

IN THE GRIP OF A BANK LOAN THE ROLE OF ÁRON MÁRTON IN THE DUTCH LOAN CASE

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Abstract. Both the Saint Michael Parish of Cluj-Napoca and the entire Diocese of Alba Iulia have been concerned for times with the issue of the loan taken out from the Netherlands. This issue was interpreted in diverse ways, it was divulged by both the Hungarian and Romanian press, and it also launched a public discussion. Yet, its exact background and focal point were unknown. In this study, I endeavour to present both the background and the protagonists and the final resolution of this delicate issue by exploring the contemporary documents.

Keywords: Dutch loan, József Hirschler, Márton Áron, St. Michael parish, Cluj-Napoca, parish administration, financial management, loan, local church history, financial challenge, austerity, settlement.

In the 20th century the most prestigious and richest parish in the diocese of Alba Iulia was the parish of St. Michael in Cluj-Napoca. Over the centuries, Cluj-Napoca became the cultural and spiritual centre of Transylvania, and at the same time a religious centre. While the historical churches (Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Reformed, Unitarian, Hungarian Lutheran) had dioceses in Cluj-Napoca and their chief pastors presented their affairs, the Roman Catholic Church was represented by the parish priest of St. Michael's Parish, which gave the parish special authority. The moral strength of the parish itself was further enhanced by the advantage of centrality and meeting religious and cultural challenges. From the end of the 19th century, the connecting threads of religious societies and associations, schools and spiritual movements unfolding in the parishes of the diocese ran together in Cluj-Napoca. Thus, in addition to the Roman Catholic bishopric of Alba Iulia, the parish of Cluj-Napoca and its other central institutions – with their advanced media – also breathed vitality into the farthest part of the large-scale diocese.

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The Roman Catholic parish of St. Michael in Cluj-Napoca served as a good example for other parishes with its pastoral work and organized institutional system (folk and women's associations and societies, Caritas and Scout troops, schools, care home, day care home, etc.). Despite its diverse and multi-oriented history, the scientific processing of its activities and institutions still awaits. I can say that the history of the twentieth-century pastoral work of the parish of St. Michael in Cluj-Napoca is an area awaiting huge research.

I served as chaplain pastor in St. Michael's Parish for a few years. I had the opportunity to investigate the rich archives of the parish. Especially in the minutes or reports of the parish board, I received references to several past events at the reference level, but I did not come across a related description. The publications published so far in print cannot be said to be coherent and comprehensive either. I didn't even find an acceptable picture of the famous Dutch loan, with clear statements. From my older priest brethren, who were even closer in time to the past events of the parish, I received only a few references, remarks at the level of mention, but not an exact answer. It is commonly mentioned that the parish of St. Michael in Cluj-Napoca, which had drifted to the brink of bankruptcy due to the famous Dutch loan, was saved from total collapse by Áron Márton.

There are few church history works that have elaborated the loan issue, the "horror" of the parish of Cluj. Árpád Paál, an excellent biographer of the period in his work "*A kisebbségi lét tanulóévei Erdélyben I-II. kt*", praises Márton Áron in a journalistic style, who started repaying interest after a successful negotiation with the Dutch.² László VIRT in his work entitled "*Nyitott szívvel. Márton Áron élete és eszméi*" mentions the settlement of the Dutch loan.³ The contemporary Péter Domokos Pál in his work "*Rendületlenül... Márton Áron Erdély püspöke*" does not even cover for local parish work, though his account of the Dutch loan would have been the most authentic. There is only one book about the parish priest dr. József Hirschler, edited by Péter Sas, which discusses the Dutch loan in a little more detail.⁴ Even after that, the big question raced through me: how could

² ÁRPÁD PAÁL, *A kisebbségi lét tanulóévei Erdélyben II.*, Csíkszereda: Pallas-Akadémia, 2008. 183–184.

³ LÁSZLÓ VIRT, *Nyitott szívvel. Márton Áron erdélyi püspök élete és eszméi*, Budapest: Teleki László Alapítvány, 2002. 50.

⁴ PÉTER SAS ed., *Egy reneszánsz lelkületű főpap Dr. Hirschler József főesperes-plébános*. Kolozsvár: Verbum, 2010.

a large foreign loan be taken out when the permission of the diocesan authority is necessary?

With the help of the official documents available in the archives, I tried to examine and systematize the starting point, background and the course of the Dutch loan case, the people involved, the solution attempts and finally Áron Márton's orderly work.

In the series *Márton Áron hagyatéka* containing the legacy of Áron Márton, I followed the speeches of the great bishop told in the times of priestship and bishopship. These speeches are usually teaching and comforting, soul-warming and hopeful sermons. They lack the so-called eruption, stronger judgment, and criticism. He did not want to lead his audience on the right Christian path through criticism, he was aware that no one could be criticized to become a better self. In Volume 16 of the Legacy Series, I found a speech in which Márton Áron parishioner speaks in a stronger tone. Obviously, there was a good reason for doing so. And this reason is to be found precisely during the period of settlement of the Dutch loan. He held that speech a year later, as soon as he took over the administration of St. Michael's Parish, on March 14, 1937, to the parish governing body and male members. What made the active pastor give a sermon full of strong statements, suggesting pain and anxiety? In the closing chord of his speech, we find obvious references to the partisanship among the members of the parish, and to the h. disagreements against the parish priest, concerning some malicious attacks. Here is an excerpt from the concluding part of the speech:

“However, precisely because I speak to men when a gathering of men, let me get closer to our lives and briefly refer to one or two symptoms of our lives. ... The spirit of strife seems to be our peculiar sin. It is called our selfishness, the curse of Turan, and it really looks as if we have an inherited tendency. No matter how hard life is, no matter what warns us that we must stick together: the partisanship that has caused so many fatal ruptures throughout our history continues to linger in our ranks. ... We hit a party, form an enemy group (if necessary, we also tease in the church), and if necessary, we do not shy away from vile denunciations. I am not saying that we are no longer sparing the church from our contemporaneous intentions, that we are willing to defile even the holiest place and occasions with our ordinary thinking.”⁵

⁵ Áron MÁRTON, Feketevasárnap. Férfiak áldozása 1937. márc. 14-én, in: *Márton Áron hagyatéka 16. Alkalmi beszédek – 1. ed.* József MARTON, Csíkszereda: Pro-Print, 2018,

With Áron Márton's speech launching a conscience test, he would like to launch the Cluj-Napoca's male audience with a better insight.

