church-run schools, and high-schools, etc) are daily under threat of being closed or are at least being significantly hindered in their activities by the Romanian government? Can foreign missions be justified in such circumstances when it seems as if every able and diligent church worker is needed in the work at home?

Obviously Babos is referring to the post-Trianon crisis and the state of the TRC in Transylvania and the whole Hungarian population's frustration during the interbellum period of greater Romania, following the First World War.

3. Can a focus on foreign mission fields be justified when the home mission work is still handicapped and is "still like a foster child" of the church? Can we speak about foreign missions when at home there are no basic charitable institutions, and what there are cannot be maintained even with the support of a central budget from the church?

Babos echoes the vehement questions of his counterparts, and I have to add that up until the 1940s it was debated whether diaconal and other charitable works could be considered as being part of the activities of home mission. Victor clearly refuted this idea (even in his famous debate with Makkai, against which, in turn, Makkai protested vehemently), whereas Imre and Makkai took the opposite position, and included education also as being

within the scope of home mission also. In 1949 Borbáth, the Barthian theologian and leader of the Reformed Orphanage, as mentioned above, welcomed Jenő Horváth's book on *The Essence of Home Mission*, in an article highlighting that Horváth¹⁴¹ did not enroll diaconal work in home missions:

"[Jenő Horváth] goes further than what our theologians have ever stated thus far. Against the interpretation of Wichern regarding the essence of home missions (which was still represented in our theological literature by Dr. Sándor Makkai), he follows the orientation of Dr. Lajos Imre, Dezső László and János Victor and declares that 'home missions could include neither diaconia, nor spiritual counseling, nor any cultural-social work of the church.' (...) So home missions is not the work of others exercised on the church, but the perpetual inner reformation of the church."¹⁴²

Then in the fourth grouping of arguments he questions the legitimacy, or at least the prioritizing of foreign missions, in Babos' summary:

1. Are the pagans really our closest neighbors? Even 1 Tim 5:8 says: "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (or a "pagan", as Babos adds). The people who are ready to argue along these lines are also quick to quote Christ's words: "Do not go in *the* way of *the* Gentiles, and do not enter *any* city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt 10: 5-6)
2. Is foreign mission necessary when such work cannot be realistically maintained financially, especially in the case of a poor country like Romania?
3. Can any results be expected from foreign missions? Are there enough good reasons in favor of foreign missions to justify the activity? Is there any real significance in us doing missions, especially as a nation which neither borders a sea, nor is a colonial power?

¹⁴¹ I have noted here that Barth would include evangelization in both foreign and home missions, although with some qualifications, and as secondary to the main task. (Cf. Barth, *Christian Dogmatics* IV/3/2, pp. 875-876ff.) I will elaborate more on the topic after I have evaluated Babos' theology of missions, see below.

¹⁴² Borbáth, 'A belmisszió lényege,' (The Essence of Home Missions), *op. cit.*, p.22.

4. Some people make a larger concession to the cause of foreign missions, claiming that it is a good work, but the time for it has not come yet, nor do churches yet have time for it.

Here the emphasis seems to be the question of time, undertaking foreign missions at the appropriate time whereas under point one, the emphasis was one of priority.

5. Another accusation is that contemporary European Christianity is in a sinful state, having made many compromises with the world, and thus it should not embark on foreign mission until it recovers its faith and repents from its sins.
6. A newer and more subtle counter argument, according to Babos, which impugned foreign missions, examines the mistakes in principle and in the practice of such mission work so far and concludes that it did not walk on a right and justified theological path. But Babos is quick to refute this objection by stating that in recent years, under the influence of modern theology (by which he meant the dialectical theology and Barthianism embraced in Transylvania) a radical spiritual renewal had taken place in missions and in missiology too, so that any such kind of objection would be and has to be regarded as anachronism.

While Babos does not give an immediate refutation of all of the above counter-arguments, he admits that these objections and arguments are both serious and mostly justified. But, as he observed

(E)very objection is marked by the very human sin which wants to solve the problem of mission to its peace of mind with the measure "of man." It is so interesting and characteristic that each objection had as its starting point either the naïve dream of perfectionism, or the logical imagination of the human mind.¹⁴³

Does Babos think in a way consistent with dialectical theology? Only up to a certain point, but this will become clearer as I evaluate his answers. The way he refutes the above objections is exemplified, for example, in his answer to the ninth objection. He argues that any theological objections against the mistakes of mission history are anachronistic in the light of a new missiological approach "purified" by "modern theology." He continues stating that faith "will bend in front of

¹⁴³ Babos, p.233.

the priority of God's will exclusively" and for this reason the "starting point" of any of the objections above is *ab ovo* false and mistaken. As a result, "Missions cannot fit and be forced into any human category and, moreover, it cannot be either justified or not justified by these categories."¹⁴⁴ After this response, Babos arrives at a somewhat positive definition of what mission is and how it can be interpreted biblically:

When I say, mission, then I say, *Jesus Christ*. If this word mission means [a mandate of] sending then mission has got a Lord who sends and has got a servant who obeys. Sender and sent one, command and obedience; mission is based on these and is growing up out of these. Warneck, the famous theologian of missions, says that Christian mission is as old as Christianity (although the concept of mission is older), we say, to the contrary, that missions is as old as the revealed Word of God. So, our thesis is: *there is mission because there is God's Word*.¹⁴⁵

Babos clearly builds up his argument on the centrality of the Word. Besides the easily noticeable influence of Barthianism, we can observe that in doing this, he gives a Christo-centric definition of mission. Moreover, by introducing the Holy Spirit as the subject of mission rather than the individual or the church, this understanding of who the Sender and who the sent one are demands a *pneumatology of mission* and makes out of the *missio Dei* a real Trinitarian act. Kool states in connection to this: "His [Babos'] reply showed the influence of Hungarian and Transylvanian mission theology with its focus on *missio Dei*, although it seems that he does not stress the predestination as strongly as they did."¹⁴⁶ This is a reference to Sándor Makkai who stressed the peculiar role of predestination in his debate with János Victor; to Imre, who stressed the same in mission, in preaching and in education; and to Jenő Horváth in his *The Essence of Foreign Mission*. Nevertheless their view on predestination, following Tavaszy's *Reformed Christian Dogmatics*, was *not* Barthian, but rather in accord with the reformed Creeds, although they embraced the Barthian interpretation of the *missio Dei* concept. Yet Babos went closer to the correction and developing of the *missio Dei* concept by Newbigin, as Newbigin pointed to the Trinitarian aspect of the Sender. He

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p.233.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ Kool, p.458.

stressed it in order to avoid a “Christo-monism” view such as Barth was charged with in missiology.¹⁴⁷ In the above pneumatological aspect Babos is also in explicit agreement with Tavaszy who maintained that “the Subject of mission is God, i.e. God as the Holy Spirit”:

So mission is mission and not propaganda. Behold! Mission asks for super-human demands. So mission cannot be done by humans and yet humans have to do it. Mission is done by the Holy Spirit and not by humans, *but not without humans*. Propaganda is done by humans, not by God, *but without God*. K. Hartenstein, Was hat die Theologie Karl Barths der Mission zu sagen? (‘Zwischen den Zeiten’) VI. Jhg. 1. Heft, p. 66. ‘alle Mission Fortsetzung des Christuslebens,’ that is every mission is the carrying on of Christ's life.¹⁴⁸

In other words, no human objections, not even logically well grounded ones, can stand but the Lord of mission disposes and is allowed to dispose both the sent one (the “missionary”) and her or his mission, the reason, the rationale why He sends.¹⁴⁹

Again Babos starts by stating what mission is *not* so that later he might be able to define positively, with greater clarity, what mission *is*:

Mission does not depend on our arbitrariness. We cannot dictate its rightness or wrongness, its necessity or lack of necessity, its due timeliness or untimeliness, its priority or secondary importance; because mission is not “one” thing among many other things and is not one “necessary” thing among many unnecessary ones. Mission is not a religious sport, neither a superfluous affixation of the Christian life, nor an ornament, nor an imported item, nor a delicacy that we can consume once we

¹⁴⁷ See more on this in Goheen's book on Newbigin, “*As the Father Has Sent Me, I Am Sending You*.”

¹⁴⁸ Tavaszy, *A kálvinizmus világmissziója* (*The World Mission of Calvinism*), p.10. In Hungarian it reads: “A misszió tehát misszió és nem propaganda. Ime! tehát a misszió emberfeletti követelményeket támaszt, a missziót tehát ember nem űzheti s mégis az embernek kell űznie. A missziót a Szentlélek űzi és nem az ember, *de nem az ember nélkül*, a propagandát az ember űzi és nem Isten, *de Isten nélkül*.” Babos refers to it without giving the full quote.

¹⁴⁹ Theologically set against rationalism, this is *personalism* (cf. Buber and Ebner), and philosophically the existentialist motif can be seen here. The decision cannot be measured by either a value-appraisal of the Neo-Kantian approach or by logically valid rational references. The obedience of the sent one to the Sender demands indeed an existentialist decision.

are full at home, nor is mission a magic instrument with which we can hide, as with a beauty spot, our mistakes, sins and unbelief before the world at home.¹⁵⁰

Notice how Babos refutes Szentes' argument in his article, with its implicit Neo-Kantianism. He is slightly ironical when reformulating 'the being/is' – 'ought to be' misapplied contrast:

So mission is that kind of a spirituality in which we give ourselves over, stoop down and humble ourselves before the eternal God and before the Lord Jesus Christ and before his will. Mission "is" [i.e., belongs to the being, to the ontological!] even when we do not like it to exist and even if we do not "need it" [this expression in Hungarian here is equivalent to the Böhman category of "the ought to be," and it belongs to the deontological. Remarks, LH].¹⁵¹

Babos also protests against the danger of entering the trap of a neo-Kantian philosophical illusion when one tries to define mission in terms of an impersonal value-appraisal which can be found in the generalized and condensed values projected in an assumed "transcendence:"

Mission cannot flow from Christian *illusion*, nor even from *enthusiasm*; but there stands behind it the glorified Lord, who speaks thus: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations." This command was not issued by one smaller or greater than the One who declared of Himself: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." For this reason *the alpha and omega of mission is Jesus Christ*.¹⁵² Mission itself is nothing other than the *continuance* of the work of the Lord Jesus. [Italics, LH.]¹⁵³

The remarkable idea in Babos' thought is his description of the deception as a "Christian illusion," suggesting that Christians can be deceived on this ground as well.¹⁵⁴ However, in the theological criticism given by Babos, value-centered moral

¹⁵⁰ Babos, p.233.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Compare this with what Kecskeméthy wrote in his article 'A jézusi tudomány' (The Science of Jesus), *op. cit.*, and our evaluation of the topic in chapter five.

¹⁵³ Babos, pp.233-234. The idea of the *continuance* of the mission of Christ by the missionary as an incentive to missions is also a reference to Hartenstein who derived it from the theology of Barth, as was quoted by Tavaszy.

¹⁵⁴ The self-deception to which he refers obviously arises from the neo-Kantian value appraisal type of interpretation, instead of looking to the theological approach. In this regard one might believe that his insistence on unconditional obedience to the Word of God, instead of just

considerations can determine the actions of a morally accountable agent, but cannot determine either the actions of God or of his obedient ‘missionary agent.’ At the time of writing his article, Babos was in his thirties, serving in a very poor area of the country, almost like a mission out-post. Just six years later out of unconditional obedience to God he left as a missionary to Manchuria.

Mission has a precious pillar: obedience to the Word of God. (...) This [mission] command cannot be limited and cannot be misinterpreted. Against it there is no room for any “but” or “if... then” defiance or other objections. There is no room either for saying that it can only be fulfilled in due time.¹⁵⁵

The “only in due time” argument has to be seen in the context of the worldwide economic crises of the 1930s and moreover in the context of the especially extreme poverty in Transylvania at that time. An illustration of this poverty is the fact that when Babos left for China, going with the Scottish Church as there was no Hungarian mission station anywhere, the Scottish Church agreed to provide half of his salary. There were years when the Hungarian reformed people could barely raise the other half of his wages.¹⁵⁶ Jenő Horváth traveled around

hypothetically or speculatively stating God’s sending will, has a Barthian ring to it. I do not deny Barth’s probable influence here, yet the way that Babos says that “mission cannot flow from Christian *illusion*, ... but there stands behind it the glorified Lord” points to the refusal of any neo-Kantian presupposition; otherwise the same sentence could be worded ‘there stands behind it (instead of the glorified Lord) the moral categoricus imperativus for carrying out mission work...’ The illusion lurks in posing the question within the context of an ethical motivation, instead of in the gospel-motivation which lies within the context of the historical death and resurrection and ascension of the sending Lord. In the latter, mission is understood as a direct continuation of the mission of Christ and not as an ethically demanding moral duty. If mission is only a moral duty, one can be excused and exempted from it if those in the immediate neighborhood of the church are suffering and in need of the church’s diaconia.

¹⁵⁵ Babos, p.234.

¹⁵⁶ Both the Scottish and the Transylvanian Church agreed to pay 120 English pounds. Cf. in the issues in the periodical ed. by J. Horváth *Egyház és Misszió*, appearing from 1932 until 1938 when it was banned. It reappeared in 1938 with the name *Az Ige (The Word)*, but ceased again the same year. See also Kool, p.460: “In 1935 the income was more than 150,000 lei. In 1938 it had decreased to about 60,000.” Kool even questions Dr. János Bütösi’s statement about a possible growing revival emerging in Transylvania around the support of Babos’ mission, in the context of this decreasing financial support. Nevertheless, Kool also refers to the need of more research into the Transylvanian situation, see fn. 828. on p.461. To which we can reply that we have evidence of the peculiar growing economical crisis which also forced

Transylvania to many different congregations collecting money to buy Babos a type-writer; it took him a whole year to collect enough money, although Babos was supported by virtually the whole TRC. Such a story gives us a fair idea of the financial situation of the population as a whole. Yet, Babos did not shy away when faced with the counter-argument as to whether this was the right time for the TRC to be engaged in foreign missions, given the suffering and hardships of the Hungarian minority in Romania, both economically and politically. He would not argue what ought to be done out of the ontological facts of history, but brings the issue back to the Scriptures:

The work was not yet at all fulfilled among the Jews when preaching of the gospel took place already beyond the boundaries. Paul and Barnabas for sure could have done a lot still in Antioch before setting off for the first mission trip. If the Christian congregation at the very beginning would have acted according to the idea that first everything ought to be put in order at home, and only then do we have the right of going further, then today there would be no Christians and probably no Christian Church either. (...) If the successive Christian generations had waited until burning questions and important duties had ceased first at home, then any pagan mission would never have been started. In the world there is also sin; not to consider this is a naive day-dream and unreal(istic) thinking.¹⁵⁷

As we can see now, first there was need to clarify the theological definition of foreign mission and how it related to other apparent urgent mandates of the church. It was only at this point that Babos started to refute one by one the objections raised against foreign missions.

Out of obedience ... they simply went and proclaimed the risen Christ, *without knowing what God's will is for them and what is the purpose of their work* (italics, LH). This compulsion cannot be circumvented by anything and cannot have strictures placed upon it by anything. Not even by lack of money because God's cause would be a very poor thing if it would depend on money.¹⁵⁸

Kecskeméthy to stop editing his *Kis Tükör*, despite increasing interest in it. Yet, we admit, there might be other reasons unknown to us at this stage of the research.

¹⁵⁷ Babos, p.234.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Beginning with obedience to the call of God, he argued first against arguments about lack of finance, then against the priority of patriotic and ethnic responsibilities, and then against the needs of the homeland, as we will see below:

Or the money which believing souls are dedicating to foreign missions has caused them pain? Am I not allowed to carry someone else's burden? For the poor widow for sure needed those two pennies and yet she has thrown them into the purse. For this, according to Jesus, she was considered as having given "everything" over.¹⁵⁹

Referring to the exaggerated nationalist argument, Babos stated:

It is certain that obedience is hard, yet Paul too went where the command called him, to the pagans, without raising patriotic or nationalistic objections against it. Of course this did not mean that he would have denied his duty toward his own kinsmen.¹⁶⁰ (...) Or do we really believe that those whom God sends into foreign mission can save the world or solve the problem of mission to the *regats* if they would stay home instead?¹⁶¹

It is evident from the quotations above that Babos is stressing the point that no natural needs whether the demanding economic, nationalist, and cultural needs of the homeland ("the problem of mission to the *regats*"), or the challenging humanitarian and spiritual needs of faraway places can serve as a foundation on which one can build missions. These would be mere human initiations and grace cannot be founded on them. The refusal of any so-called 'merely human initiations' in doing missions might sound strange to some, yet not for those who are familiar with the theological discourse. This is not a judgment against human initiatives as being bad but is set in the context of the doctrine of the sinfulness of human nature after the Fall. Against the Thomist view where "grace builds on nature,"¹⁶² in Babos' reasoning we have a demonstration of the reformed view of "grace being sovereign and not dependent on nature." Barth reinforced this reformed truth in a paradoxical and different manner, arguing with Brunner as to whether there is any possibility at all left for natural theology since grace works

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p.236.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.234.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, p.236.

¹⁶² It is a well-known dictum of Thomas Aquinas, *Gratia non tollit, sed perficit naturam*. Grace does not expel, but perfects nature.

absolutely above and against nature in his view.¹⁶³ Babos is more in line with Barth and did not accept that, when he states:

Obedience to God always goes against nature, it is never natural, it is always paradoxical. It will efface all human planning and thinking. (...) The needs at home cannot bind anyone at all from obeying God's command. (...)¹⁶⁴

In the understanding of Babos it is not the need which determines where, when and how missions should be carried out and mission is not and cannot be dependent on natural or, more concretely, on political-ethnic, economical or historical conditions; rather it is dependent solely on God who must be obeyed unconditionally. In other words, the Sender determines mission and not the other way around: the human or even spiritual needs of a given mission field do not initiate mission work.

It is also striking how Babos criticized even the churchinized and broad mission concept of Makkai, his own bishop who commissioned him for Manchuria, just as Victor during their debate challenged the wider interpretation of mission in Makkai's work:

Based on a serious evangelical stand, obviously there is no justification and differentiation in principle of any evangelical work, whether it be either home missions, or foreign missions or what we mistakenly call "church work." What is the church for if there could be a separate home mission, then a separate foreign mission and then the "official work?" Or do we measure everything with the measure of a human "ought to be?"¹⁶⁵

Against Makkai, Babos protests, can we separate mission work from the "official work?" Then, "what is church?" Otherwise the definition itself of what really the church is, falls; the ecclesiology is wrong. The essence of church inseparably is also mission. He does this consciously and he also states with that that is schizophrenic dividing what "we mistakenly call church work" from the (very) being of the church. The criticism of the neo-Kantian conceptualization of mission and

¹⁶³ Brunner, in return, maintained that in order for foreign missions to be carried out among people from other religions, it is crucial that there must be some "points of contact" left in nature after the Fall on which ground we can bridge the gap to reach out to these people with the gospel.

