

Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty of Humanities
Doctoral School of History

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION PHD THESES

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**Reformed charitable institutions in Slovakia and Sub-Carpathia in
the interwar period – with an outlook till the end of World War II**

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I. Project of choice, structure

In my thesis I would like to present the history of the more significant reformed charitable institutions in Slovakia and Sub-Carpathia from 1918 to 1945. My research covers investigation into the orphanage in Beretke established by the Slovak and Sub-Carpathia Universal Reformed Church, the orphanages in Kiskoszmály, Komárom and Léva thanks to the Kiskoszmály revival movement, the orphanages in Munkács and Nagyszőlős maintained by the Sub-Carpathian Reformed Ministering Society resp. the home for the aged in Nagydobrony and the poorhouse in Komárom brought into life thanks to local initiatives. I am not dealing with institutions with smaller, bad source conditions /orphanages in Magyarsók, Nagykálna, Jóka/ resp. with charitable institutions which can be classified only with reservations, neither with social motivation established cafeterias nor colleges /Csallókőzaranyos, Rimaszombat, Pozsony/.

I will present the institutional history primarily embedded in ecclesiastical, in this case missionary field /chapters 1-5/, but I will briefly also touch upon those social and ecclesiastical policy motives that were of influence on the founding and functioning of the examined institutions. Within this /chapter 2/ I try to give the precise definition of those expressions which give the conceptual frame of my thesis / inner mission, religious revival, graciousness/. Chapters 6-12 include the detailed, in each case separately, the microhistorical-like presentation of the founding and functioning of the chosen social institutions.

II. Research precedents

When writing this thesis I could only rely on modest research precedents. Up to the present no general work has been published on the Slovak and Sub-Carpathian reformed social institutions. In the years following the I. Vienna award two useful summarizing ecclesiastical pieces of work written by Csomár Z., Tárnok Gy. were published – to the extent of a short chapter it was Csomár who in more greater detail deals with social institutions /orphanages/, while Tárnok devotes only two paragraphs to this theme. Whereas these writings provide a proper field for the general introduction of the inner missionary field as well, although – reflected in the earlier ecclesiastical notion which did not consider Christianity as a union to be part of a closer connected church history – emphasizing the clerical line. The majority of my examined social institutions on the other hand is linked to societies the introduction of which is also missing from these works.

Decisively, depending on these two books, since 1989 social institutions are only mentioned in shorter Hungarian general works, mainly with reference to the Kiskoszmály movement . While in the only Slovak summative study /Svátková, I./ which relies on the only known, solely depending on archival sources and contemporary Slovak ecclesiastical press there is even no reference to the work of the inner mission of the Church.

More authors have tried to deal with the outlining of the history of some institutions. Fritz Peyer-Müller has concisely outlined the history of the Sub-Carpathian social institutes which has been published as a book introducing the history of the Sub-Carpathian reformed church district in his PhD thesis.

In connection with the history of the Kiskoszmály movement and its homes for orphans Kálmán Tóth's *Kősziklára épített ház. A kiskoszmályi mozgalom ismertetése* from 1942 cannot be evaded. The documentary value of his small booklet published in 1939 introducing the Timothy Association (Timótheus Szövetség), just as the beginnings of the movement introduced in the booklet *A kiskoszmályi árvaház története* is without doubt written by Károly Nehézy. Numerous shorter or longer memories about the orphanage from the 21. century have been published by László Szenczi. These have been later summarized in three memoir volumes, which serve for important data for those interested in this topic. The most competent introduction of the Kiskoszmály movement till now is connected with the name of Ferenc Szűcs, who in his in 2012 issued book *„...mint tyúk a kiscsirkéit” – Nehézy Károly élete és szolgálata* embedded in the life of the spiritual leader of the movement, minister of the Reformed Church Károly Nehézy introduces the history of the West-Subcarpathian reformed revival. Recently Ferenc Tömösközi summarized in short the history of the movement and its orphanages in his doctoral dissertation dealing with the history of the Reformed Diocese of Komárom 1918-1938 which he defended at the Selye János University Reformed Theological Faculty in 2015.