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József Hirschler, a highly knowledgeable and educated man, was a true Renaissance-type priestly dignity, a man of great enterprise. His priestly life and work - from 1901 onwards - were tied to Cluj-Napoca; from 1906 to 1936, he was the parish priest of St. Michael's Parish. He established a well-thought-out and valuable ecclesiastical institutional system, the fruits of which could be enjoyed not only by Cluj-Napoca, but also by the Hungarian community in Transylvania. In particular, the establishment of schools (including primarily the Marianum) played a decisive role in the education and upbringing of the next generation. His aspirations and their operation at the time coincided with the aspirations of the Vatican. School, press, zealous associations, care for churches, etc., which were not lacking in Hirschler's aspirations, were in line with the practice of the universal church. So, there is no way to condemn the aspirations of an ambitious parish priest, even if his works for religious and cultural purposes have been executed in a grandiose form.

The leaders of the parish of St. Michael in Cluj-Napoca were characterized by confidence and hope when the Dutch loan was taken out. Their so-called success was soon taken out to the public. Hungarian and Romanian-language newspapers often reported on a great sensation and a real success story impartially and without knowing the whole truth. The financial hardship that was slowly unfolding within the ward seemed unstoppable. With promises and silence of facts, responsible leaders initially veiled the sad reality, but not for long. The loan, shown in good light, did not yield the announced result. Therefore, a few months after the loan was taken out, it was mentioned as a bad news story across Transylvania not only in church circles, but also in civil society. Those in a hurry to help the parish have already run into individuals, obstacles, and complicated transactions that have taken the sacrificial work of nearly two decades to settle the Dutch loan.

The parish of St. Michael with the most prestigious income (real estate, foundations, and others) in the diocese of biographer also suffered from the change of empire and the world crisis of the late 1920s. The parish was seriously concerned with the maintenance and operation of institutions (schools, care

homes, associations) serving a wide range of cultural and ecclesiastical purposes; its budget was so depleted that heavy debts appeared in the budget in the mid-1920s. On the other hand, József Hirschler, who is prone to construction, moved only on a theoretical level, he was not familiar with the world of money. He relied on his co-workers in this field, trusting 100% of his direct co-workers. His most trustworthy man, who was also elected church pastor, was Ferenc Nemes, armed with monarchical knowledge and practice. Until World War II and even in the transition period after the change of empire, he accumulated success with his businesses. Not weighing the interests brought about by political and social change, he dragged parish Hirschler and the entire parish of St. Michael to take a bold step to the 'benefit / detriment' of the parish.

The start of the Dutch loan can be traced back to February 24, 1926, when the promising offer was first made by the chief caretaker Ferenc Nemes at the regular meeting of the parish church council.⁶ The Dutch creditors not only made an offer to the parish of St. Michael, but also visited all the wealthier parishes in Transylvania and Hungary.⁷ Although dr. József Hirschler was burdened by the taken out of the loan, he completely relied on and fully trusted Ferenc Nemes, the chief caretaker of; whom dr. Hirschler had been entrusting with the administration of financial affairs for years. It was not a new act to the parish council to take out the Dutch loan because the parish of St. Michael, who had large real estate assets, had previously used loans in the past for promising large investments and used them to repay existing institutions and repay debts. Thus, in the time of the parish priest József Hirschler, taking out bank loans was a common practice on the part of the leadership of the parish of St. Michael.⁸ In the current financial situation of the parish, this enterprise also proved to be very promising, because it could free the parish from the sale of another property.

Ferenc Nemes could handle the issue of borrowing and settling the loan approved by the Board of Representatives completely alone, by himself. Apparently, he also involved the parish priest József Hirschler and the people in charge of settling the loan, but he ignored them as well. His personal accounts suggested

⁶ *A kolozsvári római katolikus Egyházközség választmányának jegyzőkönyve 1926. február 24-én* [The minutes of the Council of the Roman Catholic parish of Cluj on 24 February 1926], in ARCHIVES OF THE ST. MICHAEL PARISH (hereinafter referred to as ASTMP), 6/290.

⁷ *Mailáth levele Hirschler József plébánoshoz 1927. okt. 1-én* [Letter of Mailáth to parish priest Hirschler József, 1 Oct 1927], in ASTMP, Num. 4193–1927.

⁸ SAS, *Egy reneszánsz lelkületű főpap Dr. Hirschler József főesperes-plébános*, 98.

that the steward works with the greatest devotion and honour for the parish of St. Michael. Ferenc Nemes managed to infiltrate the graces of the parish priest József Hirschler and through him to the trust of Bishop Károly G. Mailáth. In the case of József Hirschler, there was not the slightest suspicion that the great promises of his chief caretaker were just a loss of eyesight, that completely lack reality.⁹

The fog around the contract with Dutch creditors at the National Spaar et Emission Bank in Nijmegen also proves that the main actor, Ferenc Nemes, was aware of the dangerous gamble. When József Hirschler, who is free to visit the bishop, as well as the chief caretaker, forgets the borrowing, they keep silent and obscure the facts; they would like to give the impression that the Status is also a party to the treaty, and so on. It is true that Dutch creditors do not comment on the dilapidated position of their Bank either. It is only important for them that the church buildings in the centre of Cluj-Napoca be bound by an international contract.¹⁰

It should also be added that the county bishop of Mailáth, from whom he was personally and with immediate approval - to the exclusion of the competent experts of the diocesan office - given the green light to borrow, was never a proficient man in material matters.