¹⁶⁴ Babos, p.235.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

church is evident here. Also when Babos points to the very essence of the church as mission as playing the key ontological role in its foundation. This suggests that mission belongs to the *ad esse*, to the very being, rather than just to the *ad bene esse*, to the mere well being of the church:

Every work has a special condition and this is God's commission to us. Every work carries only the significant mark of special differentiation, but in no way can one be circumvented to the detriment of another; whether we prioritize them in time or in space. Each one has the same task, each one has the same compulsion and each one should be carried out in the same spirit. If a congregation, or *if the church loses this foundation of its own being, this evangelical foundation,*¹⁶⁶*then that church is not a church anymore in the evangelical sense of the word.* This is one side of the coin. (Italics, LH)¹⁶⁷

We have here a non-negotiable statement referring to the heart of the matter: according to Babos, the church which is not a missional church cannot be regarded as a church, and consequently, I might add, there is no justification for any other type of ecclesiology which does not choose this fundamental starting point. Then he turns to the *spirituality* required for undertaking missions:

¹⁶⁶ At this point, and in order to emphasize the significance of the emphasis laid on the *evangelical* character of the TRC in the language of Babos, I quote here the remarks of Dr. Ábrahám Kovács, who tried to clarify the Hungarian connotation of the word 'evangelical' in terms of the Hungarian Reformed Church's self-definition and identity. I am quoting his explanation in length:

"The term Evangelical when translated from Hungarian usage of the German word *evangelisch* into English can mean either Evangelical or Lutheran depending on the usage. This is often used interchangeable in the primary sources and can be very misleading if not applied properly. Besides this, Evangelical is also translated from Hungarian word, *evangéliumi*. The best way to understand its usage if we consider the official name of the Hungarian Reformed churches was 'Reformed according the Gospels Helvetian Church of Hungary.' [*A Magyarországi, Evangélium szerint reformált Helvét Egyház*]. Then from this one might have rendered the official title of the contemporary church as Reformed Evangelical Church of Hungary." See in: Ábrahám Kovács, *A Budapesti Evangéliumi Református Németajkú Leányegyház eredete és története 1858 – 1869* (*The History of the German Speaking Reformed Affiliated Church of Budapest 1858 – 1869*). Debrecen: 2004, see the footnote on p.111. Thus could Babos refer with weight to the Evangelical character of the TRC as its identity mark expressed even in its historical name.

¹⁶⁷ Babos, p.235.

Let us now see the other side of the coin. (...) The missionary spirit has as its own characteristic that it can see from a larger perspective; so, when in a glimpse, God's world-plan for her or him becomes obvious, then she/he will not just see the far-away tasks and God's plan in this world, but he/she will also see more intensively the task which stands before him/her at home.¹⁶⁸

As a result, the false dilemma of home mission first versus foreign missions can be solved thus:

Nobody ever said yet that home mission is not needed because we want to do foreign missions. Only if someone is still living under the law, can the closest ones, the neighbors, be allowed to starve under the pretext of "korban." Let us be at peace: those who will give to foreign missions, will give with a far more zealous spirit to home mission causes as well. Or do we wish to rule with spiritual "terrorism" over them in whom the Holy Spirit works?¹⁶⁹

Then he gives his last conclusion which amounts to a sharp criticism of the theological irresponsibility and prejudice of his contemporaries':

It is a cardinal mistake of those who criticize foreign missions that usually they speak with lofty phrases, without ever being involved in or studying missions, and usually they appeal to the consciences of others'.¹⁷⁰

Some might think that Babos is being overly critical here of those who appeal to the consciences of others, while themselves despising initiatives taken for foreign missions. But if the clergy are interpreted as being representative of the whole church, then such an appeal could be taken seriously. So they not only could speak, but were bound to speak in the name of others and could feel free to appeal to the consciences of others. Such an understanding was also due to the neo-Kantian conviction prevailing in the Transylvanian mindset that the representatives of the church play the role of the educators of the masses as well.

Similarly, the concept of Makkai on education bears the marks of that Enlightenment illusion which is perpetuated by the rationalist, Kantian and neo-Kantian

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, pp.235-236.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p.236.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*.

philosophical tradition that humanity can be educated and with education can be rectified and perfected.¹⁷¹

It is interesting how Babos described the situation of the early 1930s. He suggested that only a few ministers and no more than a hundred lay people will do home mission work and also offer donations to both home and foreign mission causes. To those who criticized foreign mission as diverting monies away from home mission, Babos answered as follows:

The critics of foreign mission should only give to home mission as much as those people who are zealous for foreign mission are giving to home mission; and the critics of foreign missions should be zealous for home mission as much as those people burning for foreign mission are zealous for home mission – then there would be available a huge amount of money at the disposal of home mission. Home mission would not be *just a fashion and a work ordered* [i.e., from high church leadership] *in the church*. (Italics, LH.)¹⁷²

Babos was evidently referring here to the concept of Bishop Makkai, whose idea of making mission an ordered activity from above was criticized by Kecskeméthy and even by Imre, though he was a friend and companion of Makkai and came from the same *Vécsi Szövetség* which was considered by Kecskeméthy a counter-movement to the CE *Szövetség*.

We could see how lots of false questions are burdened with not only a false starting point and as a result, the outcome from these false premises could be demonstrated, and is false and non-evangelical too; it is false and not appropriate to the evangelical resolution of the problem which arose between home and foreign mission as an apparent choice asked from someone; but it even can force some people to take a false personal stand and just opposite to what the gospel requires. (...) Our lives have to be changed that in both home and foreign mission work we might be able to obey God till death. Up till then this problem will always persist there and *will be there to our judgement*. [Italics, LH.]¹⁷³

Babos regards the objections raised against doing missions biblically in the church of being mistakenly formulated and logically inconsistent for any serious

¹⁷¹ Veress, p.162.

¹⁷² Babos, pp.236-237.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, p.237.

theological position and, as he remarks, the resulting answers are, and had to be, both “false and non-evangelical too.” Moreover, Babos called the tenor of their whole approach “not appropriate to the evangelical resolution of the problem.” In my opinion that is a significant theological *caveat* which could have served as *normative* if taken seriously. What was at stake for him and what concerned him was that these non-evangelical quasi-solutions could result in a wrong decision by some to do “just the opposite to what the gospel requires,” and we can add, in the plain belief that they were doing the right thing; and – *horribile dictu* – they would do so in the name of, and as representatives of, *the* true reformed church.

At the end of his exposition of the matter, regarding the “regát-misszió,” Babos has a suggestion to offer:

The question regarding regat-mission is this: how can we supply pastoral care to them? (...) But when we consider that most of these souls are far away from the gospel and Christianity then our question acquires a unique qualification: how can we gain these souls for the gospel? How can I draw their attention to obey God? Then we have arrived again to mission. Thus can a “third mission” be justified. The picture of the regat-mission is a mirror to us and points back to the home situation again. Thus we arrive at the same conclusion as with the cause of foreign mission. We have to become something else, not the church.¹⁷⁴

“We have to become something else, not just the church.” This is pivotal to a Calvinistic understanding of man's most important duty as stated right at the beginning of his *Institutes*, where the great Reformer emphasizes that knowing the self through self-examination in the light of the Word is equally important and should go hand in hand with knowing God. Babos demands the same self-examination (“the regat-mission is a mirror to us and points back to the home situation”) that *Kis Tükör* repeatedly called for, and takes the whole question as a matter of spirituality and right knowledge of God. Thus, and only thus could he disclose the weakness of the counter arguments:

We have to get a different spirit(uality). Whatever issue is in question, it is the question of spirituality, whether there or at home. Those who take a stand against foreign mission with the slogan: “first at home;” to them I can say with similar argumentation that it is pointless to go to the regat, because the problem is back at

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p.238.

home. I could press the argumentation of the critics of foreign mission to the very absurd point and say: why am I going to preach the word to others, when there is still a great amount of unbelief in my family; or, why should I preach to others, if I myself am not willing to obey it? The regat mission becomes also a personal question because every mission is the question of the harvesters always. For the regat mission is the same; it needs first not money, but humans with spirit.¹⁷⁵

But what were the deeper causes of resistance against the promotion of missions which challenged Babos to create such an ample theological study and developing so many arguments in favor of it? One reason was the tension between the official church and the evangelicals of the mission movement, mostly linked with the CE Union,¹⁷⁶ as we will see below.

As early as in 1925 the *Evangéliumi Munkások Erdélyi Szövetsége* (EMESz) (the 'Transylvanian Association of Evangelical Workers')¹⁷⁷ sent an official letter to

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ On the evangelization strategy of CE and EMESz, see more in *Kis Tükör*, examples below:

John Mott's slogan was echoed in the call of the CE Union:

"For the evangelization of Transylvania in this generation!" see the many calls for prayer and concentrated prayer weeks for the evangelization of Transylvania and especially at the **November 2nd, 1930 CE conference in Marosvásárhely**, as we read in *Kis Tükör* Vol. 20, Nr. 46 (November 15, 1930): pp.181-183:

'Az Ige és Lélek fegyvereivel való harcra hívta föl a jelenlevőket „Erdély evangélizálásáért ebben a nemzedékben!”'

On the EMESz:

In *Kis Tükör* Vol. 20, Nr. 19 (May 10, 1930): p.73, there is an important article describing the history of EMESz, penned by Alfa-Tau:

'Erdély Evangélizálásáért' ('For the Evangelization of Transylvania')

"This year, on the day of Saint István [or Stephen, the first Hungarian King's day, August 20th] will be the 12th year since those who became convinced about the will of God for the Evangelization of Transylvania and felt vividly their own responsibility in this matter, founded with Christian brotherly cooperation the Transylvanian Association of Evangelical Workers (EMESz) [so it took place in 1918, the year of the annexation of Transylvania to Romania!]. They thus established the organization whose designation across Transylvania is the spread of the gospel and the promotion of new life in Christ. To this end they offered their voluntary and free service in each local denomination of Christ's church, which would welcome this supporting ministry in their spiritual work."

The editor afterwards also complained that the greatest need is for a permanent traveling secretary.

¹⁷⁷ For more research see collected data on the EMESz in Zoltán Szász, *op. cit.*, on pp.52-54. We give here his summary in Hungarian on how the EMESz was in the beginning positively received by the church, and especially by Vásárhelyi, who later on, as bishop, started to

criticize them. Then, during Communism, he vehemently collaborated with the Communist authorities to completely annihilate them. (As we already saw above, Imre also complained that Vásárhelyi, when bishop, never really liked any mission work, although he spoke differently in public about the church's mission work. But during the Communist regime he publicly considered that God judged the mission work led by Imre. It is no wonder that the same Vásárhelyi was able to preach at the time of Stalin's death, applying Christ's name from the book of Revelation to the dictator, and calling him unashamedly that "shining Morning Star.") However, in the early 1920s he considered a partnership level of collaboration between the official church and the EMESZ, and correspondingly with CE, as we see cited below:

"1924-ben a Keleti Újság című lap szenzációként tárgyalta, hogy a református egyház vezetősége a jóváhagyott alapszabályokkal rendelkező EMESZ-t protestáns népszövetséggé óhajtja kifejleszteni és a cél érdekében meginduló szervezkedés vezetésével Vásárhelyi János kolozsvári esperest bízta meg. Vásárhelyi János a Református Szemle oldalain válaszolja meg a felröppent hírt, és három pontban csoportosítja a felmerülő kérdésekre a választ. 1. Az EMESZ célja az alapszabályának 3 és 5 §-a szerint, hogy közös munkára szervezze azokat a lelkeket, akik feltétlen meggyőződéssel vallják, hogy úgy az egyéni, mint a közélet valóságainak gyógyítására egyetlen hatalom a Jézus Krisztus evangéliuma. Az EMESZ munkásokat akar nevelni és adni az anyaszentegyház, népünk, az Isten országa javára. E cél érdekében az EMESZ alapszabályának 5.§-a szerint előírja az ifjak és felnőttek számára bibliamagyarázó, evangelizáló, hitmélyítő összejövetelek megtartását. Évenként egy vagy több evangelizáló, hitmélyítő tanfolyamot rendez a szövetség székhelyén vagy vidéken, szövetségi lapot ad ki, állandó levelezésben áll tagjaival, a Bibliát és vallásos iratokat terjeszti. Ezeket a célokat és feladatokat Vásárhelyi János szükségesnek és áldásosnak tartja. 2. Arra a kérdésre, hogy milyen szerepre vállalkozott az EMESZ-el kapcsolatban, azt válaszolja, hogy az egyház és különösen a lekipásztorok azt illetően, hogy támogathatják-e az EMESZ-t, határozott igennel felel. Hozzáteszi azonban, hogy az EMESZ az egyház részéről csak akkor számíthat támogatásra, ha előbb odaadó munkássággal tesz bizonyosságot arról, hogy munkásságával nem követ egyházellenes célokat, ha teljes bizalommal részt vesz az egyes gyülekezetek hitépítő munkájában. Erre nézve az EMESZ két évvel ezelőtt (1922) azzal felelt, hogy feladatok kijelölését kérte s a gyülekezeti munkában való odaadó részvételre elkötelezte magát. A kolozsvári egyházközség felkérte és elfogadta az EMESZ tagjainak a közreműködését a vasárnapi iskola, szegények gondozása, iratterjesztés, betegek látogatása és más pasztorális tevékenységekben. Itt jegyzi meg Vásárhelyi János, hogy eddigi tapasztalatai alapján meggyőződött arról, hogy az EMESZ készségesen és önzetlenül kíván részt venni az anyaszentegyház munkájában. Végül a 3.-ik pontban Vásárhelyi arról beszél, hogy a püspök (Nagy Károly) az egyház közvetlen felügyelete alatt álló és jóváhagyásával működő, egyházi egyesületeket feloszlatta, mert lehetetlennek ítélte, hogy ezek az egyesületek egyidejűleg állami, politikai ellenőrzés alá essenek. Ez a körülmény nem zárja ki, hogy az egyházon kívülálló, államilag előírt formák között létesült társadalmi egyesülések fel ne ajánlhassák támogató munkájukat az egyház javára és azt az egyház el ne fogadhatta mindaddig, amíg a támogatás jóhiszeműségében és áldásosságában kételkedni oka nincs. Ezért ha az EMESZ ezt a támogatást az egyháznak, lelki és anyagi érdekeinek önzetlen szolgálatával felajánlja, semmi oka sincs az egyháznak visszautasítani ezt a szolgálatot, sőt az EMESZ-t ebben az irányban támogatni kötelesség is."

the Kolozsvár reformed congregation's Kirk-session, in the hope that their proposal would be forwarded higher. As the time came for CE to do something for promoting foreign missions, they asked if the donations for this goal could be channeled through the church's accounting office. It is clear that the motion was tackled only when in 1926 Sándor Makkai became the new bishop after Bishop Károly Nagy's death. That explains why Makkai could give more authority in promoting the churchinized home mission strategy of his former colleagues and friends from the *Vécsi Szövetség* ('*Vécsi Association*'), especially Lajos Imre. But it was only in 1928, when at a conference organized for the theological students in the Seminary, that Kecskeméthy gave a public lecture on the essential task of the church in undertaking foreign missions. Unfortunately the atmosphere still was not much in favor of this initiative. The reason for this is that before Kecskeméthy's lecture, another lecture was given on the evaluation of the work of CE and of EMESz in which Dr. Géza Nagy both praised and criticized the CE movement.¹⁷⁸ His main stated objection to CE was its allegedly 'Independist' and not Calvinist identity which, if true, automatically pitted CE against the institutional 'Calvinist' tradition of the TRC. In fact, this was an unwarranted allegation, based solely on the denominational commitment of the founder of the CE movement world wide. Yet, the discussion following Nagy's lecture prompted future-ministers and those already ministers and professors present there to distance themselves from the movement. Sadly, prejudice prevailed again over sober arguments; in spite of this, the next day Kecskeméthy tried to promote the cause of missions in a second lecture.

If we look to what Nagy wrote after he criticized CE, it is evident that every word is from the constellation of the neo-Kantian 'ought to be,' a kind of legalistic program, like "this and that has to be done" in order to improve and reform the church. But there was no guarantee that this would ever inform the practice and the reality of church life:

This is why we must turn our attention, beyond the work of the Christian Union [CE], to another and mightier work: *toward a serious, soul saving and soul keeping and sanctifying churchinized home mission work.*(*italics by the author*) (...) The rank

¹⁷⁸ Géza Nagy, 'Az Evangéliumi Munkások és az egyház' (The Evangelical Workers and the Church) *Református Szemle*, (October 30, 1928): pp.710-715.

of ministers *ought to* be refreshed with members more rooted and more lively believing. A healthy common sense and spirit *has to be* created among them. The youth under education *should love* the Bible and *ought to live with it*, as with precious spiritual food. The elders *must* learn at last and practice their *holy* duties too. The people's, the church-members' vast crowd *must* be encapsulated in an educational church discipline, inspired by love and wisdom. These are the most urgent tasks now if we want that the church not only in capite, but in membris too should be reformed. If in this blessed ministry the Christian Union will give us a helping hand, then we will always be able to find with them the way of co-operation (emphasis on the many "must" and "ought to be's," LH).¹⁷⁹

This was indeed a friendly gesture with the best intentions. But how could there be any practical cooperation without tensions? Although Nagy was sincere and earnest in his program to reform the church, his theological starting point was completely different and contrary to the spirit of Reformation. It is noticeable that Nagy implies that we can expect the church to be reformed after the accomplishment of the listed "most urgent tasks," as if the sovereign work of grace is conditional upon completed moral actions or "holy duties." But such moral actions in the church are certainly not the cause but the result of that grace. In contrast to the above neo-Kantian "must" and "ought to be" and "duty-morality," CE proclaimed a ministry of love toward the Saviour in voluntary and free dedication as a natural result of the experience of sheer grace, not because of the need to fulfill any legalistically perceived gospel-law. Such a theological position avoided both the danger of Anti-nomianism on one side and the temptation of Neo-nomianism on the other. Many CE movement members and the theologically minded people gathered under the Transylvanian Association of Evangelical

¹⁷⁹ In Hungarian it reads:

"Ezért kell, a Keresztyén Szövetség munkássága mellett egy másik hatalmasabb munka felé fordítanunk a figyelmünket: a *komoly, lelkeket mentő, lelkeket megtartó és megszentelő egyházi belmissziói munka felé*. (...) A papságot fel kell frissíteni alaposabb és elevebb hitű tagokkal, egészséges közszellemet kell benne teremteni, a tanuló ifjúság szeresse meg a Bibliát és éljen vele, mint drága lelki táplálékkal, a presbyterek tanulják meg és gyakorolják végre *szent* kötelességeiket is, a nép, az egyháztagok egyetemét pedig fogja át a szeretettől és bölcsességtől sugallt komoly, nevelői egyházfegyelem. Ezek a legsürgösebb teendők most, ha azt akarjuk, hogy az egyház nemcsak in capite, hanem in membris is reformáltassék. Ha ebben az áldott munkában a Keresztyén Szövetség segítő kezét nyújt nekünk, akkor mindig meg fogjuk vele találni az együttműködés útját."

