

Eötvös Loránd University  
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Theses

László Ravasz and the Calvinist Education Policy  
in Hungary  
Between the Two World Wars

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## 1. The Hungarian Reformed Church, and Calvinist people in the Hungarian society

The visible and invisible church, the organization and the Christianity of the people confessing the disciplines of Christ jointly formed the history of Europe and Hungary. The Reformed Church, that is the church reformed by the Gospel (i.e. the Word of God), had to fight not only for its own survival, but also had to make sacrifices for Hungarian independence and its intellectual rise for centuries. The fight for survival was a complex one itself, involving components of inner weaknesses and outside forces. Material and intellectual gain usually happened after traumatic periods, which opened new avenues for restart.

One of the consequences of the lost battle against the Turks in 1526 was that whole counties remained without priests. Thus, after 1526 migrating preachers could spread the new disciplines, novel intellectual streams, the Lutheran then the Calvinist teaches in the country, which was divided into three parts. By the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century 80-90 percent of the population in Hungary was protestant, mainly Calvinist. By 1734 all four church districts were established and the primary curator and secondary curator positions were set.

The absolutist Habsburg power tried to exercise a variety of methods to suppress the protestant intellectual mentality during the period of counter-reformation. Finally the Edict of Tolerance (Joseph II) during the "enlightenment" period at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, created a legal framework for religious freedom and church self-government. Still, the Reformed Church remained inferior and were not treated equally with the Roman Catholic Church. During the 1848-49 Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence a new law declared the four established Christian denominations to be completely equal. But when the Revolution was defeated, the autonomy of protestants were attacked again (1859 Protestant Patent). Finally, after the Compromise between the Habsburg monarchy and the Hungarian Parliament in 1868 the 53<sup>rd</sup> Law reassured religious freedom again.

The united Hungarian Reformed Church was established at the meeting of the Synod in October, 1881. The Synod laid down the foundations of church constitution which is nowadays still valid in the principles: It is based on majority system, corporate governance and parity. The church is led by governing bodies. Among these at congregation level the presbyteries are the lowest ones, while the Synod is the highest one. The Synod of the supreme legislative body of the church having 116 members and meets in every ten years. The Convention has 38 members with limited power to operate the activities of the church between Synod meetings. It is responsible for the regulation and supervision of all church-related education systems, including the education of priests, and for controlling the "Public Fund" and for caring and supporting of scattered followers.

The Reformed Church consists of autonomous, independent congregations, which have a high level of freedom and broad rights. The individual church districts are highly independent units, they can make independent decisions and supervise the dioceses belonging to the district. This autonomy often served to enforce local interests. In many cases these particular interests led to irrational decisions, prevailed over universal interests, and has also become an obstacle to modernization. The fact that the church was not commanded from a central organization gave specific features of each church district, also lending a unique color ("Tisza Calvinism", "Danube Calvinism"), which prevented uniformity.

For long the Debrecen District dominated as spiritual center of the Hungarian Reformed Church and the Debrecen served as the headquarters of the Synod, meeting regularly in Debrecen. But in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the modernization efforts of the Church gradually shifted the center to Budapest and the Danubian Church District, where László Ravasz was one of the prominent figures.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the organizational framework developed and there was no external threat to the church. In spite of this, the Reformed Church became weakened, worn out spirituality, and faith became formalized in many places.

Census data showed that the proportion of Calvinists in the years between 1920 and 1940 remained between 20-21% of the population, but showed large differences among regions. The vast majority of them lived in the Great Plains, typically in small towns, villages and outskirt farms. However, in small isolated areas of other parts of Hungary such as the Őrség in Transdanubia, Ormánság, and around Pápa they also formed densely populated blocks. Agricultural work was the form of occupation for the majority of Calvinists. The nearly two million individuals of Calvinist people belonged to diverse social class, it was only a very small proportion had large estates (1,000 acres of territory or more). The vast majority of them owned or leased a land less than 28 acres, but a significant number worked on only 7 to 14 acres or even in a smaller plot. In other occupations such as mining, industry, trade, transport – altogether only 23% of the Calvinists worked.

In Budapest in the period between 1881 and 1930 the number of Protestants grew by 85%, primarily due to immigration. But it is still only 12% of residents have been Calvinists according to the 1930 census data, that is about 121 thousand people. In the supreme political and artistic elite, as well as among the judiciary officials (judges, prosecutors) and the administrative and military officers were Calvinist overrepresented. Still, they were the mostly less competitive, less skilled and thus the most vulnerable group of the population of the city. As a piece of evidence, they typically lived in the suburbs, where their proportion was 15.8% in the Pest side, and only 10% within the Grand Boulevard.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as a consequence of the lost 1<sup>st</sup> World War and its closing Trianon Treaty, a significant portion of the inhabitants and the territories Hungary were taken away and connected to other countries. This created a serious crisis in the life of the nation that was similar in many respects to the situation after the lost battle against the Turks in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The revolution and related and subsequent the significant losses of the country induced a self investigation and the recognition of the major problems in the Hungarian Reformed Church. After the major trauma a fresh start and a spiritual renewal was necessary to serve the nation. The secularization and the spread of new intellectual movements (Marxism, liberalism) that was going on for several decades had to be stopped or at least counterbalanced. At that time even for those who still attended at church services, it did not mean a significant spiritual surplus. But the young Hungarian theologians who visited the Dutch and Scottish protestant churches, brought home their positive experience, and accommodated new working methods and novel areas of activity. The members of the Christian youth organizations (Christian Youth Association, the Hungarian Christian Evangelical Association, Soli Deo Gloria, Pro Christo Federation of Hungarian Students) recognized the Gospel values, as well as the strength of faith for individuals, families and communities (nation). Thus, this young generation became a stimulating leading force of spiritual revival. The power of faith of the Reformed Church in keeping the nation alive is especially experienced in the disconnected Transylvanian territories. There the Reformed Church District exercised centralized management of the district. This modern management policy enriched and taught László Ravasz: He used this experience later as the head of the Danubian Church District, to modernize not only his own district but also the Hungarian Reformed Church.