It was also important for the ward chief to take out the Dutch loan because his own business was also in danger, and he hoped he could use some of the Dutch loan to save his own business. With this, of course, the property situation of St. Michael's parish was shaken and endangered.¹¹

At the beginning of the world crisis, the Dutch loan case soon became a debt-increasing tool for St. Michael's Parish. Due to interest payments, the parish leadership was forced to take out new bank loans. All of this, of course, was done with bishop's approval. József Hirschler took advantage of the situation of the sickly (aggravated from 1931) bishop Mailáth when approving new bank loans. The

⁹ *A kolozsvári római katolikus egyházközség képviselőtestületének jegyzőkönyve 1926. febr. 28-án [Minutes of the Council of the Roman Catholic Parish of Cluj on 28 February 1926, in AStMP, 6/290.*

¹⁰ *Nemes Ferenc főgondnok jelentése [The report of Ferenc Nemes], in ARCHDIOCESAN ARCHIVES OF ALBA IULIA, (hereinafter referred to as AAAI) Num. 307–1926; AAAI, Num. 1797–1927.*

¹¹ *Nemes Ferenc főgondnok kézzel írt levele Mailáth püspökhöz 1927. júl. 29-én [Handwritten letter of Archpriest Ferenc Nemes to Bishop Mailáth on 29 July 1927], in AAAI, Num. 1797–1927.*

leaders of the Episcopal Chancellery, the real experts of the Chancellery and the Status Board, could only observe the cause of the disaster from a distance. They were not commissioned by the most competent body, the bishop.¹²

In front of the parish council on behalf of the Dutch loan, the parish priest József Hirschler announced on the meeting of 22nd of February 1928 the serious mistakes that had been made around the Dutch loan. Two members of the board (Imre Gabányi and János Klumák) found out that the chief caretaker Ferenc Nemes had settled a couple of budget items from the parish debts but used the remaining amount for his own purposes: he tried to save the drugstore „Gergely Ferenc utóda” and settle his own debts.

According to the confession of the electoral clerk (Márton Szilágyi), the chief guardian also falsified the minutes.¹³ He has invested huge sums in the Commercial Bank of Cluj-Napoca, which was on the verge of bankruptcy. He solved all this with the signature of the parish priest, who often did not even know what he was signing, most of the time the custodian signed blank papers with it or used pseudonyms when naming the items. Ferenc Nemes took out loans for himself from the Cluj Savings Bank and Credit Bank in the name of the parish priest.¹⁴

After the embezzlement case was uncovered, the parish leadership sought temporary solutions and austerity measures: the budget was rewritten; in order for the parish to have access to financial resources, officials, staff, and teachers were required to pay a 5% church contribution. Parish priest József Hirschler offered the income of the new villas in the promenade to the parish.

¹² *Kivonat a kolozsvári római katolikus egyházközség képviselőtestülete 1927. május 22-én tartott rendkívüli közgyűlésének jegyzőkönyvéből* [Extract from the minutes of the Extraordinary General Assembly of the Roman Catholic Parish of Cluj held on 22 May 1927], in AAAI, Num. 1797–1927.

¹³ *A holland kölcsön elszámolásának és felhasználásának megejtésére kiküldött külön bizottság jegyzőkönyve, 1928. február 22-én* [Minutes of the special committee sent to investigate the settlement and use of the Dutch loan, 22 February 1928], in AAAI, Num. 83–1928.

¹⁴ The Commercial Bank of Cluj Napoca was notoriously under suspicion at the time. When a request was made to merge it with the Transsylvania Bank in Cluj Napoca, the Cathedral Chapter, at its meeting of 28 April 1927, firmly refused. They certainly did not want to endanger the Transsylvania Bank, which managed the diocese's foundations, together with the bankrupt Commercial Bank. – ARCHIVE OF THE CHAPTER FROM ALBA IULIA, (hereinafter referred to as ACAI) Num. 39–27.

Of the HUF 600,000 loan taken out, HUF 540,000 remained due to transfer and handling costs, amounting to lei 34,112,252. The loan was used to repay part of the debt of church institutions (eg. Marianum, parish), bought houses and printing houses, lent it to church employees (eg. József Hirschler) and bought shares from banks. A larger amount was set aside by the superintendent for his own business purposes. József Hirschler undertook the amount set aside by Ferenc Nemes and offered a payment of 1,200,000 lei a year for this purpose, until the deficit from the loan was remedied. The other unwarranted investment was in the Providentia printing house. The incompetent management also caused a failure at the Providentia Institute, and the printing house was also forced to borrow. The saddest fact is that the parish also faced settling interest on the Dutch loan when it had no financial means to do so. The committee responsible for the implementation of the Dutch loan, which otherwise met only once in this case, regretted the relentless actions of Chief Guardian Ferenc Nemes. Another difficulty was caused by the “successor of Ferenc Gergely”. The huge debt accumulated was aggravated by the fact that the superintendent took out loans from all kinds and kinds of people who, seeing that their money was lost, also made claims to the parish.¹⁵

Chief custodian Ferenc Nemes resigned from his post in March 1928.¹⁶ The council of the parish, which was financially on the edge of the abyss, silently acknowledged such a step by the superintendent. The parish was in an unfortunate financial situation, so it was forced to take out more bank loans. A loan from the Savings Bank and Credit Bank of Cluj-Napoca and Transsylvania was necessary because if the parish had not repaid the exact interest on the Dutch loan, Holland Bank would have sued the parish, and a total collapse would have been inevitable.

The Bishop’s Commissioner (Kálmán Héjja)¹⁷, sent by the main authority of Alba Iulia, examined the budget, economic activities of the parish of St. Michael for several days, as well as the issue of the Dutch loan itself. He interrogated Chief

¹⁵ *A Kolozsvári Római Katolikus Egyházközség képviselőtestülete közgyűlésének jegyzőkönyve, 1928. március 25. [Minutes of the General Assembly of the Roman Catholic Parish of Cluj, 25 March 1928]*, in AStMP, Num. – 1928.