Workers (EMESz) and resolved to reject the view that the gospel can either replace God's Law with an empty notion of grace, ('cheap grace', as Bonhoeffer coined it) or make it into a 'New Law' for believers. Thus instead of creating any Neo-nomianist order they rejected all forms of Neo-nomianism and emphasized the worth of a free and grateful service in God's Kingdom, as the Heidelberg Catechism had suggested so boldly (cf. the Third Part of the Catechism). Kecskeméthy is plain here:

It belongs to the essence of love that it springs not from outside compulsion, but it springs out of a free and inner will. That love which is fed by an interest or by a sense of duty is not real love. The mind can bow before a Kantian categoricus imperativus, but love never. A voluntary free love can be enflamed only by [another, heavenly] Love.¹⁸⁰

Let us turn now to the lecture given by Kecskeméthy the next day. After giving a thorough analysis of the sad church situation and revealing the reasons for the lack of any significant participation in world mission on behalf of the Hungarian reformed churches since the Reformation, Kecskeméthy offered a practical solution to the crisis:

As a solution he [Kecskeméthy] brings up a motion worded in the form of a proposed Resolution which declares the need for foreign missions and nominates it as the first task of the church. Let us participate in the mission to the Turan¹⁸¹ peoples.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Alfa-Tau 'Isten üdvakarata' (God's Will for Salvation) *Kis Tükör* Vol. 20, Nr. 45 (1930): pp.177-178.

¹⁸¹ The Turan peoples were Asians considered to be related to the Hungarians.

¹⁸² We do not have the space here to survey this topic. Moreover, Kool has already done so, as we read on pp.289-294; 373-374; 528-529. See also the survey of Zoltán Szász, pp. 40-44.

And because the local [Koložsvár] CE has already made progress¹⁸³ toward this aim,¹⁸⁴ let us join ourselves to [the Turan mission initiative of] this movement.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ See copies of the related documents from the Archives of the Transylvanian Church District in Koložsvár, in the Appendices and extracts below. The parts significant to our discussion have been translated and highlighted in bold:

DOCUMENT NR. 1.

The Superintendent of the Koložsvár Presbytery

To the Council of Executive Directors of the Transylvanian Reformed District

Szám: 852–925 esp.

Méltóságos Igazgatótanács!

Az Evangéliumi Munkások Erdélyi Szövetségének a koložsvári református egyházközséghez benyújtott kérését, miután az részben Egyházkerületünket is érinti, tisztelettel felterjesztem. **(At the Request of the *Transylvanian Association of Evangelical Workers* submitted to the Koložsvár Reformed Congregation because it concerns our whole Church District, I submit the following with respect.)**

Koložsvár, 1925 November 23

Vásárhelyi János

Esperes (Superintendent [and local minister of the Koložsvár Congregation]).

DOCUMENT NR. 2.

The Council of Executive Directors of the Transylvanian Reformed District

To the Home Missions Committee

L.Cs.B. 1926.I.20.

10807

Sz: 852–925

Az EMESz kérése a turáni misszió segítése tárgyában. (the Request of the *Transylvanian Covenant of Evangelical Workers* concerning the support of the Turan [peoples' foreign] mission)

Dr. Imre Lajos belmissziói előadó úrnak (attention, Dr. Lajos Imre, Home Missions Committee Lecturer)

Szíves véleményének közlése végett megküldjük az EMESz.-nek a koložsvári e.m. esperese által ide felterjesztett kérését (To ascertain your kind opinion on the matter, we send you the Request of the *Transylvanian Covenant of Evangelical Workers* forwarded to us by the Superintendent of Koložsvár Presbytery).

Koložsvár, 1926.I.19.

Signed: (?? Indecipherable)

¹⁸⁴ See copies of the related documents from the Archives of the Transylvanian Church District in Koložsvár, in the Appendices and extracts below. The parts significant to our discussion have been translated and highlighted in bold:

DOCUMENT NR. 3.

Minutes of the Home Missions Committee

KIVONAT

(EXTRACT OF THE MINUTES from the assembly of THE HOME MISSION COMMITTEE of the Transylvanian Church District – the 18th of April, 1928)

Az erdélyi református egyházkerület belmisszió bizottsága 1926 április 18.-án a Theológia tanácstermében tartott gyűlésének jegyzőkönyvéből.

Jelen vannak: dr. Makkai Sándor, püspök elnöklete alatt Hegyi András, dr. Jancsó Ödön, Vásárhelyi János, Tőkés József, Ferenczy Gábor, Juhász Albert, dr. Gönczy Lajos, Farkas Jenő, Nagy Lajos, dr. Kristóf György, Maksay Albert és dr. Imre Lajos belmisszió előadó, ki a jegyzőkönyvet is vezeti.

1. Elnöklő püspök aa. megnyitja a bizottság gyűlését, kifejtve annak a munkának az egész egyház jövőjére való fontosságát (The chairing bishop, [our] Brother, opens the session of the Committee, expounding the importance of this work for the whole future of the church), melyet a bizottság van hivatva irányítani (and which work this Committee is appointed to direct). Megállapítja, hogy a gyűlés szabályszerűen hivatott össze, üdvözli a megjelent tagokat és vendégeket s a gyűlést megnyitja

Tudomásul szolgál

7. Előadó bemutatja az Evangéliumi Munkások Erdélyi Szövetségének az Iazgatótanács 1706–1926 sz. alatt a bizottsághoz letett iratát (The Lecturer presents the motion of the Transylvanian Covenant of Evangelical Workers, forwarded by the Council of Directors under Nr. 1706-1926 to this Committee,) melyben azt kéri, hogy a külmissziói célokra leendő adakozások az egyházi pénztárakon átvezetve az egyházi hatóságok által juttassanak rendeltetési helyükre (requesting that any future donations earmarked for foreign missions might be channeled through the church's accounting office and might be sent to their designee through the official leadership of the church). Ezzel kapcsolatban előadó felhívja a bizottság figyelmét arra, hogy a külmissziói érdeklődés egyházunkban teljesen ki van halva és, hogy minden evangéliumi egyháznak pedig ez nagyon fontos tevékenysége. (Related to this, the Lecturer [of the Committee, Dr. Imre], also draws the attention of the Committee to the fact that interest in foreign missions has completely died out in our church and that this is a very important activity of every [other] evangelical church).

Bizottság az előadó javaslatát elfogadva (The Committee accepts the proposal of the Lecturer) kimondja, hogy (and calls for):

1. Felhívja az összes vasárnapi iskolákat, bibliaköröket, hogy a külmisszió kérdéseiről szóló megbeszéléseket vagy előadásokat vegyenek fel programjukba, erre a célra igyekezzenek a gyermekek érdeklődését és áldozatkészségét megnyerni. A legközelebbi lelkészi konferencián a külmisszió kérdését egy megbeszélés vagy előadás tárgyául kitűzni. (The attention of every Sunday school and Bible-study group to include in their program, discussions and lectures the topic of foreign missions. They also should endeavor to gain the interest, the attention, and the sacrificial intention of the children for this goal. At the next ministers' conference, the question of foreign missions should be the focus of a discussed theme or lecture.)

2. Felterjesztést intézni az Igazgatótanácsához, kérve, hogy döntsön afelett, hogy melyik külmissziói intézményt vagy munkát ajánlja támogatásra s hívja fel a lelkészeket, hogy a külmisszió kérdésének fontosságáról évente legalább egyszer emlékezzenek meg az ighirdetésben éspedig a pünkösdi ünnepek alkalmával. (A Motion has to be put before the Council of the Executive Directors [of the District], requesting a decision concerning which foreign mission institute or work they recommend as worthy of support. Also, the ministers

The report concluded by stating that, “the Proposed Motion, to be discussed and accepted as a Resolution, stands before the assembly of the theological

should remember at least once annually in their preaching the importance of foreign missions, e.g., at the time of celebrating Pentecost.)

10. Több tárgy nem lévén, elnök megköszöni a bizottság tagjai érdeklődését és a gyűlést bezárja.

Tudomásul szolgál.

Dr. Makkai Sándor s.k.

Dr. Imre Lajos s.k.

püspök, elnök(Bishop, Chairman)

előadó(Lecturer), jegyző

A Kivonat hitelélül.

Kolozsvár, 1926, május 14.

Dr. Imre

¹⁸⁵ See in *Református Szemle* (February 17, 1928): pp.104-105. See Kecskeméthy's comments on this in *Kis Tükör* Vol. 18, Nr. 9 (March 3, 1928): pp.33-34. See also the comments of Dr. Mihály Mezey, minister of Magyarlápós in the following issue with the title 'Képzelet és valóság' (Reality and Imagination) in *Kis Tükör* Vol. 18, Nr. 10 (1928): pp.37-38.

conference.”¹⁸⁶ What was the fate of this Motion which paralleled that forwarded by EMESz earlier?¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ For further research in the matter see Zoltán Szász, pp. 54-55. We are giving a full quote below from Szász, as he summarized the debate's main points, as it reads in Hungarian:

“Az erdélyi református egyház földjén a CE érdemeivel már a történelemé, mert az evangéliumi munkát már az egyház végzi, - véli előadása zárógondolatában Nagy Géza.

Dr. Kecskeméthy István nem késik a megválaszolással. A Kis Tükör márciusi 3-i számában *A hevesebb szövetségesekhez* című cikkében válaszol a teológus konferencián elhangzott előadásra. Nem Nagy Gézának címezi a cikket, hanem a szövetségi tagoknak. Mindjárt a cikk elején megjegyzi, hogy a hevesebb szövetségesek kivált a fiatalabbak nagyon rossz néven vették a támadást a CE ellen és nagyon elégedetlenek voltak a vezetőség szóltan türelmével ezért harcias választ sürgetnek. Nagyon kéri a heves szövetségeseket, hogy ne szomorítsa őket a támadás főképp pedig fegyverbe ne szólítson senkit. Először is mert a kellő helyen a kellő felelet megadatott rá. Másodszor mert szerintem nem is akaratos támadás volt csak őszinte aggodalma őszinte feltárása a CE-vel szemben. Sokszor akinek aggodalma van a CE-vel szemben abból lelkesebb munkás válhat, mint abból akinek még aggodalma sincs, ezért a CE nem legyőzni, hanem meggyőzni akarja ellenfeleit. Ezután megismétli Kecskeméthy a CE-nek azt a régi megállapítását, hogy munkáját sikeresnek, sőt egyáltalán valamit érőnek csak úgy tudja elképzelni, ha önállóságát és függetlenségét fenntartja. Tudniillik a CE az egyházának, ki-ki a saját felekezetének hű és alázatos: de a szövetséget nem szoríthatja felekezeti korlátok közé. Ezért van szükség önállóságra és ezért olyan hajlékony és finom a szeretet tüzében szinte felolvadó szervezet. A lehetőség szerint pakolás nélkül való só, kovász és gyertya akarunk lenni gyülekezetünkben. De úgy, hogyha a kerítésen túl is cseppen valami az se ártson. Minden földi érdek nélkül való a célunk, melyért minden földi korlátra való tekintet nélkül küzdünk. Hogy az evangélium újjászülő ereje minden faj és felekezet szívébe eljusson, s így ez a korhadt és gonosz világ a Krisztusban megújíttassék. Ki meri mondani, hogy ez nem református cél? Aki ezt a célunkat nem osztja és ebben a munkában nem vesz részt az az ő dolga, de kijelentjük, hogy ez még nem jogosítja fel őt arra, hogy a mi becsületes szándékainkat meggyanúsítsa és minket minden lépten-nyomon leigazoltasson. Bármily divatban vannak is mostanság a leigazoltatások. Ellenben aki osztja és érte munkálni kész, az ne felejtse, hogy csendességünkben van a mi erősségünk. A mi királyunk töviskoronát visel.

Dr. Mezey Mihály Magyarláposi CE Szövetséges lelkész sem késlekedett tollat ragadni a válaszadásra. Válaszát a Kis Tükör lapjain *Képzelet és valóság* címmel tárta az olvasóközönség elé. Leginkább Nagy Gézának azt a mondatát kifogásolja, hogy az erdélyi református egyház földjén a CE érdemeivel már a történelemé, mert az evangéliumi munkát már az egyház végzi. Válaszában kihangsúlyozza, hogy a CE Isten akaratának alázatos munkása és nem tanokat vagy tudományt hirdet és nem külső megszervezését tekinti feladatának, de példaadással segíti a kegyelem után áhító szíveket az újjászületésre, sokszor éppen akkor, amikor az egyház csak “tanít” és adminisztrál. Mezey szerint a CE Szövetség tagjai az üdvösséget a legközvetlenebb módon a kálvini egyházban élhetik meg. Ez az egyház mindenki számára megszentelt drága értéket jelent, de az Egyház maga, és nem a keretein elhelyezkedett egyének vagy csoportok sajátlagos törekvései.”

¹⁸⁷ For further research this can be compared with the evaluations of the importance of the Reformed High Week as can be seen in the following issues of *Kis Tükör*:

Kecskeméthy delayed in making the resulting reaction public and it is certain he was reluctant to do so for a long time; I can find no written explanation for this delay. I wonder whether he was ashamed of how the decision placed the church in a bad light. The text of the motion was published as a **Proposed Resolution on Foreign Missions** and the whole text is in the *Kis Tükör* of August 23, 1930 under the title: *‘Egy elkésett közlemény’* (A Belated Announcement) which was originally read at the Kolozsvár Conference of Theologians, February 1-5, 1928.¹⁸⁸ Kecskeméthy added to the Proposed Resolutions his short remark: “We just add to this that of course the Kolozsvár conference did not accept this Proposal of Resolution. Nevertheless, it will sometime!”¹⁸⁹

On the Református Nagyhét (Reformed High Week)

In *Kis Tükör* Vol. 20, nr. 35 (1930), there is an official Invitation for the *Református Nagyhét*, the Reformed High Week Conference, in Marosvásárhely between September 9-14, 1930.

In *Kis Tükör* Vol. 20, Nr. 38, (September 20, 1930), we read in the editorial article signed by: Absens *‘A református nagyhét’* (The Reformed High Week) an appraisal of Imre’s lecture on home missions. Cf. Cited in chapter Five.

Imre’s lecture was published in *Református Szemle* (September 20, 1930): pp.391-393 and in *Református Szemle* (September 30, 1930): on pp.405-408, under the title *‘Az egyház és a misszió’* (The Church and Mission).

In *Kis Tükör* Vol 20, Nr. 39 (1930): p.155. we read: (in: *‘Marosvásárhelyi “Nagyhét”*):

“István Debreczeni said in his lecture that Dr. Aladár Szabó is the father of Hungarian Home Mission. There is still something else that we want to clarify. The lectures emphasized that *home mission can happen only through the official church*. It is “free willed,” “not compulsory,” and “only official.” We accept all these too. We can accept, even with regard to CE, that any “self-[centered]-home missionaries” are to be rejected, except that this does not accord with another wish expressed there for having more lay workers in mission. But are CE not lay workers? What would they have said if they realized that in hosting and serving for free the many [thousands] participants at the conference, the CE members were the first and most zealous? (...) Only Rev. József Tóthfalussy can tell us what would have happened if he simply would have “excommunicated” the CE members, [because accused of being selfish inner-looking] “self-missionaries” [of the church], and sent them away from the conference! It might have been useful to clarify this.”

¹⁸⁸ Kecskeméthy’s Proposed Resolutions are published after his lecture *“Megérett-e egyházunk a külmisszióra?”*, see above.

¹⁸⁹ As a historical curiosity and for evidence of an early promoting of the foreign mission cause in *Kis Tükör* see, for example: Béla Bedő, *‘Mit teszek a külmisszióért?’* (What Do I Do for Foreign Missions) *Kis Tükör* Vol. 19, Nr. 39(1929): pp.170-171, Bedő Béla felhívása a külmisszióra nézve. *Kis Tükör* Vol. 19, Nr. 44 (1929): p.191.,: Dr. K. Tompa Arthur: *‘Szövetségünk figyelmébe!’* Közli, hogy mit tett a kolozsvári CE szövetség az elmúlt 12 év alatt...

Kis Tükör Vol. 20, Nr.1 (January 4,1930): p.3: the *Hajnal* and MEKMSz felhívása:

The Debate on Mission in ‘Egyház és misszió’ and the Sending Out of Babos

In the April-September 1933 issues of the monthly Transylvanian periodical *Egyház és misszió* we find an interesting debate on the dilemma as to whether the Hungarians should have a mission mandate in the Balkans among the Turkish people who are Muslims. The April issue contained an editorial with the title, *Is Mission to the Mohammedans for Hungarians*. The editor asserts that mission to Muslims is totally different from that of foreign missions in general, as Muslims are monotheists who strive to spread their faith, just like Christian missionaries. Turkey is one such Muslim nation; it is also a nation ethnically and historically related to Hungarians. So the question naturally arises as to whether the Hungarians have a special duty and responsibility to proclaim Christ to the Turks in the Balkans, being so close to them both geographically and ethnically.

The editor then focuses on the challenging arguments of a well-known Scottish theologian, Dr. J. M. Webster,¹⁹⁰ who had serious doubts as to whether this particular mission was the God-given task of the Hungarian reformed people. His reasoning stirred up a significant debate as he was well known among these same Hungarian reformed people. Moreover, he had spent some years living among Hungarians, so he was considered to be a specialist in Hungarian church affairs. The editorial quotes him at length:

‘Mit tesz a magyar protestantizmus a külmisszióért?’ (What Does Hungarian Protestantism Do For Foreign Missions?)

Lajos Döbrössy in the *Kis Tükör* Vol. 21, Nr. 7, (February 14, 1931): p.26. Taken over from Hajnal.