Earlier no writing appeared on the history of the orphanage in Beretke while the only traceable literature about the history of the reformed poorhouse in Komárom was written by Zoltán Galambos in the sixties remaining only as manuscript paper *IA „református szegényház” (története) a rév-komáromi református keresztyén egyházban/.*

The most important group of used sources for the drawing up of the dissertation were the diocese, church district, convent and synod minutes, the majority of which were published. The search of these, published mainly in the years of 1918-1938, came up against unwanted difficulties, because they are only sparsely to be found in Slovak and Hungarian public collections. The author of these lines visited numerous reformed parish churches from Komárom to Huszt to gather repeatedly the latent missing copies in the musty cellars of vicarages or in the sultry towers of churches.

The contemporary church press meant almost the same source-material which, in many cases, supplemented very well the sources from the record.

There are relatively few sources to be found about the examined institutes in archives with more reasons to be blamed. While these charitable institutions were kept up by societies or churches and did not deal with political activities as for this they were generally beyond the visual angle of the government, and so only sporadic and very scanty source material remained about them. Not much better is the situation in the case of the ecclesiastical archives. Among the eight examined institutions seven were supported by societies which maintained only loose connections with the organs of the Church. They even took care of their inner documentation connected with their activities. However following the cessation or the dissolution of the society these documents diminished. Among the church archives in this way only I have found considerable source material in the Collection of Reformed Colleges of Sárospatak archives as well as in the Synodic Archive of the Hungarian Reformed Church in Hungary. The lack of archive sources have been partly fortunately compensated by the once in the functioning social institutes remained documents found at the concerned persons' /leaders, ministers, educators/ descedants or relatives. Here I have to emphasize the legacy of Károly Nehéz and Erzsébet Szeghalmi deaconess into which I could have a look thanks to

Ferenc Szűcs /Budapest/; the Kiskoszmály orphanage leading Kalocsay family documents including the lengthy memoirs of Kalocsay Ferencné which I could go through thanks to the deceased Kalocsay Ferenc; Tóth Kálamán's legacy which was made available to me by his daughter Ilona Tóth /Dunaszerdahely/; to Zoltán Gaál, a former educator of the Timothy orphanage, for his in 1939-1940 detailed diary which was given to me for study by Dezső Gaál /Bogya/, as well as the abided documents in the legacy of Lajos Gérecz, the head of the orphanage in Beretke, which I could look into thanks to the deceased Mária Végh /Tornalja/.

Particularly I have to mention Árpád Hargita, who in the nineties – by mail or personally – visited the once participating still living persons of the Kiskoszmály movement who by post or in the form of interviews have shared important information with him. Making the most of this material Hargita would have liked to work up Nehézy's life and the history of the Kiskoszmály movement, but his death hindered him in doing so. However his collected letters have endured, one part of which he has summarized together with the typewritten interviews in a manuscript source collection entitled *Vázlat és gyűjtött anyag és gondolatok. Nehézy Károly – felvidéki ébredés – kiskoszmályi mozgalom és kisugárzásai*. Hargita's commenced work was finally finished with the already above-mentioned writing of his book.

III. Results

The Slovak and Sub-Carpathian Universal Reformed Church was considered all the time as one of the main representatives of the Hungarian national ambitions and Hungarian irredentism between the two world wars by the Czechoslovak government. The actively, gradually becoming isolated Church, which lost its beneficial and in part material support benefiting from the state before 1918 as well, realized by the middle of the twenties that its survival and the preservation of the national-denominational identity of Hungarian Christians can be achieved only by self-organization. The missing of upper reformed educational institutional systems and the strengthening of inner religious life was considered as the measure of pressing identity. All of these were answers to the laicization processes as well. This was merely reinforced by the secularization character of the Czechoslovak state /and mainly the Czech-Moravian part of the country/.