¹⁶ *Nemes Ferenc főgondnok kézzel írt levele Gabányi Imre ügyvédnek 1928. máj. 26-án. [Handwritten letter of Ferenc Nemes, Chief Curate, to Imre Gabányi, lawyer, 26 May 1928.]*, In AAI, Num. 1797–1928.

¹⁷ Kálmán HÉJJA (1863-1952) Archdeacon of Gyulafehérvár from 1902, auditor, foundation inspector, school inspector, in Sándor FERENCZI, *A gyulafehérvári (erdélyi) főegyházmegye történeti papi névtára*, Budapest-Kolozsvár: Szent István Társulat – Verbum, 2009, 267.

Trustee Ferenc Nemes, who confessed that he owed about 8 million lei from the Dutch loan and also had 16 million lei in private debt. 34,112,252 lei were received from the redemption of the Dutch loan currencies, of which the resulting deficit after the use of the useful items was 20,692,595 lei. Ferenc Nemes explained the deficit with an amount given to 116 creditors. The most bitter loss was caused by the purchase of 7,200,000 lei worth of shares for the parish from the Commercial Bank of Cluj-Napoca, which was on the verge of collapse. The final conclusions of the episcopal commissioner: the parish of Cluj-Napoca owes a Dutch loan of 600,000 Dutch forints, or 39.9 million lei. Of which actual value: 10,602,296 lei. Shortage: lei 29,297,704.¹⁸

As a result of the Bishop's commissioner's investigations, it became clear to the Alba Iulia authority that the material losses of St. Michael's Parish were caused by the embezzlement of Ferenc Nemes, who was known as an economic expert, and it became clear that he could never pay the stolen sums. The "bona fide" parish priest József Hirschler can be blamed for what happened because he did not consider the necessary parish supervision important. The committee responsible for the Dutch loan and the parish council itself are also responsible for what happened because the proper supervision has been postponed. All these circumstances helped chief caretaker Ferenc Nemes to act according to his own head and seriously damage the parish.

After the resignation of chief caretaker Ferenc Nemes, Gyula Jelen took over the position of chief caretaker and the tasks involved.¹⁹ His ideas, based on which he wanted to lead the parish, showed a good direction. He did not consider fair that the burden of the parish was borne by only a few, so he set up an economic committee of specialists. However, he soon had to realize that they could only repay the Dutch loan by taking out new loans.²⁰

¹⁸ Héjja Kálmán *egyházmegyei számvevő kézzel írt jelentése a püspöki hivatalnak az egyházközség anyagi helyzetének vizsgálatáról 1928. ápr. 21-én*, [Handwritten report of Kálmán Héjja, diocesan auditor, to the bishop's office on the examination of the financial situation of the parish on 21 April 1928], in AAI, Num. 1797–1928.

¹⁹ Mailáth püspök leirata az egyházközségnek 1928. dec. 12-én [Epistle of Bishop Mailáth to the parish on 12 Dec. 1928], in ACAI, Num. 5291–1928.

²⁰ See: ACAI, Num. 6/290; Hirschler József *a felterjesztett jegyzőkönyvekhez illesztett rövid levelét 1929. júl. 19-én* [József Hirschler's short letter to the minutes of July 1929. 19 July], in AAI, Num. 284–1929.

The Board of Directors of the Diocesan Council, especially the secular president and senator Elemér Gyárfás, provided better assistance to the leaders of the parish at the special request of the main authority of Alba Iulia. The loan was now settled in two threads: diocesan authority - Gyárfás and parish - Hirschler. The well-intentioned affairs of Elemér Gyárfás were constantly hampered. The distrust of the leaders of the church council in Cluj-Napoca and the special actions of József Hirschler made it difficult to settle the loan case he had started.

There was only one solution left for the administration of the parish of St. Michael: the retirement of József Hirschler and the appointment of a new responsible priest. Senator Elemér Gyárfás played a major role in clarifying the matter. After his intervention, it became increasingly clear to the Alba Iulia chief authority that the current parish leadership was unsuitable for the financial management of the loan settlement. Parish priest József Hirschler was absolutely convinced that the settlement of the loan was proceeding in the greatest order. In his letters, he reassures his bishop more than once that the loan case has been taken over by professionals, it will take place through banks, so no harm to the parish can come from it.

It was inevitable that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Romanian state leadership would not pay attention to the case, which had been going on for too long.²¹ The Holy See, through the Bucharest Nunciature, urged a solution as soon as possible. And the main authority in Alba Iulia left the matter to a comprehensive settlement for too long. Even after the bishop's control, he should have taken stronger action against the administration of József Hirschler.²²

²¹ *A Kultuszminisztérium levele Mailáth püspöknek 1934. szept. 13-án [Letter from the Ministry of Culture to Bishop Mailáth, 13 September 1934]*, in AAI, Num. 126.337–13848; *A Kultuszminisztérium levele Mailáth püspöknek 1934. júl. 9-én [Letter from the Ministry of Culture to Bishop Mailáth, July 1934. 9 July 1934]*, in AAI, Num. 82.991–9185; *A Kultuszminisztérium levele a plébánosnak, „Domnule Preot” címzéssel 1934. júl. 9-én [Letter from the Ministry of Culture to the parish priest, addressed to „Domnule Preot”, July 1934. 9 July 1934]*, in AAI, Num. 82.991–9185.