## **2. The Calvinist education and culture**

The Reformed Church had a significant effect on the life of the whole Hungarian nation through its priests, primary, secondary school level teachers and the individuals who received education in Calvinist institutions for centuries. In the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries in the inner territories of Hungary the majority of the population was protestant, while in Transylvania Calvinists remained the majority even in later centuries. In the progress of public civilization the effect of the Reformed Church is crucial from the second part of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The educational role of the church was especially important in publication of books and the sophistication of Hungarian language. The reformers started to continue liturgical services in Hungarian referring to the Word of God (Mátyás Dévai Bíró). They emphasized the importance of the translation and spreading of the Bible and other religious works in Hungarian because in this way the not only highly educated but all people could read and understand the Word. According to the opinion of the reformers, the basis of a religious life can be solely the Bible. The very first Bible translation is from the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and supposed to be the work of bohemian Hussite priests (followers of Jan Huss), but only fragments of this is available. In 1527 the reformer Janos Sylvester printed the first Hungarian Bible texts in Krakow. It was also Krakow, where the translation of the letters of Apostle Paul by Benedek Komjáthy appeared. In 1536 the first Hungarian songbook decorated with musical notes by István Gálszécsi was published. Also in this year the first Hungarian tale-book was printed. Furthermore, around this time the first Hungarian calendar appeared in Krakow, then the first Hungarian linguistic book was printed in Sárospatak-Újsziget.

In 1541 the New Testament translated by János Sylvester was printed here as well. The very first Hungarian world history book was also written by a Calvinist, namely István Székely in 1599. Additionally, in Debrecen the first Hungarian mathematics book was printed in 1575, and also first Hungarian botanical book (also the first in this discipline) by Péter Méliusz Juhász. It is due to the work of Péter Laskói Csókás, and outstanding priest and teacher was one, that the Hungarian language got involved in the world-famous Calepinus-dictionary, which includes ten different languages and was known all over the world. It was published in 1585.

Thus, the first printed materials in Hungarian were fragments of the Bible, but in a few decades in all areas of cultural life significant publications appeared, making the foundation of Hungarian scientific and cultural life. The first, complete Hungarian translation of the Bible was led by the well educated theologian, Gáspár Károli, pastor of the Gönc congregation. This translation, first printed in Vizsoly in 1590, has had a very significant effect on Hungarian literature since then. This first full translation has been printed more than one hundred times and it has been the most widely used and known Hungarian book.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century most of the printing houses were Calvinist. The printing houses published the works of pastors and schoolmasters, and in this way served science, literature, arts and public education by printing, and distribution. Between 1527 and 1608 more than 500 Hungarian books were printed, the majority of these were from Calvinist, since the Lutheran Church consisted of mostly German, Slovak and Slovenian congregations, and only minority of them were Hungarian language-based. In parallel with the spread of the Reformation a number of schools were established. Education was supported by ABC-books, the works of István Gálszécsi, István Benczédi Székely and Mátyás Dévai Bíró. Altogether in the 16<sup>th</sup> century there were 168 schools in Hungary, among those 134 were established by Calvinists. The Debrecen, the Sárospatak, the Pápa and the Nagyváradi Colleges, which subsequently became so famous, were founded in this century. The

Hungarian language and also the Hungarian patriotic commitment received an important emphasize at these schools, although the language of teaching was Latin. Besides these famous colleges, Bethlen Gábor established a college in Gyulafehérvár in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which later moved to Nagyenyed. These Calvinist colleges became famous because of the lifetime achievements of well educated, scholarly teachers. Some foreign teachers also taught in these institutions, such as Amos Jan Comenius, the best known teacher of the Sárospatak college, a great figure of the universal education history. In Gyulafehérvár, there were German scholars as well: Johann Alstedius, Johann Bisterfeld, Ludwig Piscator. The two greatest Hungarian educators of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, János Apáczai Csere and Pál Keresztúry also taught here. The work of Apáczai, *The Hungarian Encyclopedia* was mainly written during his stay in the Netherlands, but the last chapters were completed upon his return to Hungary in 1654. It was published in Utrecht in 1655, but for some reason it was back-dated to 1563. So this work preceded the famous French Encyclopedia (1751-1780) by 100 years. Later Apáczai founded the college in Kolozsvár in Transylvania. The reformation not only fulfilled an important role in Hungarian public education and scientific life, but it also served by transferring the foreign, mainly Western-European culture and spirit. Hungarian Calvinist students swamped Western European universities. In the 16th century more than 100 young Hungarians completed their studies abroad. They transferred the worldwide revolution of spiritual movements and ideas. According to available scripts, although from the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the censorship tried to confiscate their so called “dangerous” books, the students could circumvent the controlling authorities using various tricks and finesse. József Keresztesi, who was famous for writing Annals, smuggled 700 kilograms books in two large boxes. Péter Bot also smuggled a large quantities of book, some reported 700 kg, another report said 1500 kg.