Following the First World War, from the point of view of the Reformed Church, Upper Hungary /Slovakia, Sub-Carpathia/ was considered mainly an outlying area. Not quite 10% of all the Reformed of historic Hungary lived in this territory, in a long stripe of land, from Pozsony to Técső, mainly in village surroundings. First of all the latter one was the reason that since the 1880-ies the inner mission gathered momentum in Hungary which was an urban phenomenon, it barely circulated in congregations of Upper-Hungary before 1918. Though groups of inner mission were established sporadically here as well. These however maintained closer contact with the inner mission centres of the capital first of all. It follows from the foregoing that the Reformed, transferred in the very beginning to Czechoslovakia, possessed neither a unified inner mission nor a serious inner mission institutional system.

There was another social position in case of the Upper-Hungarian Lutherans who, mainly thanks to the German congregations, maintained a serious institutional system in the

examined area even before 1918. The Lutheran inner mission exercised influence on the Calvinist congregation too, but this was not notable.

Before World War I the inner mission was going on decisively within the scope of social frames. The institutional Church only realized the significance of this work in the twenties and tried to integrate these societies into the Church, herewith taking into its own hands the organizing and controlling of that. Since the reformed inner mission without more serious antecedents in the Slovakian and Sub-Carpathian areas in the twenties, it emerged in remarkably changed surroundings, and for this reason its development differs from the one in Hungary. Even though the organizing was initiated by the societies here as well, the institutional Church actively took steps against these from the beginnings, and so tried at the same time to organize the inner mission according to its own guiding principles and keeping it in the framework of the congregation. One of the characteristics of the Slovak and Sub-Carpathian inner missions was that the evangelical /social/ and the ecclesiastical-confessional/institutional/ line of direction unfolded parallel next to each other.

The latter most significant character was the head of the Theological Seminary in Losonc, the inner missioner lecturer of the convent, Béla Sörös. Set out from his own experience Sörös tried to introduce such kind of an inner mission policy in the Church, which in the strictly confessional scope, the dynamism of evangelical movements securing certain characteristics could have been found. His efforts have only partly been crowned with success.

The Church tried to create the framework of the institutional inner mission work. Likewise the in 1923 constructed, but never confirmed Church Statue-Book /CSB/ Act VIII. dealt with the regulation of the inner mission. While the state approval of the CSB was delayed, the start of the „clerical“ inner mission work became increasingly more pressing, therefore the convent – as first among the Sub-Carpathian Reformed Churches – had the VIII. article, in form of a statute, to come into force in 1926. Further the convent estimated the establishment of the mission boards of the church districts and dioceses.

By the second half of the thirties the directing and controlling organs of the congregational missions of the Church had developed, the inner mission took root in more and more congregations, but it became a mass phenomenon only in the Sub-Carpathian district. In this district many-sided missionary work developed, which was, for the most part, due to the commitment of bishop Bertók Béla. Till 1936 he was able to keep in one group the directed ministers and laymen of the inner mission belonging to the different piety tendencies, but with the presence of the Kiskoszmály movement /Circle of Friends - Baráti Kör/ this unity broke up.

The representatives of the evangelical line before 1918 were largely members of the most important organization of the pietists in Hungary – the Bethenia Society. They established Czechoslovakia's first /decisively/ reformed inner missionary society, the New Reformation Association, which was the representative of the pre-war society Christianity, which before the war had no connection with the institutional Church. The organization though, after two-three years of its foundation came to an end during 1923-24, but its functioning was important in two aspects. On the one hand as a reaction to the establishing of the society the Church began more intensively dealing with the developing of the congregational inner mission institutional framework and legal regulation, while on the other

hand on the forums of this organization the /pietist/ reformed followers, not knowing about each another till then, got in touch with one another for the first time. After a few years the cessation of the society was not imperative. To this above all it was down to the unexpected departure of the leading members from the country.

The Béthel Society was established by the members of the New Reformation Association of Western–Slovakia in 1930, which was the most significant representative of the reformed evangelical inner mission policy in the thirties in Czechoslovakia. Under the spiritual leadership of Károly Nehézy the blossoming out of the pietist inner mission revival movement /the Kiskoszmály movement/ found followers mainly in the villages and small towns in the territory between the Vág and Garam rivers. Setting against the social problems of the Hungarian village the church welfare work, in this way the institutional orphan custody came to the fore in the work of the movement. The leaders of the Slovak Calvinists strived for the whole development of the absenting inner mission institutional system and so made strenuous efforts to organize the foreign mission. Its evangelization activity was aimed at the whole renewal of ecclesiastical life. The specific character of the movement was given by the mainly provincial, rural character, its increased commitment towards orphan care and the characteristic community of property and Christian fundamentalism characteristic of early Christians. Its spiritualness was formed mainly by its very impressive leader, Károly Nehézy. In the background mostly the traditions of late pietism and puritan piety are being outlined, mixed with the heritage of Calvin's theology.