²² *A bukaresti Apostoli Nunciatura olasz nyelvű levele Mailáth püspöknek Luigi Arrigoni titkár aláírásával 1933. márc. 25-én [Letter in Italian from the Apostolic Nunciature of Bucharest to Bishop Mailáth, signed by Secretary Luigi Arrigoni, 25 March 1933]*, in AAI, Num. 8806–1933; *Az Egyházmegyei Tanács levele Mailáth püspökhöz 1933. ápr. 8-án [Letter of the Diocesan Council to Bishop Mailáth on 8 April 1933]*, in AAI, Num. 830–1933; *A bukaresti Apostoli Nunciatura olasz nyelvű levele Mailáth püspöknek Luigi Arrigoni titkár*

For Elemér Gyárfás, the deplorable situation of the parish was unacceptable. He also stayed connected with Béla Gajdátsy, Office Director, and Dániel Zomora, Deputy Bishop.²³ In the end, his opinion crystallized that only by dismissing the parish priest József Hirschler could the further deterioration of the situation be prevented. Doing so was hampered by the bosom friends lined up behind Hirschler, who encouraged him not to let anything out of his hands or undertake to retire. Yet he was no longer able to see through the material affairs of the parish. The final accounts of 1933 and the budget of 1934, as well as the minutes, studied by Elemér Gyárfás revealed a startling picture. He prepared a report on all this for the diocesan authority.²⁴

For this reason, Bishop Mailáth - now with the advice of his clerks - acted more decisively in 1935, ordering the establishment of the Directorate to manage the property affairs of the parish. The Directorate proved to be an intermediate solution because the specialists who entered it, primarily lawyers, were appointed by the parish priest József Hirschler. The members handled the financial affairs correctly according to the state laws, everything was done properly, but they did not look for the final solution. Rather, their own lawyer's fees, their bank interest, hovered before their eyes, they did not settle the debt-equivalent debt due to the

aláírásával 1933. júl. 27-én [Letter in Italian from the Apostolic Nunciature of Bucharest to Bishop Mailáth, signed by Secretary Luigi Arrigoni, 27 July 1933], in AAAI, Num. 8988–1933; A Főhatóság levele a kolozsvári plébánia hivatalnak 1933. márc. 29-én [Letter of the Bishopry to the parish office of Cluj-Napoca, 29 March 1933], in AAAI, Num. 1051–1933.

²³ *Az Egyházmegyei Tanács levele Mailáth püspökhöz 1933. dec. 4-én [Letter of the Diocesan Council to Bishop Mailáth on 4 Dec. 1933], in AAAI, Num. 3114–1933; Az Egyházmegyei Tanács levele Mailáth püspökhöz 1933. dec. 13-án [Letter of the Diocesan Council to Bishop Mailáth on 13 Dec. 1933], in AAAI, Num. 3186–1933; Az Egyházmegyei Tanács levele Mailáth püspökhöz 1933. nov. 18-án [Letter of the Diocesan Council to Bishop Mailáth, 18 Nov. 1933], in AAAI, Num. 2824–1933.*

²⁴ *Az Apostoli Nunciatura kérésére a Sacra Congregatio Concilii számára megfogalmazott válaszlevél a holland kölcsön-üggyről dátum nélkül [Letter of reply to the Sacra Congregatio Concilii on the Dutch loan case at the request of the Apostolic Nunciature, undated], in AAAI, Num. 1797–1934; Az Egyházmegyei Tanács jelentése a holland kölcsönről 1934. jan. 10-én [Report of the Diocesan Council on the Dutch loan of 10 January 1934], in AAAI, Num. 3292–1934; Egyházmegyei Tanács Igazgatótanács levele Mailáth püspöknek 1934. febr. 15-én [Letter from the Board of Directors of the Diocesan Council to Bishop Mailáth, 15 February 1934], in AAAI, Num. 380–1934.*

Dutch loan, which accumulated a lot. Their case management eventually triggered a measure by the Ministry of Finance, which set up a state lock guard.²⁵ According to the plan, the Directorate is obliged to put order in the financial affairs of the parish, but the parishioners (Romulus Fersigan, Gheorghe Dubleşiu, Virgil Nistor) could not free the parish from their oppressive yoke. At the same time, the internal conflicts of interest within the leading circle of the parish, the tension between Endre László, the bank manager, and the chief guardian Gyula Jelen did not help to resolve the matter. Moreover, the fast-breaking lawyer Jenő Péterffy (son-in-law of Endre László) also sought to ‘cleanse’ the Directory of members who did not meet them and to support the parish priest József Hirschler, in fact, he reinforced his mistake.²⁶

Lock wards sent out by the state have crippled the parish situation for several years. The trustees spent very little of the parish’s income on tax refunds, and even tried to fill their own pockets as soon as possible.²⁷

In this hopeless situation, the diocesan authority had to act. We can witness an interesting coincidence in taking the decisive step. The very seriously ill Bishop Mailáth was finally transported to Budapest, and the leadership of the diocese was taken over by Deputy General Dániel Zomora and the office manager Béla Gajdáty, who saw the Dutch loan issue most clearly. Hirschler lost his protective support just in his most critical position. Meanwhile, attacks were also made on

²⁵ *A Direktórium tervezete, Hirschler és Gajdáty kézzel írott megjegyzéseivel 1935. márc. 6-án [Draft of the Board of Directors, with handwritten notes by Hirschler and Gajdáty, March 1935. 6 March 1935]*, in AAAI, Num. 714–1935; *A kolozsvári Szent Mihály plébánia egyháztanácsának jegyzőkönyve 1935. ápr. 8-án [The minutes of the parish council of St. Michael’s parish in Cluj on 8 April 1935]*, in ACAI, 6/290.

²⁶ *Péterffy Jenő levele a Direktóriumhoz 1935. máj. 21-én [Letter from Jenő Péterffy to the Board of Directors, 21 May 1935]*, in AAAI, Num. 714–1935; *Péterffy Jenő levele a Direktóriumhoz 1935. máj. 30-án [Letter from Jenő Péterffy to the Board of Directors, May 1935. 30 May 1935]*, in AAAI, Num. 714–1935.