The 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries were the age of the counter-reformation, when the religious interests of the Catholic Church and the interests of the German-language Habsburg House were complementary. Many of the rich and highly ranked noblemen returned to Catholicism and forgot their Hungarian language and suffered Germanization. But some nobles and gentry remained Calvinist and loyal the persecuted church and their mother language. In the 18th century, during the awakening of the Hungarian national spirit it is important to stress the role of the two Calvinist royal bodyguards, György Bessenyei and Sándor Báróczi Sándor who launched a novel, significant literature movement. Other outstanding writers who had an important role in the flourishing literature life were Ferenc Kazinczy, József Kármán, Mihály Csokonai Vitéz and Ferenc Kölcsey. Kölcsey was a graduate of the Debrecen Debrecen College. The patriotic („kuruc”) spirit of the college had a deep impact on his poetry and on his public activity. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century under the influence of Kazinczy was very important in the process of the renewal and enrichment of Hungarian language. The Calvinist Ferenc Kölcsey was the strongest supporter of Hungarian language renewal movement in the Parliament, where an ongoing fight was continued for the official use of the Hungarian language. Thus, the Hungarian Reformed Church had fought for the subsistence Hungarian language for centuries. Especially in Transylvania there was clear the correlation between eventual local decrease of members of the Calvinist congregations and the disappearance of spoken Hungarian in the given area.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the Hungarian Reformed Church was the leading force that could keep the dispersed Hungarians in the frame of religious life. The leadership of the Transylvanian Church District maintained a separate diocese for those Hungarians who lived in ancient Romanian territories. For Calvinist church members in Bukarest, Pitest, Galac the Hungarian religious services and the spiritual missionary activity of the pastors also meant the subsistence of Hungarian national identity. For those Hungarians who were Catholic, the Romanian Government established a Romanian Catholic Bishopric in accordance to the arrangement with the Pope. It made Hungarian language services in Catholic churches impossible.

The need for the development and reorganization of church educational institutions was already recognized in the beginning of the 20th century by several key church representatives such as Sándor Imre, András Dóczy and also Jenő Sebestyén. They urged the form a standardized education policy to reach high quality teaching and more effective spiritual training. It gradually became clear that it was not enough to sophisticate the education, renew the educational infrastructure of the church (physically and mentally) but it was inevitable to widen the boundaries of the circle: to open new avenues for the public education and activities outside and over the regular school system, and also to participate in the intellectual ascension of the nation.

The renewal in faith was expressed in renewal thinking and acting, the best representatives of Calvinist intellectuals moved became activated: priests, theologians, scientists, teachers organized conferences about the possible solutions of the serious problems and tensions of the society: competition organized by *Hungarian Way (Magyar Út)*, conferences of the same organization, conferences on the „single problem” (i.e. the spreading costume of having only a single child in the family), camps of the Soli Deo Gloria organization (SDG), Calvinist Young Agrarians conference in Budapest, the formation of the Hungarian Evangelical Workers Alliance (which was a Christian-Socialist party advocacy group), their theologian/pastor conferences on topics such as ”Social questions in the light of Gospel”. Besides the joint thinking they planned and realized real projects, demonstrating that spiritual awaking strongly affects to the society and serves for the benefit of the community. It also led to the recognition of the serious problems of people living at the margin of the society and initiated for

the unselfish support. The talent-seeking programs, which started in the Sárospatak College, and the scholarships supported by educational programs for very poor young individuals of agricultural origin, the initiation of county-side research programs, the village-seminars, the launch of the "Public College" programs were all the consequences of this spiritual renewal. In 1941 the "Public College" Council was established by the initiation of the Young Christian Association (KIE).

Hungarian domestic policy after the Trianon Treaty, and especially the cultural and education policy handled the ascension of the nation, and the enrichment of intellectual treasures as an absolutely high priority. It looked at the culture as a strategic sector to reinforce the nation. Therefore this sector received strong financial support as well. (It really received a significant proportion of the national budget.) The state asked the support of the churches to reach national strategic goals, especially counting on the help of the Catholic Church, which existed as a state-religion and in this period and acted as both the primary supporter and the main and benefactor of the political power. The Calvinists were at the 21% of the population, therefore the Hungarian Reformed Church received only a modest support when compared to the Catholics, a fact that had been criticized from that side time by time. The ministers for Religion and Public Education Ministry (first Kuno Klebelsberg, then Bálint Hóman) had developed a strategic concept and also an action plan. The Christian and patriotic education primarily took place in institutions that were maintained by the churches. Outstanding talents among the Calvinist intellectual, such as the Nobel-prize winner Albert Szentgyörgyi Albert with others enriched the international reputation of Hungarian intellectual life.