The Kiskoszmály movement tried to extend its influence to the other two reformed church district. In the Slovak Cistibiscan Reformed Church District there efforts remained unsuccessful the main reason of which can be found in the unanimously negative conduct of the district board. On the other hand serious results were achieved in Sub-Carpathia; in the second half of the thirties spirituality and inner mission methods characteristic for the movement succeed in adopting. However this led to the division of the till then united ministerial department in the missionary field and also to a sharp confrontation with the church leadership.

While the church welfare work of the Kiskoszmály movement was acknowledged in each and every case, meanwhile its interconfessional character, the public worship of the joining pious Christians, and the society form of the Church met with serious antipathy to one part of the leaders of the Church. Realizing this Nehézy, from the very beginning, strove for close cooperation with the institutional Church and the Church recognition of his movement. The „process of becoming a Church“ of the Béthel Society was a result of a longer process, which was concluded only after the first Vienna resolution. One of the important moments was the handshake of the two most significant characters, Sörös and Nehézy in Losonc in 1937, representing both the ecclesiastical-confessional and the evangelical trend, which symbolically declared the reception of the evangelical movements. In the background of the atonement we have to see first of all the Sub-Carpathian Hungarians, within this, the by initiated Szilassy Béla Reformed Union movement wanting to increase the Calvinist public importance, the establishing of which fitted very well into the national locking up process of the second half of the thirties.

Particularly, we also have to mention the assessment of the Timothy Association could not in the frame of the Kiskoszmály movement, because its history constitutes an interesting,

although less known chapter not only for the Slovak reformed inner mission but it also interesting for the Czechoslovak Hungarian youth movements as well. The youth movements between the wars in Czechoslovakia organized themselves equally on an ideological and denominational basis as well. Among the best known of them was the people's-left wing orientated Sarló (Sickle) functioning between 1928-1934, as well as the organising of the Prohászka Circles on the basis of national-Christian worth for Catholic youth. Wanting to organize the reformed youth into one group, the in 1926 launched youth movement by Béla Sörös at the theological college in Losonc once and for all got stuck. The reason for this can be searched for, first of all, in the different viewpoints of the social question existing between the church leaders and the towards the left wing orientated reformed students. Later although there were initiatives to restart the reformed youth work, but these, with the exception of the Timothy Association, could not claim more meaningful results. The Timothy Association found the proper answers to the problems of society in the practising of piety and protestant fundamentalism. Despite the small number of the association's members their built up and maintained Timothy home for orphans was considered as a significant achievement nationwide.

The Sub-Carpathian ramification of the Kiskoszmály movement was set up known as the Circle of Friends in 1936, while Béla Szabó, Zsigmond Simon and Tóth Kálmán played a determining role in its being established. Considering its character it had the same basis as the Kisoszmály movement, although in the course of time it grew richer with peculiar features. The Circle of Friends never became a society, all the time it remained a movement of renewal within the Church. Béla Bertók, the Sub-Carpathian bishop, in 1937 nevertheless sharply turned against the pietist ministers' organized movement, because he saw the danger of outer influence of the district inner mission work and the giving up clerical-confessional directive principles till then. Thanks to the bishop's action, the room for action of the movement significantly narrowed down. Its leader, Béla Szabó, departed from the church district to evade further conflicts with Bertók.