²⁷ *Részlet Hirschler „Kamarás Úrnak” (Gajdáty Béla) címzett, kézzel írt, bizalmas leveléből [Excerpt from Hirschler’s handwritten, confidential letter to „Mr. Kamarás” (Béla Gajdáty)]*, in AAAI, – 1797; *A kolozsvári egyházközség választmányának jegyzőkönyve 1934. okt. 25-én [The minutes of the parish council of Cluj on 25 October 1934]*, in AAAI, Num. 1418– 1934; *A választmány által kiküldött „kilences bizottság” megbeszélésén készült jegyzőkönyv 1934. szept. 21-én [Minutes of the meeting of the „Committee of Nine” sent by the Electoral Council on 21 September 1934]*, in AAAI, Num. – 1797.

the part of the Romanian government, he was considered a chauvinist person, and the main authority in Alba Iulia was asked to terminate his stay in Cluj.

The Board of Trustees of the Diocesan Council - as the only solution - recommended to the Episcopal High Authority to entrust the complete settlement of material affairs to a church person with the power of administrator oeconomicus. According to their proposal, the settlement of the financial and economic affairs of the parish would fall under the competence and control of the Board of Directors of the Diocesan Council.²⁸ For this task dr. Alajos Boga status school officer would be seen as the most suitable.²⁹ On the other hand, the construction was hindered by the attitude of the parish priest József Hirschler, who did not even mind to stand aside.³⁰

The main authority of Alba Iulia is taking steps at the negotiation level to resolve the material and pastoral issue of the parish of Cluj-Napoca. After Alajos Boga has not undertaken, he is looking for a suitable priestly person who would find a way out in this complicated situation. Three priests were asked: Gáspár Botár, who was a friend of József Hirschler, Ernő Veress and Áron Márton. Divine providence arranged for the choice to fall on Áron Márton, in whom a suitable individual took over the head of the parish of St. Michael.³¹

József Hirschler wanted to remain in the parish position. He knew behind him some members of the Directory, who later caused a lot of inconvenience to Áron Márton parish priest. Until the day of his dismissal as parish priest and archbishop, József Hirschler (15th of March 1936), at the encouragement of his friends, he tried to act in Bucharest. Nerius Valerio Valeri, Archbishop Alexandru Cisar of Bucharest and the authority of Alba Iulia unanimously saw fit to see Hirschler leave the head of the parish and even Cluj.³²

²⁸ *Az Egyházmegyei Tanács levele Mailáth püspöknek 1934. jan. 11-én [Letter of the Diocesan Council to Bishop Mailáth, 11 Jan. 1934]*, in AAAI, Num. 3292–1934.

²⁹ *Zomora Dániel püspökhelyettes levele Gyárfás Elemérhez 1934. febr. 26-án [Letter from Deputy Bishop Dániel Zomora to Elemér Gyárfás, 26 Feb. 1934]*, in AAAI, Num. – 1797.

³⁰ *Hirschler József plébánosnak a nunciushoz intézett memoranduma 1934. febr. 22-én [Memorandum from parish priest József Hirschler to the nuncio on 22 February 1934]*, in AAAI, Num. 184–1934.

³¹ József MARTON, *A Gyulafehérvári Római Katolikus Egyházmegye a 20. században*, Csíkszereda: Pro-Print, 2014, 94.

³² *Alexandru Cisar bukaresti érsek levele a gyulafehérvári főhatósághoz 1938. ápr. 9-én [Letter from Archbishop Alexandru Cisar of Bucharest to the Archbishop of Cluj-Napoca, 9 April*

At its last meeting on 17th of March 1936, the Directorate asked the Alba Iulia High Authority to accept its resignation on 18th of November 1935, because it could still not take responsibility for the events that took place in the life of the parish. Jenő Péterffy, who wrote the minutes, noted that intrigues, accusations, and unfounded news complicate the work of the Directorate. What really happened was that the Directory had fled the sinking ship of the parish. Praising themselves for their ‘sacrificial work,’ they left themselves, relinquishing all responsibility, while reserving to themselves the right to continue to have a say in matters remotely, to accuse others, and even the new parish and his work with their attacks.³³

In such a tangled situation and with more than 90 million lei of debt and custody, Áron Márton took over the leadership of the parish on 23rd of March 1936, as vicarius oeconomus. In doing so, he undertook to settle the case responsibly. On behalf of the high authority, he had to pull the parish back from the brink of bankruptcy in a short time and even settle the affairs of the retired József Hirschler.³⁴

When Áron Márton successfully started settling bank loans and debts, the ‘church-loyal’ wrestlers, József Hirschler’s bosom friends, reappeared.³⁵

The physically and mentally broken abbot-parish priest also assumed malice in the fair and just procedure of the Alba Iulia high authority. His misconception was strongly influenced by bank manager Endre László and his son-in-law Jenő Péterffy.³⁶

Auxiliary Bishop Adolf Vorbuchner worked to get the Hirschler case to a standstill. The state authorities did not tolerate the person of József Hirschler in any office, so Bishop Vorbuchner had to withdraw his new mandate to József Hirschler, the rector of the Institute of Priestly Education. Due to the resentment of the state authorities towards Hirschler’s person, Vorbuchner considered best if the retired

1938], in AAAI, Num. 7957– 1938.

³³ *A Direktórium jegyzőkönyve 1936. márc. 15-én [Minutes of the Board of Directors, March 1936. 15 March 1936]*, in AAAI, Num. 714–1935.

³⁴ Gergely Kovács, *Szentnek lenni nem kevesek előjoga, hanem mindenki hivatása*, in *Keresztény Szó XXV/4*, 2014, 1.

³⁵ *Péterffy Jenő levele Mailáth Gusztáv püspökhöz 1936. máj. 23-án [Letter of Jenő Péterffy to Bishop Gusztáv Mailáth, 23 May 1936]*, in AAAI, Num. 1915–1936.