### **3. The works of László Ravasz and Sándor Imre related to the educational policy of the Danubian Church District**

László Ravasz (born in 1882 Bánffyhunyard - died in Leányfalu 1975)

Although the ancestors of László Ravasz were Calvinist priests through generations, this did not predestinate him to the task he tried to achieve. But it was rather his talent and diligence. He was well educated, was gifted in writing, learned aesthetics and philosophy besides theology. He saw the model of his great teachers of excellent schools where he attended. He gained experiences abroad and got acquainted with the central administration, and as the secretary of the Transylvanian bishop, he mastered the division of labor among the Administration, Education and Financial Departments. He studied several human science fields, wrote a Ph.D. thesis on aesthetics, and dissertation on theology as private professor.

He started a new theological journal, the *Road (Út)* with Sándor Makkai and Sándor Imre in Transylvania, which aimed at the reconstruction of Transylvanian life based on faith and missionary spirit. He wrote articles in *Calvinist Review*. He edited the *Protestant Review* between 1914 and 1918. The profile of this journal gradually widened: it started a new style to win the intellectuals, discussing important questions of the Hungarian evangelical Christianity. Under his editorial work the journal articles and essays on the a wide range of issues of Calvinist education and pedagogy. As a result protestantism as a unified intellectual trend first appeared in the Hungarian intellectual life.

Karl Barth had great influence on his view on theology, but his participation in the evangelical youth movement (MEKDSZ) had even greater significance. He became member of the leadership of this organization in Budapest, when János Victor was the head, whose "life and speech secured the message of the Gospel". Hearing the Gospel speeches of the Scottish John Mott (while still being in Transylvania), he also had a great experience, on which experience he wrote an article in a parochial journal.

In 1921, at critical times for both nation and the church, he was invited for the priest position from the Kálvin Square Congregation, following the unexpected death of Elek Petri. He has already filled more clerical positions: district clerk, then sub-bishop under György Bartók, who later became his father-in-law. With Sándor Makkai and Lajos Imre, they jointly worked out a new program, which targeted the reorganization of clergy life in Transylvania, based on living faith and missionary spirit. His relocation into the Hungarian mainland was well accepted by the public of Transylvania. László Ravasz accepted the invitation from Budapest on the condition that it comes together with the appointment to become the bishop as well. The election was won by László Ravasz with great ascendancy against István J. Kovács, a theology teacher, with the support of groups which wanted less militant clergy politics. He was the bishop of Danubian Church District from 1921 until his obligate resignation in 1948, possessing secular and clerical positions (member of academic associations, head of the National Priest Unity, ORLE), an outstanding member of protestantism. As the chairman of the Synod after the death of Dezső Baltazár, was the most influential member of the Hungarian Reformed Church between the two World Wars.

László Ravasz aimed the organization of a modern church, which is authentic and is present in the life of society. Taking so many roles in public life gave him the opportunity to evangelize. He recognized the importance of the press and the radio, he consciously searched for speaking in mass media. He took part in editing several reviews. The restarted Protestant Review became a significant periodical under his intellectual guidance. He was the chief editor of *Calvinist Life* from 1934-1938, which under the subtitle *Christian Social Life Magazine* dealt with important issues of ecclesiastical life such as school and educational matters,

supporting the creation of a unified concept of the church in educational politics. Between 1934-1938 he co-edited the *Hungarian Calvinism* with Jenő Sebestyén, and after the merge of the two periodicals, the *Calvinist Future*. These organs showed the opinions of important personalities of that time period, poets, public figures and educators.

Besides strengthening the internal, spiritual life of the clergy, Ravasz worked to create a unified Calvinist clergy. He inherited a strongly centralized clergy administration in 1936, when replaced bishop Baltazár, and became the Head of the Synod. There was an existing, strong hierarchical leading group, and the central institutes of the clergy also had great power. The Convent proposed a number of initiatives and the execution was fulfilled by the central clergy organizations. This authoritarian setting and strong centralization resulted in criticisms and stricture even within the Church. He consciously cultivated the foreign relations, and regularly went abroad. He felt he needed to emphasize for European protestant countries and for the US the slogan that we are "the far east Bastion of the protestantism" and that the Hungarians made tremendous efforts over centuries to spread the faith and the Gospel. He wrote and published books in German and English about the Hungarian Church, introducing the history of the clergy, its role in creating community and promoting education. He also wanted to draw the attention of the international protestant public to the consequences of the unfair border formation of the Trianon Treaty, the difficult situation of the church communities split away from the main branch of the reformed Church, and to awake the universal liability to save these "Bastions". Ravasz also supported economical movements and organizations, and actively participated in these together with his colleagues. He felt the discussion between the different denominations was important. He also expressed himself in the "union" debate in the press, in the '30s. The script of Béla Bangha, a monk, launched the debate once again, although this issue was not without preceding discussions in the past. Lajos Prohászka and Imre Révész emphasized the significance of the unification of the Christian Churches in several forms, based on the Word "...and there were one fold and one pastor...". Béla Bangha proposed to search for common points (i.e. those traditions which are common in both Catholic and protestant churches) But his conclusion about dogmatic differences was that there is only one possible way to follow: the Protestants must return to the Catholic Church. This idea, of course was dismissed by János Victor, saying, that the protestants are tied to their faith not because of historical, but because of conscience reasons. László Ravasz wrote an answer entitled "Unity or friendship" for the thesis of Béla Bangha. He valued the article as a gesture of coming closer, and appreciated that, but he expressed that the dogmatic union, if it is possible at all, can be process lasting for several thousand years. His view was that there were more urgent questions, such as the internal and external threat of Christianity. By going into details, he declared that the spreading of atheism in the world, means threatening against universal truths, such as the existing of God, the Trinity, the duality of soul and body, etc. For this reason it is the duty of the Christian Churches to express their faith, to appreciate the faith of others, and to stand up against all types of disbelief.