The first Vienna resolution influenced the development of the inner mission in different ways in the examined area. The slow strengthening of the ecclesiastical inner mission continued on till the end of World War II. The, till then, relatively rapidly expanding impetus of the Kiskoszmály movement was nevertheless worn down by the frontier changes because it could only adapt itself to the changed circumstances with difficulties. On the other hand the frontier changes led to positive changes for the Eastern Circle of Friends / Keleti Baráti Kör/. The Sub-Carpathian church district, restricting its activities, ceased to exist. Its incorporation with the Slovak Cistibiscan Reformed Church District gave it an opportunity for the expansion towards the areas of the home country, later on the reannexated Transylvanian areas. The dynamism of the latter is well indicated by the fact that by the end of the war about half of the Sub-Carpathian ministers were members of the Circle of Friends.

During the state turning point in 1918/1919 we have knowledge of only two small capacity reformed social institutions in the annexed territories from Hungary to Czechoslovakia / the alms-houses in Komárom and Magyarsók/, while already in the time of the first Vienna resolution six reformed orphanages, four alms-houses and one home for the aged composed the social institutional system of the Church. The decisive part of these

institutions were established as a result of the unfolding Upper Hungarian and Sub-Carpathian awakening.

The majority of the established social institutions were orphanages. The taking up of the caring of orphans gave a specific characteristic to the Upper-Hungarian and Sub-Carpathian reformed church welfare work. Nevertheless the resultant changes were in the case of state orphan care in the background of this phenomenon. The state children's homes functioned, for the most part, as distributing centres in historical Hungary, from which the children needing help were directed for custody to /mostly provincial/ families. The non-Hungarian native speaking children were transferred mainly to Hungarian families, not once far from their native country. This experience resulted most times in the gradual Magyarization of the cared children. Following the state turning point the Czechoslovak state took over and further activated the system of Hungary's central orphan care with so much deviation that it now rearranged it to its own national interests serving for „Czechoslovakization” and secularization. The children in bigger and bigger proportions arrived at Slovak families, and their education was moving on compulsorily in secular schools. This system resulted in the weakening or loss of national and denominational identity for the Hungarian reformed children who were taken to state children's homes. Nevertheless we don't think that these would have been the main purposes for establishing orphanage institutions. We can see this rather in the continually broader-ranging spreading, but on the basis of this the strengthening social sense of responsibility turned towards orphan care. These external reasons played an important role in that.

Among the examined social institutions in my dissertation three orphanages were brought into existence and maintained by the Kiskoszmály religious revival. Characteristic of these in the movement was their social foundation and in their regulation and functioning the conceivable prevalent pious spiritualness. The manifestation of interconfessionalism was that, irrespective of religious affiliation, the needy children and the orphanage employees were taken on in the first years. After establishing closer links with the institutional Church this had changed to a certain degree and bigger emphasis was put on its Calvinist nature. Although the orphanages of the Kiskoszmály movement, contrasted with the other social institutes, disposed over its own estate as well, struggled with financial problems all the time because they cared for an excessively greater number of children compared to their income.

In the beginning the Béthel Society maintained a coeducational home for orphans in Marcelháza belonging to the diocese of Komárom, then from 1931 in the centre of the name-giving movement in Kiskoszmály /diocese of Bars/. The different relationship towards the Kiskoszmály movement between the leaderships of the two dioceses played a decisive role in the moving of the orphanage from the diocese in Komárom to the diocese in Bars. While the leaders of the diocese in Komárom, in the forefront with dean Gyalókay, clearly rejected the pious spiritualness represented by the movement /with this the movement as well/ in the meantime the leaders of the diocese in Bars, deans Pál Patay then Pál Czeglédy, recognizing the importance of the wide-ranging social and evangelizing work carried out by the movement – under supervision of the Church – considerably supported the Béthel Society in a moral and material aspect, too.

A serious problem of the orphanage in Kiskoszmály from the outset was that there was no opportunity for proper education for the bigger children in the village. That is why a

branch orphanage was opened for secondary school orphans in Léva in 1934. Because of its small capacity the orphanage in Léva could not entirely help the problem, so the Timothies established an orphanage for boys which in the following year moved into a storeyed building built by them – the Timothy mansion-house. Herewith a division of labour evolved between the institutions according to which the infants and children of kindergarten age were brought up, in the future too, in Kiskoszmály, the girls in Léva and the boys in the orphanage of Komárom. Following the first Vienna resolution the social institutional system of the movement had further increased. The former leader of the Eastern Circle of Friends, Szabó Béla, already a minister in Pozsony, initiated the founding of an orphanage in the Slovak capitol, however about the functioning of which we know very little and after a short existence was wound up.