‘Zsidómisszió’ (On Mission to the Jews), mostly written by the Jewish Dr. Adolf Klein:

Vol. 21, Nr. 15 (April 11, 1931): pp.57-58; ‘Krisztushívő zsidók konferenciája Galacban’:

Vol. 21, Nr. 18 (May 2, 1931): pp.69-70, “Készülj Istened elé, óh Izráel!” A galaci zsidómisszió konferencia lefolyása’

‘Adakozás a misszióra!’ (Offerings for Missions)

Kis Tükör Vol. 21, Nr. 31 (August 1, 1931): pp.123-124: ‘Kinek nem kell a misszióra adakozniuk?’ (Who Ought Not To Give To Missions?)

‘What is mission?’

Kis Tükör Vol. 21, Nr. 31 (August 1, 1931): p.121: ‘Misszió’ (quoting Fraser Donald).

¹⁹⁰ See more on his (and of Dr. D. Fraser’s) direct contribution in sending Babos to Manchuria, in Kool, *op. cit.*, pp.454-455. In the beginning only Kecskeméthy’s circle took their suggestions seriously, cf. the *Kis Tükör* issues from that time; followed later by the Group of Seven and their mentor, Imre.

Of course I know that the Mohammedans are relatively so close to you that it appears almost as a calling, but the mission work to Mohammedans is of such a nature and type, in which and under which task the average Hungarian would soon become downcast. In my opinion it would be more advisable for any Hungarian missionary to go directly to the pagans of Africa or India. (...) I have well grounded reasons for saying this.¹⁹¹

The article concludes with the challenge and the promise that the next issue would present Lajos Döbrössy, a reformed pastor and missionary from Hungary to the Muslims in the Balkans¹⁹² and his opinion on the matter. His arguments are included in issues Nr. 5, 6 and 7.

According to Döbrössy, the Hungarians are called specifically to evangelize the Turkish nation; it was his belief that Hungary had a greater responsibility than other Christian nations to this mission field. Furthermore, he believed that they are called first of all to the Turkish mission before mission among other pagan lands. Döbrössy admitted that he even broke his links with the Liebenzell Mission in 1928 over this issue, although they were prepared to send him to Japan. He decided to work independently and without the support of any foreign mission agency, being convinced that God was leading him in a different path. He preferred a “self-sufficient”¹⁹³ (somewhat like the ‘Three-Self Theory’ emphasized by Roland Allen and John L. Nevius, as cited above) way of relying on God and was happier with a work which required a home agency and Hungarian national leadership: “It is to our shame that, in spite of our four hundred years of mainline church history, we had not enough self-confidence to start and carry out a work in self sufficiency.”¹⁹⁴ Döbrössy is criticizing the weak attitude of the Protestantism in the region as being unable to recognize and assume its missionary task. Of course, Hungary was never one of the European colonial powers and historically was always so poor and permanently devastated by wars carried out by foreign

¹⁹¹ See the full quote in the editorial ‘Való-e a magyarnak mohamedán misszió?’ (Is Mission to the Mohammedans for Hungarians?) *Egyház és Misszió* Vol 2, Nr. 4, (April, 1933).

¹⁹² On the life and work of Lajos Döbrössy, see the detailed description in Kool, on pp.473-488.

¹⁹³ “Önállóan” – ezt a kifejezést többször is használja és hangsúlyozza Döbrössy. (“Self-sufficient” - this term is used several times and is always emphasized by Döbrössy.)

¹⁹⁴ In Hungarian it reads: “Szégyenünk, hogy négy évszázados történelmi egyház létünkre nem volt eddig önbizalom bennünk arra, hogy egy munkát önállóan kezdjünk és folytassunk.”

rulers against its population that it looked nigh impossible for it to initiate and carry out any missionary enterprise overseas.¹⁹⁵

Döbrössy goes on explaining his commitment to a more Hungarian based mission initiative and it was an attractive argument for his Hungarian readers:

I learn a lot from other [non-Hungarian] missionaries. I never stand up with my wisdom when we consider together the challenge of the work. I really give credit to their work. I practice real fellowship with them in front of the Turks. I am in unity with them although they belong to very diverse denominational backgrounds. I can still pray with them and yet maintain my conviction [against relying on them]. I am thoroughly against [the idea] that we Hungarians should make any attempt to rely on foreigners in the mission to the Turks. That was how I could achieve their total appreciation and acceptance of working together on a level of complete partnership. [This happened] Even though in the first months the Germans considered the reality of the Hungarian-Turkish links and [hypothetical] kinship a bare fiction and they were laughing with contempt.¹⁹⁶

While there is enormous dedication reflected in these words, it is questionable if this was a realistic view given the fact that historically the Hungarian Reformed Church was never able to fulfill her missionary calling. Our concern with this attractive motive is whether or not it is simply a subtle expression of Hungarian nationalism masquerading as a biblical pattern. The same can be asked about the Turan mission initiative which occurred earlier; in fact, Döbrössy's ideas could be considered a qualified version of the former.¹⁹⁷ There is an evident optimism behind the scenes in both cases. Pointing to his rationale in carrying out his mission task, Döbrössy declared, "I need to be steadfast in spite of many difficulties because I know that on our experience and on the knowledge that we gain from God *will be built the Hungarian Foreign Mission of which we are laying down just the first*

¹⁹⁵ The idea that mission could only proceed hand in hand with colonization also persisted. But these kinds of excuses ignored the fact that any mission movement usually has a revival behind it as a driving force and central motivation for evangelization and mission, as recorded by church historians. It is beyond the limits of this research to evaluate why this was rejected by the Hungarian theologians and why so many church leaders would at least, ignore it; this must be a topic of research for others.

¹⁹⁶ Döbrössy, op. cit, in: *Egyház és Misszió* vol. 2, nr. 5 (May, 1933); p.1.

¹⁹⁷ See for example the analysis of the question in Kool, p.529.

stones.” [Italics, LH.]¹⁹⁸ Döbrössy fiercely opposed any “joint-venture strategies” with Western mission agencies although these might seem justified given the very difficult situation. It is no accident that he is maligning this practice in the same issue of *Church and Mission* which announced the sending out of the first Transylvanian missionary, Sándor Babos, who was joining the Scottish mission station in Mukden and half of whose salary was to be paid by the Scottish missions agency in Manchuria. Döbrössy argued vehemently:

That we render a few “day laborer” missionaries to the service of foreign missions will not secure us a place for our small Hungarian Reformed Church at the table of the other big sister churches; but only by standing our ground with a self-sufficient, genuine mission enterprise and with new methods standing faithfully on a hard field. (We will always lose confidence in ourselves if we look to our foreign brothers, instead of looking to God and going ahead with our own tasks.)¹⁹⁹

Döbrössy gives many historical examples from church history to prove the point that since the period of the 16th century Reformation, the Hungarian Reformed Church has had a unique historical role in pioneering mission to the Muslim Turks from among the European nations.

The first reference is from as early as 1546 when the Hungarian Protestant preacher Gyula Zsigmond Tordai²⁰⁰ wrote a letter to Melanchthon, followed in 1551 by a letter from Rev János Fehértói²⁰¹ to the famous Swiss reformer, Bullinger who was also the author of the Second Helvetic Confession of Faith. These letters give firm evidence that the proclamation of the Gospel could happen not just in Transylvania but even in the heart of the Ottoman Empire where many Hungarian Protestant preachers were preaching.²⁰² Döbrössy also pointed to the important historical fact that János Ungnad had translated the Scriptures and the

¹⁹⁸ Döbrössy, *op. cit.*

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ “You have to know that under Turkish rule the Gospel is preached freely everywhere. It can be considered God’s strange benevolence that he allowed this conquest by the barbarians. There is the fullest freedom given here which our own kings [at home], if they had the authority, would hinder with weapons.”

²⁰¹ He even expressed his hope that the Turks would very soon accept Christianity!

²⁰² It is a historical fact that at the public theological debates the Turks did not sympathies with the Roman Catholics, considering them idol-worshippers, and could better accept the Protestant way of worshipping in a church which had only white walls.

Protestant Confessions into many Slavic languages of the Balkans, with the hope that this would have a lasting effect on the neighboring Turks as well.²⁰³ In the next issue of *Church and Mission*, he mentioned the strategy that Stanley Jones once called “at the round table” method as being the best way for a Hungarian to present the Gospel. He was strongly critical, lamenting the fact that Hungary's Mária Molnár was considered a German, simply because she worked alongside German missionaries and because she was sent by the Libenzell Mission Institute to Papua New Guinea. He concluded that Hungarian missionaries in other Continents were never accepted as Hungarians for the same reasons. He stated that

it needs decades for our church to realize and fully comprehend that her only *raison de l'etre*, the only and very reason for her being is to concentrate her forces here (*i.e. in this mission to the Balkans, my remarks, LH*), because it is clear that God allowed the Hungarian Reformed Church to be kept safe amidst so many storms in order to bring the proclamation to the East. The field is at our feet, so what do we have to do with an English colony...?²⁰⁴

Döbrössy admitted that his third argument was a subjective and weak one; I consider it rather neither more nor less debatable than the previous other two. He compared the Turkish mentality with that of both the Hungarian and German.²⁰⁵ Döbrössy concluded his article by turning back to the arguments of Dr. Webster. He was outraged by Webster's suggestion that Hungarians would not be steadfast in a mission to Muslims enterprise. He recalled the example of Sándor

²⁰³ There was another advantage for the Hungarians in evangelizing the Turks, according to Döbrössy. If a Turk became a Christian, he would become a Hungarian too, a direct evidence of the fact that even in Döbrössy's time nationality could not be separated from religion. Strangely, Döbrössy hoped that, based on this same ground, one could convince an average Turk that Hungarians and Turks were sister nations and that their differences in religion did not change the fact that they are relatives.

²⁰⁴ See *Egyház és Misszió* Vol. 2, Nr. 6 (June, 1933), where we can read the second part of his article.

²⁰⁵ His conclusion is that the Hungarian soul is more intuitive, like the Turkish, but the German mentality is more alien to them, the Germans being quite rigid, precise and rational people. One rather strong point in his evaluation is the fact that the Hungarian and Turkish language are very similar, thus the structure of the languages bring a very similar way of thinking to both nations, etc. The most interesting part of his argument is where he asserts that the greatest living Turkologists in his days are Hungarians, like Vámbéry and others! Given the advantages from the point of view of language, obviously the Hungarians are the first among the nations.

(Alexander) Kőrösi Csoma (1784-1842), the famous Transylvanian-born missionary. In his youth he attended the Reformed College in Nagyenyed, then went to Tibet and faithfully served in extreme living conditions to produce the first Tibetan Grammar and Dictionary, which was published by the Asiatic Society of Bengal.²⁰⁶ But Babos was commissioned for Manchuria on August 24th, 1934 and so the debate²⁰⁷ was ended; the practical life-situation decided the end of the running debate. Yet the questions raised by Rev. Lajos Döbrössy remained with the Transylvanians. They were unable to achieve a wider-scale mission enterprise in the years leading up to the Second World War and beyond, right up until the Communist take-over which terminated any opportunities for a foreign mission sanctioned by the official church.

Babos concluded his above presented evaluation with a remarkable observation which leads us back to the main problem already discussed, as to whether Transylvanian theologians in their ecclesiology ever tried to formulate and define the nature of the church as being first and foremost mission. Babos himself clearly did so, when he crowned his study with a simple but profound statement, leaving us with a brilliant definition of the church. "Where there is no missionary spirit,

²⁰⁶ See more on his life and activity in Hungarian: in Ervin Baktay, *Kőrösi Csoma Sándor*. Budapest: 1962, 1963; or in Gyula Halász, 'Magyar világtárók,' in: *Ezeréves Magyarország (Hungary of a Thousand Years)*. Budapest: 1940. See also in English: Theodore M. D. Duka, *Life and Works of Alexander Csoma de Kőrös*. London: Trübner's Oriental Series, 1885. Also Csoma Sándor Kőrösi, *The Life and Teachings of Buddha*. Calcutta, India: Susil Gupta Private Ltd.; the same in Hungarian: Csoma Sándor Kőrösi, *Csoma Sándor Buddha élete és tanítása* ford. Bodor András, II. Javított kiadás. Bukarest: Kriterion Könyvkiadó, 1982. Elek Csetri, *Kőrösi Csoma Sándor indulása*. Bukarest: Kriterion Könyvkiadó, 1979. There is a series of articles written by W.W. Hunter with the title 'A Pilgrim Scholar' also on Kőrösi, Csoma Sándor, published in the Allahabad *The Pioneer Mail*, a British Indian journal from the 19th century, that is translated and republished in Hungarian in the above 1982 edition of the translation of Kőrösi, Csoma Sándor's work on Buddha.

²⁰⁷ "He was *officially sent* to Manchuria as a missionary of the Hungarian Reformed Church of Transylvania. *But in practice* it was a circle of foreign mission friends (which consisted not only of individuals but also of groups) led by Dr. Jenő Horváth who carried the work. [Emphasis, LH.]. This number had grown to about 2,038 individuals in 1938 and 323 (of the 783) congregations. Among this number were 193 pastors. [out of almost 700, so the "clergy" was rather poorly represented in a supposedly churchinized mission!, LH] The mission periodical *Egyház és misszió* was read by 2,300 people [compare that with the church membership of almost a million, note, LH].", - states Kool, p.460.

there is no life. For this reason, there is no church without mission.”²⁰⁸ This calls to mind the dictum of Tavaszy, quoted earlier as being revolutionary, that “the Christian Church is a missionary church.” Previously I compared this with other definitions which prevailed worldwide later in the 1960s and 1970s, such as Moltmann's, “Mission does not come from the church; it is from mission and in the light of mission that the church has to be understood;”²⁰⁹ and Newbigin's, “(a) Church which is not a mission is not a Church” (1948)²¹⁰ and, “(t)he fundamental question is whether the church as such is mission.”²¹¹ Finally, I compared all these with the missional church definitions of Bosch, when fully grounding ecclesiology on a missiological basis, emphasizing that missiology is integral to ecclesiology and that mission has an ontological role in constituting the essence of the church:

Its mission (its “being sent”) is not secondary to its being; the church exists in being sent and in building up itself for the sake of its mission (...). Ecclesiology therefore does not precede missiology (...) The question, “Why still mission?” evokes a further question, “Why still church?” (...) Without mission, the church cannot be called catholic.²¹²

Dr. Jenő Horváth had somewhat similar thoughts. In 1948, in an attempt to formulate what mission is, he paraphrased Mt 16:18, thus: “... on this rock, *i.e., on this confession of faith, on [the] mission*, I will build up my church...” (bold, LH)²¹³ Unfortunately, he never developed this idea further, although this definition of missions points to a possible definition of the church too, where the Church is not the founder and bearer of mission, but rather mission is the foundation of the church and so mission bears the church. This can be compared with the way in which Bosch summarized the realization of the impact of missiology on the formulation of ecclesiology:

²⁰⁸ Babos, p. 239.

²⁰⁹ Moltmann, p.10.

²¹⁰ Newbigin, *The Reunion of the Church*, p.11.

²¹¹ Newbigin, *Lesslie One Body, One Gospel, One World*, p.18.

²¹² Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, pp.368-389.

²¹³ Horváth, Jenő *A belmisszió lényege, A belmisszió református teológiai alapvetése* (The Essence of Home Missions, The Reformed Theological Foundation of Home Missions). Kolozsvár: Kiadta az Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület, 1948, p. i.

Gradually, however, a fundamental shift emerged in the perception of the relationship between church and mission, in both Catholicism and Protestantism, so much so that Moltmann (1977:7)²¹⁴ can say, “Today one of the strongest impulses towards the renewal of the theological concept of the church comes from the theology of mission.”²¹⁵

Dr. Dániel Borbáth pointed to the danger of regarding Jesus as the embodiment of an ideal instead of treating Him as a person:

Not an idea, a notion or conception appeared in Jesus, not an impersonal divine power, but we face a person in Him. “Dei loquentis persona.” (Calvin, *The Institutes* I. 7:4.) God Himself, the only God’s Personality, Self and Essence is speaking.²¹⁶

Thus, in accordance with Borbáth, the spiritual food of the church cannot consist just of neo-Kantian moral ideas seen compressed in an ideal figure of Jesus, but in a real Son of God, Jesus, and in his good news (the gospel, the Jesus-event), embodied in his living person. The proclamation of this gospel and thus, the constant provision of the church with spiritual food, i.e., home mission, perceived and practiced mainly in the evangelization and perpetual inner revival of the church, is essential to its being.²¹⁷

János Mester, a reformed minister of the Szederjes congregation, published an article in *Az Út*, in the early 1930s. This is useful in providing me with the contemporary perspective of a local pastor on the difference between the home mission movement prior to, and after, Imre’s proposal to the General Assembly in 1922. After that, the movement had been officially domesticated, its work being

²¹⁴ This is a reference to Moltmann’s book, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, op. cit..

²¹⁵ Bosch, *ibid.* p.369.

²¹⁶ Borbáth, Dániel ‘Az immanens Szentháromságtan, Az egyház krisztológiai tanításának alapja,’ (The Doctrine of the Immanent Holy Trinity: The Foundation of the Christological Teaching of the Church) in *Theológiai Tanulmányok, Emlékkönyv Dr. Kecskeméthy István, theológiai professzor életének 70.-ik, theológiai tanári szolgálatának 40.-ik évfordulójára*, Kiadja Az Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület Theológiai Fakultásának Tanári Kara, 1934, p. 78. In Hungarian: “Nem egy idea, egy eszme jelent meg Jézusban, nem egy személytelen isteni erő, hanem egy személlyel állunk szemben. „Dei loquentis persona.” (Kálvin Inst. I. 7:4.) Maga az egyetlen Isten személyisége, éneje, essenciája szól.”