Education was an accentuated field of reforming the church, therefore Ravasz chose the right person for the right assignment with good sense, and delegated the task to his friend whom he knew from Transylvania, the well known scholar, the pedagogic professor Sándor Imre. Imre was employed by the "Danubian Church District" as lecturer of educational matters. This position was new in the district. The long-term idea of Ravasz was to mandate his friend to reform the whole Hungarian Calvinist educational system, but this great plan could not be executed due to internal and external reasons.

Sándor Imre, junior (born in Hódmezővásárhely, 1877 - died in Budapest, 1945)

Sándor Imre received his PhD degree at the University of Kolozsvár and studied in Heidelberg and Leipzig afterwards. He became private professor in 1912 in Budapest. In 1919 August, he became a minister for a few days, then he was appointed to be state secretary at the Education Ministry. From the beginning of 1925, he was appointed to be a professor of pedagogy at the University in Szeged. From this year, the Calvinist church also employed him. His works and writings transmitted constant values even in changing circumstances. His priority was to preserve the nation and to save and continue the traditions. He followed the works of János Apáczai Csere, István Széchenyi, József Eötvös and Miklós Wesselényi, serving the education of the nation and the intellectual uprising. He published his book entitled *Views of Earl István Széchenyi about pedagogy* in 1904. In this script we can read about the concept of national pedagogy, the thought of collection the national characteristics, the importance of working for public welfare as a token to promote progress. He unfolded the concept of national education, and its content in many works. It was also the basic reoccurring subject in his lectures, since according to his view, it was connected with the perseverance of the nation. He considered it as the question of survival. He believed that the Hungarians as a nation can not be handled as they were unified and self-conscious. Therefore, not only the individuals, the local communities, but also the nation has to be educated. In the concept of educating the nation it was an essential element that "educative mentality" should be spread. Therefore he was in favor of not only scholarly but also public dissemination of his work. He described the special tasks of the various communities in his works, articles and books. He wrote about the pedagogy in families, pedagogy of childcare institutes, public schools, and secondary schools as well as about the pedagogy in the higher education. In Kolozsvár Sándor Imre, just like László Ravasz, attended Károly Böhm's philosophy

seminars and István Schneller's pedagogy seminars at the Ferenc József University, Faculty of Humanities, and became a faithful follower of professor Schneller. He wrote two books about pedagogy: *Pedagogy* (1928) and *Pedagogy of the public school* (1928). When László Ravasz was the editor in chief of the *Protestant Review*, he published articles regularly from well-known Calvinist educators, and scholars. There Sándor Karácsony wrote an appreciation on the book of Imre Sándor Imre entitled *The main questions of family education*, in which the author collected his previous 9 years lectures at the University of Szeged. His further main writings are *The spread of the educational concept*, *The educational view of priesthood*, which writing was offered to the memory of Ferenc Zsinka. The thoughts of Imre were continued and further developed by Sándor Makkai in his work, *Hungarian pedagogy, Hungarian culture* (1937). Sándor Makkai also studied at the Transylvanian "Böhm-Schneller" philosophy, pedagogy school.

László Ravasz employed Sándor Imre to fill the new position of the Church District called the lecturer of education affairs from 1925, which position meant a variety of work and responsibility. From 1928 Imre occupied different positions in the Synod and in the Convent. In 1939 he became a permanent member of the Synod. In the general assemblies of the District Sándor Imre reported about the function and progress of the secondary schools and the primary school-teacher training colleges. His reports were sophisticated and complex in respect of format and content. He was professional, competent and consistent. Thus, as he collected data for many years, he made it possible to see the trends and changes by time.