³⁶ *Zomora Dániel általános helynök levele Hirschler József nyugalmazott plébánosnak 1936. márc. 21-én [Letter from Deputy General Dániel Zomora to retired parish priest József Hirschler, 21 March 1936]*, in ACAI, Num. 962–1936.

parishioner leaves not only Cluj-Napoca but also the country for some time.³⁷ Márton Áron, the parish priest took measures to cover the financial costs of József Hirschler, who was forced to receive medical treatment abroad.³⁸ Auxiliary Bishop Adolf Vorbuchner also had a paternal love for Prelate Hirschler throughout, with only one request - precisely for his sake - not to stay in Cluj-Napoca if possible.³⁹ The priests instigating Hirschler and his 'friends' in Cluj-Napoca further hindered the settlement of his case in a regular channel.⁴⁰ The restlessness and disobedient attitude of the retired parish priest caused many difficulties for the auxiliary bishop and the new leadership of the parish of St. Michael. He seized every opportunity to stay in Cluj-Napoca. His last wrestling also affected his health. Prelate Joseph Hirschler passed away on 17th of November 1936, confirmed by sacraments at the Park Sanatorium in Cluj-Napoca. At his funeral, by order of the chief pastor, Márton Áron parish priest preached.⁴¹

Since 1932, the clean-handed Áron Márton has gained such great prestige before the people of Cluj-Napoca that no one has questioned his authenticity. After liberating the parish from the custody,⁴² he was able to settle the Dutch loan on a

³⁷ *Vorbuchner Adolf püspök levele Hirschler József nyugalmazott plébánosnak 1936. március 22-én* [Letter from Bishop Adolf Vorbuchner to József Hirschler, retired parish priest, 22 March 1936], in ACAI, Num. 2075–1936.

³⁸ *Zomora Dániel püspökhelyettes levele a Szent Mihály plébániának 1936. május 14-én* [Letter of Deputy Bishop Dániel Zomora to the parish of St. Michael, 14 May 1936], in ACAI, Num. 1765–1936.

³⁹ *Vorbuchner Adolf püspök levele Hirschler József nyugalmazott plébánoshoz 1936. szept. 2-án* [Letter from Bishop Adolf Vorbuchner to József Hirschler, retired parish priest, 2 September 1936], in ACAI, Num. 2832–1936; *Márton Áron plébános levele Hirschler József nyugalmazott plébánosnak 1936. szept. 9-én*, in SAS, *Egy reneszánsz lelkületű főpap Dr. Hirschler József főesperes-plébános*, 536–537.

⁴⁰ *Botár Gáspár levele Hirschler Józsefnek 1936. szept. 26-án*, in SAS, *Egy reneszánsz lelkületű főpap Dr. Hirschler József főesperes-plébános*, 546; *László Endre levele Hirschler Józsefnek 1936. október 5-én*, in SAS, *Egy reneszánsz lelkületű főpap Dr. Hirschler József főesperes-plébános*, 549–550.

⁴¹ *Márton Áron h. plébános levele Vorbuchner Adolf segédpüspöknek 1938. márc. 14-én* [Letter of parish priest Áron Márton to auxiliary bishop Adolf Vorbuchner, March 1938. 14 March 1938], in AAI, Num. 783–1938.

⁴² *Gyárfás Elemér szenátor levele Márton Áronhoz 1936. dec. 27-én* [Letter from Senator Elemér Gyárfás to Áron Márton on 27 Dec 1936], in ACAI, Num. – 1927.

larger scale from 1937, even though his opponents moved every stone to prevent his actions.

He tried to face the constant stuttering. Many claimants came forward who demanded an after-commission for some of their service from the past. Members of the former directorate attacked with prosecutorial catches while he had to settle the payment of interest and other debts on the Dutch loan (to the Savings Bank and Credit Bank of Cluj-Napoca and Transsylvania Bank). Those who have seen a good source of money in St. Michael's Parish so far are reluctant to let go of the 'treasure chest.' For him, the most inconvenience was caused by the constantly accusing lawyer Jenő Péterffy. In the story of settling the Dutch loan case, he is the character who accompanied Áron Márton's entire work in Cluj-Napoca as a shadow - with bad intentions.⁴³ He expressed his dislike of the main authority in Alba Iulia and Áron Márton during the time of the parish priest József Hirschler, and even through him: he constantly incited the abbot-parish priest against the main authority, encouraged and influenced him to write a memorandum to the Chaplain. Márton Áron was constantly annoyed by him with provocative letters, as he was completely excluded from settling cases and thus dropped from a serious lawyer's contribution. He addressed indictments to the Alba Iulia authority, demanding that the culprits be put on the verge and punished for mistakes made in the past. He worked at all costs, to overthrow Áron Márton and prevent his election as parish priest.⁴⁴ He charged and demanded a huge sum for his work as a lawyer during Hirschler's time. Finally, he reported Aron Marton to Archbishop Alexandru Cisar of Bucharest and, through his mediation, to Apostolic Nuncio Andrea Cassulo.⁴⁵ Then, in the spring of 1938, Auxiliary Bishop Adolf Vorbuchner was forced to reveal

⁴³ *Traian German kolozsvári ügyvéd levele Vorbuchner Adolf segédpüspökhöz 1936. júl. 13-án* [Letter from Traian German, lawyer from Cluj to Adolf Vorbuchner, auxiliary bishop, July 1936. 13 Jul.] in AAAI, Num. 1418–1936; *Márton Áron h. plébános levele Vorbuchner Adolf segédpüspöknek 1936. júl. 15-én* [Letter of parish priest Áron Márton to auxiliary bishop Adolf Vorbuchner, July 1936. 15.], in AAAI, Num. 11–1936; *Péterffy Jenő ügyvéd levele Vorbuchner Adolf segédpüspöknek 1936. aug. 14-én* [Letter from the lawyer Jenő Péterffy to the auxiliary bishop Adolf Vorbuchner, Aug. 1936. 14 Aug.], in AAAI, Num. – 1936.