²¹⁷ As I previously quoted Dr. Béla Kenessey’s famous saying: “What souls are in need of is not axiology, but the gospel.”

accepted by and subjected to the official church. Rev. Mester, first of all, offers a criticism of the circle around Kecskeméthy:

Not long ago the home mission work was perceived by some as having evangelization as its main goal.²¹⁸ The Scriptures were explained always and everywhere; the word was proclaimed not by those who were appointed to do so, but by others also, who claimed their right to do so by appealing “to the royal priesthood and to prophecy.” This led to a kind of exclusion of smaller associations outside the church. (...) This had one drawback: the phenomenon took out from the church those who could not find enough spiritual food in it.²¹⁹

Mester then praises the initiative and accomplishments of Imre’s circle and of the domestication process. Interestingly, the point which he emphasizes as the most important achievement of this process is the re-clericalization of the movement: “In recent times the church had to realize that it is best if the home mission work is led by the ministers.”²²⁰ Thus practically, in contrast to the Church’s reformed Creeds to which even Mester subscribed, the guarantee of mission work rests in

²¹⁸ Previously, I remarked that Barth, in contrast with Mester, speaks about home mission clearly as being primarily and first of all evangelization: “...it is perhaps legitimate to take the word evangelization in the usual modern sense, in which it is distinguished from missions or related to what we now call home missions, and means the directing of the message to those who stand in the more immediate environs of the community.” (Cf. *Church Dogmatics*, IV/3/2, p.872.) Concerning other activities which can be enrolled under the notion of home mission, secondary to evangelization, Barth states: “(i)t must say it in connection with the other ministries of the community, and particularly in conjunction with what is to be called its diaconate in the narrower sense, as the latter must also have an evangelistic character. (...) What is vital is that the evangelizing community should say what it has to say to those around in a glad and spirited and peaceful way corresponding to its content (...) What is vital is that it should really say this, i.e., the Gospel, and not something else.” (Cf. p.874.) Only later when he starts to speak about mission in a wider sense and not just in the sense of home missions; only then does Barth make this balancing qualification (and even that cautiously): “...missions, in spite of the one-sidedness of their particular task, are concerned with the establishment of the whole ministry of the Church. They must be carried through in the form not only of preaching and evangelization but also of instruction and diaconate.” But then he adds immediately, “(t)hese task cannot become an end in themselves...”, etc. (Cff. on pp.875-876.)

²¹⁹ János Mester, ‘A lelkipásztor élete, mint a gyülekezeti munka egyik alapfeltétele’ (The Life of the Minister As One of the Fundamental Conditions for Congregational Work) *Az Út* (1930): pp.326.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

the ministers and not in the Word of God. And this happens at the apex of the churchinizing process of the mission movement. The divine attribute of the self-sufficiency of the Word, emphasized boldly in the Second Helvetic Confession, is virtually denied here. The gospel is made sufficient and guaranteed only through the operating of the “infallible church clergy” (like that of the Church of Rome’s, which the TRC delightedly often criticized), the office preceding the Word of God, to which normally the office(r) is, and should be just a humble bearer. It is evident that what Mester is interested in is the authority and power of his person as a cleric over his congregation. There is no hint in his article that perhaps the minister should repent for being at least partially responsible for some of his congregation being without spiritual food; or for the possibility that he himself and his activity may be a hindrance to evangelization and mission work.

As a contrast to this lack of self-examination and critical self-reflection, combined with a judgmental prejudice against those urging self-examination and repentance in order to make the church aware of its mission call, we can look to the writings of Dr. Imre. When arguing in favor of foreign missions, he surmised that one of the reasons why the church was in crisis was the lack of missionary zeal among church members and in the church as a whole.²²¹ This public acknowledgement credited what both Kenessey and Kecskeméthy and their circle had been saying for the previous thirty years, their conviction being a lonely voice in the wilderness:

It is quite probable that our disobedience and dereliction in this singular life or death sized question brought upon our heads those weaknesses and the grievous hardships in which we were and in which we still are.²²²

At this time Professor Imre also refuted the argument against undertaking foreign mission because Hungary was not a colonizing country. Imre pointed to the fact that “the command of mission is universal and is not addressed only to a nation

²²¹ This can be placed alongside what Murray stresses concerning missional disobedience: “It is this evangelizing responsibility of the members of the church that we are so liable to neglect, and the indictments must be directed to multiple aspects of failure to bring to expression our profession, a failure that reflects on our conviction and devotion. No phase of evangelism is more indispensable to the spread of the gospel and to the building up of the church.” Murray, p. 251.

²²² Imre, ‘Egyházunk és a misszió’(Our Church and Mission), *op. cit.*, p.121.

which has colonies.” On the contrary, “the first who have heard and understood the mission call were the apostles, who belonged not to a political mega-power, but to an oppressed and colonized people.” So, “the situation was quite the opposite because the oppressed and colonized Jewish nation was the one which made a gift of the message of the gospel to the children of the oppressing and colonizing nation.”²²³ One might expect Imre to conclude that the oppressed Hungarians should share the gospel and serve the Romanians against whom they had protested so many times. But again, that point is not made. Instead, from the pen of Imre comes again the stereotyped criticism against Western nations for confusing colonization and the spreading of white civilization with mission. This blind spot is even more curious, as like Döbrössy, he refers to great men of the TRC from the past who, since the Reformation had brought the gospel to the neighboring peoples, including the Muslims. The parallel should have been obvious as this ministry happened when the Turkish Empire colonized the Hungarian territories. Besides, when mentioning the Jewish nation as being willing to serve their own oppressors with the blessing of the good news, mention could also be made of how the “official leadership” of the Old Testament Church hindered this service and so were the first remarkable obstacles in the way of the kingdom of God. Why is this obvious parallel forgotten? Imre also observed that, “here in the Transylvanian District and in the whole Reformed Church of Romania, people [for the first time ever] have started to notice the importance of mission, although not [mission necessarily] related to the church, just in relation to individuals”²²⁴ and the beginning of concern and interest toward foreign missions appearing in associations outside the church

yet God has shown His clear will that this kind of work has to be done in and through the church. On the one hand, even the association (the Transylvanian Association of Evangelical Workers), came up before the church with the proposal that the donations of the association will be managed through the accounting system of the congregations and the District’s, from which it is shown clearly that those donations, even if they are not the official donations of the church, yet they derive from the ministry of the living souls found in the church. Recently, in autumn, as is usual

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ *Ibid.* p.124.

when our church holds its annual Reformed High Week Conference, there was a lecture followed by discussion which dealt with the topic of foreign missions.²²⁵

Although the group which was first concerned about the cause of foreign missions²²⁶ donated monies as an association, they were still considered here as being outside the church, in spite of their willingness even to channel their donations through the church's accounting system. Theologically, they professed with this gesture and commitment a 'Connectionalist' orientation, rather than the 'Independence' with which they were often charged by the officialdom. Their ecclesiology thus seemed to be in line with the official Standards of the reformed church, yet, they never achieved the privilege of having their donations considered as "official donations" of the church. However, paradoxically, Imre also says that through sending their donations via the church, the donors are "found in the church." They are "living souls" and their donation "derives from a ministry of living souls?" One must pose many questions here. What is an "official donation?" How does Imre understand the term 'church' here? Is he referring to the official church, that is, the senior church leadership or to the baptized members of the church? Does belonging to a sodality automatically exclude a person and make them into someone who is *outside* the church, even if she or he is one hundred percent loyal to the Church and its Creeds? Certainly the criteria for church membership were never clarified and that can be an indirect hindrance to mission activity too, as Victor noticed in his debate with Makkai.²²⁷

Imre refers here to a lecture he gave on the topic of mission in general,²²⁸ although that lecture was focused on *home* mission rather than *foreign* mission. As we observed, at these yearly events it was emphasized that the church, not the sodalities, should do home mission. The real problem here is, who is the *subject* of doing missions, and who is the targeted *object*? Barth pointed to the phenomena in the history of the Church that sadly, most of the time the Church instead

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ i.e., the *Transylvanian Association of Evangelical Workers* (the acronym in Hungarian is EMESz).

²²⁷ See in chapter five of this thesis.

²²⁸ At the *Református Nagyhét* (Annual Reformed High Week), see above the remarks given in *Kis Tükör* about the event, by both Kecskeméthy and Máthé.

of being the Subject of mission becomes degraded to the needy state of being the sphere of the act of missions:

It is true that, apart from the early days in the Reformed sphere, the organized Churches have been for the most part the sphere of action rather than the subject in relation to this whole outburst, the initiative being taken in the main by voluntary individuals and groups.²²⁹

One can notice here the differences in posing the problem. Imre says, the church *ought to* do home mission, it *ought not to be* the object of missions. Barth says, it is a fact that the church more often does not do it, but forgetting to be a missional church, an evangelizing church (which demand belongs to its *ad esse*, to its very true being, to the justification of its ontological existence), rather it became the sphere of mission. This does not mean that Barth would not opt for and would not insist that

the community itself and as such is *the acting subject* in foreign missions too, *or else it is not the Christian community*. That in practice there may be definite circles or unions or societies which initiate missions corresponds to the practical discharge of many other ministries in the Church. (italics, LH)²³⁰

Is the church the subject of mission or is God? Is it a *missio Dei* or a *missio ecclesiae*? If the church or even the association is the *Subject*, then certainly God becomes or is degraded to become the *predicate* of mission.

I turn back now to Imre's important study, critiqued above. In a continuation of his paradoxical statements about donations from members of a sodality being considered to be both from 'outsiders' and 'insiders' in the church, Imre then remarks on the new openness of the official church toward mission: "On the other hand, the church itself also came to a much clearer realization that for the sake of the awakening of souls she has to do something as well."²³¹ So the church, as an abstract idea apart from the living souls which constituted her, becomes an agent for waking up the sleeping ones, even when the agent itself is in need of being awakened. Or does the church, understood and perceived in its ideal state (i.e.,

²²⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/3/1, p. 27.

²³⁰ *Church Dogmatics*, IV/3/2, p.875.

²³¹ Imre, 'Egyházunk és a misszió' (Our Church and Mission), p.124.

awakened and not sleepy), become its own subject and object in the mission field?

How can the church do anything for the spiritual awakening of people unless she is first herself awoken? Who is the subject of mission here and who is the object? Total confusion in the argument, indeed. At least Barth spoke in a clearer way of the presence of so-called 'Christo-pagans' in the church, but in my opinion Imre is confused because he curiously from what the church *ought to be*, i.e., the *subject* of her mission, concludes that the church *is* the subject of her mission and can never can be the object of mission at all. Such a denial of reality impedes the possibility of any change in reality; that is the illusory trap here. Jenő Horváth, just two years after the sending of Babos to the mission field, tried to characterize and summarize the characteristics of the Transylvanian foreign mission work, contrasting it with that of Hungary:

Although the work is continued in a spirit of mutual brotherhood, the orientation of the reformed foreign missions is visibly different in Hungary than it is in Transylvania. The former, in its foreign mission view, is reminiscent of a romantic, German pietistic influence. Their work is divided (China, Oceania, Islam [in the Balkans]), just as their theoretical foundations are divided [following these geographical areas].²³²

But when Horváth turns to a description of the Transylvanian theology of missions, although he later boasts of its more fully churchinized mission concept and of the fact that in Transylvania mission is carried out by the whole church hand in hand with the "official church," he had to admit that this concept was still far from being altogether clear and theologically stable:

The Transylvanian view is also in flux, although [compared with Hungary] it has a more specific character and definitely is a church[inized] foreign mission, which best validates the [outlandish] reformational theology. [He is referring to the contemporary Swiss dialectical theology assumed to be the real reformational theology.]²³³

We notice here that Horváth, like Imre, Tavaszy, and especially László (as seen above) equate dialectical theology simply with the theology of the reformers,

²³² Horváth, Jenő A külmiszió lényege (The Essence of Foreign Missions), p.241.

²³³ Ibid.

believing that it is constant with, and faithful to the Reformation Confessional Statements. If true, one could agree with him to some extent that the Transylvanian concept, compared with the Hungarian one, “best validates the outlandish reformational theology.” Certainly Horváth believed that the Transylvanian churchinized concept of mission was more biblical and confessional and as such, that it was more specifically “reformed.”

[This “more specific character” is also reflected in the fact that] besides the German and especially the Basel-relationships, there is cooperation with the Scottish reformed [people] too [here he refers primarily to the churchinized mission work model achieved and carried out by the Scots]. [Again] this [“more specific character” of the mission work] does not mean necessarily that it is better or more “Hungarian” than the one in Hungary. The [fact that it is] “definitely a churchinized foreign mission” means in practice that it was organized completely within the church by the public appeal of the Friends of Foreign Missions and the work was carried out and provided for financially and spiritually completely from within the church, and yet still it was organized with the preservation of volunteerism.²³⁴

This “more specific character,” that is, the Transylvanian mission work as being more theologically reformed compared to that of Hungary, refers to the assumption that the official church-leadership control means and guarantees by itself the doctrinal control.²³⁵ As we have seen, the Scottish reformed church’s example served as a model to Imre and fairly so, because there the mission work was carried on through a modality model. Yet this modality did not exclude the role and the acknowledgement of the sodalities (as in Transylvania), due to the foundational work and clarification of theologians like Dr. Inglis, as Professor John Macleod stated in his 1938 lectures:

Perhaps the best specimen of the work of this ecclesiastical school in the department of the clearing away of difficulties in matters of Christian teaching was Dr.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ I do not deny the necessity of the controlling role of the doctrinal standards, as such; I merely question the self-imposed and alleged absoluteness of the church in enforcing them. Furthermore, I am questioning this power-element which seems to play a greater role of authority than the doctrines and standards in themselves. This happens because mission is churchinized (compared with Hungary); the assumption is even backed by a reference to cooperation with the Scottish church where mission was undertaken by the church.

John Inglis,²³⁶ to whom the credit belongs of securing, over a century ago, a place for Foreign Missions as a definite scheme in the program of the Church of Scotland.²³⁷

The reconciliation of modality with the sodalities never took place in the TRC. The practical exclusion of the movement from the church, the refusal to work together in a partnership pattern, and the official church's constant war with the sodality-type of ministries, prompted the following somewhat bitter remarks from Kecskeméthy:

I have full appreciation toward the home mission work started with such élan in the reformed church, but I would wish that all the praise-worthy leaders would raise the goal a bit higher: high up to the air-level of the Spirit of Pentecost. If they would not have mocked the universal Christianity attitude as "general Christianity" and would not have started with this label an annihilating war against it...²³⁸

But if, as I suggest, Horváth is wrong in his above quoted assumption,²³⁹ then the linking of a churchinized mission concept with both the control of mission work being placed firmly in the hands of the "official church," (excluding the otherwise balancing control of the volunteer-principled sodalities) and the equation of the "official church's" theological orientation with the theology of the Reformation, proves very untenable theologically and can be misleading.

On the ground of the theory of missions the "definitely a churchinized foreign mission" [idea] means the duty of pointing to the future by acknowledging that the real reformed foreign mission is that kind of church mission which is confessional, reformational and biblical. And however weak and small the signs are which point to the future of foreign missions, they have to continue to point to it. On a theoretical level,

²³⁶ Dr. John Inglis (1762-1834) was a minister first in Tibbermore, then of Old Greyfriars, Edinburgh. In 1805 he became the Moderator of the General Assembly and was also instrumental in convincing the General Assembly to appoint a committee for Foreign Missions (in 1824). He was orthodox in doctrine and wrote in support of the establishment principle (*The Importance of the Ecclesiastical Establishments*, in 1821 and *A Vindication of Ecclesiastical Establishments*, in 1833).

²³⁷ Macleod, p. 197.

²³⁸ See the editorial 'A pünkösti lélek' (The Spirit of Pentecost) in *Kis Tükör* Vol. 21, Nr. 21 (May 23, 1931): pp.81-82.

²³⁹ See my reasoning above based on an explanation offered by Dr. MacCormack for some of the reasons why the Transylvanians believed, against the evidence, that the Barthian turnover against the liberal theology of the past was a complete return to the Reformation, or to Calvin's teaching and the Creeds in general.

this can be our call as much as is the understanding of the call of the East in [mission] practice. That the West has not noticed yet both our theoretical and practical foreign mission activity is not important: God has noticed and put us to work and that is enough.²⁴⁰

In other words, if the official theological stance of the church (declared as the only “orthodox” orientation), including missiology is embodied in the church hierarchy which imposes it from above, and this is the guarantee against heresy, then there is a danger that this supposed “orthodoxy” may be used to close down any new initiatives and impede further theological discussion. It can be easily abused in the power games of church politics. Meanwhile, theological reasoning is subject to an imbalanced censorship, and freedom of scholarship and of conscience is not encouraged or preserved. There is a striking illustration of the abuse of ecclesiastical power to the detriment of mission goals from the field of Jewish mission in Transylvania; it demonstrates how the churchinized mission, left to the hands of an official leadership, can in fact hinder mission, as we will see below.

The Illustration of the Mission to the Jews

As with Protestant churches in the West, there were a few attempts during the Second World War to help Jews²⁴¹ on behalf of the District of the Transylvanian Reformed Church.²⁴² Many church members, mostly individually, tried to hide

²⁴⁰ Horváth, Jenő A külmisszió lényege (The Essence of Foreign Missions), p.241

²⁴¹ It might be important for the historical context to mention here that in Hungary Jews were emancipated and enjoyed full rights of citizenship only years after the Scottish Mission to the Jews was set up in Budapest in 1841. The law was issued in a year (1867) of political agreement and relative reconciliation (as in 1849 the Austrians crushed the Hungarian revolution and war for national independence) with the Austrians which created a strong Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The law of 1867, order XVII., paragraph Nr. 1. declares: “The Israelite population together with the Christian population of the country are declared to be granted to have similar rights, and are enabled to the practice of all civilian and political rights.” (See in: *Magyar törvénytár, 1836-1868. évi törvénycikkek*. Budapest: 1896, p.354.)

²⁴² However, it is important that we make here another historical observation concerning the status of Jews in Transylvania, from as early as the 17th century, secured by the famous Calvinist Governor of the Principality of Transylvania, Gábor Bethlen: “(H)e did not only receive persecuted anabaptists into the country, but also *granted the Jews freedom of religion and, out of respect for human dignity, he gave them the right to wear Christian clothes*. Although Bethlen had a firm belief in the Calvinist Church, he also held the other churches in honor.

and protect Jews. Even the Council of the Directors presided over by the Bishop tried to issue some papers to protect them and kept an amicable relationship with the Chief Rabbi of Kolozsvár, although they could not protect him from deportation later.²⁴³ In 1944 the *Jó Pásztor Misszió*, (*The Good Shepherd Mission*) of Transylvania, was formed following the example of the same Mission then working in Hungary which became famous in rescuing many Jews and also their families. Although it followed the pattern of the *Jó Pásztor Misszió* in Hungary, it became an independent entity following the rejoining of Transylvania to Romania, and put as its first aim the sharing of the Good News with the Jews and the comforting of them in their Holocaust tragedy. Dr. Imre Kádár was its first leader.²⁴⁴ Dr. Lajos Imre, the head of the Mission Department of the Transylvanian Reformed Church from its very beginning (1922-1950), was also a leading member of the *Jó Pásztor Misszió* Board.²⁴⁵ In 1945 Imre wrote in the official magazine of the Church: "The work of the *Jó Pásztor Misszió* today is as important as it was during the war. This branch [of mission work] must be presented in the congregations."²⁴⁶ Then, in 1946: "(t)his work is a duty proceeding from the Gospel."²⁴⁷ Then, again in 1947:

Moreover, he protected them with his power." [Emphasis mine, LH] See József Barcza, 'Peregrináció, vallási türelem' (On Students "Wandering" and Religious Toleration), in *Tanulmányok Erdély történetéről* (*Studies in the History of Transylvania*), Szakmai konferencia Debrecenben, István Rácz (ed.). Debrecen: Csokonai Kiadó, 1988, p.275. Similarly, it was an initiation of the *Hungarian* Bethlen which led to the translation of the whole New Testament into *Romanian*, published for the first time in the Principality of Transylvania in 1648!