Between 1921 and 1941 significant investments and constructions were made in the Danubian Church-District: altogether 56 church buildings and 75 schools were built – among them the Baár-Madas Girls Secondary School was the greatest investment, which flared later with a boarding school. Another example was the Julianna Calvinist Elementary School, which was constructed using the support coming from The Netherlands. 71 homes for priests, 41 home for teachers, 85 houses for congregations and 17 additional facilities were erected by the church. In this 20 years the population of the church district grew because of the migration to the agglomeration of Budapest, but in certain parts of the countryside of the Danubian region there was a decline because of the "single child problem". By the presidency of Ravasz an Inner-Missionary Committee was formed, which had a program for the church extension, for spreading the Gospel and to control social work activities. The expansion of the Bishop Office was significant. Human recourses widened, the number of the staff increased. The employees became specialized and professional officers managed the topical issues, such as school administration. The number of religious positions such as priests, curates, religion teachers increased from 12 to about 20 in the Budapest church diocese, than in 1937 three more curates were employed. The work activity of Sandor Imre resulted in positive changes. His yearly reports gave exact picture of the schools, the faculty of teachers, the events of the school year, and also the financial, pedagogical or any other kinds of problems of these institutions. Each session of the individual boards of school matter were open for the public and initiated considerable interest and attendance. In general there was a great interest and emphasis on the education and pedagogy.

There were yearly meetings for the secondary school directors and for the teachers of the same subject also had joint meeting. The teachers of the two Primary School Teacher-Training Colleges also had regular meetings. Professionalism prevailed in the Examiners Board of the secondary school final exams and also at the final exam of the teacher training schools. In the educational commission of the church district there was a special commission for religion-teaching, where they also dealt with the religion-teaching of those students, who attended state or community schools. In these 20 years many institutions were established. They organized and broadened boarding schools in the countryside, helping the education of children living in small villages or farms. Teacher training and education became more efficient and the supervision of all kinds of schools turned to be better by church and state authorities. The postgraduate training of the teachers was very effective and the pastor candidates received basic teacher training as well. Thus, these two professions got closer to each other and helped the cooperation between teachers and pastors. The joint work of László Ravasz and Sándor Imre was very productive. The educational issue of the Church District had significant development and became more professional. However, the external economical difficulties, the consequences of the World economical crisis, the increasing difficulties related to the maintenance of schools and also the need for spiritual renewal forced a unified educational program.

#### **4. The Calvinist educational institutions, the problems of the Calvinist education**

The Calvinist congregations and the Reformed Church operated their institutional network for Calvinist education with significant financial sacrifices. The Hungarian Reformed Church administered 1090 primary schools (out of a total of 6618 schools nationwide, of which 1115 were state-run and 750 municipal). and 23 out of the 157 secondary schools were Calvinist. Amongst Calvinists the "8 grade civilian schools" were less popular, only 13 out of the 407 nationwide institutions were Calvinist. Ten out of the fifty training institutions (kindergarten teacher training, primary school teacher training for men and women separately) were Calvinist. Imre and Ravasz agreed on the significance of the secondary-school teacher training in Debrecen so that future

teachers could get special guidance that enables them to educate children in protestant moral. It was a great deficiency of the education policy of the period that Calvinist teacher training was not managed institutionally. The support of the Calvinist Law Academy was important ecclesiastically and socially, because this way Calvinist jurists (e.g.: notaries) were educated. However its existence was not economical, only one third of its students were Calvinists (in year 1933/34) and the state policy (Klebersberg, Minister of Education) did not support the denominational Law Academies either. The support of the four Theological Academy (Debrecen, Sárospatak, Pápa, Budapest) was questionable firstly because of the decreasing number of students and because running of these institutions were not economical. But because of the traditions and the existential factors there were no actual intention to close either of these institutions.