⁴⁴ *Péterffy Jenő levele Mailáth Gusztáv püspökhöz 1936. máj. 23-án* [Letter of Jenő Péterffy to Bishop Gusztáv Mailáth, 23 May 1936], in AAAI, Num. 1915–1936.

⁴⁵ *Péterffy Jenő ügyvéd feljelentő levele Alexandru Cisar bukaresti érsekhez 1938. ápr. 2-án* [Letter of denunciation from lawyer Jenő Péterffy to Archbishop Alexandru Cisar of Bucharest, 2 April 1938], in AAAI, Num. 7957–1938.

the case of Cluj-Napoca and the pastoral work of Áron Márton to the nuncio. In retrospect, the malicious action against Áron Márton can be considered caring, because the nuncio received unbiased information from the most authentic person about the future bishop of the diocese.

Márton Áron parish priest was supported in this nerve-grinding work by the specialists of Alba Iulia, from the Status, and a larger percentage of the church council.⁴⁶ Auxiliary Bishop Adolf Vorbuchner, who knew Áron Márton well during his service in Sibiu, stood by and encouraged him in everything, during his visits to the parish, he was pleased to note that both spiritual and material affairs were going well in Cluj-Napoca.⁴⁷ The Board of Directors of the Diocesan Council, including the secular president of Elemér Gyárfás, a senator, who proved to be a useful helper with his qualifications and parliamentary relations, helped him in his work as a defensive wall.⁴⁸ The work of Áron Márton was followed with great attention and assisted by the Episcopal Authority of Alba Iulia (Deputy Bishop Dániel Zomora, Office Director Béla Gajdátsy).⁴⁹ Gyula Jelen, the chief caretaker of the parish, also helped Áron Márton with the greatest goodwill after taking over the parish. Unfortunately, he resigned soon enough.⁵⁰

Áron Márton solved the biggest burden of the parish, the issue of the Dutch loan, by slowly disconnecting everyone from the case at his own risk and negotiating favourable payment terms from Dutch tenants through the background negotiations

⁴⁶ *A kolozsvári Szent Mihály egyházközség választmányának jegyzőkönyve 1937. febr. 25-én* [The minutes of the parish council of St. Michael's parish in Cluj on 25 February 1937], in ACAI, 7/290.

⁴⁷ *Vorbuchner Adolf püspök leirata Márton Áron megbízott plébánoshoz 1936. okt. 17-én* [Transcript of Bishop Adolf Vorbuchner to the acting parish priest Áron Márton, 17 October 1936], in AAI, Num. 3359–1936.

⁴⁸ For more on this topic, see: József MARTON, Gyárfás Elemér kapcsolata Márton Áron püspökkel, in Gyárfás Elemér a „civil püspök”, ed. László HOLLÓ, Budapest–Kolozsvár: Szent István Társulat–Verbum, 2016, 132–147.

⁴⁹ *Márton Áron bizalmas levelei Gajdátsy Béla irodaigazgatóhoz 1937. jan. 19-én és 20-án* [Áron Márton's confidential letters to Béla Gajdátsy, office director, 19 and 20 January 1937], in AAI, Num. 1797–1937.

⁵⁰ *A kolozsvári Szent Mihály egyházközség választmányának jegyzőkönyve 1936. nov. 16-án* [The minutes of the electoral council of the parish of St. Michael in Cluj on 16 November 1936], in ACAI, 7/290.

of lawyer Dezső Schilling.⁵¹ Later, when the case required more discretion, he even turned off Lawyer Schilling and - with the knowledge and consent of Bishop Adolf Vorbuchner - took all responsibility and handled the most delicate cases alone - with the help of lawyer Gábor Tusa.⁵² In a relatively short time, he managed to bring order and remove the incompetent persons who caused the unfortunate situation. In addition to the nerve-wracking financial troubles and unlawful attacks, he did not neglect his pastoral work in the strict sense either. By this time, we can already witness the acceleration of events: the appointment of apostolic governors and bishops, and finally, the consecration of bishops in Cluj.

Áron Márton, as bishop, remained the material administrator of the parish of Cluj-Napoca with the permission of the Holy See. He monitored and supervised the settlement of the debts of the Dutch loan, which was directed to the right channel.⁵³ He strictly required the parish leadership to repay the debt with the utmost precision. The extremely complicated loan business, which lasted for nearly two decades, was completely completed in December 1945.⁵⁴

After all, the Dutch loan to St. Michael's Parish, which caused so much material and moral damage, and its settlement were of great benefit to the diocese of Alba Iulia: it clarified the qualities of Áron Márton in official ecclesiastical circles, all the way to the Vatican.

⁵¹ *Márton Áron és Gyárfás Elemér megállapodást kötnek Schilling Dezső ügyvéddel a Holland-kölcsön rendezése ügyében 1937. máj. 3-án* [Áron Márton and Elemér Gyárfás conclude an agreement with Dezső Schilling lawyer on the settlement of the Holland loan May 1937. 3 May 1937.], in AAI, Num. 1963–1937.

⁵² *Baráth Béla levele Márton Áron püspökhöz 1943. okt. 21-én* [Letter of Béla Baráth to Bishop Áron Márton on 21 October 1943], in ACAI, Num. 995–1943; *Márton Áron levele Baráth Béla kolozsvári plébánosnak 1943. nov. 18-án* [Letter of Áron Márton to Béla Baráth, parish priest of Cluj, 18 Nov 1943], in AAI, Num. 2773–1943.

⁵³ *A kolozsvári Szent Mihály egyházközség választmányának jegyzőkönyve 1939. máj. 9-én* [The minutes of the Council of the parish of St. Michael in Cluj, May 1939. 9th of May, 1939], in ACAI 7/290.

⁵⁴ *A kolozsvári Szent Mihály egyházközség választmánya gyűlésének jegyzőkönyve 1945. dec. 19-én* [Minutes of the meeting of the electoral council of the parish of St. Michael in Cluj on 19 Dec. 1945], in ACAI, Num. 7/290.

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