²⁴³ See István Tőkés, *A romániai magyar református egyház élete, 1944-1989* (*The Life of the Hungarian Reformed Church in Romania, 1944-1989*). Budapest: Magyarságkutató Intézet, 1990, pp.115-116.

²⁴⁴ He was a former director of the Hungarian theatre and was converted, becoming a Deacon of the Hidelve Reformed Congregation in Kolozsvár. At the end of the war he left for Hungary and became the organizer and coordinator of this work entrusted to him by bishop Ravasz on behalf of the Church. The mission was considered and accepted as one of the official branches of the mission activities of the Reformed Church.

²⁴⁵ A Bible Study was held every Wednesday in the building of the Theological Seminary for people who were interested in the evangelization and support of the Jews. Mrs. Friedmann, a converted Jewish lady, ran a sewing school for girl survivors from the concentration camps. About 15 orphan boys were accommodated in three rooms of the Seminary.

²⁴⁶ Református Szemle, 1945, p. 157, quoted in Tőkés, *A romániai magyar református egyház élete, 1944-1989* (*The Life of the Hungarian Reformed Church in Romania, 1944-1989*).

²⁴⁷ Református Szemle, 1946, p. 75, quoted in Tőkés, *A romániai magyar református egyház élete, 1944-1989* (*The Life of the Hungarian Reformed Church in Romania, 1944-1989*).

“(t)his mission is the measuring scale of our faith and of our mission-power.”²⁴⁸ In 1945, at the proposal of Imre Kádár, who left for Budapest, Dr. Jenő Horváth²⁴⁹ was employed officially as a missionary minister and general secretary to *Jó Pásztor Misszió*.

In 1944, the Bishops of the Hungarian Reformed Churches wanted to issue a Public Pastoral Letter in which they planned to condemn the persecution of, and the atrocities committed against, Jews.²⁵⁰ A special messenger of Bishop László Ravasz from Budapest brought the proposed text to the Transylvanian bishop with the hope that if it were signed, it might then be read from every pulpit. The bishop summoned the Counsel of Directors, although he could have decided independently to sign it. It became obvious that he was reluctant to do so and he proposed an alteration of the text. Dr. Sándor Tavaszy and Dr. Lajos Imre argued with him publicly, with no success; the Public Pastoral Letter was not read from the pulpits, although doing so could have resulted in hundreds of Jewish lives being spared.²⁵¹ And yet, surprisingly in 1947, Bishop Vásárhelyi could still write: “We do not need to be ashamed in front of the judgment seat of history (...) We never turned from the right path in the Jewish question...”²⁵²

²⁴⁸ Református Szemle, 1947, p. 23, quoted in Tóké, A romániai magyar református egyház élete, 1944-1989 (The Life of the Hungarian Reformed Church in Romania, 1944-1989).

²⁴⁹ Every Monday, Horváth ran a prayer-meeting in the Seminary and every Sunday morning at 8.45am, a worship time especially for Jews.

This work lasted only for a short period of time and in the years 1948-1949, following the political changes, it was hindered by the Communists and gradually was forced to cease under state oppression. Horváth baptized a few converted Jews in this period and organized fundraising campaigns to help the orphans left by the Holocaust, whom he looked after in his home. He became friends with Rev. Richard Wurmbrand and Sabina, his wife (they were involved in Jewish Mission also in Bucharest at that time), who visited him several times in Kolozsvár and supported the work in many ways.

²⁵⁰ Even the Bishops of the Lutheran Church decided to join the initiative. Transylvania, being part of Hungary again during the war, had only one Reformed bishop, János Vásárhelyi.

²⁵¹ Imre Lajos *Önéletírása (Autobiography)*, pp.295, 297-298.

²⁵² See his article in the official magazine of the Reformed Church of Transylvania, in the Református Szemle, 1947, p.396. One can compare this with the writings of István Bibó, the famous Hungarian thinker and hero of the 1956 Hungarian revolution against the regime, who strongly and openly criticized his father in law, Bishop Ravasz for his failure to express regret and apology toward the Jewish people on behalf of the whole Trans-Danubian Bishopric under him; as included in Bibó's published collected articles, unfortunately not translated into English.

Dezső László's Critique of Jenő Horváth's Missiology and the Communist takeover

After writing his first grand opus on missiology, *The Essence of Foreign Missions*,²⁵³ Jenő Horváth in 1948 completed a similar study under the title, *The Essence of Home Missions*.²⁵⁴ The following year there were two critical articles in response to the book in the official Journal of the TRC for theological research, *Református Szemle*. The first was written by Dániel Borbáth²⁵⁵ and the second by Dezső László²⁵⁶ who later became leader of the Office for Missions of the Transylvanian Church District. Both of them, like Horváth, were members of the famous “Group of Seven,”²⁵⁷ who in the 1920s had organized the “Friends of Foreign Missions” movement. In his review of Horváth's work, Dr. Borbáth remarks:

Dr. Jenő Horváth has accomplished the solution of a long awaited task of Hungarian reformed theology by writing his new book. For many years Hungarian theological literature was preoccupied with the question of home mission and church; and there was a time when it [these works] had to refute the [alleged] charges of church-antagonism on the part of home missions.²⁵⁸

Dezső László's incisive critique is completely different in its appraisal. In two successive articles he provided a full critical analysis of the missiological pattern offered by Horváth. László started his critique with a negative criticism and added that the standpoint of the author of the book “is in many regards in complete contradiction with the concept of home mission developed by the theologians of the

²⁵³ Previously submitted also as his doctoral dissertation which appeared in 1936 and is considered the first comprehensive Transylvanian (and Hungarian) systematic missiology. First published in *Theologiai Szemle*, ed. by Sándor Csikesz, Vol. 12, pp.177-283. Later published in a separate book as: Jenő Horváth, *A külmisszió lényege, A külmisszió református theologiai alapvetése* (*The Essence of Foreign Missions, The Reformed Theological Foundation of Foreign Missions*), Debrecen: Theologiai Tanulmányok, Különlenyomat, 1936.

²⁵⁴ Horváth, Jenő *A belmisszió lényege*, op.cit.

²⁵⁵ Borbáth, Dániel ‘*A belmisszió lényege*,’ (*The Essence of Home Missions*), pp.21-24.

²⁵⁶ See his critical study in two parts, published successively with two, slightly different titles: Dezső László, ‘*A belmisszió alapkérdései*’ (*The Foundational Questions of Home Missions*) *Református Szemle* Nr. 17. (September 15, 1949): pp.461-465; and Dezső László, ‘*A belmisszió alaphivatásai*’ (*The Foundational Callings of Home Missions*) *Református Szemle* Nr. 18. (September 30 1949): pp. 500-505.

²⁵⁷ See in chapter one.

²⁵⁸ Borbáth, p.21.

church thus far.”²⁵⁹ With this remark he openly admitted that there can be as many opinions as there are theologians. Once the church's leadership had taken a stand in one direction, that was understood to be the only theological orientation of the whole church. According to László, the official view of the church, as represented by its leadership, was different from what Horváth argued for, and this by itself was enough to call Horváth's views into question. László observes that Horváth's book addresses basically four questions: 1) what is home mission; 2) what is the place of home mission among other church ministries; 3) what is the place of the doctrine of home mission in the system of Practical Theology and 4) what is the role of this book in the renewal of the church? László then gives his critique in that order.

I agree with his careful analysis and that Horváth too easily derived his position from the Bible. László is right in charging Horváth with making the calling of apostleship equal to that of the calling of a missionary. He is correct in criticizing the quick conclusion that the latter automatically derives from the former.

László then asked how home and foreign missions *can* be justified, if it is impossible to do so directly from the Bible? Can we still justify these two outstandingly important activities of the church? László's answer is that “if we cannot justify them on a direct biblical basis, we can still accept the full justification of their legitimacy on a *church* basis.”²⁶⁰ László challenges Wichern here, saying that even Wichern (who in fact coined the notion *home missions* more than a hundred years earlier) was speaking of mission and home mission without the Bible as his criterion, but rather the church. He explains that Church life consists of events and activities about which the Bible does not teach directly, and yet we are still bound to speak of and to carry out these tasks; on the one hand because the church situation demands them out of necessity, and on the other hand because the Word of God refers to them indirectly. László next talks about home mission in a wider, then in a narrower sense. The wider sense means that it is good to call home mission (for lack of a more appropriate notion about it), the work of the Holy Spirit by which He warns the church that they should be more obedient to do the tasks which Christ has entrusted to the members of His church.

²⁵⁹ László ‘A belmisszió alapkérdései’ (‘The Foundational Questions of Home Missions’), p.461.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

Writing another article the following year, László referred to his earlier critique, stating that what he had then reviewed primarily in a negative critical manner, he now wanted to approach differently by emphasizing the positive aspects:

With regard to the theological foundation or *foundations in principle* of mission works, I have already expounded in detail my ideas relating to it in a critique of a book in Nr. 17. and 18. of last year's issues of *Református Szemle* in my study with the title *The Foundational Questions of Home Missions*. My review, (...) pointed more to the negatives and shed light on those points which are coming up when reviewing a book. This necessitates that I should also say something positive, whatever can be said, and to focus on those aspects which could not be treated when criticizing a book.²⁶¹

In February 1950, between these two articles, another study of László's was published in *Református Szemle* in which he gave a positive appreciation of Albert Molnár's 'Program of Edifying the Church' a half century before in 1900. With this gesture he clearly expressed his underlying faithfulness to the official modality model; and this in spite of the more evident inclination of the church leadership towards an ambiguous compromise with the Communist regime. Correspondingly, he could be seen as being wholly against the model of Kecskeméthy, and to some extent, even against what Imre's circle stood for thus far. This was an important step, as we know now that beginning with January 1st, 1950, László was appointed by the General Assembly and took over the presidency of the Office for Missions of the Church District (thus becoming the third most powerful man in the church, after the bishop; the bishop from 1936 to 1960 being János Vásárhelyi,

²⁶¹ Dezső László, 'Az egyházunk missziója' (The Mission of Our Church) *Református Szemle* (March, 1950): pp.75-83.

who survived the arrival of the Communist dictatorship!) Dr. Lajos Imre,²⁶² who had led it since the early 1920s, was forced to/had to resign.²⁶³

²⁶² Cf. this with what Imre says in his *Autobiography*, cited above, on p. 298, and in other places: "So the mission work of the church continued even after the war, but there were some limitations to it. The associations were wound up, therefore the branches of the mission work going on through these associations came slowly to an end. In Hungary, church life commenced in a totally new form. The old leaders were moved from their positions and a false repentance gained ground. This consisted of declaring loudly the mistakes made by the leaders of the church without remembering one's own mistakes and of attempting to bring preaching and ministering in the church into harmony with the theses and requirements of the new world order and ideology. Thus personal views often gained a theological basis.

More and more people asserted also here in Transylvania that God condemned the mission work of the church done so far. **Vásárhelyi declared that** Tavaszy, Gönczy and myself had corrupted the formation of theology students for generations and **that the whole mission work was of no use.** (bold, LH). However Sunday school teaching and youth work continued for a while. We even held conferences from time to time. The last students' conference was at Zsibó in 1948. Finally mission work meant nothing more than making statistics about how many people came to church. The office for mission work was closed. In the College (*the Theological College, note by Levente Horváth*) I received a little room next to the library and even that had to be shared with others. In January 1950 I handed over the office and the affairs of the office, with Ákos Darkó witnessing, to Dezső László, the newly elected general director who was to manage the mission from then on." (p.298.)

"But the Friday evening Bible study classes of the Vécsei Union ended once and for all. (Though) Gradually all the professors became members of the Union. From among the pastors of Kolozsvár, Dezső László and Mózes Bíró joined in. The number of the members was increasing. New members joined in even after the Union was wound up. But that was the end for the Union and there were several reasons for this. The new professors did not have such warm and friendly relationship as we used to have. We were too many for an intimate circle. And it was not desirable to attract unfounded suspicions by such gatherings. So we ceased meeting, giving away one of the means for cultivation and maintenance of our brotherhood." (pp.309–310.) See also on p.293:

"In this totally new world I can understand even Bishop Vásárhelyi who ten years ago (*probably in 1953, as the Autobiography's commencing date reads as the 20th of March, 1963, note by Levente Horváth*) declared our mission work to be idle and leading to damnation and who accused Sándor Tavaszy, Lajos Gönczy and myself of corrupting a whole generation of the Transylvanian church district by the views and work which we had done and stood for, since the Lord condemned our work and it came to nothing. That is all right. Greater men than we experienced the same thing and were judged in the same way. The Lord sees and knows what happened.

Let me mention here the fact that we started dealing with mission also after the Second World War. I came to the conclusion that mission is not a separate, self-sufficient theological discipline, but it is a demand that must be met by every pastor in his activities. It is what reminds the church and the pastor to perform the duties of their calling so as to preach the

László summarized the changes in the life of the church since Imre began and led its home mission program and then, without explicitly criticizing his mentor, introduced his own ideas about mission:

More than a quarter of a century has passed since this office was organized by the venerable General Assembly of the District. This quarter of a century has brought significant changes in the whole theological concept of our Church, in its legislative procedures, in its inner systematization of operations and in its outside situation. All this justifies that I should make a meticulously researched object of the whole question of mission. My thesis will be divided in three parts. First of all, I will try to outline *the situation* in which I see the cause of mission today in our church; then I will look to *the tasks* which are resulting from the situation; and finally, I will point to the most urgent *actions* which have to be taken.²⁶⁴

We can compare his main theses with the views already identified in this research. Under his first aim (to outline the situation of mission) he presents a further three sub-points relating in turn to the theological situation, the legal-organizational situation, and finally, the day-to-day situation. I am interested here only in the first, and I am occupied with the theological principles on which László built:

Word of God as an institution or as a person and to do that faithfully and with a sense of responsibility toward God." (p.293.)

²⁶³ It might be relevant to quote here how M. van der Ende sees it:

"He [Imre] writes about this phenomena as bitterly as about theology losing importance. 'Mission work does not exist for the synodic law. Synodic law does not regard the church as a community fighting in the world for the holy cause, trying to seek and to keep the children of God, but it considers the church a corporate body of high rank, whose declarations weigh and which thus is an important factor of the life of the nation.' In our church 'mission was first done, then talked about, and finally organized:

- first it was done, since people started giving testimonies of the grace in their lives to the people around them wherever God had placed them;
- afterwards it was talked about, it became the favorite topic of speeches;
- finally it was organized, because church districts considered that home mission had to be adapted to the church. At the beginning the idea for the home mission lecturer was to inspire home mission work, to motivate ... now he makes statistics, collects and gives reports, supervises etc. ... seen from within the church the cause of mission regressed by now compared to its situation before organization.' " On p.177.

²⁶⁴ László, 'Az egyházunk missziója' (The Mission of Our Church), p.75.

First of all, I pin down that theological standpoint that based on the *Bible* it is impossible to make a distinction between the mission activities and the non-mission activities of the church. According to the Bible, behind every work of the church, as a starting cause, there stands the sending command to the work of Christ. Christ would send equally to the completion of every church ministries. (...) We cannot say that the administration of the sacraments, the worship services, the religious education and church administration, are not mission work. We cannot assert either that in contrast with these, the Sunday School, the Bible-study meetings, care for the diaspora, or any other work is mission work.²⁶⁵

We can see a tendency in his thought to interpret each activity, even the apparently “less spiritual” activity of a parish, under the Lordship of the Sender, and so to call it mission. The organic aspect is emphasized, that as everything points to the same goal, so everything can be included as part of the witnessing activity of the Church in the world. László thus comes very close to the perception of the essence of the church as consisting in mission itself. Meanwhile he is also running the risk of “pan-missionism,” as we have seen debated and questioned by Victor in the thinking of Makkai. It is indeed difficult to make any distinction between the two concepts, namely that the essence of the church consists in mission, and the idea of pan-missionism (i.e., that everything the church and the clergy does is mission); without contrasting them and placing them in a wider context. But before doing so, we can note that László was fully aware of the counter-arguments that his reasoning might have invited:

Against this concept many would argue that the ministries ordered by Jesus are of two kinds: one is when the people (believers) are coming to the church; the other is when the church goes to the people. Based on this understanding, the latter are (particularly) mission works.²⁶⁶

Dezső László went even further than Makkai, and it is important that we compare their ideas. I wonder whether László himself was aware of this fact and wanted to reject the views of both of his predecessor: Makkai and Imre. For example, Makkai in his main work on these issues, *Az egyház missziói munkája* (*The Mission Work*

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.* Here we have to remark that unfortunately Dezső László went even further than Makkai, to whom we will compare his attitude. See later on in this chapter.

of the Church'), gives a famous definition of missions. It is not an exhaustive one, for it is merely descriptive and biblical, but neither is it a prescribing definition):

In worship the souls are *coming* to the church; in education the church deals with those who, in the best case, are *brought* to the church. In missions the church herself is *going* to, *searching for*, and *conquering* souls for Christ.²⁶⁷

Whether László had this in mind or not, it is even stranger that he forgot so quickly what he himself had quoted from Brunner in his book. Was his firm conviction concerning Dialectical Theology, or as he preferred to call it, the Theology of the Word, so quickly given up? Just twelve years earlier László had written:

This theology [of the Word] due to its dialectical aspect emphasized, for the sake of the worship of the church, preaching within *free frame*, i.e., within non-liturgical frames. This kind of preaching of the church outside its liturgical frame was called by Dr. Lajos Imre, home mission. (...) This situation was noticed especially by Brunner and thus he warned us that the church nowadays has to return from the stone-church [model] to the moveable tent-church [model] of the pilgrim people in the desert.²⁶⁸

For a more detailed comparison between the two men, we must now examine what Makkai thought in a preliminary article of his from 1936, with the same title as his succeeding and fully developed book published two years later: *Az egyház missziói munkája* (*The Mission Work of the Church*). Here he used as his starting point the same ideas of the famous Swiss theologian, Emil Brunner, which László quoted above.²⁶⁹

First of all, Makkai understood the need for a mobilization of the church for her mission. That, in turn, demanded a change in the methods of church work and in how such work should be carried out, and Makkai acknowledged that. But the source of the Church's passion and energy was described by Brunner in a famous illustration, cited also two years later by László:²⁷⁰

²⁶⁷ Makkai, *Az egyház missziói munkája* (*The Mission Work of the Church*), p.116.