The problem of supporting Calvinist institutions present were not only in the Danubian Church District, but all around the country, since in contrast with the Catholic Church the Hungarian Reformed Church did not have any grand estates which could provide substantial income. It was the task of the Synod to provide the lawful conditions of the schools in order to make them function. The laws were adequate, but still there was no guarantee that “the the spirit of the Calvinist Schools and Colleges, and the Christian conception will be ensured institutionally”- as Jenő Sebestyén wrote in the *Calvinist Review*. A number of schools went into state control because of financial problems. It was a constant and real grievance that the ministry gave more support to the Catholic institutions. The Calvinists felt that their overshadowing is inequitable and unfair, they presented their discontent in numerous forum, and László Ravasz also gave voice to these matters. A lot of articles also criticized the liberal church policy, which had adverse consequences on Calvinist institutions. Budapest, the capital supported primarily the Catholic Church, and they built new church buildings using the money of the taxpayers. Imre Szabó, head pastor of the Budapest diocese made considerable efforts to make the church supporting “capital city aid” available for the Calvinist as well, if not in equally but at least proportionally. After handing in a multiple petitions, the system of “capital city aid” evolved. The “Lónyay Street Secondary School” and five new church buildings were built with the help of this aid in the 1930s and ‘40s. The issue of the teacher’s subsidization by the state was also a matter of question. Aladár Szabó Jnr. gave his discontent in the press about the new regulation of the question, which was disadvantageous for the Calvinists. He suggested that the smaller congregations, which support a school, should be subsidized by the church districts. In this way these schools could survive. Analyzing the question of the church and its school system, Ravasz noted that 50-80% of the Danubian Church District’s expenses were paid for school support. Because of the highly expensive costs lot of schools were contracted, which resulted that the denomination character disappeared, or in other cases the schools were closed. Besides the expenses of the every day function other expenses also came up, which meant the expenditure of higher amount of money. The educational authorities could ordered the renovation and the restoration of the schools. In other word (with Ravasz phrasing) “the denomination pays, and the state orders”. The church had to accomplish these instructions in a period when state grants was revoked or cut significantly. This state grants supported tuitions and other related expenses, but not at the necessary rate. Aladár Szabó summarized his suggestions to save the schools from closing and from leaving their character in 3 points. They were the following: 1. forcing the state to pay proportional grants; 2. higher level support of the congregations, which administer schools, perhaps by the foundation a “school found”. 3. education and teaching of more self-conscious teachers. The amount and the value of the state grant was a constant problem between the church and the state which created tension. The biggest deficiency of the education policy was that the institution types were not set according to the actual demands. The church missed to formation of trade schools. This was a problem because such schools could have had the role of educating agricultural knowledge at a higher level since a significant number of Calvinist people worked in agriculture. The problem of the religious teaching was present in the state and the church schools as well. There were not enough religion teachers and sometimes their qualifications were not proper. This phenomenon was a problem especially in Budapest, which grew into a metropolis in a very short time. A “Class for Religious Education” was formed in 1927 which aimed to revise the level and the methodology. Budai Gergely a theology private professor was appointed to become the head of the “Committee for Religious Education”. He was in charge of the education of religion, and especially of the supervision of religion teaching in non-Calvinist schools. In connection with this, he had to keep a record of the Calvinist students who attended non-Calvinist schools and he had to present and discuss these reports provide proposals for future progress. The detailed regulation was described in the “*Regulations for School District Religious Education*”. The committee involved a number of diocese heads and Istán B. Pap, Gyula Muraközy, Gergely Budai, István Csűrös and Kálmán Farkas as additional members. In conclusion the results did were not proportional with the rate of the mental and financial investments. In other words, the spiritual level reached at church schools and the Calvinist education was not successful enough in many respects. It provided literacy and knowledge in a reasonably high level (especially the schools of the capital, and the traditional boarding schools in the countryside), but the religious education was not always successful, and faith did not became a value.

## 5. The new thoughts of Sándor Imre on educational concept and its public reception

The Calvinist public view missed a comprehensive education policy already in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At a conference for teachers in 1916 András Dóczy presented his arguments why the rethinking of the education issue would be important. The related essay if Imre was written 15 years later in 1931 by the order of the Universal Education Committee. Its extended version was published in 1935 entitled “*The educational policy of the Hungarian Reformed Church*”. The described concepts and suggestions were born with the support and agreement of László Ravasz, reflecting his plans to reform the church.

Imre compared the statistical data to the nationwide population data by school types. He also evaluated the quality of training in each type of schools and compared the needs and their costs. He gave suggestions regarding the types and numbers of the institutions, and also repeated the previously published opinions in the press. He gave rational and economical viewpoints and arguments, he also made cautious suggestions, but he never mentioned actual names when suggesting the closure of institution. In the chapter entitled *The sharing of the financial load among congregations* he provided evidence that the distribution of the expenses is fundamentally different depending on that whether the congregation administers a primary school or not. The expenses of the churches which supported secondary schools could not be compared to the others. Those are important data that the tuition fee of the Calvinist secondary schools were higher than state school fees, so the families with children had even more expenses to contribute to the church schools.

As there were no new significant private foundations, and the help of the state support was uncertain (and not valorized), Imre repeated his suggestions which was published in multiple pedagogical journals. According to his recommendations the charge of the school functionings should be divided between church and state that “all running costs should be paid by the church, while all the personal expenses including locally appearing personnel costs should be paid by the state. However, the Convent declared that they cannot support such an idea because it would have been a step to secularization. The essay of Imre emphasized the insistence of the right of the church to found schools, but it also accepted the control of the state. But at the same time he wanted to preserve the local self government principle. The church also insisted on that the cultural institutions of the government should have no denominational character.

A significant statement of the thesis was that he so the case of education the duty of the whole Church, and should not be the problem of the individual congregations, dioceses and church districts. He suggested the proportional distribution of the expenses and the central control of cultural issues.

Sándor Imre also suggested to survey the schools and foundations not by the given diocese but by general standards. In addition, he advised the use of the freely available foundations for educational purposes.

He felt it necessary to reorganize the “Universal Education Committee” and to rethink the implementation of the Education Law. He also thought it was important to transform the education of clergymen using the new scientific results.

Although it was a proposition for every church district to prepare written assessments on the “Imre proposal”, we found only one opinion with the signature of Ferenc Papp in the Synod Archives. Papp was a member of the Committee of Education in the Over-Tisza Church District. This professional assessment was likely not to be a personal opinion, but rather the joint standpoint of the members of the committee of education at the Over-Tisza Church District. It is worth listing the members of the Committee: along with Ferencz Papp Dezső Baltazár, Béla Kun and István Veress and supplementary members Béla Bodor Lajos and Tóth Lajos.