As a consequence of the frontier change in 1938 the Kiskoszmály orphanage /and the inner mission/, getting into a peripheral situation owing to geographical and transport reasons, lost its meaning and later the under-aged orphans were moved to Léva in 1942. Paralell with this increasingly greater importance was attached to the Timothy orphanage in Komárom. After the war the returned territories belonging to Hungary in 1938 became part of Czechoslovakia again, the leadership of which, referring to the principle of collective guiltiness, put into force civil disability measures against the country's Hungarian population. The Béthel Society, as an unreliable organization from the standpoint of the state, was dissolved, its possessions were confiscated. Károly Nehézy and the bigger part of the volunteers of the Kiskoszmály movement departed for the mother-country in 1947.

In the case of the functioning of the orphanage in Beretke the religious spiritual attitude of the founders was clear. In accordance with the preferred strict denominational trend of the institutional church solely reformed children were admitted. The institution worked in good material conditions all the time to which the support of the institutional church contributed as well. Its financial situation rendered it also possible to invest the accumulated surplus into the purchasing of land, afterwards to be leased. The obligation of the inner mission in establishing the orphanage is unambiguously demonstrated, however strained relations were to be felt in the course of its functioning between the directing board of the orphanage and its first two headmasters, Gyula Bácsy and Zoltán Borza. The pious spiritualness represented by the last named two persons was, that is to say, consistently rejected by the board of the orphanage led by Zoltán Tornallyay. It is likely that this opposition played a decisive role in Bácsy's leaving and Borza's resignation of the headmaster's position as well.

Though the orphanage in Beretke in principle functioned as an orphanage of the Universal Church, it functioned actually as a regional orphanage as a result of the regional division of the Church. Its initiators were the Calvinists in the diocese of Gömör, who also supported it financially to the highest degree. The members of the orphanage board were also from Gömör. Among them It was the Tornallyay family which stood out and endowed the manor-house while it even covered the expenses of its reconstruction. We reckon the awakening combined with the patron tradition of older ages. Margit Tornallyay and Zoltán Tornallyay played a determining role in directing the institution all the time, being true protectors of the institution, their notion was also decisive in connection with the directing and functioning of the orphanage.

In the background of the founding of the orphanage in Munkács and the home for the aged in Nagydobrony, among the Sub-Carpathian social institutions, was the inner mission similarly as the institutions of the Kiskoszmály movement, while in the background of the revival of the orphanage in Nagyszőlős we can discover the, for earlier ages characteristic, social responsibility paired with patron tradition. Although the Sub-Carpathian Reformed Helping Society /SCRHC – Kárpátaljai Református Segítő Egyesület/ legally founded the home for orphans in Munkács, and this same society was responsible for the maintenance administration and for the administration of the orphanage in Nagyszőlős so the society background was only seeming. The SCRHC functioned as an accomplishing society of the ecclesiastical inner mission work of the Sub-Carpathian church district. Its leadership practically agreed with the leadership of the church district. Bishop Bertók explained its establishment with practical reasons, but in our opinion that intention had a great influence in its being established as well so that the Church couldn't have a say in the directing of the functioning orphanages by the SCRHC /within the two other church districts/.

The history of the almshouse in Komárom differs from the other examined institutes in my thesis. During its existence the home for destitute children was not institutionalized. The old men having found here refuge lived from the financial aid and donations of the local church, the Calvinist believers of the town and the Protestant Women's Club /Protestáns Nőegylet/. The systematic spiritual care of the living in the almshouse had been solved only with the establishing of the deaconship in the thirties which took up the issue of the almshouse and its residents. The building of a new, modern asylum in the period was in the plans of the church all the time, its realization however never took place owing to material reasons in the beginning then to the difficulties of the war. The almshouse in Komárom just as the whole reformed social institutional system in the region of Slovakia and Sub-Carpathia between 1928–1938 and the territory reached by the battle-line of the war as well as the political changes were entirely swept away.

IV. Related Publications

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