²⁶⁸ László, *Az Anyaszentegyház élete és szolgálata* (*The Life and Ministry of the Holy Mother Church*), p.87.

²⁶⁹ Both Makkai in 1936 (then again in 1938) and László in 1938 are quoting Brunner and give the reference in a footnote of their source as follows:

Brunner, Emil, *Um die Erneuerung der Kirche*, Bern-Leipzig, 1934, p. 29.

²⁷⁰ Makkai, *Az egyház missziói munkája* (*The Mission Work of the Church*)

The symbol of the missionary church is no longer the static *Temple*, but the *Holy Tabernacle* which can be carried and which itself will go and reach out to souls. (...) [Makkai then continues, stating that Brunner] ...calls for the mobilization of the *lay* members of the church, as the practice of the universal priesthood; urges for *free forms of preaching* which are not bound strictly to the liturgical order, where the starting point is not coming from the Bible, and yet are leading to it, which have a missionary and not congregational character.²⁷¹

We have to highlight one more statement from Makkai in this context, a statement which offers both a diagnosis as well as a solution of the Transylvanian church situation:

The character and the specific tasks of the *missional* church have a deep impact on, and raise the interest of, the Hungarian evangelical²⁷² Christian churches.

The static, institutional church which waits for souls to come to her is no longer fit to fulfill the demands of modern times, not even in our region. Our churches have to realize also that they are not a political, cultural, or social *means*, but genuine *churches*, the parts, representatives and realizations of Christ's Church.²⁷³

László definitely reversed his mentor's teaching in a peculiar way, ignoring the warnings of Imre from 1939, with which he had formerly agreed:

Today people wait for the Word of God to come to them. The church should not expect them to look for places and occasions where the Word is preached. Therefore, the church and church work needs to be dynamic, vivid, modern and it needs to take every opportunity given by God and corresponding to His will. (21)" p. 174.²⁷⁴

Let us now examine what professor Dr. István Tókécs says in his appreciation of Dezső László's late ministry as the officer of missions, appointed in 1950:

(DL) was convinced that God Himself, the Lord of the Church, judged the past and led the course of history to reject "the work of the associations." (...) According to

²⁷¹ Sándor Makkai, 'Az egyház missziói munkája' (The Mission Work of the Church), pp.319-322.

²⁷² The word in this case is used in the specific (Hungarian) meaning and as the title of the reformed churches, and refers to the historically evangelical roots of the Protestant churches in general, of course.

²⁷³ Makkai, *ibid.*

²⁷⁴ Lajos Imre, 'Egyházi törvényhozásunk új követelményei' (The New Demands of Our Constitution of Church Laws) *Az Út* (1939), Különlenyomat (Published as a separate booklet also), Kolozsvár: 1940, p.6.

him, at the end of the day the church obeyed God when it accomplished the abolition of associations. (...) for this reason, a significant part of the ministers called him the “red superintendent” because they could not agree with him on this. (...) (i)n reference to one of his articles, the Bucharest office of censorship sent a message via the Ministry of the Cults: “Dezső László should not want to turn Calvin into a Marxist.”²⁷⁵

Tőkés attempts to defend, what in his opinion was the obvious good intention of László in trying to co-operate, although maybe not collaborate, with the suppressing regime. However later, when Tőkés refers to the visit of Bishop Bereczky from Budapest, we must remember that Bereczky was appointed in place of Ravasz (who resigned in 1948 as a protest against the Communists) and was characterized as being a “puppet-bishop” in the hands of the Communists:²⁷⁶

In such situations he [László] can be misinterpreted easily, but only outside faith. (...) The above said things are only confirmed by the visit of the Budapest reformed bishop, Albert Bereczky, to Transylvania in the year 1956.²⁷⁷ The bishop had to

²⁷⁵ Tőkés, *A romániai magyar református egyház élete, 1944-1989* (*The Life of the Hungarian Reformed Church in Romania, 1944-1989*), p.141. (See as a reference for Dezső László's attitude at the beginning of the Communist era, especially on pp.140-142.)

²⁷⁶ See in this regard the *Memoirs* of bishop László Ravasz, cited above, and the well written and thorough analysis of the times and situation during the Communist era by István Szabó Bogárdi, *Egyházvezetés és teológia a magyarországi református egyházban 1948 és 1989 között* (*Church-governing and Theology in the Reformed Church of Hungary Between 1948-1989*), (published PhD thesis), Societas et Ecclesia, A magyar Protestáns Közművelődési Egyesület kiadványai, Nr. 3., Ethnica kiadás, Debrecen, 1995. See for example p.10 and footnote, elsewhere and also his conclusions, on pp.168-177.

See also the work of Jos Colijn, *Wer mag winder uns sein? Bruchstellen in der Kirchen – und Theologiegeschichte der reformierten Kirche Ungarns nach dem II. Weltkrieg*, Kampen, 1992. It was later published in Hungarian:

Jos Colijn “Kicsoda ellenünk” – Törésvonalak a második világháború utáni magyar református egyház- és teológiatörténetben, fordította Győri L. János, Kiadja a szerző megbízásából a KEPE, Kiskúnfélegyháza, 1996.

²⁷⁷ Whatever was true of Hungary, the same was true of Romania too in regard to the approach of the Churches by the Communist authority. Ravasz, as a bishop forced into retirement, remembered this period writing:

“The Communists had realized that they were only strengthening the church by persecution. But they thought that by supporting it they could weaken it from within, if they could influence the official leadership of the church. Thus the method was: weakening of the church by the church.” (László Ravasz, *Válogatott írások 1954-1968*. Bern: 1988, p.270., idézi: ifj. Fekete,

experience painfully that in Transylvania his Socialist-friendly church politics orientation was not regarded as being Evangelical. Seeing this he declared: “Only with Dezső László can I feel myself in total congruency”²⁷⁸ in connection with the problems arising in Romania.²⁷⁹

It is also important to see Dr. Tőkés’s commentary on László’s, *The Mission of Our Church*, written at such a historical moment as a significant elaboration of the concept of mission and, in fact, as a new shift in the concept of mission, as quoted and analyzed above. Tőkés seems almost embarrassed to notice²⁸⁰ that László’s view gradually gained ground in the public thinking of the church in the 1950s, amidst the critical events which pressed and forced, at least the official church, into a compromising form of co-habitation with the Communist regime.

One of the writings of Dezső László from 1950 bears the title: *The Mission of Our Church*. In it he wrote that, “it is impossible to make a distinction between the mission activities and the non-mission activities of the church.” In the given context, the adjective “mission” refers to the movements of associations (like evangelizations, etc.). If we forget this, then the whole essay might be put in a false light, whereas the same paper reads: “God’s Spirit started the movements, because the church forgot” its own mandate. But [as László says] for “today already it is evident that ... carrying out mission work was not commissioned to societies, but to the church. Thus she herself needs to work on her own renewal by the guidance of the

Károly ‘Száz éve született Makkai Sándor 1890-1990’, in: *Theologiai Szemle* Vol. 38, Nr.3 (1990): pp. 172-181.)

²⁷⁸ Bereczky referred Karl Barth’s 1948 letter to him which was quoted (though selectively!) frequently in the coming years by both the official leaders of the Reformed Churches in Hungary and in Romania, and unfortunately served as a justification and excuse for their “theological” orientation. As Colijn observes, the letter was prompted by misleading information given to Barth by János Péter, the infamous collaborating church leader. The next letter, written in 1951 also to Bereczky, was never made public or quoted in the Communist countries, although it was published, translated and well-known in the West. That second letter was a sharp criticism of the church policy of the official leadership of the church both in Hungary and Transylvania and also an open comparison to the “German Christians” theological self-justification in Hitler’s time. László’s hesitant attitude in resisting the official line probably can be explained due to his unconditional loyalty to Barthian theology, proven in the previous years, also. See Colijn, *op. cit.*, cf. pp. 116-118.

²⁷⁹ Tőkés, p.141.

²⁸⁰ Obviously because meanwhile he regarded and spoke highly of László as an outstanding theologian throughout his book.

Spirit in every area of the church's life ... and she needs to proclaim the gospel even beyond." (Bold, LH)²⁸¹

The modality versus sodality issue seems to be resolved once for all for Dezső László, arguing without adequate evidence and simply stating that "today already it is evident." But on what reasonable ground could that be claimed? Clearly, Barth's view concerning the sodalities was not yet fully known, due to the fact that the *Church Dogmatics IV* was only published later,²⁸² yet László claimed to be in agreement with Barth in all his major theological orientations. Tókécs goes on to remark also that László,

(w)ould admit the value of the societies after the World War, but "this concept – László writes – cannot be justified either theologically, or on a biblical basis, or on a confessional basis." In reality "most of the mission works became the work of several congregations, in other words they have achieved their set goals."²⁸³ To back up his position, he quotes from a study of Lajos Imre written in 1938: "Mission work consists in the most important part of the church's work, which is based on the consciousness of the church's calling in this world, and which as such will renew the church as a whole." (But as) Dezső László continues: "in today's situation, mission works can be done less and less in the way that they were carried out for thirty years through the use of movements. With this, as with a God-given fact, we had to seriously bring it to an end. But this will not mean at all the relinquishment of mission works... The new home mission work is not the work of a movement, but the work of the [local] congregation." (Quoting from the article in *Református Szemle*, pp. 85-86.)²⁸⁴

Dr. Tókécs concludes with his own well-grounded doubts regarding what László sustained as a great achievement that the local congregation is from now on the Subject of missions, instead of the movements and sodalities, as follows:

²⁸¹ Tókécs, p.141-142.

²⁸² In 1958; although it could have been anticipated, as Barth had already spoken on these ideas *in nuce* in several of his other lectures and writings.

²⁸³ And he says this in the year when Babos, his companion, friend and colleague from among "the Group of Seven," (see above) could not come home from Manchuria, the mission field, because it was evident that Communism had cut off Romania; and he also maintains this despite the fact that no other mission work could be done by any of those congregations, due to the severe restrictions of the Communist authorities!

²⁸⁴ Tókécs, p. 142.

In our opinion Dezső László *went beyond the admitted theological boundaries* when he stated that the abolition of the life of the movements [i.e., the abolition of the registered associations and organizations, whether of the church's or of sodalities] "does not mean at all the abolition of mission work." We have to ask, as it was asked by many in the 1950s, is the giving up of mission not evident, in fact, in that after the turning point (the year of 1950) there were no more youth conferences (organized by) even only 5-10, or 15 congregations; there were no more evangelization weeks (because there were not allowed either);²⁸⁵ there were no more (home) mission traveling secretaries, who could keep alive and cultivate the fellowship-consciousness; there was no more mission to the diasporas or foreign mission; there were no more (College and University) Student's worships; no more deaconesses or diaconal services, etc. Evidently, many things could still be continued on the local congregational level, but many things could not be continued also. Besides, we can question with even a double emphasis: is it allowed to withdraw the "biblical-confessional" ground from the movements (societies') life and from the charity institutions? [Bold, LH]²⁸⁶

In contrast to this, Rev. Ferenc Visky, the unofficial CE movement leader during the period of Communism, together with others (except for when he was in prison), continued to organize illegal evangelization weeks and underground

²⁸⁵ It will be important here to point out clearly that the only exception in this regard was the abolished CE movement which went underground and resisted, both the collaborating high-official leadership of the church and the Communist authorities. They never withdrew themselves in "slavish obedience," but although amidst serious and admitted fears, they kept on organizing these activities and underground conferences and evangelization weeks illegally and suffered prison because of their "confessional commitment" despite the comfortable, theologically unjustifiable stance of the official church in the late 1950s. Cf. with what we read in the books:

László Miklós (ed.), *Akik imádkoztak üldözőikért* (Those Who Prayed for Their Persecutors), *Börtönvallomások, emlékezések* (Confessions and Memoirs from Prisons), vol. 1-2. Kolozsvár: Kiadja az Erdélyi Református Egyházkerület, 1996.

András Visky, *Bilincseket és börtönt is* (Also Chains and Imprisonment), op.cit

Sándor Szilágyi, *Boldog rabságom* (*My Happy Imprisonment*). Kolozsvár Koinónia Publishing, 1997. Ferenc Visky, *Szerelme szorongat* (*His Love Constrains Me*). Kolozsvár Koinónia Publishing, 2005. Ferenc Visky, *Anti, (Anti)*, Kolozsvár Koinónia Publishing, 2005.

Júlia Visky, 'Az Úré a szabadítás,' in *Az Úré a szabadítás* (*Salvation Is with the Lord*), Olivér Czövek (ed.). Budapest: Primo Kiadó, 1989; *Etc.*

²⁸⁶ Tőkés, p. 142.

meetings, conferences, and youth camps despite the constant surveillance and occasional interrogations by the Secret Police.

Interest in foreign missions was also maintained as is clear from the following story. In the early 1980s, a young American, Carol Nerge, was trying to decide whether Romania or Nepal was her mission field. After a few secret visits to Romania when she came into contact with Visky's circle, she decided for Nepal. Before leaving for the field she attended one of Visky's underground camps where she gladly agreed to be commissioned and sent out by this underground community. She continues to stay in touch with them, and revisited Romania several times with her Nepalese pastor husband. Visky writes about the ecclesiastical circumstances in which the underground activity of CE took place and how it was carried on in spite of the converging sanctions of the church and the Communist authorities:

The official leadership of the church stigmatized the spontaneous rise of the people [against Communism] of 1956 as being not just against the state, but also against the Word and Holy Spirit. After the suppression of the revolution the campaign against those who urged for the renewal of the church became stronger. The church and state media under bold titles campaigned against the already abolished, yet still alive in spirit CE Bethany. One of the superintendents (Sándor Fekete) issued a series of articles with such titles as: "The Bethany [movement] is against the church;" "The Bethany is against the state;" "The Bethany is against peace, against culture, against the nation;" "Their members are reactionaries [aiming to re-establish the old political realm], they are counter-revolutionaries betraying the holy cause of socialism."²⁸⁷

A final illustration of the outcome of the churchinized mission versus revival mission movement can be given. Rev. Sándor Szilágyi, a CE movement adherent, was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment because of his faith; he provided some significant data concerning the attitude of the high leadership of the church in those years in his secret Memoirs in 1976.²⁸⁸ After quoting Dr. János Victor's thoughts from his *Református Hiszekegy* (*Reformed I Believe*'), namely, that Jesus was seized as a criminal by the church authorities, first on the charge of "sacrilege, then on

²⁸⁷ Visky, *Bilincseket és börtönt is* (Also Chains and Imprisonment), p.213.

²⁸⁸ It was read on Radio Free Europe broadcasting and published in 1997 after the Romanian revolution.

the charge of being a dangerous subversive, so that the worldly court judged him also and sentenced him to death;" he continues with another quote: "only He was forsaken, we suffer together with Him [so we are no longer alone]." Szilágyi comments:

What a grace that the same happened in our lives too, we who were sentenced. Once the retired theological professor, Dr. Jenő Horváth explained his opinion about us [CE people] to bishop János Vásárhelyi [in the 1950s]: "It was not they who detached themselves from us [the church], but we excluded them from our midst!" On hearing this, János Vásárhelyi vehemently replied: "The time has come to cut them forever!"²⁸⁹

Having overviewed both the differences and similarities in the theology of missions and of ecclesiology of the most influential theologians of the period, I could come to a closer examination of the exclusivist attitude of the modality with regard to sodality and observe where this process led the TRC and with what unfortunate consequences it was left under the Communist rule.

In this chapter, looking first for reasons for the specific development of ecclesiology and missiology in Transylvania, I began with a comparative overview of the works of the most influential theologians in order to highlight their orientation based on their similarities and differences. Then I analyzed the reasons why the breakthrough for foreign missions proved so difficult in the TRC. I then explored the theology of missions developed by Babos and compared his ideas with those of Döbrössy before comparing and evaluating the views of László and Horváth, then following László's career into the Communist era. I next summarized the resulting effects of the official church's concept of missions which led to compromise with the new regime and to the persecution of CE, both by State and church authorities. Looking for reasons for the specific development of ecclesiology and missiology in Transylvania, I concluded with a comparative overview of the works of the most influential theologians in order to highlight their similarities and differences. In the next chapter, I will summarize my research and draw conclusions from this detailed, extensive study.

²⁸⁹ Szilágyi, p.137.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

According to my findings there were certain attempts to define what mission is among the theologians of the TRC in the period 1895-1950, but few of them tried to give adequate biblical and genuinely reformed theological definitions. Nevertheless, the conceptualization of mission existed and varied from theologian to theologian in accordance with what they believed about the legitimacy of the sodalities against the modality. That produced basically two main camps in the theology and practice of missions. One rejected the sodalities, rendering any mission activity exclusively under the church, which meant in reality, due to an ambiguous ecclesiology, the officialdom of the church. The other model pronounced in favor of the church partnering with the sodalities in carrying out missions. Rather than being orchestrated from above, they opted for missions to operate on a grass-roots level and took that as the starting point in their ecclesiological thinking. In chapter two I demonstrated that the circle of Imre tried to build their missiology upon the peculiarly formulated ecclesiology of the Transylvanians, which was decisively influenced by the neo-Kantian Ravasz. The circle of Kecskeméthy, by contrast, looked at missions as being the essence of the church. They tried to shape their ecclesiological modifications on a missional church concept in order to challenge and change the status quo of an unfortunately over-institutionalized church structure and practice, hoping that revival might come through the missionary movement (represented and channeled by CE and EMESz).

In chapters three and four I dedicated a vast study to the historical, philosophical and theological causes of disinterest in mission. I have found decisive the effects of Hungarian neo-Kantianism and Barthianism, as I deem their influence cannot be overstressed to the detriment of focusing on Reformational theology in formulating Transylvanian ecclesiology and missiology, despite the seemingly declared and even growing confessionalism in the stand of the official church after the 1920's.

The Barthian solution of Tavaszy, Imre and their circle of confounding the Reformer's doctrine of the self-sufficiency of Scriptures for the 'illumination', as explored in the fourth chapter, was taken on board by the Transylvanians who believed that this still reflected the doctrine of the Reformers. I point to the fact that in the TRC the self-sufficiency of Scripture was substituted with a theological principle, searching for and finding the source of authority in the leadership hierarchy playing the role of the 'ecclesia representativa.' Thus the representative church, i.e., the official leadership, who were supposed to represent the masses of the church, could easily exclude the sodality formed from among the laity, in the name of the same laity, as I noticed specifically throughout chapters five and six.