The authenticity of the data was not questioned by Papp, he agreed with the assessment of the statistical data of the institutions, he supported some specific ideas. The proposals for solutions and especially the centralization of resources were not acceptable for him. The detailed, multi-faceted justification and reasoning highlights and confirms the previously mentioned conflicts between the leaders of the Danubian and Over-Tisza Church Districts. The centralization would likely place the decisions to the office in Budapest, and although it would result in a more modern, transparent administration and it would allow a more effective use of the financial resources, it was unacceptable for the conservative, tradition keeping, particular interest-defending church leadership of Over-Tisza led by Dezső Baltazár. And it was in vain to declare unity, if the putative or real local interests supported different decisions and concepts.

Papp made some principal and some practical comments in his reasoning. According to this, the centralization contradicts the historical development and constitution of the Church. For its realization a new assembly meeting of the Synod Meeting would be necessary. This would be expensive and would damage prestige (The preceding codex was created three years before, that would have to be modified.). The local offerings would decline, and the problematic substitution of this would make the maintenance of the institutions more difficult. Papp was also anxious about the debts, which had already been generated by the school operating congregations. He felt it would be difficult to decide which schools to shut down, and influence and protection would likely prevail. Lastly he expressed his anxiety that centralization would mean absolutism and uniformity in contrast to the protestant principle of individualism, the peculiarities, the special nurturing methods (Debrecen, Sárospatak, Pápa) would disappear.

## **6. The proposal of Ravasz László and Imre Sándor did not succeed; the hypothetical reasons for this. Other suggestions for the reorganization and renewal of education control**

The necessity to centralize Calvinist education system was recognized by László Ravasz and Sándor Imre, and this proposal was supported by Imre Dóczi, Béla Szentpéteri Kun, Miklós Nagy as well. At the same time the leadership of the church was divided on this issue (as well), and the public associated with the church was not prepared either for this kind of radical reorganization, which would have broken the traditions. The proposal for radical reorganization was strange for the congregations and church institutions which adhered to autonomy. Even if it would have provided more effective management and higher quality work in the life of the remaining institutions. On the other hand, the proposal did not contain any plans or elaborated details about the placement of the teachers who worked in schools to be shut down. The questions raised by Ferenc Papp were justifiable. The promotion of the local particular interests prevented the rationalization even in those issues which were well supported with professional reasons and justifications. Personal questions and tensions, the aspects of power and prestige could also be found in the background. It was an essential and a new idea of the proposal that it suggested to work out a broader concept for education, also emphasizing that the institutions have to convey the importance of the spiritual values, the values of faith, alongside enhancing knowledge and education. Hence it is not enough to provide knowledge to educate, but it is necessary to breed the young people in order to form them faithful for their country and be well educated. There was a consensus about the objectives, the need for breeding the nation and the active role of the church in this task did not cause debates, the involved leaders and professionals agreed on the theory, but opinions significantly differed about the methods of realization.

Lots of comment appeared in the press on the educational issue were published of education in the press, some of them without names. As an example, one of the articles in Calvinist Life reported about the students of the undivided, overcrowded classes, and the huge tasks in front of the teachers: "The most beautiful and most resonating programs could be continued, but what can a teacher do in such a school where 60-80 children is waiting at once for the teacher? How should he/she share his/her soul and heart with all of them? The real face of the nation is not formulated in the secondary schools, but is formed in the primary schools." The passage "most resonating program" is likely to refer to the educational policy articles of Imre. After the essay of Imre appeared, Miklós Nagy raised the issue that an accurate tabulation should be prepared for the Universal Convent, which would show how much direct or indirect expenditures the owners had of the schools had in relation with the supervision and monitoring of the schools in the preceding five years. Based on this survey a decision could be made to establishing and maintenance a modern Convent-led organization. The new organization would provide the supervision. The school-policy proposal, which was published in the Protestant Review by Miklós Nagy, who was a teacher in Szeghalom, strove to create the full centralization of the supervision of the schools with Budapest as the center and with the dominance of the Danubian Church District. This draft did not plan to affect the number of the institutions, and did not make any proposals concerning the expenses and financial questions. Kálmán Hetessy wrote about the greatest deficiency of the Calvinist mass education: it was impossible for primary school students to go into higher economic school, because no such schools existed. He pressed for establishing vocational schools. He declared that "with the establishment of vocational schools new power and vividness could be brought into the life of Hungarian Calvinism, and though this into the future of the nation."

As the comprehensive reform, these special plans did not materialize either. Amongst the inner reasons the lack of uniform leadership of the church has to be emphasized. Although according to the unanimous resolution of the Convent Presidential Council of October 26, 1929, "there is one church policy", in practice that was not the case. The nature of the autonomous entities derived from the institutional structure of the church, the different conceptions of the leaders of the church districts, their power considerations, particular interests, the different historical development, especially the rivalry between the Over-Tisza and the Danubian Church District, the emulation between Budapest and Debrecen for fulfilling the leading position, and of course the human factors all stalled unity. The two respected bishops, Dezső Baltazár and László Ravasz diverse personalities and their diverging approaches on church policy issues were important factors. The thought of governing from one center (which would have been likely Budapest, which by the time grown into a political, cultural and spiritual center) was very different from the idea of autonomous organizations, congregations. In turn, the outer reason was that the country was shifted into a new war, and for both the country and for the Church salvage of spiritual and material values became the most important task.