All these resulted in the official church transcending the person of Jesus (and his mission), practically speaking, in order to carry out the (their) church's mission. The alleged 'insufficiency' of Scripture created a paradoxical 'making sufficient' of it, by the elevation of a superimposed hermeneutical principle over the biblical text, backed with authoritarian church structures. This imperceptibly absurd move in the TRC did not allow the readers of the Scriptures, or even of contemporary theology, to transcend the church authority self-imposed over it and so did not invite them to interpret, discuss, and re-create their religious tradition in the light of the world wide context of the universal body of Christ. Instead of building their hermeneutics on the self-sufficiency of Scripture, in looking for an authority they used the axiological method to decide and establish authority in the church. Church structures substituted for textual self-sufficiency and the 'hermeneutical circle' resulted in a process of effacement of the teaching of the biblical text and, subsequently, of the biblical theology of the Reformers.¹

¹ As a result of the above, I am only highlighting the fact that the Böhm-disciple Sándor Makkai felt bound as a bishop of the TRC to explain the particular and very different situation regarding the sodalities in Transylvania and after leaving for Hungary wrote in defense of the 'specific Transylvanian view on sodalities' explaining the matter to the wider Hungarian public: "If the church is in reality a church then only the church is allowed to do mission: hers is the work, to her are belonging the workers, and to her belong the souls for whom and on whom she works. This conviction led the Transylvanian Reformed Church [to believe] that instead of different unions, free associations and sodalities, with its very own workers it should take into her own care and provision the different strata of the church." See in: Sándor Makkai, 'Protestáns közviszonyok Romániában' ('Protestant Public Footing in Romania'), in: *Magyar Protestáns Almanach*, Budapest, 1933, p.53. In the original it reads: "Ha az egyház igazán egyház, akkor csakis maga misszionálhat: övé a munka, övé a munkás, és övé a lélek, akért és

I am distinguishing four types of views of church and missions. In my opinion, that presented by Makkai² and represented by Imre, and later by László and their circle in Transylvania, was what I would call an *exclusivist modality view* of church and mission which was basically intolerant of any volunteer principle, unlike the *inclusivist modality view* which characterized the reformed church in Hungary.³ One can distinguish two more views also, given the above. I think there can be an *exclusivist sodality* which is excessive and this was not the case for CE within the TRC. The last view can be called the *inclusivist sodality*. The tendency with the *modality exclusivists* is in *separating* the church from societies rather than *distinguishing* clearly between church and society as being embodiments of the one and the same entity: the *organic* Body of Christ. The tendency with the *sodality inclusivists* is in *separating* the church from the Kingdom rather than *distinguishing* clearly between the Kingdom and societies.⁴ When attempting to understand the two mission models of Imre and Kecskeméthy, I was persuaded that Kecskeméthy was a *re-inventionalist* in his efforts for the perpetual reformation of the church. Imre was a *conventionalist* meeting the constant exigency of a church in crisis and attempting the readjustment of the structures toward mission from a missiologist's view in his efforts for the perpetual reformation of the church.⁵

In conclusion, I want to summarize and offer some further observations in trying to understand the two main different models:

akiben munkálkodik. Ez a meggyőződés vezette az erdélyi református egyházat arra, hogy a különböző egyesületek és szabad alakulatok helyett a maga munkásai által az egyház tagozatait vegye gondozásba.”

² Quoted in the previous footnote above.

³ The situation in Hungary, to its credit, can be compared with the Scottish one, although it was in Transylvania, ironically, that the Scottish example was frequently invoked as a model.

⁴ The tendency of the first group from among the four, was toward identifying modality with the Kingdom, whereas the tendency of the fourth view was toward identifying sodality with the Kingdom.

⁵ Their basic philosophical and practical differences in thinking can be summed up thus: Imre tried to churchinize the mission first in keeping with his mentor Ravasz, whereas Kecskeméthy tried to missionize the church first, although missionising as a program and *modus vivendi* of believers in his concept went far beyond the church's boundaries; it naturally started with the church visible. Yet both men shared the same aim of stirring up missionary mindedness in a traditional and disinterested church.

First, the inability of these two main protagonists to define mission, was not due to their lack of knowledge in the area but due to the inherent practical exigency ever persistent in theological reasoning against any attempt to give a final definition of mission. One has to face a kind of antinomy which always hinders the solving efforts. To have a rule in advance to solve the antinomy, is or will be or has proven to be a dangerous game always. As Derrida warns, "Any invention of the new that would not go through the endurance of the antinomy would be a dangerous mystification."⁶ Mission would remain an enigmatic theological concept between the antinomy of ecclesiology and missiology, says Bosch⁷ and Horváth noticed something similar when he said: "home mission is a hidden, moreover an enigmatic something, yet no less a reality than the tangible ones, it is a mystery".⁸ No wonder that some scholars argue, like Fekete⁹, that Makkai (and Imre too), wrote an ecclesiology rather than a missiology and like Ende that Imre wrote a Christian education philosophy rather than a missiology. On the other hand, Kecskeméthy seems to have been more successful in defining what mission is in itself, and does not base it on any ecclesiological presupposition. Surprisingly, as I observed, beginning with Tavaszy, followed by Imre and ending with Horváth¹⁰ and László (although with differing approaches) they all came close to the recognition that the church is not a real church if it is not based on mission

⁶ Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*. Translated by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992, p.72.

⁷ See Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p.511. Quoting Stephen Neill, *Creative Tension*, London: Edinburgh House Press, 1959, p.81. and also Freytag and others:

"There can be no doubt that the last decades have seen a surprising escalation in the usage of the term 'mission' - surprisingly, that is, in light of the fact that these decades have also witnessed unparallel criticism of the missionary enterprise. The inflation of the concept has both positive and negative implications. One of the negative results has been the tendency to define mission too broadly - which prompted Neill to formulate his famous adage, "If everything is mission, nothing is mission," and Freytag to refer to "the specter of pan-missionism." Even if these warnings have to be taken seriously, *it remains extraordinarily difficult to determine what mission is.*" [Emphasis, LH.]

⁸ Jenő Horváth, *A belmisszió lényege* (The Essence of Home Missions), op. cit, see on p.ii. of the 'Preface.

⁹ Cf. Károly Fekete, Makkai Sándor gyakorlati teológiai munkássága, cited above, Debrecen, 1997, pp.88-94.

¹⁰ He came so close to the concept of mission being the very *esse*/being of the church: "Meanwhile mission is also a fundamental question, a 'to be or not to be' [question] of the Church of Christ, as well." Horváth, p.3.

(i.e., mission belongs not just to the *bene esse* of the church, but also to the *ad esse* of the church, it is its only *modus vivendi*). Yet they all failed to build a missional (Guder) ecclesiology based on this recognition, except for Kecskeméthy who clearly proposed it but unfortunately never actually undertook it himself.

Second, the differing views of Kecskeméthy and Imre about the general Christian¹¹ versus the confessional reformed nature of the missionary model and whether this could be solved in one way or another turned out to be a false dilemma. As I observed when evaluating the researched material, it cannot be declared that in order to churchinize mission we should go so far as to become a church-centered mission. Yet unwittingly this was the result of the forced churchinizing of mission, i.e., the Practical Theology-program planned by Ravasz, launched by Imre, bolstered with theological statements by Horváth, orchestrated ‘from above’ by Bishop Makkai, and finally distorted by László who opened it up to ecclesiastical and political abuse. Under László and Bishop Vásárhelyi leadership, the church started to collaborate to some extent with the Communist authorities and mission, having been integrated into the church, could practically be abolished. On the other hand, it became clear to me during the research, that the problem cannot be solved either by deciding for a para-church model, saying that this will keep us more Christ-centered.¹²

Third, these two models were similar to what could be found in Hungary at the time. The debate there between Makkai and Victor in 1941 parallels what happened in Transylvania a few years earlier.¹³ The dilemma in their major focus and in their many discussions was the modality versus/or parallel sodalities dilemma.

¹¹ Cf. Kecskeméthy’s protesting: “*universal* rather than *general* Christianity”, as quoted earlier.

¹² In fact, this could involve a real risk of not staying church-focused. Besides, in resolving not to focus on the church there is no guarantee that by doing so we will achieve a Christ-centeredness. Indeed, there is a danger that whatever results will be neither Christ-centered nor church-centered, but autonomously Christ-lost and church-irrelevant.

¹³ It is somehow interesting to see how Imre himself made a comparison: “There were two views regarding mission. One held that first an organization was needed, which could later be made alive. This was mainly the view in Hungary, but it also had an effect in Transylvania in a large argument which began with the idea of joining the Scout movement to the Associations that were formed in 1932. The followers of the other view attempted to gain *persons* for Christ, because they were convinced that people with the same serving and strong faith will by all means organize themselves. A few people, who became even fewer, and I were supporting the latter view and I attempted to keep the Bible study groups formed as a result of our Sunday school work together and to make connections between them. We talked

Fourth, the theological possibility of a church-focused and yet Christ-centered mission can be sustained only by stating its practical impossibility, by maintaining the critical and prophetic perspective that the church is in constant danger of running the risk of becoming an aim in itself, and as such, an aim of even missions. Missions is not just a function of the church, as Kecskeméthy rightly warns, with the service of the church as its final end. Rather, for a church to be in mission, the centre of its proclamation must be Christ Himself.¹⁴ This makes mission the *essence* of the church rather than merely one *function* among many. Being comes before knowing. The Church is the object of faith, it can be known adequately only by faith. Its being is a given fact¹⁵ in faith, it comes prior to its understanding even by the “transcendental epistemology” of the Böhmiens.¹⁶ Here I

and struggled a lot over these Mt: 28 ideas. I still remember as blessed and happy times the discussions with Dezső László and Béla Z. Nagy about work among young people and with Mrs. Andor Járosi about the girls' association.” Imre, *Önéletírás (Autobiography)*, pp.291-292 .

¹⁴ See for further examination the editorial article of Kecskeméthy on 'Mission' in *Kis Tükör* Vol. 21, Nr. 31 (August 1st 1931). Below are some selected statements of his ample reasoning in order to highlight his thoughts on the issue:

“Mission is quite *foreign to the nominal Christianity* of nowadays. Somehow the Great Commission (Mt 28:19-20) is left out in the everyday practice of our faith. (...) It is *the task of historians to research and demonstrate why and in what manner this happened*. (...)

Mission is the target-orientation of sanctification and can only be validated by fulfilling the mission tasks [Emphasis, LH].” One can observe how the doctrine of sanctification is immediately connected to the theology of missions in Kecskeméthy's theological concept. Then he continues, stressing the major role of the Augustinian voluntarian principle in carrying out missions:

“That is why the Saviour would say, it is in vain that people call him Lord - saying to him, my Lord! My Lord, - unless they fulfill the will of his heavenly Father. For human beings a want of this means there is no state of salvation for them. For the great promise of Matthew 28: 20 - ‘and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world’ - is the pledge and assurance for the believers living on earth and is set forth like a condition for the fulfillment of the command given in the previous verse (i.e. the Great Commission).” Then Kecskeméthy takes an illustration from the history of missions to highlight his point in describing the inertia of the institutionalized church created by the persisting ‘Neonominalism,’ and giving reasons why a resulting curious vicious circle hinders the church from becoming a missional church. See in the rest of the article.

¹⁵ And cannot be approached with a Kantian agnosticism as being just a working presupposition of which existence cannot be either proved, or denied. It cannot be found in the sphere of things only subjectively adequate.

¹⁶ *Be-com-ing* a church is guaranteed by mission which is the essence of the church. A church's self-awareness of itself as a church cannot be guaranteed by self-reflection, but rather by its being in the process of mission. It is an order of knowledge (*ordo cognoscendi*), which follows

pointed to the danger of not being aware of the lingering neo-Kantianism, and its epistemological method, as I discovered in the supposedly theological reasoning of the official TRC's theologians, instead of following the strictly reformed theological approach. What is first in the order of being is last in the order of knowing. Luther says of grace that it can be known only *sub contrario*, under contrast. Similarly, mission can be known only under contrast and this is how it indirectly serves the church.

Fifth, description is not enough for we need a prescriptive aspect as well. The church cannot be "known," only believed, according to the Apostle's Creed; but to believe the universal catholic church demands an epistemological approach of which we cannot directly be in possession, not even with the unaided "autonomous reason" proposed by Kant. As we cannot know Christ *according* to the flesh (*secundum carnem*) anymore, only *in* the flesh (*in carne*), in the same way, we cannot know His Body, the church directly either. One can see the church in Christ, but not apart from Him, not outside of Him; "only" as a body. We can only indirectly perceive it in humility and this is especially valid in applying the incarnational model of missions. It seems that Kecskeméthy originated more *descriptive* ideas (i.e., what the Scriptures tell us about mission, and only then exploring how the church should do it) and Imre more *prescriptive* ideas for mission (how the church should do mission and then trying to justify that from the Scriptures) carried out by the church. In this regard Imre proved to be more Kantian than biblical. On the other hand, Kecskeméthy had a more critical and *proscriptive* demand toward the church and yet he was '*pro-perspective*' in fighting for the future of the church; whereas Imre was more *descriptive* about what the church's mission should be. That being said, Imre too did not refrain from making sharp criticisms of his own denomination from time to time.¹⁷

Sixth, following the above, I deem it necessary that a self-critical definition of identity needs to be proposed for what exactly mission and the church should be in the Transylvanian realm; national identity should not be denounced yet it

the order of being. So the order of being (*ordo essendi*) and the order of knowing (*ordo cognoscendi*) might not be the same in the understanding of the church as a phenomena.

¹⁷ Generally speaking, I assume that Imre was more successful in following the incarnational model in mission, at least in home or "inner" mission, by utilizing missionary zeal in the church, the church being seen as a purely religious and ethno-cultural entity. That seemed to be more in keeping with the Transylvanian Hungarian identity.

must be opened up to difference. As Derrida says, “what is proper to a culture is to[sic!] not be identical to itself.” That is to be even, “different with itself.”¹⁸

It is difficult for me to anticipate how my research and the conclusions I draw can contribute, if at all, to my church and its missionary calling and enterprise in the twenty-first century. But my critique will be the first contribution to the theological work and church practice of the TRC, as there has been little research done in this area, and the little that has been done has failed to be critical.

There is an urgent necessity for more research to be done both internationally and locally (in the history and present of the TRC) on the long reaching effects (sometimes unrealized) and influences of neo-Kantianism on ecclesiology and on other reformed doctrines in their dogmatical development. There is also an urgent need to discover to what extent even the neo-orthodoxy of the twentieth century was influenced by neo-Kantianism, although generally it is believed that it escaped this unbiblical ground. My contribution, I hope, will stimulate a dialogue on these important issues which were raised by our forefathers in faith and which are so much neglected today in the TRC. It is my hope that the HRC in both Hungary, Romania, and elsewhere will be challenged with the comparison I have made of the local interpretation of mission contrasted with that of the world wide context both in space and time. I would like to think that somehow my research will be at least a ‘tiny step’ in turning my church towards being a more mission-oriented church and helping her to face contemporary challenges, calling the TRC out from her insular position and to examine whether her present institutionalized structure is suitable for the needs of the emerging generation. I consider this to be crucially important for the preparation of the church for the post-modern challenge on both a local and global level. Thus I paid significant attention to the Hungarian neo-Kantianism which championed the Modernism of the times. I freely acknowledge that some questions remain unanswered but if I at least highlighted the inherent problematic nature of these disputed questions in missiology on both the local and international level, then I consider my research to be worthwhile.

I am also proposing an opening of a dialogue and fair debate on my findings both locally, with my fellow churchmen and churchwomen, and on a wider level,

¹⁸ Derrida, p.9.

with the contribution of theologians worldwide. The modality versus sodality dilemma persists everywhere and some kind of resolution is crucial for the future of a church called to serve in a society where modernist and postmodernist views still prevail.

Any proposed discussion has to disclose the possible self-deceptions inherent in the idea that the reality of the church can be changed by mere criticism in the name of an ecclesial idealism. It is misleading to draw a line between the church's spiritual or "worldly calling;" rather, what has to be clarified, is the differences between the inherent or apparent, and between the real or assumed mandates of the church. I hope to stir up discussions in my own church with my thesis that a biblically reformed concept of mission was over-shadowed by an ecclesiology grounded on German transcendental idealism which confused the Kingdom of God with an ethical kingdom and that theologians then tried to reform the TRC in the light of that philosophical pattern. The proposed discussion has to identify the boundaries of mission action and cultural mandate in order to guard against any "over-contextualization" of missions. The situation of the TRC proves that we must discern between incarnation, identification and involvement in the incarnational model we apply. The consequences of the TRC's disastrous isolationism, both in the near and recent past, are painfully apparent. However, a realization of these consequences could propel the TRC into partnering with others in mission, as they seek to play their part in world evangelization. This in turn could also provide a challenge and a check on her mission theology and ecclesiology. Will the TRC be capable of doing mission in Christ's way when the church must be the hermeneutic of the Gospel? Can the TRC overcome the factors which have crippled her missionary consciousness, i.e., the privatization of the church in the Enlightenment which was succeeded by the neo-Kantian corset? The TRC has to find a means to avoid the neo-Kantian failure which produced a theological confusion that substituted the *missionary dimension* of the church with its *missionary intention*. Furthermore, it took refuge in a non-theological method which obscurely exchanged the putting into practice of the biblical realism which genuinely describes what the church really is, with the mirage of the 'ought to be' state of the church.

Then, I propose we must discuss how to distinguish between the Kantian model of the church and the Biblical model of the church, and between the moral

organization of mankind and the Kingdom of God, when the neo-Kantian theologians like Ritschl and his Transylvanian counterparts were aiming for the church's transformation to an ethical kingdom of ends. How would such a teleological transformation relate to missions and to a genuine reformed eschatology? How can the TRC move from "context to contextualization" and be able to embrace the model of cross-cultural communication in her own cultural and political setting? Can ethno-centricism be avoided by a balanced and more reformed theological orientation? My proposal is that following my thesis the TRC has to liberate itself for a missionary encounter and, following Goheen's evaluation of Newbigin's missiology, has a threefold task:

- 1) The historical task: the TRC needs a missiological analysis of its historical, social and ethno-cultural context;
- 2) The epistemological task: the TRC needs an alternative theological theory of knowledge to that of philosophical, in the re-making of the theology of the church and mission; and
- 3) The theological task: in presenting the gospel as a public truth in the Transylvanian-Romanian reality of present and future.

I do urge other scholars to continue the research begun in this dissertation and to explore the issues further.

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